I. The Earliest Americans

Cross-curricular Connections

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<td>• “The Hunting of the Great Bear” (an Iroquois legend about the origin of the Big Dipper)</td>
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At a Glance

The most important ideas for you are:

- The first peoples of North America are believed to have crossed from Asia into North America, either via a land bridge or by water, sometime in the distant past, perhaps between 30,000 and 15,000 years ago.
- As the first peoples spread across and throughout North and South America, their customs, traditions, and languages changed as they adapted to new environments and new ways of food production.
- Anthropologists, for purposes of study, categorize Native Americans into culture regions.
- In studying representative cultures, it is a good idea to note their geographical region, physical environment, methods of obtaining food, housing style, clothing, and religious beliefs.

What Teachers Need to Know

In Grade 3, students are beginning a more detailed and in-depth chronological investigation of topics in U.S. history. For students in Core Knowledge schools, some of the topics will have been introduced in Grades K–2, including ways of life of a few specific Native American peoples, early European explorations of the Americas, and life in colonial America before the rebellion by the English colonists.

A. Crossing the Land Bridge

Background

Scholars generally agree that the native peoples of North and South America migrated to this continent from Asia, but they disagree on when and how the first peoples crossed from Asia to North America. Estimates on their arrival range from as long as 50,000 years to about 1,500 years ago. It can be said with some certainty that not one, but many “waves” of people coming at different times, from different places, and by many different means settled the Americas in the distant past.

During that period, Earth was undergoing the last Ice Age. Much of Earth’s water was frozen in the form of snow and ice. As a result, the ocean levels were lower, and some land that is now submerged was then above water. During the
Ice Age, Asia and North America were connected by land. Archaeologists have long believed that the first Americans crossed a “land bridge” joining the eastern tip of Asia and what is now Alaska, and moved southward through a narrow ice-free corridor. However, in recent years this idea has been questioned. Some scholars believe that conditions would have been far too cold and difficult for a crossing in Beringia. Some even doubt the existence of an ice-free passage. Today, many scholars believe that the earliest settlers may have come to North America in boats, or by walking across frozen water, or by following the then-exposed continental shelf that bordered the Asian and North American Pacific Coasts. In any case, the movement east across Asia and into North America probably took place over thousands of years.

The first peoples to cross into North America from Asia were hunting prehistoric animals, such as the woolly mammoth and the bison. It may be that the first peoples followed these herds across the land bridge; or perhaps they arrived by other means and began hunting. Wherever the animals roamed, the hunting parties, probably made up of extended family groups, followed.

In discussing this subject with students, it makes sense to mention the land bridge hypothesis but also to mention other possibilities. It is not important for third graders to have a precise knowledge of the dates, which are still the subject of much debate among historians and archaeologists. Our knowledge of this time is very limited, and discovery of ancient artifacts and bones are our only clues to the nature and timing of the movement of peoples into North America. It will be sufficient if students understand that the migration, or migrations, took place long, long ago, thousands of years before the rise of ancient civilizations they have studied, like Greece and Rome.

Spreading Throughout the Continents

As the Ice Age warmed, the hunters who were now in North America followed their prey. They moved south through western Canada, the Rockies, Mexico, Central America, and eventually, by about 10,500 BCE, all the way to the southern end of South America. Some groups branched east until, over time, people reached the east coast of North America and the rainforests of Brazil. All along the way, some groups dropped out of the wandering and stayed in places that seemed hospitable. It is important to remember that this movement of people occurred over thousands of years.

Changing Ways of Life: From Hunting to Farming

As the ice disappeared, so did the prehistoric animals that the hunters relied on for their food, clothing, and shelter. The animals may have died out because of the change in temperatures or because the hunters killed too many mammoths, mastodons, and other large animals. The lack of these animals may be one reason that groups moved on. They were looking for the ever-scarcer big animals to hunt.

To make up for the lack of big game, hunters turned to smaller game, such as deer and rabbits, for their food. People also began to pick wild plants, nuts, seeds, and berries and to dig up roots to eat. It is probable that people were gathering wild foods as early as 15,000 BCE. Even when people hunted, it is also likely they gathered other types of food, depending on their availability.
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Early people in the Americas, like people in the Middle East in ancient times, noticed as they foraged for food that some plants grew better than others. Some people reasoned that if they planted the seeds of these plants, they could get more food and get it more easily than by wandering over miles of land looking for berries and plants to pick. This process of planting and harvesting wild plants for people to eat is called domestication. With the domestication of plants, the development of farming ensured a steady food supply for those cultures that adopted farming. The most obvious benefit of a steady source of food was that people no longer had to search for food.

Because farming required staying in one place, settlements of a few families grew in size as the population grew. With a steady diet and better food, people were living longer and having more children. Once a number of people were gathered in one place, some form of authority was needed to organize them for the public good and to keep order. This was the beginning of government. However, even those who were nomads or seminomadic hunters had some form of organization that ensured order within the group. Whether a chief and advisors ruled a city-state of 10,000, as in the Aztec city-state, or an extended family group of 30, as with the tribes of the Great Basin, someone decided what was to be done and who was to do it, and made certain that everyone did what he or she was supposed to do.

The development of Native American cultures in North America is somewhat different from what occurred in Mexico and Central and South America. While some groups—such as the Anasazi in what is today the southwestern United States, the Mississippian culture of the Southeast, and the Northeast Woodlands peoples—both hunted and farmed, many North American native peoples remained mainly hunters. Some also participated in widespread trading networks.

Languages Evolve

As groups dropped out of the general migration and adapted to the environments in which they had chosen to settle, they began to develop different languages. A fundamental change was in the words that were necessary or important to different groups. People who became farmers would need a large vocabulary that referred to crops, tools, and the growing process. Those people who remained hunters might develop many more words relating to the hunt, to the animals they killed, and the uses they made of them, such as food, clothing, and tipi coverings.

Inuit (Eskimos)

The northernmost native peoples in North America were and are the Inuit. These people are sometimes called Eskimos, but Inuit is the preferred term. It is the name that the people call themselves and means “humans.” They live in Alaska and in the Arctic region of Canada. Branches of Inuit also live in Greenland and Siberia. Scholars believe that the ancestors of the Inuit did not cross the Bering Strait from Asia into North America until about 4,000 years ago, which would explain why they are the most northern group of native people. It is believed that the Inuit came to North America either by boat after the land bridge was underwater or possibly by walking across the frozen Bering Strait during the winter.
Some of the Inuit of today live very much the way their ancestors did. For food, clothing, weapons, tools, and fuel, they rely on the fish they catch and the caribou, seals, whales, and walruses they hunt. In winter, the Inuit live in houses made of sod, wood, and stone, and in summer, they use tents made of animal skins. Igloos, shelters made of blocks of snow, are used only when the Inuit go on hunts and then only rarely.

Kayaks and dog sleds are their means of transportation. Much of the Inuit religion revolves around the sea and animals. The Inuit are noted for their carvings in soapstone, ivory, and bone, which often use characters from their religious lore.

**Anasazi (Pueblo Builders and Cliff Dwellers)**

By about 2,000 years ago, the Anasazi had settled in what is known today as the four corners area of the Southwest, that is, where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah meet. Originally hunters and gatherers, the Anasazi turned to farming by around 1000 CE. Their crops were primarily maize (corn), beans, and squash.

The first houses of the Anasazi were pithouses constructed below ground. By 1100 CE, however, the Anasazi were building cliff dwellings, multistoried stone apartment buildings with many rooms, set into mountainsides. By the late 1200s, for unknown reasons, the Anasazi began to abandon their cliff dwellings. Possible reasons include drought, disease, pressure from invading groups like the Apache, and internal dissension among villagers. Archaeologists have found no proof of any of these.

By the mid-1500s, when the Spanish arrived in the Southwest, there was no trace of the cliff dwellers. In their place were descendants who lived in villages of adobe houses. These houses were built with a type of sun-dried brick made from clay. Both the clay and the bricks themselves are called adobe. The Spanish called these houses pueblos, and applied the name to the villagers as well; hence, the Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi became known as the Pueblo Indians.

**Mound Builders**

There are three different cultures that prospered at three different times that are classified as Mound Builders: the Adena (1000 BCE–200 CE), the Hopewell (100 BCE–700 CE), and Mississippian (500 CE–1600 CE). There are thousands of their mounds throughout the eastern part of the United States. The mounds are just that—huge, high domes of dirt or long, narrow mounds of dirt, like ribbons, that wind across the landscape in twists and turns. Building such huge structures required thousands of workers and some form of government to organize and direct them.

The Adena culture developed in the Ohio River Valley and spread through what are now the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky. The Adenans may have been farmers, or they may simply have harvested wild grains. Much of what we know of the Adenans is based on archaeological analysis of their mounds. Archaeologists speculate that the mounds were built as graves and also as sites for religious observances. There are no traces of the Adenans after about 200 CE, and archaeologists do not know what happened to them.
The Hopewell culture also developed in the Ohio River Valley and spread from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and west to the Mississippi River. In the east, the culture penetrated as far as the western slopes of the Appalachians. The largest mound that has been found is 40 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. The Hopewellians were hunters and fishers as well as farmers, raising corn, beans, and squash. Some of the people were also traders; Hopewellian trade goods have been found in distant parts of the continent, and trade goods from as far away as the Rockies have been found among Hopewellian artifacts. Archaeologists speculate that the Hopewellian trade network stretched from the Rockies to the Atlantic, and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The Hopewell culture began to decline sometime between 500 CE and 700 CE.

The Mississippian culture did not penetrate quite as far north, west, or east as the Hopewell Mound Builders, but it was a more complex society. In addition to burial mounds, the Mississippians built city-states surrounded by villages and farms. Each city included temple mounds, homes, workshops, and marketplaces. While the northern city-states died out sometime in the 1500s, the southern centers were still functioning in the 1600s when the French and Spanish explored the Gulf coast area. European diseases decimated the population of these people. The Cherokee and Choctaw are two cultures that are descended from the last Mound Builders.

B. Native Americans

Background

Scholars differ on how to group culture regions. Recent research has resulted in the difference between the Sequence grouping of Native American cultures and how they are presented here.

Most anthropologists have classified Native American peoples into culture regions in order to study and understand them, in the same way that anthropologists study members of other ethnic groups, such as the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia or the Zulu people in the Republic of South Africa. A culture region is a geographic area in which different groups have adapted to their physical surroundings in similar ways. However, even within culture regions, groups still retain certain individualized characteristics. The following profiles attempt to describe the characteristics of both a culture region and of specific peoples within those regions. The Southwest, Eastern Woodlands, and Southeast culture groups are featured because they were the areas of first encounters between Europeans and Native Americans. In teaching about these peoples, point out that, for the most part, these groups are present in American life today.

Southwest

The native peoples of the Southwest lived in what are today Arizona, western New Mexico, and parts of Utah, Colorado, and Texas. The area has a very dry climate with little rainfall. There are a variety of physical environments: plateaus, mountains, valleys, and desert. Where irrigation was possible, Native Americans raised squash, corn, beans, cotton, tobacco, and gourds. Where annual precipitation was inadequate for farming, the people were hunters and gatherers. Those
who were sedentary farmers lived in permanent housing. Those who hunted for their food had homes that could be disassembled, easily transported, and reassembled.

**Hopi**
- Name means “peaceful ones”
- Specific group of Pueblo Indians
- Homes of adobe or stone; usually square or rectangular in shape
- Known for fine basketry and pottery
- Number more than 10,000 today, and most live on a reservation in Arizona
- Historically were farmers and later also became shepherders
- Woven cotton clothing
- Many deities associated with nature
- Kachinas, spirits who were messengers of the deities and visited a community for six months annually, represented during ceremonies by men wearing masks

**Zuni**
- Specific group of Pueblo Indians
- Homes of adobe or stone; square, oval, or rectangular in shape
- Mainly farmers and artisans
- Noted for their silver and turquoise jewelry, pottery, and baskets
- Some 9,000 live in the Zuni pueblo in western New Mexico, rebuilt on the site of one of seven the Spanish destroyed.
- Woven cotton clothing
- Deities associated with nature

**Navajo**
- The tribal name in the Navajo language is *dine’* or *dineh*, which means “The People”
- Originally hunters and gatherers
- Acquired sheep from the Spanish in the 1600s and became shepherders
- Hogans for homes: dome-shaped building made of logs and mud
- Known for their silver jewelry and woven rugs and blankets
- Number more than 220,000 today on reservations in the Southwest
- Largest single group of Native Americans today
- Earn living in lumbering, mining, and herding
- Clothes made from buckskin and cotton; after the introduction of weaving by the Spanish, brilliantly colored woven clothing
- Earth Surface People (humans) and Holy People (supernatural beings); people should keep their lives in harmony with the supernatural world through ceremonies.
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Cross-curricular Teaching Idea
When teaching about Native American groups, you may wish to share some myths and legends associated with each culture group, e.g., with the Iroquois, “The Hunting of the Great Bear.” Be sure your discussion includes how elements of the culture are reflected within the story.

Apache

• Primarily nomadic hunters and gatherers
• Raided other native peoples, Spanish, and later Americans for horses and other goods
• Wickiups as homes: dome- or cone-shaped poles covered with brush or grass; because they were nomads, their houses had to be easy to assemble.
• Today, more than 16,000 live on a reservation in the Southwest.
• Earn living through raising cattle, timber, and mining
• Clothing made from animal skins
• Believed in mountain spirits who lived in the mountains and had power to create good or evil in the lives of humans

Eastern Woodlands

The Eastern Woodlands are also called the Northeast Woodlands. The region stretches from the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River south to South Carolina and from the East Coast west to the Mississippi River. All parts of the region have the full change of seasons. The physical environment includes coastal plains, river valleys, mountains, and lush forests. Farming is possible in most areas, and the main crops that Native Americans grew were corn, beans, and squash. They also hunted small game and fished to supplement their farming. They used the skins of the animals they killed for clothing.

There were two main house styles in the Woodlands, the longhouse and the wigwam. The longhouse was built in the shape of a rectangle but had a rounded roof. The top and sides were covered with bark. Some Woodlands Native Americans lived in villages of longhouses that were surrounded with a wooden stockade. In other areas of the Woodlands, the people lived in wigwams. A wigwam had a pole framework, which was either cone- or dome-shaped. The framework was covered with mats, bark, or hides.

The Woodlands Native Americans worshipped the spirits of nature. They believed in a Supreme Being who was all-powerful. Shamanism was part of their religious practices. A shaman is a person who, while in a trance, can communicate with the spirits. They speak and act through him. Shamans were also medicine men whose job it was to cure the sick.

Iroquois

• Group of Indian nations known as the Iroquois League, Iroquois Confederacy, and later the Six Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca (c. 1570) and Tuscarora (c. 1722)
• Matriarchal society: mother and her children as basic unit
• Each of the six Iroquois nations is a group of related family units traced through the mothers.
• Sachems, or chiefs representing each nation at a tribal or league council, are chosen by female heads of families.
• Allies of the British in the French and Indian War
• Allies (except Oneida and Tuscarora) of the British in the American Revolution
Today, more than 22,000 in New York State and Ontario, Canada
Mohawks today known for their special skills as steelworkers building skyscrapers

Mohican
- Originally along the Hudson River in what is New York State; driven east by the Mohawks
- Fought against white settlements but ultimately sold land
- Today, few surviving Mohicans on a reservation in Connecticut

Delaware (Lenni Lenape)
- Originally in Delaware River basin in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware
- Made treaty with William Penn in 1680
- Forced out by whites and the Iroquois in 1700s
- Allied with British in the American Revolution
- Remaining members on reservations in Oklahoma and Ontario, Canada

Susquehannocks
- From southern New York, across central Pennsylvania, to the north end of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland
- Agreed to live under English colonial governments but lost their land to white settlers who could not be controlled by the governments
- Last group massacred in 1763

Massachusetts
- Original people in what is today the area of Boston and its suburbs; Massachusetts Bay Colony
- Sided with the colonists in Metacom’s War (King Philip’s War) in 1675–1676 but lost land to white settlers anyway
- No known groups had survived by 1800

Powhatan Confederacy
- 30 tribes in some 200 settlements enclosed with stockades along the coasts of Virginia and Chesapeake Bay
- Colony of Jamestown established on their land
- Marriage of Powhatan’s daughter, Pocahontas, to John Rolfe eased tensions for a while
- Warfare erupted and continued off and on until 1644 when the tribes were effectively crushed.
- A few groups still exist in eastern Virginia.

Southeast
The Southeast Native American culture region comprises what is today the southeastern United States from the lower Mississippi River Valley to the Atlantic
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Ocean and from Tennessee to the coastal plain along the Gulf of Mexico. Two tribes in the Southeast were the Cherokee and the Seminole tribes.

The Seminole people were primarily hunters and fishers. They lived in houses made of poles with thatched roofs. The Seminole dress was very distinctive, with colorful strips of cloth, which may have been influenced by the textiles of the Spanish colonists who settled in the Seminole area of Florida. The Seminole tribe was a mix of many peoples, including Native Americans from different tribes and even some runaway slaves. The Cherokee farmed, hunted small game, fished, and gathered nuts and berries. The crops they raised were corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers. The Cherokee were excellent farmers and shared much of their agricultural knowledge with the European colonists who settled in their area. During the winter, the Cherokee people typically lived in houses made of logs or canes with bark roofs, and in the summer lived in houses made of poles covered with grass or mud. Their clothes were made of animal skins, and they were known for their pottery and woven baskets. The Green Corn Ceremony held annually after the harvest was an important part of their religious ritual. They cleaned their houses, lit new fires and doused the old ones, and settled arguments.

The Seminole and Cherokee were both part of the Five Civilized Nations, also known as the Five Civilized Tribes, who were forced by the U.S. government to leave their land in the 1830s. Many of them live in what is today the state of Oklahoma.

### Cherokee

- One of the Five Civilized Nations: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole
- Attempted to fit into European-American conception of what Native Americans should be
- Converted to Christianity
- Became excellent farmers
- Wrote a constitution
- Recognized as sovereign nation
- Lost land to European-American settlers
- Forced to march to Oklahoma Territory in the Trail of Tears; over 4,000 died
- Some 95,000 today live in Oklahoma.

### Seminole

- One of Five Civilized Nations
- Lost land in Florida to white settlers after years of fighting
- Forced to move to Oklahoma
- Currently about 4,000 live in Oklahoma, and a much smaller number live in Florida.