

A Short Quiz on Facts and Attitudes about Native American People

This quiz will help students and others identify some stereotypes about Native Americans and prepare them for specific and accurate information. Despite its name, this brief activity is not really a quiz; it is intended to start discussion. If you are a teacher, you may want to have students complete this quiz as a class, in small groups, or individually. If you are a librarian, you can introduce the quiz as a pre-reading activity during a youth reading circle or book discussion group. As they read, students can look for information that supports or contradicts the quiz statements. You can use the quiz answers to help guide the post-quiz discussion.

Answer “true” or “false” to these statements about Native people.

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| _____ | 1. Any one of these three terms— <i>American Indians</i> , <i>Native Americans</i> , or <i>Native peoples</i> —is acceptable and respectful. |
| _____ | 2. Native Americans speak one language. |
| _____ | 3. All Native Americans live in tipis. |
| _____ | 4. All Native Americans are noble, humorless, and respect Mother Earth. |
| _____ | 5. All Native Americans live on reservations. |
| _____ | 6. Native Americans have a similar appearance: high cheekbones, black hair, dark skin, prominent nose. |
| _____ | 7. This phrase might be offensive to Native Americans:
“You act like a bunch of wild Indians!” |
| _____ | 8. Native Americans wear beaded dresses, moccasins, or buckskin pants every day. |
| _____ | 9. All Native Americans participate in powwows. |
| _____ | 10. To be considered a Native American, a person must have a mother, father, grandmothers, and grandfathers who are Native American. |

Answers

- 1. TRUE.** Although some Native people prefer one term over the others, most feel that any of these terms is acceptable and respectful. These terms include peoples indigenous to North, Central, and South America. The Native people of Alaska are generally referred to as *Alaska Natives* (not Eskimos) and Canadian Natives as *indigenous, aboriginal, or First Nations*. In South America, Native peoples are most often referred to as *Indigenous Peoples*. Whenever possible, it's best to use the specific tribal name, such as White Mountain Apache, to affirm the diversity of Native peoples and to honor the group's or individual's heritage and identity.
- 2. FALSE.** Before Columbus arrived, the Native people of North, Central, and South America spoke more than 1,000 different languages. Most Native cultures preserved their traditions orally, but a few had written languages as well. Although attempts were made by colonizers and missionaries to destroy Native language, more than 700 Native languages are still spoken today. Preserving and revitalizing Native languages are issues that many people are becoming concerned about. Visit these websites to learn more about language preservation efforts: the Native American Language Center (<http://nas.ucdavis.edu/NALC/home.html>) or Native Languages of the Americas (<http://www.native-languages.org/>)
- 3. FALSE.** Historically, Native people lived in many kinds of dwellings, including tipis, which were favored by nomadic hunting tribes such as the Plains peoples. But Native Americans in other parts of North America also lived in igloos, pueblos, hogans, and longhouses, among other types of dwellings. In some instances, people's housing organization reflected clan or kinship systems and familial relationships. Although most contemporary Natives live in contemporary dwellings, many still use traditional building techniques in their cultural or spiritual lives, in much the same way that they would have in the past.
- 4. FALSE.** These kinds of generalizations reinforce stereotypes. A stereotype is a generalization that is applied to all members of a group. If you are a teacher or librarian, have students discuss why such statements can't possibly be true. Ask if they can think of books, movies, television shows, or other sources of these stereotypes. Then ask them to think of images of Native people that combat these stereotypes.
- 5. FALSE.** Today, nearly 70% of Native people do not live on reservations, although reservations remain at the center of many Native traditions, customs, and festivals. In the U.S., reservations were created in the 1800s and, in most cases, Native people were forced to live on them after the federal government removed them from their traditional homelands to make the land available to non-Native settlers. Some tribes, however, were able to maintain their original homelands, which constitute their reservations today. But reservations also arose when tribes purchased land from other tribes or entered into agreements with the U.S. government (federal or state).

6. **FALSE.** This is a stereotypical expectation of what Native Americans might look like. No single physical description can define Native people—all Indians do not look alike. Some have curly hair, others have straight; some may have green or blue eyes, others have dark brown. Native people can be tall or short and can have very fair or darker skin.
7. **TRUE.** A phrase such as this implies that Native American people are wild or savage, without manners, and uncivilized. People sometimes unknowingly use stereotypes and hurtful language when talking about Native Americans. Some books use loaded words. They may refer to Native people as *savages* or to a Native war victory as a *massacre*, while not describing the killing of Natives as a massacre. The terms *squaw*, *papoose*, and *redskin* are commonly used by the dominant society, but not by Native people, who consider them derogatory. Other phrases further instill misguided understandings. When someone says “low man on the totem pole,” they may not realize that totem poles tell important stories and the bottom figure is often the most important one (and usually not a man). Using the term “Indian giver” implies that Indian people are dishonest or thieves. As part of a discussion, you may want to research and identify historical U.S. government documents that negatively refer to Native Americans. Study the language in these documents to help students better understand the historic attitudes of the U.S. government toward Indians, and discuss how those attitudes may have shaped stereotypical ideas still prevalent today.
8. **FALSE.** Although many Native people have incorporated elements of their cultures into their clothing styles, most Native people wear regular, contemporary clothing daily. But regalia and ceremonial dress are worn during important events or ceremonies and express the significant role of culture to Native people living in a contemporary world. Styles, colors, and designs of regalia or dress signify age, status, region, or spirituality to people who understand and recognize what they are looking at. Accoutrements such as feathers, jewelry, or headdresses also have special significance. Some Native people, however, wear elements of traditional-style clothing today for practical reasons. For example, to keep warm, Igloolik hunters still wear sealskin mitts and boots when hunting walrus or caribou. Or, for comfort, some Native people wear moccasins with blue jeans.
9. **FALSE.** The idea that all Native Americans participate in powwows is a misconception. Historically, powwows began as intertribal gatherings among Plains tribes. Today, many Native people do attend powwows all around the country in urban, reservation, and rural settings. Powwows serve many purposes, including entertainment, renewal of friendships, dancing, singing, and celebrating identity. Powwows are social gatherings, but many also include dance competitions where dancers are judged on their regalia, dance styles, and ability to stay on beat with the drum music. Powwows promote respect and understanding among people of different tribal backgrounds.

10. FALSE. Tribal governments often use racial and political considerations to determine that a person is a tribal member and may identify as a community member. Tribes' requirements for ancestry *and* affiliation with a tribe or community often pre-date European contact. However, there is no single established standard to determine who is Native American. While degree of Native blood is a common determinant, "blood quantum" requirements for membership vary from tribe to tribe and are influenced by the U.S. federal government's forced definition of Native people in some instances. Each particular tribe, village, nation, and community has established their own criteria for their citizenship. Although these criteria may be cultural and traditional, they may also change with time or the needs of the community. Cultural identity is just as important to being "Native American" as the government's designations.

Quiz excerpted from "A Pre-Visit Guide for Teachers" with permission from the Education Office of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

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