

# Native American Heritage Day in a Box

## West Virginia Native American History

### Early History

The first people, in what is now West Virginia, were the Paleo-Indians or early hunters and they arrived before 11,000 B.C.E. (Over 13,000 years ago!) Archaeological digs across the state have uncovered stone weapons from this era. These people likely lived in small family units and were nomadic hunters. Between 7,000 and 1,000 B.C.E., Archaic cultures developed in the Panhandles and Kanawha Valley. These people tended to settle in one place for a long period of time and had gardens, used pottery, and gathered food. As time progressed closer to European settlement, West Virginia was occupied by various Native American tribes. They lived in small villages, hunted, farmed, and fished. By 1600 organized tribes such as the Delaware, Shawnee, and Cherokee were present in West Virginia. The Iroquois Confederacy (located primarily in New York and Southern Ontario) also claimed this land and made treaties with European Settlers without the consent of the Shawnee or other groups.

### Diversity of Native American Groups

Native American history is complicated and diverse. It is important to understand that not all Native American Tribes were the same. Every tribe has its unique languages, traditions, histories, politics, economies, religions, and overall ways of life.

### Understanding Bias in History

It is important to understand that history books often tell the story of encounters between European settlers and Native tribes from the perspective of the white settlers. Europeans "othered" Native Americans by referring to them as "savages" or "uncivilized" which allowed them to justify their murder and removal from ancestral lands. When you read history about Native Americans, think about whose side is telling the story and remember that Native Americans are people just like you.

### Native Americans Today

Native Americans are still alive and present today across the Americas. There are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States and thousands more that are unrecognized. Some Native Americans live on the 300 reservations managed by Native nations, others live in cities and towns across the United States. For the past 500 years, Native Americans have faced dislocation, genocide, and various abuses. It is important to recognize the struggles faced by these groups historically and today. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, there are over 5,500 Native Americans living in West Virginia today.