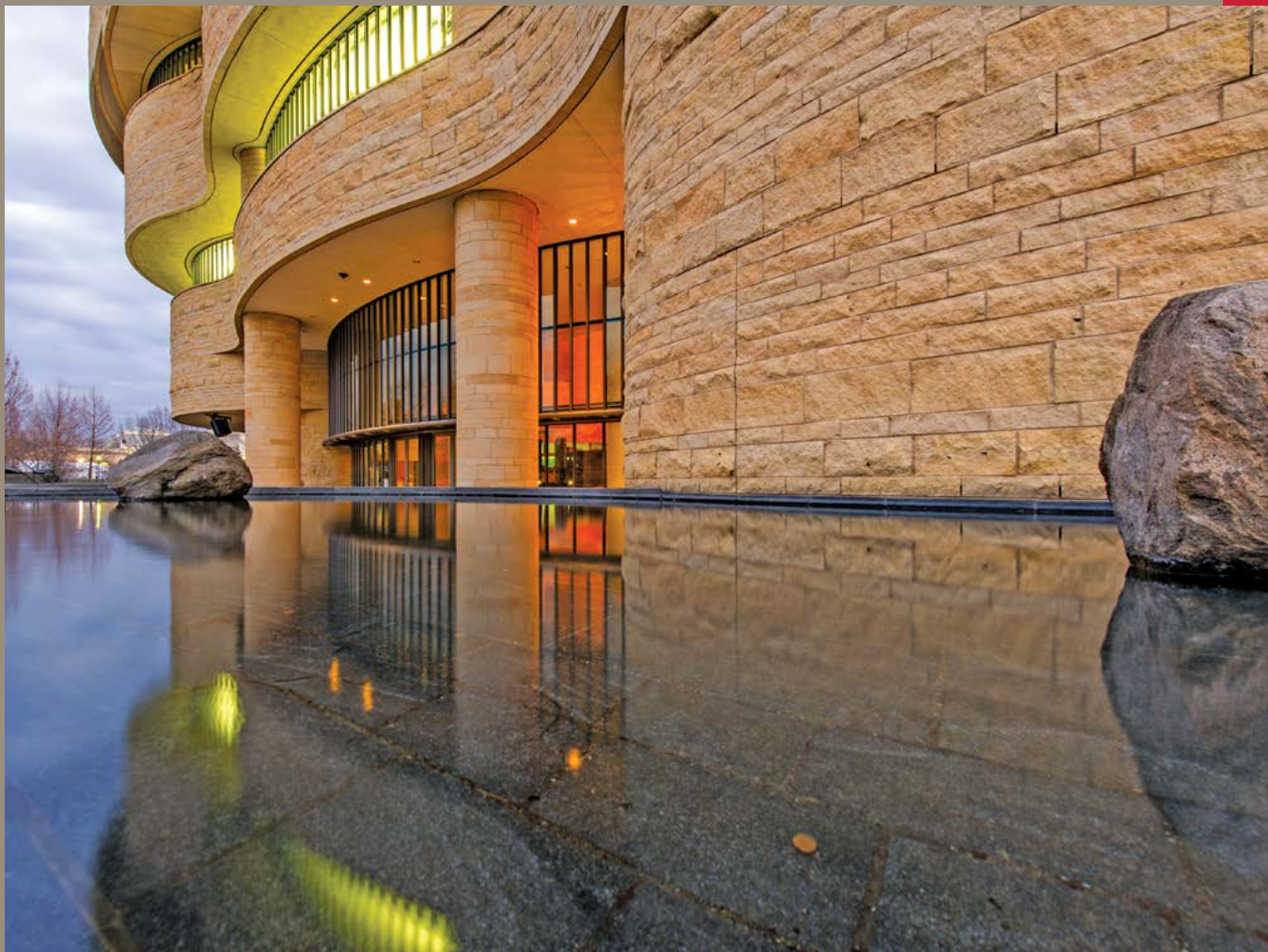


# Native Knowledge 360°

A NATIONAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## Framework for Essential Understandings about American Indians



**NATIVE  
KNOWLEDGE** | **360°**



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of the American Indian*

NATIVE KNOWLEDGE 360° A National Education Initiative

## Transforming Teaching and Learning about American Indians

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is joining with Native communities and educators nationally to help change the way American Indian histories, cultures, and contemporary lives are taught in K-12 classrooms. This long-term initiative, *Native Knowledge 360°* (NK360°), provides educators and students with deeper and more comprehensive knowledge and perspectives about Native Peoples, bringing the richness of the museum’s collections, scholarship, and live programming, along with the diverse voices of Native experts and young people, directly into classrooms nationwide. At the center of *Native Knowledge 360°* are Native people themselves.

Currently, there is little evidence in classroom materials—textbooks, curricula, or academic standards—of important historical and contemporary events that include American Indian knowledge and perspectives, and little or no integration of these events into the larger narratives of American and world history. The museum’s collaborations with Native communities, teachers, scholars, and educational leaders are essential to the development of new resources for the classroom. *Native Knowledge 360°* is a platform for NMAI and Native Peoples to correct, broaden, and improve what is taught in the nation’s schools and to provide model instructional materials and professional development for teachers. It also serves as a stimulus for the national conversation on education for and about American Indians. To anchor this work, the *Native Knowledge 360°* home page features searchable lessons and resources for the classroom, information about programs and professional development opportunities for educators, and additional information about the NK360° initiative. Visit [AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360](http://AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360).

Working in collaboration with Native communities, education agencies and organizations, scholars, and teachers, the NMAI has developed classroom-ready resources that are diverse in content and format. Digital inquiry lessons, interactives, teaching posters, educational websites, and videos help teachers and students understand the complex and robust stories of Native America. Classroom resources feature primary and secondary sources, Native perspectives, images, and objects from the museum’s collection. Materials are accompanied by lesson plans for teachers and skills-based assessments for students. NK360° materials are designed to align with relevant standards, such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for social studies education; and STEM and arts-related standards. With these classroom resources, teachers can trust that they are providing their students with accurate, vetted, and culturally appropriate materials. In addition, the NMAI offers engaging professional-development programs for teachers in a variety of formats, such as residencies, institutes, workshops, digital learning, and conference presentations.

*Native Knowledge 360°* resources and teacher training empower educators to confidently build meaningful classroom experiences that provide a more complete understanding of Native American histories, cultures, and contemporary lives.



Volkswagen Beetle named “Vochol,” decorated by Huichol (Wixaritari) artists using more than 2 million glass beads, 2006. Photograph by Alejandro Piedra Buena, courtesy of the Museo de Arte Popular

NATIVE KNOWLEDGE 360° A National Education Initiative

## Framework for Essential Understandings about American Indians

Educators! The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) invites you to consider content about American Indians from a more complete perspective. NMAI’s *Native Knowledge 360° (NK360°): Essential Understandings about American Indians* is a framework that allows you to see new possibilities for creating student learning experiences. Building on the ten themes of the National Council for the Social Studies’ national curriculum standards, NMAI’s *Essential Understandings* reveal key concepts about the rich and diverse cultures, histories, and contemporary lives of Native Peoples. These concepts reflect a multitude of untold stories about American Indians that can deepen and expand your teaching of history, geography, civics, economics, science, engineering, and other subject areas.

NMAI collaborated with Native communities, national and state education agencies, educators, and others to develop these *Essential Understandings*. They serve as the foundation for our museum’s educational work. We also share them with teachers, curriculum developers, other museums, state and federal agencies, and education organizations to promote more expansive and informed thinking about Native American histories, cultures, and contemporary lives. We encourage state and local educators to work with Native Peoples in their areas to make the *Essential Understandings* more specific and relevant to their regions and to design curricula and materials that address local standards.

Teachers know that it is impossible to teach about the Americas—histories, governments, cultures, environments, societies, and contemporary issues—without teaching about Native Americans. Instead of the same old lessons about ancient American Indian food, clothing, and shelter, we invite you to explore the resources available to educators through NK360°. Visit [AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360](http://AmericanIndian.si.edu/nk360) and consider how you can expand your students’ knowledge and understanding of the contributions and experiences of Native Peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Resources from Native Knowledge 360° demonstrate what NMAI’s *Essential Understandings* look like in action.

*Special acknowledgement: The NMAI thanks the Montana and South Dakota Offices of Indian Education, who first established Essential Understandings for their respective states and have partnered with the NMAI to create its national framework.*

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 1 AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURES

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of American Indian cultures and cultural diversity.

*Culture is a result of human socialization. People acquire knowledge and values by interacting with other people through common language, place, and community. In the Americas, there is vast cultural diversity among more than 2,000 tribal groups. Tribes have unique cultures and ways of life that span history from time immemorial to the present day.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ There is no single American Indian culture or language.
- ⌘ American Indian cultures have always been dynamic and changing.
- ⌘ American Indians are both individuals and members of a tribal group.
- ⌘ Interactions with Europeans and Americans brought accelerated and often devastating changes to American Indian cultures.
- ⌘ For millennia, American Indians have shaped and been shaped by their culture and environment. Elders in each generation teach the next generation their values, traditions, and beliefs through their own tribal languages, social practices, arts, music, ceremonies, and customs.
- ⌘ Native people continue to fight to maintain the integrity and viability of indigenous societies. American Indian history is one of cultural persistence, creative adaptation, renewal, and resilience.
- ⌘ Kinship and extended family relationships have always been and continue to be essential in the shaping of American Indian cultures.
- ⌘ American Indians share many similarities with other indigenous people of the world, along with many differences.



(Left to right)  
O-o-be (Kiowa), 1895. Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Photographer unknown, NMAI.  
Kwagiulth Flower by Richard Hunt (Kwak'waka'wakw), 2006. Photograph by Roger Whiteside, NMAI.  
Christopher Cote (Osage), 2008. Skiatook, Oklahoma. Photograph by Katherine Fogden (Mohawk), NMAI

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 2 TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of American Indian history and its legacy.

*Indigenous people of the Americas shaped life in the Western Hemisphere for millennia. After contact, American Indians and the events involving them greatly influenced the histories of the European colonies and the modern nations of North, Central, and South America. Today, this influence continues to play significant roles in many aspects of political, legal, cultural, environmental, and economic issues. To understand the history and cultures of the Americas requires understanding American Indian history from Indian perspectives.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ❑ Many American Indian communities have creation stories that specify their origins in the Western Hemisphere.
- ❑ American Indians have lived in the Western Hemisphere for at least 15,000–20,000 years.
- ❑ The Western Hemisphere was laced with diverse, well-developed, and complex societies that interacted with one another over millennia.
- ❑ American Indian history is not singular or timeless. American Indian cultures have always adapted and changed in response to environmental, economic, social, and other factors. American Indian cultures and people are fully engaged in the modern world.
- ❑ American Indians employed a variety of methods to record and preserve their histories.
- ❑ European contact resulted in devastating loss of life, disruption of tradition, and enormous loss of lands for American Indians.
- ❑ Hearing and understanding American Indian history from Indian perspectives provides an important point of view to the discussion of history and cultures in the Americas. Indian perspectives expand the social, political, and economic dialogue.
- ❑ Indigenous people played a significant role in the history of the Americas. Many of these historically important events and developments in the Americas shaped the modern world.
- ❑ Providing an American Indian context to history makes for a greater understanding of world history.



*Young powwow dancer, 2007. Photograph by Cynthia Frankenburg, NMAI*

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 3 PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of American Indian people, places, and environments.

*For thousands of years, indigenous people have studied, managed, honored, and thrived in their homelands. These foundations continue to influence American Indian relationships and interactions with the land today.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ❑ The story of American Indians in the Western Hemisphere is intricately intertwined with places and environments. Native knowledge systems resulted from long-term occupation of tribal homelands, and observation and interaction with places. American Indians understood and valued the relationship between local environments and cultural traditions, and recognized that human beings are part of the environment.
- ❑ Long before their contact with Europeans, indigenous people populated the Americas and were successful stewards and managers of the land, from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego. European contact resulted in exposure to Old World diseases, displacement, and wars, devastating the underlying foundations of American Indian societies.
- ❑ Throughout their histories, Native groups have relocated and successfully adapted to new places and environments.
- ❑ Well-developed systems of trails, including some hard-surfaced roads, interlaced the Western Hemisphere prior to European contact. These trading routes made possible the exchange of foods and other goods. Many of the trails were later used by Euro-Americans as roads and highways.
- ❑ The imposition of international, state, reservation, and other borders on Native lands changed relationships between people and their environments, affected how people lived, and sometimes isolated tribal citizens and family members from one another.



*(Left to right) Saguaro and prickly pear cactuses on the Sonoran Desert, 2004. Photograph by Roger Whiteside, NMAI Wild rice harvesting, 2010. Leech Lake, Minnesota. Photograph by Kat Communications, NMAI.*

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity among American Indians.

*American Indian individual development and identity is tied to culture and the forces that have influenced and changed culture over time. Unique social structures, such as clan systems, rites of passage, and protocols for nurturing and developing individual roles in tribal society, characterize each American Indian culture. American Indian cultures have always been dynamic and adaptive in response to interactions with others.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ❑ For American Indians, identity development takes place in a cultural context, and the process differs from one American Indian culture to another. American Indian identity is shaped by the family, peers, social norms, and institutions inside and outside a community or culture.
- ❑ Historically, well-established conventions and practices nurtured and promoted the development of individual identity. These included careful observation and nurturing of individual talents and interests by elders and family members; rites of passage; social and gender roles; and family specializations, such as healers, religious leaders, artists, and whalers.
- ❑ Contact with Europeans and Americans disrupted and transformed traditional norms for identity development.
- ❑ Today, Native identity is shaped by many complex social, political, historical, and cultural factors.
- ❑ In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many American Indian communities have sought to revitalize and reclaim their languages and cultures.



Lummi Nation First Salmon Ceremony, 2010. Photograph by Kat Communications, NMAI

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 5 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among American Indian individuals, groups, and institutions, and with those of other cultures and societies as well.

*American Indians have always operated and interacted within self-defined social structures that include institutions, societies, and organizations, each with specific functions. These social structures have shaped the lives and histories of American Indians through the present day.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ❑ American Indian institutions, societies, and organizations defined people's relationships and roles, and managed responsibilities in every aspect of life—religion, health, government, diplomacy, war, agriculture, hunting and fishing, trade, and so on.
- ❑ Native kinship systems were influential in shaping people's roles and interactions among other individuals, groups, and institutions.
- ❑ External educational, governmental, and religious institutions have exerted major influences on American Indian individuals, groups, and institutions. Native people have fought to counter these pressures and have adapted to them when necessary. Many Native institutions today are mixtures of Native and Western constructs, reflecting external influence and Native adaptation.
- ❑ A variety of specialized agencies have been formed to interact with and serve American Indian individuals, groups, and institutions.
- ❑ Today, because of treaties, court decisions, and statutes, tribal governments maintain a unique relationship with federal and state governments.
- ❑ Today, American Indian governments uphold tribal sovereignty and promote tribal culture and well-being.



Navajo Code Talkers in World War II, 1943. Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea. Photograph by United States Marine Corps, courtesy of National Archives

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of how American Indians create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

*American Indians devised and have always lived under a variety of complex systems of government. Tribal governments faced rapid and devastating change as a result of European colonization and the development of the United States. Tribes today still govern their own affairs and maintain a government-to-government relationship with the United States and other governments.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ Today, tribal governments operate under self-chosen traditional or constitution-based governmental structures. Based on treaties, laws, and court decisions, they operate as sovereign nations within the United States, enacting and enforcing laws and managing judicial systems, social well-being, natural resources, and economic, educational, and other programs for their members. Tribal governments are also responsible for interactions with American federal, state, and municipal governments.
- ⌘ Long before European colonization, American Indians had developed a variety of complex systems of government that embodied important principles for effective rule. American Indian governments and leaders interacted, recognized each other's sovereignty, practiced diplomacy, built strategic alliances, waged wars, and negotiated peace accords.
- ⌘ After 1492, American Indians suffered diseases and genocidal events that resulted in death on a catastrophic scale and the rapid decimation of Native populations. These episodes greatly compromised the continuity of existing tribal government structures.
- ⌘ A variety of political, economic, legal, military, and social policies were used by Europeans and Americans to remove and relocate American Indians and to destroy their cultures. U.S. policies regarding American Indians were the result of major national

debate. Many of these policies had a devastating effect on established American Indian governing principles and systems. Other policies sought to strengthen and restore tribal self-government.

- ⌘ A variety of historical policy periods have had a major impact on American Indian people's abilities to self-govern. These include:
  - Colonization Period, since 1492
  - Treaty Period, 1789–1871
  - Removal Period, 1834–1871
  - Allotment/Assimilation Period, 1887–1934
  - Tribal Reorganization, 1934–1958
  - Termination, 1953–1988
  - Self-Determination, 1975–present



United States Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne), 2005. Photograph by Walter Larrimore, NMAI

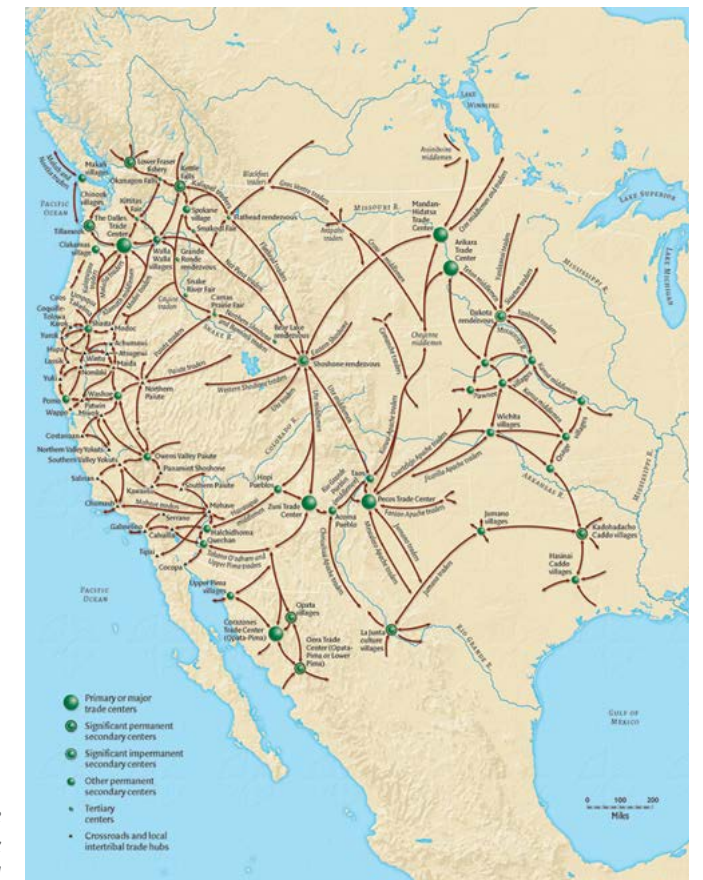
## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 7 PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of how American Indian people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, both in the past and today.

*American Indians developed a variety of economic systems that reflected their cultures and managed their relationships with others. Prior to European arrival in the Americas, American Indians produced and traded goods and technologies using well-developed systems of trails and widespread transcontinental, intertribal trade routes. Today, American Indian tribes and individuals are active in economic enterprises that involve production and distribution.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ For thousands of years American Indians developed and operated vast trade networks throughout the Western Hemisphere.
- ⌘ American Indians traded, exchanged, gifted, and negotiated the purchase of goods, foods, technologies, domestic animals, ideas, and cultural practices with one another.
- ⌘ American Indians played influential and powerful roles in trade and exchange economies with partners in Europe during the colonial period. These activities also supported the development and growth of the United States.
- ⌘ Today, American Indians are involved in a variety of economic enterprises, set economic policies for their nations, and own and manage natural resources that affect the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services throughout much of the United States.



North American Indian Trade Routes. Map by Cartographic Concepts, Inc., NMAI

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 8 SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of the development of Native knowledge and the relationships among science, technology, and society in historical and contemporary American Indian communities.

*American Indian knowledge resides in languages, cultural practices, and teaching that spans many generations. This knowledge is based on long-term observation, experimentation, and experience with the living earth. Indigenous knowledge has sustained American Indian cultures for thousands of years. When applied to contemporary global challenges, Native knowledge contributes to dynamic and innovative solutions.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ American Indian knowledge can inform the ongoing search for new solutions to contemporary issues.
- ⌘ American Indian knowledge reflects a relationship developed over millennia with the living earth based on keen observation, experimentation, and practice.
- ⌘ American Indian knowledge is closely tied to languages, cultural values, and practices. It is founded on the recognition of the relationships between humans and the world around them.
- ⌘ American Indian knowledge allowed American Indians to live productive, innovative, and sustainable lives in the diverse environments of the Western Hemisphere.
- ⌘ American Indian knowledge and related innovations, goods, and technologies (e.g., agriculture) have had enormous global impact.
- ⌘ Major social, cultural, and economic changes took place in American Indian cultures as a result of the acquisition of goods and technologies from Europeans and others.
- ⌘ Much American Indian knowledge was destroyed in the years after contact with Europeans. Nevertheless, the intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge, the recovery of cultural practices, and the creation of new knowledge continue in American Indian communities today.

(Left to right)  
Machu Picchu  
from the southern  
agricultural terraces,  
2011. IRP (Inka Road  
Project) Archive, NMAI  
Qeshuar Chaka  
suspension bridge over  
the Apurimac River  
in Peru, 2011. IRP  
(Inka Road Project)  
Archive, NMAI



## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 9 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of American Indian participation in and influences on global connections and interdependence.

*American Indians have always engaged in the world beyond the immediacy of their own communities. For millennia, indigenous people of North America exchanged and traded ideas, goods, technologies, and arts with other tribal nations, near and far. Global connections expanded and intensified after contact with Europeans. American Indian foods, technologies, wealth, and labor contributed to the development of the modern world.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ Interactions among American Indian communities across the Americas contributed to the change, growth, and vitality of Native nations.
- ⌘ Global interactions with Europeans and others had both positive and negative consequences for American Indians.
- ⌘ The knowledge and perspectives of American Indians and other indigenous people around the world have the potential to inform solutions as global interdependence intensifies and change accelerates.
- ⌘ As sovereign independent nations, American Indian tribes and their citizens are participants in global politics, economies, and other facets of contemporary life.



Guatemalan corn.  
Photograph by Katherine  
Fogden, NMAI

## NMAI ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING **10** CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in American Indian societies past and present.

*Ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship have always been part of American Indian societies. The rights and responsibilities of American Indian individuals have been defined by the values, morals, and beliefs common to their cultures. American Indians today may be citizens of their tribal nations, the states they live in, and the United States.*

### KEY CONCEPTS

- ⌘ As citizens of their tribal nations, American Indians have always had certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities that are tied to cultural values and beliefs and thus vary from culture to culture.
- ⌘ Not all American Indians today are citizens of their tribes.
- ⌘ American Indians have acquired U.S. citizenship through a variety of means, including certain treaties and military service. Citizenship for all American Indians did not occur until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.
- ⌘ Some American Indian people have neither desired nor accepted U.S. citizenship.
- ⌘ American Indians today may be citizens of their tribes, the United States, and the states in which they live.
- ⌘ As U.S. citizens, American Indians have often been denied the same rights and privileges as other U.S. citizens. They have formed movements to gain equitable rights and privileges.
- ⌘ More than 560 tribal governments are recognized by the United States as having rights of sovereign self-government. Dozens of other tribes are recognized by various state governments, whose authorities and responsibilities differ according to the laws of the states.



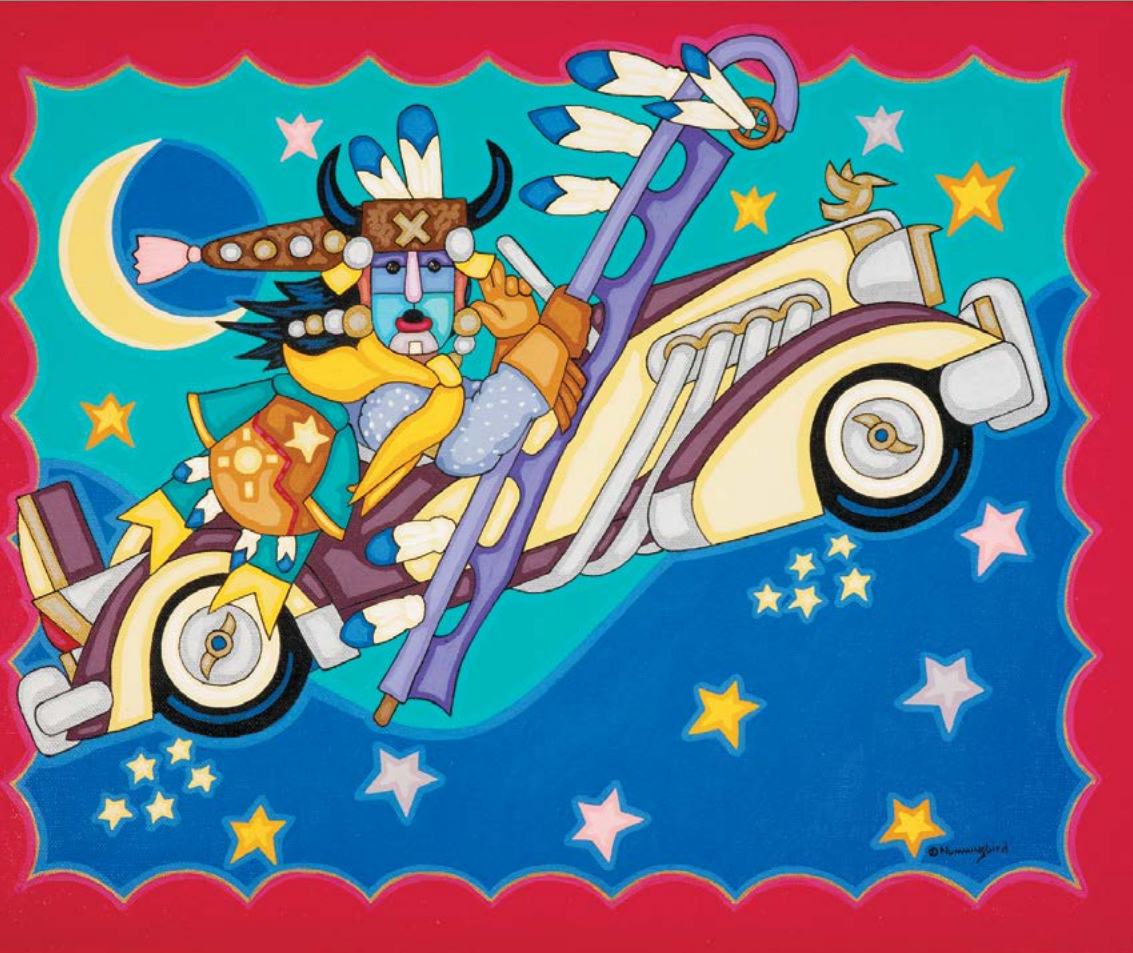
*President Calvin Coolidge with Native delegation, 1925. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress*



*Maya ceremony, 2011. Photograph by Isabel Hawkins, NMAI*

*(Background photograph) Maya corn, 2011. Photograph by Isabel Hawkins, NMAI*





Front cover: *The National Museum of the American Indian, 2013. Photograph by Digital Blue, Russ Coover. NMAI*

Back cover: *Buffalo Boy and His Duesenbird by Jesse T. Hummingbird (Oklahoma Cherokee), ca. 2000-2004. Gift of R.E. Mansfield. NMAI*



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