| The Native American Way of Life |
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| **Article**  Lexile 820  **PAGE 1**  AP Photo  *Last year, Native Americans from around the country gathered to celebrate the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian. The museum is all about the rich culture and history of Native Americans.*  November is Native American Heritage Month. There are many different Native American groups. Each one has its own way of life. Here is just a little bit of information about Native Americans.  **Growing Up Native American**  What is it like to grow up as a Native American child? Each tribe has different beliefs about how to raise children. But they do have some things in common.  In Native American cultures, children are highly respected. Native Americans believe that all things in nature are equal. This includes adults, children, animals, and plants. This belief gives children an equal place in Native American societies. For this reason, children in Native American societies have a lot of freedom. They also get to take part in all events, just as the adults do.  Most Native American groups take growing up very seriously. They see children as the future of their way of life. Parents hope their children will be able to make decisions independently while keeping their way of life in mind.  Most Native American tribes believe in certain ways of raising children. Kids are allowed to learn by making observations, instead of only learning information that adults teach to them. At the same time, adults teach lessons through oral stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Through listening and observing, Native American children learn to respect the Earth.  **Respecting the Earth**  All Native Americans have a deep respect for the Earth. Because of this, Native Americans have always taken great care in how they treat the planet and its creatures. For example, the native people of the Great Plains relied upon the buffalo for their way of life. However, they never took the animal for granted. When they killed a buffalo, they were thankful to be able to eat its meat. When they used the buffalo's skin to cover their tepees, they were thankful to live under the buffalo's spirit. The Native Americans used as many parts of an animal as they could. Why? They believed that it was wrong to take more than they needed.  The Lakota, or Sioux, people have an Earth Day ceremony. They celebrate the planet and the connection among all things on it. During the ceremony, the Lakota honor the Earth, the sky, and the four directions. As they look in each direction, they honor a different thing. They look West and talk about water—keeping it clean and not wasting it. They look North and talk about keeping the Earth clean. They look East and talk about educating their children with their values. Finally, they look South and ask that power be taken from people who waste what is on the planet.  **Storytelling**  Storytelling is common among all Native Americans. The people enjoy hearing and passing along the stories. Storytelling is more than just entertainment. It reminds the people who they are and where they came from. Many of the stories are about Native American values—such as honoring life, ancestors, and the planet.  The stories can take different forms. They involve many lessons and characters. Sometimes the stories are told in words. Sometimes they are told in songs, dances, or prayers. Some stories are about the origins of the people's ceremonies. Other stories talk about how animals and plants came to be. Each Native American society has its own stories. The stories may be different depending on where the tribe lived. For example, the native people of the Pacific Northwest tell stories about the raven, while desert tribes tell stories about the coyote.  Native American stories have been passed from generation to generation for thousands of years. For much of this time, the stories were not written down. The people passed the stories on because they were such an important part of the Native American way of life. Their words have preserved the people's values, religions, and customs.  **Naming Ceremony**  Names mean a lot to Native Americans. Many Native American societies have naming ceremonies in which people are given their new names. Not all of the ceremonies are the same, of course. The Creek people, for example, give children a name at birth to honor an important event. Once the child becomes a teenager, the tribal leaders choose a new name, based on the child's personality. This takes place at a festival.  At the festival, a tribal leader calls out a name four times, and then tells who will receive this name. The name might describe qualities such as strength, kindness, or stubbornness. The person who is to get the name steps up to the leader to receive the name and a gift.  Native Americans are named for their personalities or actions. Since people usually change as they grow older, some people may go through several name changes in a lifetime.    **PAGE 2**  Dig Deeper  **American Indians**  As you read in "The Native American Way of Life," there are many groups of Native Americans. Each group has its own way of life. Here are some facts about the Seneca Nation.  The Seneca people lived in what is now New York State. Along the banks of rivers, they built large buildings called longhouses. Inside a longhouse, there was enough space for many families or many generations of one family to live together.  The Seneca people fished in rivers, hunted, and farmed. They planted what were called the "Three Sisters": corn, beans, and squash. They had a reason for planting these crops together. For one thing, corn grows high, while squash grows low to the ground, so the crops did not fight each other for rain and sunlight. Also, beans make the soil richer, helping the other plants grow. When eaten together, these three crops make a healthy meal. Over the course of hundreds of years, the Seneca came to understand all of this.  The Seneca people were part of the Iroquois League, or the Six Nations. These were six Native American groups that joined together after years of battling one another. The Six Nations would meet and make some decisions together by holding votes. Sometimes, tribes of the Six Nations fought wars against other tribes.    **Dictionary**   |  | | --- | | **connection** *(noun)*    many things linked together | | **heritage** *(noun)*    something, like a way of life or culture, that is passed down from one generation to the next | | **independently** *(adverb)*    without the support of others | | **observation** *(noun)*    the act of observing or seeing | | **oral** *(adjective)*    spoken | | **origin** *(noun)*    the beginning or starting point | | **personality** *(noun)*    many things that come together to make a person | |