

Lesson 1: Understanding Where We Live

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: One 60-90 min. Lesson *or* Two 40-60 min. Lessons

Materials:

- Google Slides [Presentation](#)
- Chalk/White board
- Long piece of string (~10ft)
- Personal computers (sharing is an option) OR schedule a library/computer lab so that students have access to the internet.
- Print out [“Where Do I Live?”](#) worksheets with [Land Acknowledgement](#)
- If printing out hard copies of activity page: coloring utensils

The following lesson aims to expand students’ understanding of their local geography by looking through an Indigenous lens. Students will explore natural geographic features in their local communities, how these features are related to Tribal peoples, and how we can care for and respect our land. Students will learn to recognize the lands as ancestral homelands and acknowledge the land’s importance to local tribal peoples.

Expressive Outcomes:

I know I can identify local tribes in my area.

I know I can describe traditional territories of local tribes.

I know I can explain where local Native governments and communities are located today.

Teacher Background:

****This is important historical and geo-political information for California. If you live in another state you should look up local information for the place you teach.***

Before exploring California geography from an Indigenous lens, it is important to note that prior to European settlement, the dynamics of human activity and land use looked quite different. The geography of the land allowed Native populations to thrive, thus explaining why California was home to more than 150 different language groups. However, the biggest distinction between pre-colonial geographical understandings

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and how we conceptualize physical and human geography today is that Native peoples did not practice land ownership, but rather land stewardship. Native peoples had a very deep connection with their homelands and took their responsibility of tending to it very seriously. A settler perspective of having ownership of the land justifies the extraction of resources for human benefit. A Native perspective of having a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the land always considers the well-being of all living things, and receives Earth's gifts with gratitude instead of taking them out of greed.

Following this pre-colonial notion of land, we take a critical look at the historical relationship between Natives and the California State and US Federal government. The government's treatment of California tribes is known as the most violent and lawless in the country. Even before California gained statehood, California Natives survived the invasion of Spanish missionaries from the south, and the forced conversion, biological warfare, and slavery that came with it.

In 1849, *nine* days before The Treaty of Hidalgo was signed, Gold was discovered in California's foothills. This event marked a massive migration into California from countries all over the world, and centered California as an economic powerhouse.

After California gained statehood in 1850, the government took control of traditional Native territories in order to use the land for gold extraction and other economic purposes. Because of this, the majority of Native people were stripped from their homelands.

In an original attempt to follow national precedent, the California government developed **18 treaties** with tribal leaders that promised them small parcels of land to serve as reservations, in exchange for protection and resources from the CA state government. However, by the time the treaties were signed and sent to be ratified by the US Senate, CA State leaders changed their minds, realizing that the state would forfeit economic opportunities by giving ownership of natural resources to tribes.

Supporting California's economic development at the expense of tribal safety, the Senate left the 18 Treaties **unratified**. As a result, the California government took control of the entire territory of California, leaving Natives with no land, no protection, no citizenship, and nowhere to live. A string of stringent laws were passed through the California government ensuring that Natives would have little to no legal rights, and

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allowing them to be legally coerced into slavery conditions.

This lasted until the years 1906-1910, when the government appropriated money to buy small land parcels to house the landless Natives. Even though Natives lived in California, they did not gain citizenship until 1924, and so during this time, Natives were not only landless or suffering from housing insecurity, they did not share the protection of their rights by the government as did its legal citizens.

In 1934, the **Indian Reorganization Act** supported Natives in developing tribal governments and provided land to Native communities. However in 1958, the **Rancheria Act** was passed, and terminated the existence of **41 California tribes**. Since then, tribes have worked to regain their land and their federal status.

Today, there are still many California tribes who have not regained their **federal recognition**. This deeply impacts their ability to gain funding and build economic security for their people. In California, states may achieve **State recognition**, however this recognition may not grant tribal communities all of the protections as having Federal recognition would. Some tribes have no recognition from either the State or Federal government, some have only State recognition, and some have both State and Federal recognition. Recognition status can have very real economic impacts on the tribal community, along with impacts related to mental and physical health.

It is important to note that with a loss of federal recognition also came an increased pressure for Natives to **assimilate**. Not having a legal connection to traditional land, traditional foods, and being left without any government protection, many Native people altered the way they lived in order to protect themselves. Many families relocated into urban centers, changed their traditional names, learned English or Spanish (depending on the time and location), and many publicly rejected their Native identities.

Without access to traditional lands, foods, and family structures, culture and general well-being were severely strained. Still today, tribes' and Native peoples' connection to culture and **indigeneity** can be impacted by whether or not they receive official legal recognition from state and federal governments.¹

¹ **For more info, read:**

<https://www.indianz.com/News/2019/03/12/the-revelator-tribes-without-recognition.asp>

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Tribes who do have government recognition have **tribal sovereignty** over their territory. This means that the State and Federal government's ability to interfere in tribal affairs is limited at the discretion of the tribal government. Each tribal government has its own laws and regulations, as well as its own system of determining membership. Members of tribal communities are **citizens** of the sovereign tribal nation in addition to their citizenship to the United States government. Tribal nations have the ability to set up their own judiciary systems, develop the economies of their nations, and often have health care support systems in place. No tribal community is the same, and it is impossible to make assumptions about the laws, protocols, and systems within a tribal nation without researching the specific tribal nation in question.

The United States government treats Native peoples differently than others in regards to race. Native people are often left off or are miscounted in the census by identifying as mixed race. Native people are also counted by the government's **Bureau of Indian Affairs** based on their amount of Native blood, a measurement that is impossible to accurately measure, for genetic reasons but also due to the historical intermixing of Native and non-Native peoples due to colonialism. This measure, known as "**Blood Quantum**" is inherently racist, and is used as a method for erasing Native peoples from the United States, as it qualifies membership in the Native community through an illegitimate genetic measurement as opposed to cultural and community involvement.

TEACHER NOTE: It is important that educators **never** quantify Native identity through **Blood Quantum** measurements. Teachers who ask students what "percent" Native they are actively contributing to the erasure of Native communities by expecting Natives to prove that they belong to a group in order to be legitimate. Teachers must avoid projecting their preconceived notions of what it means to be Native, as Native identity is complex and has been deeply impacted by settler actions that have consciously and unconsciously damaged the Native community. These actions and systems of oppression are not just historical, but continue to exist into the present.

ENGAGE

Mindfulness Activity (5-10 minutes)

1. Encourage students to get comfortable, close their eyes, and visualize their

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- environment.
2. Ask students to visualize peeling away what is surrounding them where they're sitting, beginning with the windows and walls, then the roads and buildings of their community, until there is nothing but land left.
 3. Ask students to visualize being outside. Ask them: What do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell? (**checking-in with senses**)
 4. Gently explain to students that seeing the land bare, with only the grass, dirt, animals was the everyday view of the original Native people of this area in which we stand today.
 5. Explain that local Native families took care of this land like it was family, and relied on the availability of plants, animals, and clean water for living everyday life.
 6. Ask students to notice how they feel when visualizing the landscape in this way.
 7. Remind students that they can revisit this exercise anytime they want to find a way to reconnect to the land that they live on.
 8. When appropriate, encourage students to start to come back into their space, asking them to visualize putting back the roads, fences, houses, etc...
 9. Tell students, "Regardless of where you stand, this is and always will be Native land. Even though the landscape you saw in your mind looks much different today, underneath the roads and houses and buildings is that same land where local Native communities lived. Many of these families still live here today, in the same neighborhoods where you live with your families."
 10. Today, our ecosystem is out of balance. It has been mistreated by us. But, this land has memories and it remembers what it was once like to be cared for by Native people. Now if we are willing, we are capable of restoring the land back to how it used to be, in balance.
 11. Follow up with some of these questions (choose 3 or 4):
 - ❖ Why is it important to think of the land without other things on it?
 - ❖ What does it mean to have an ecosystem out of balance?
 - ❖ Why is our ecosystem out of balance today?
 - ❖ How can Native people take care of the land again?
 - ❖ How can we help restore the land back to how it used to be?
 - ❖ What natural features did you visualize after peeling away all of your

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surroundings?

- ❖ What are some things that humans added to the land?
- ❖ Why is it important to know about our land?
- ❖ How can we show our appreciation for our land?

EXPLORE

Google Slides & Native-land.ca (10-20 minutes)

1. **SHOW Slide 3** with a modern California map and **ASK** kids:
 - a. Where are we located?
 - b. What's the closest city to us? Biggest?
2. **SHOW Slide 4** with a California Native community map and **ASK**:
 - a. What do they see?
 - b. Can they locate the tribes closest to them?
 - c. Do they notice any familiar names?
3. **SHOW Slide 5** with the two maps next to one another. **DRAW** a Venn Diagram on the board and compare the two maps.
 - a. What are some differences? Similarities?
4. **SHOW Slide 6** and, either as a class or on individual computers, **VISIT** Native-Land.ca
 - a. Read out loud the **Native Land Disclaimer** as a class
 - b. **EXPLAIN** that *maps of Indigenous land will never create an accurate picture for us today because borders and territories were understood differently by Native tribes; if anyone is curious about the boundaries of local tribes, we can reach out to the tribal leaders of those Tribal Nations. Native-land.ca recognizes that this map is not error-free and, like us, greatly relies on local Indigenous communities for the correct information.*
 - c. Insert different city names or zip codes to see what local tribes are in the area.
 - d. Try turning on and off the “Territory” and “Languages” toggles and observe and discuss the differences (“Treaties” may be a bit advanced for

younger students).

EXPLAIN

Google Slides cont. (15-30 minutes)

1. **SHOW** students **Slide 7** with the question “**When you think about the land where you live, what comes to mind?**”
2. **ASK** the students to take a moment to consider this question.
3. **SHOW** slides with the following vocabulary words:
 - a. *Ancestral*
 - i. What other word do you see in this word?
 - ii. What does the word *ancestor* mean?
 - iii. Do you know where your ancestors come from?
 - iv. Definition: any person from whom one is descended
 - b. *Territory*
 - i. What does *terra or tierra* mean?
 - ii. Definition: Land and waters under the jurisdiction of a town, state, nation, sovereign, etc.
 - c. *Colonize*
 - i. What word do you see in this word?
 - ii. Do you know who colonized these lands?
 - iii. Definition: to establish a settlement on a distant territory and begin to rule
 - d. *Tribal Nation*
 - i. What makes a nation?
 - ii. How is a nation similar or different to a territory?
 - iii. Definition: Federally recognized tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States. At present, there are 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
4. **SHOW** slide with the vocabulary word:
 - a. *Time immemorial*

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- i. **Definition:** Refers to a point of time in the past that was so long ago that people are uncertain of precisely when it was.
- ii. **EXPLAIN** that Native people have been living in their ancestral homelands forever. MUCH longer than settlers have.
- b. **SHOW** this idea using a string:
 - i. Ask for 3 student volunteers to hold 3 different places in the string, like so:



- ii. Explain that the string represents time. Student A is “time immemorial”, Student B is when Europeans colonized this land. Student C is the present time.
5. **EXPLAIN** that Native people still live in their ancestral homelands, but have also lost a lot of their land through relocation.
 - a. Native people care very much about taking care of their homeland.
 - b. Native people believe that land is like a relative, and must be treated with respect.
 - c. Land can be our teachers, too.
6. **SAY:** In fact, we are also living on Native ancestral homelands.
7. **REFER BACK** to Native-land.ca activity, and **ASK** students whose ancestral lands they live on.

ELABORATE

Google Maps Scavenger Hunt and Create A Map (15-25 minutes)

Hand-out “Where Do I Live?” worksheets (suggestion: partner up!):

1. **TELL** students to navigate to maps.google.com
2. **READ** the activity instructions together and **GIVE** students time to ask questions.
3. If possible, **DEMONSTRATE** how to find one of the features and how to fill out the

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table together.

4. **GIVE** students time to create their own maps on the second page.

EVALUATE

Land Acknowledgement (15-30 minutes)

1. **Hand out** the “Land Acknowledgement” worksheet to each student
2. **EXPLAIN** to students that a respectful Land Acknowledgement requires much research and promise to action. Today we are going to begin that process by *acknowledging* the controversial history of the place we live. Ask volunteers to put in their own words what they learned from this lesson. Whose ancestral territory is their home located on? What does it look like to act as a guest in someone else’s home? How can we show respect and reciprocity to the land we live on? What do we have to be grateful for? The following lessons will build on this acknowledgement and students will come back to this in the final project.
3. **SHARE:** give students an opportunity to share their maps and land acknowledgements with another student, a pair of students, or if time allows with the entire class!

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Read a [story](#) about the local land from Greg Sarris’ book *How a Mountain Was Made*
2. Listen to [Central Pomo](#) being spoken by a native
3. Record any questions the students have and reach out to local tribal leaders or [Redbud Resource Group](#) for answers!

VOCABULARY

Ancestral: any person from whom one is descended

Territory: Land and waters under the jurisdiction of a town, state, nation, sovereign, etc.

Colonize: to establish a settlement on a distant territory and begin to rule

Tribal Nation: Federally recognized tribes are recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States. At present, there are 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.

Time immemorial: Refers to a point of time in the past that was so long ago that people are uncertain precisely when it was.

STANDARDS

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7

Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4.3

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.2

Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4

Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 4 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CA Social Sciences Framework:

4.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.

3. Identify the locations of the Pacific Ocean, rivers, valleys, and mountain passes and explain their effects on the growth of towns.

4. Use maps, charts, and pictures to describe how communities in California vary in land use, vegetation, wildlife, climate, population density, architecture, services, and transportation.

4.5 Students understand the structures, functions, and powers of the local, state, and federal governments as described in the U.S. Constitution (Tribal Sovereignty/Tribal Governments).

5. Describe the components of California's governance structure (e.g., cities and towns, Indian rancherias and reservations, counties, school districts).

CA Indian Essential Understandings:

Essential Understanding 5: *Relationships*

Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to tribal cultures. Reservations were established in treaties, essentially a contract between two sovereign governments. Land was never "given" to American Indians. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

- I. That both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.
- II. That Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.
- III. That acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.

Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians:

Essential Understanding 3: *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.

- 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

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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.
- 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.

CA Environmental Principles and Concepts:

Principle I - People Depend on Natural Systems

The continuation and health of individual human lives and of human communities and societies depend on the health of the natural systems that provide essential goods and ecosystem services.

Concept A. The goods produced by natural systems are essential to human life and to the functioning of our economies and cultures.

Concept B. The ecosystem services provided by natural systems are essential to human life and to the functioning of our economies and cultures. **Concept C.** That the quality, quantity, and reliability of the goods and ecosystem services provided by natural systems are directly affected by the health of those systems.

SOURCES

- Krol, A. U. “[The Revelator: Tribes without recognition struggle to protect their heritage.](#)” (2019).
- Acquaint yourself with the [Native-land.ca Teacher Guide](#)
- Read up on the cultural and traditional land of the [Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria](#)
- Sarris, G. (2019). [Waterbug Walks Aways with Copeland Creek.](#) *How A Mountain Was Made.*

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- Google Earth: [Celebrating Indigenous Languages](#)

Other useful resources to become familiar with:

- [How to form a Land Acknowledgement](#)
- [CA Indian Essential Understandings](#)
- [Native Knowledge 360 Essential Understandings](#)
- [List of Tribal Nations by County](#)