

# AMERICAN ORIGINALS

## Smithsonian tells the stories of Native Americans

**N**ovember is Native American Heritage Month. Thanksgiving, the big holiday of the month, is a time when many non-native Americans pause to think of those who lived here before



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*InSites*

Europeans crossed the ocean. The story of the newly arrived Pilgrims struggling to survive in a strange land before being aided by the Wampanoag tribe, and then repaying them with a harvest feast, is the basis for the holiday.

Of course, like much of the history we learned in grade school, the story is much more complex. When I was a kid, we learned a very white-washed version of natives and newcomers getting along swell before having the first Thanksgiving. We made paper Pilgrim hats and native headdresses and had a fun day at school, fol-

lowed by a great meal and a long weekend.

I don't know how the story is presented to grade-schoolers today. Hopefully, the kids get a more nuanced, yet age-appropriate, telling of the settling of America. The world was an even more brutal place then than it is now, and history is usually written by the victors. If you want to get a better understanding of the colonization of America, visit the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's website, [americanindian.si.edu](http://americanindian.si.edu).

The Smithsonian takes a deep dive into many aspects of Native American history and culture. The museum, in Washington, D.C., is once again open, but the website provides a wealth of information if you're not comfortable traveling in these perilous times.

The site uses a combination of articles, images, audio and video to tell the stories. The home page spotlights upcoming virtual programs, including Native American cinema, indigenous youth talking about their future, a

return to traditional diets and a look at native artists. The cinema program will already be underway when you read this, but some of the movies will be available to watch through Thanksgiving day.

A drop-down menu at the top right of the page, photo links further down the page and text links at the bottom can all be used to navigate to the various online offerings.

There are lessons and other resources for K-12 teachers to use in the classroom. These include webinars, posters, handouts, videos and virtual field trips.

The Exhibition Websites section covers a variety of topics, including Day of the Dead, Food, Mascots, Native American Veterans, Native American Women, Thanksgiving, Trail of Tears/Removal and Wampum. Each of these topics has photo links to numerous subtopics. You can spend a good deal of time exploring here and come away with a lot more knowledge on Native Americans than you went in with.

A Google Arts & Culture link leads to a gallery of creative work by indigenous people, as well as imagery depicting them. It includes historical and contemporary paintings, sculptures, photos, textiles, clothing, basketry, pottery and more. The American tribes were not monolithic, and they inhabited a wide range of habitats, such as forests, plains, coastlines, desert and the Arctic. The items they made to live in these varied environments, and to express themselves, cover a wide range of materials and styles.

History is full of people being conquered and oppressed by others with superior numbers and technology. The story of Native Americans is a sad chapter in this ongoing saga. As we struggle to improve the way people treat one another, learning about each other is a crucial step. When we see others as people instead of stereotypes, we can begin to heal. This site is a good place to start.

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