



“Myth”- Understandings: How beliefs about groups become stereotypes.

~ Fact vs Myth ~

Facts are bits of information that are always true. For example, the first picture that you see on the top of this page is of the cartoon character Pocahontas. That is a fact. She is a cartoon character from a Disney movie called Pocahontas. During this activity, you will learn the difference between facts and myths. **Myths** might be a term that you are not very familiar with yet. Myths are bits of information that are false, even though sometimes people really believe that they are true.

A good example of a myth is that “All Native American people look like Pocahontas.” This is not true; it is a myth. Real Native American people do not look like cartoon characters. Stereotypes are similar to myths. In fact, a stereotype is a type of myth.

Stereotypes are beliefs about a group of people that are not true, even though many people might believe them. When statements are made about entire groups of people based on a myth – such as “All Native American people have dark skin and long hair, just like Pocahontas” – that would be considered a stereotype. Native Americans are not cartoon characters that someone drew, they are real live people. Real Native American people have a variety of skin colors and wear their hair in many different hairstyles, ranging from short to long. They are made of the same things like skin and bones just like you. Hey! Look at that! You just learned a new fact about Native American people!



You can often tell facts from myths if a statement starts with “all” or “every.” See if you can spot the stereotypes in the sentences below. Circle true or false for each statement.

- a. TRUE or FALSE All of the Native American people are gone.
- a. TRUE or FALSE There are five million Native American people today.
- a. TRUE or FALSE All Native Americans still live in Tipis.
- a. TRUE or FALSE Every Native American wears feathers and animal skins.
- a. TRUE or FALSE There are over 500 tribes in the United States today.
- a. TRUE or FALSE Native Americans can live in different types of homes.
- a. TRUE or FALSE All Native Americans speak the same language.
- a. TRUE or FALSE Everyone in the tribe wore headdresses.
- a. TRUE or FALSE Native American people today, dress, speak and live like most people in the United States.
- a. TRUE or FALSE Every Native American can ride a horse.
- a. TRUE or FALSE All Native Americans live on a reservation in the woods.

Did you find the 7 stereotypes?

~ What does a Native American Look like? ~

When you think of Native Americans, is this the image that comes to mind? Why? Most likely, the first time you ever learned about Native Americans was when you were in Kindergarten. You might have made and worn paper hats for the pilgrims and feathered headdresses for the Indians as you learned about the first Thanksgiving. When you were a little older, you might have watched the cartoon Pocahontas or learned about Native American people from a long time ago in history class. If you are not exposed to anything else, this is the image that is stuck in your mind. Long ago, some experts say that there were over 10 million Native American people all over North America. When people started coming here from Europe, many of the Native people caught diseases that never existed here before. During that time many Native American people died from those diseases. Over the next 450 years, Native American people faced many difficult challenges and were forced to live in a different way than they were used to.



Over time, in many places, Native Americans welcomed people from other cultures into their communities and those other people became part of the tribe. Some of those other cultures were from South America, Africa, Asia, and from a variety of European countries. The influences from these other cultures changed the way that Native Americans looked across the United States. Native Americans are still alive and strong today. In fact, there are around 5 million people in the United States who are of Native American heritage. But, as you have learned, life is very different for Native Americans today. They no longer live in tipis or wigwams, or follow the buffalo. That does not mean that their culture is gone; actually, the opposite is true. The Native American culture is celebrated today in many ways. One of the common activities in the Native American communities are powwows, which are social gatherings where Native people gather to sing, dance and celebrate their culture. Powwow dancers wear beautiful and colorful outfits called regalia, there are drum groups who sing the songs in the Native languages. The best dancers and singers often have a competition where a prize is given for the best performance. They do not wear their regalia every day; it is only for special occasions. Very similar to the way that you might dress in special clothing if you are going to a wedding or other important event.

What does a Native American look like today? They do not look much different from you. Long gone are the days of deerskin clothing and moccasins. Today, the standard outfit for young Native Americans includes jeans, t-shirt, socks and shoes similar to what you wear. Some Native Americans have light skin, and some have darker skin tones. Some have light hair, and some have dark hair. Some live on reservations and some live in cities or towns. You might even have a Native American in your own classroom or neighborhood. Because they look like everyone else, you might not realize that they are Native Americans. It is important to remember that you cannot judge someone based on their culture, or what they look like, but you might be able to learn from them by getting to know them.

- Has your understanding of Native Americans changed after reading this article?
- How is your life different from or the same as Native American peoples’ lives?
- How can stereotypes be harmful?

WHAT I KNOW NOW

WHAT I WANT TO KNOW



DIRECTIONS: Now that you have completed these activities, in the box on the left below, write down, or draw, anything that you know about Native Americans.

In the box on the right below, write down, or draw, anything that you would like to learn about Native Americans in the box on the right.

Talk with your parents or teachers about the things that you would like to know. They can help you find resources that will tell you all about how differently each tribe lived. There are books written by Native American people, cultural events, such as powwows, and museums dedicated to Native American history and culture.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, science and technology: Grades 5

- **CCSS.ELA-ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2:** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.** Grade 4 (1, 3, 4, 7, 8); Grade 5 (1, 3, 4, 7, 8); Grade 6 (1, 3, 4, 7); Grade 7 (1, 3, 4, 5, 7); Grade 8 (1, 4, 5, 6, 7)
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3:** Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

