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# Indian Education for All

# Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

Developed by
the Office of Public Instruction

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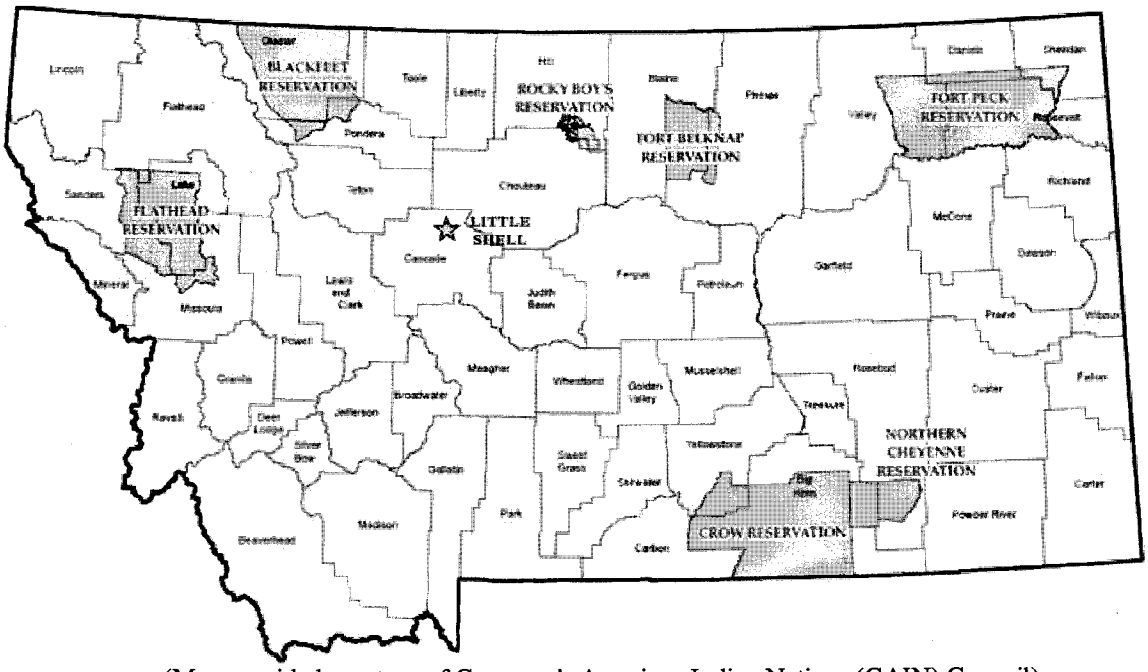
# Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

## Essential Understanding 1

**There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.**

BACKGROUND




(Map provided courtesy of Governor's American Indian Nations (GAIN) Council)

A reservation is a territory reserved by tribes as a permanent tribal homeland. Some reservations were created through treaties while others were created by statutes or executive orders.

| RESERVATIONS: | TRIBAL GROUPS: |
|---|---|
| Flathead | Salish, Kootenai, Pend d' Oreille |
| Blackfeet | Blackfeet |
| Rocky Boy's | Chippewa-Cree |
| Fort Belknap | Gros Ventre, Assiniboine |
| Fort Peck | Sioux, Assiniboine |
| Northern Cheyenne | Northern Cheyenne |
| Crow | Crow |

The Little Shell Chippewa Tribe is without a reservation or land base and members live in various parts of Montana. Their tribal headquarters is located in Great Falls, Montana.

About 35 percent of Montana's Indian population does not live on reservations. Instead, they reside in the small communities or urban areas of Montana. The individual history and circumstances of Montana's urban Indian people are as diverse as the people themselves.

Most Montana Indian students attend public schools across the state. There are only two tribally controlled K-12 schools in Montana. Each reservation also has its own tribally controlled community college.

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## Essential Understanding 2

**There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by entities, organizations and people. A continuum of Indian identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional. There is no generic American Indian.**

### BACKGROUND

**"Background" borrowed liberally from Cleary, Linda Miller and Peacock, Thomas, Collected Wisdom: American Indian Education, Allyn and Bacon (1998).**

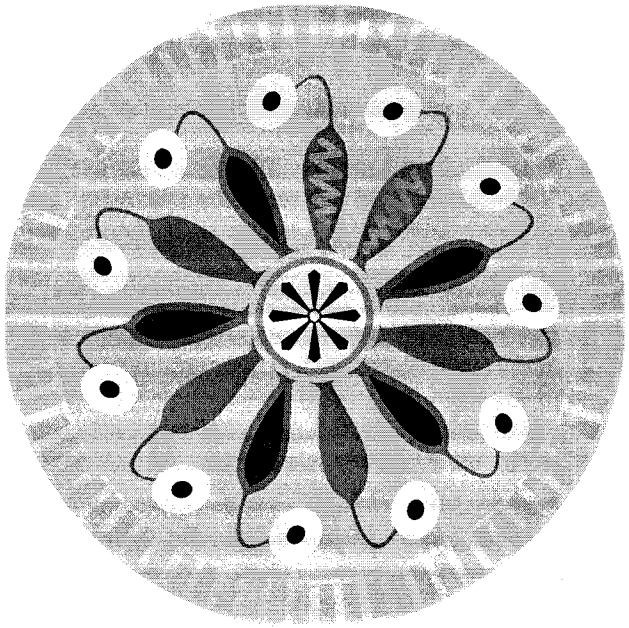
**Identity is an issue with which human beings struggle throughout their lifetime. Questions of** "Who am I?" and "How do I fit in?" are universal questions of the human condition. Historically, schools have been places for students to explore their identities. However, when the culture of students' homes and communities is not evident in school, finding a way to belong within that system is more difficult and can lead to frustration. Educators need to ensure that each student has an opportunity to feel included in the classroom either through materials or pedagogical practices.

Even larger issues of "Who is an Indian/Tribal Member?" exist among Indian people themselves. The federal, state and tribal governments may all have their own definitions for who is a member. As a general principle, an Indian is a person who is of some degree Indian blood and is recognized as an Indian by a tribe/village and/or the United States. There exists no universally accepted rule for establishing a person's identity as an Indian because the criteria for tribal membership differs from one tribe to the next. To determine a particular tribe's criteria, one must contact that tribe directly. For its own purposes, the Bureau of the Census counts anyone an Indian who declares to be such.

Amidst all of these issues, educators must remember that Indian students come to school with a variety of backgrounds. There are those who show characteristics of tribal ways of being and belief, and those who show themselves to be tribally affiliated yet do not have what some people might regard as American Indian behavior and appearance. They have differences of skin color, dress, and behavior; and there may be deeper and subtler differences of values and of ways of being and learning.

What is important is that all humans be allowed feelings of integrity and pride connected with who they are and with whom they identify in order to help them develop the self-esteem and self-confidence that will enhance their learning.

It should also be noted that there is not a single American Indian learning style, nor is there a group of several styles of learning, that fits all American Indians either as individuals or tribal groups. Teachers should recognize various learning styles, and they should adapt their teaching methods to individual learners. At the same time teachers should build on and expand the individual student's approaches to learning. However, recognizing that teachers must use a variety of teaching methods to meet individual learning styles does not mean that culture doesn't influence learning styles. The differences in the cultures of home and school certainly impact the teaching-learning process. Classrooms need to integrate culture into the curriculum to blur the boundaries between home and school. Schools need to become a part of, rather than separate from, the communities in which they serve.



**The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.**

**Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the "discovery" of North America.**

## BACKGROUND

Tribal languages, cultures, and traditions are alive and well throughout Indian country. Indigenous languages are still spoken, sacred songs are still sung, and rituals are still performed. It is not important for educators to understand all of the complexities of modern day contemporary American Indian cultures, however, educators should be aware of their existence. They should also understand the ways cultures might influence much of the thinking and practice of American Indians today.

These histories and traditions may be private, to be used and understood only by members of that particular tribe. Educators should be aware of this issue when asking students about their histories, ceremonies, and stories.

Educators should also be consistent with policies surrounding "religious/spiritual activities" and ensure that Native traditions and spirituality are treated with the same respect as other religious traditions and spirituality.

Each tribe has a history, as valid as any other belief, that can be traced to the beginning of time. Many tribal histories place their people in their current traditional lands in Montana. For example, educators should respect these beliefs when teaching about "the history of mankind," particularly regarding the Bering Strait Theory. Many tribal histories will be told only orally as they have been told and passed down through generations. Some tribes may only tell certain stories during certain times of the year, and this knowledge should be respected in classrooms.

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## Essential Understanding 4

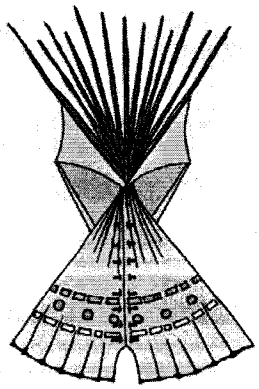
**Reservations are lands that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties, statutes, and executive orders and were not "given" to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:**

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

### BACKGROUND

Indian Nations located in Montana Territory prior to the passage of the Montana Constitution in 1889 held large land bases as negotiated through their treaties with the United States. The treaties assigned tribes to certain areas and obligated them to respect the land of their neighbors. However, in the 1860s, as miners and others rushed into the prime gold fields that often lay along or within the designated tribal lands, tribal life was disrupted. The new inhabitants demanded federal protection. These demands resulted in the garrisoning of Montana and the eventual relocation of the tribes to smaller and smaller reserves.

The federal government and many Montana citizens did not understand the lifestyles of Montana's Indian tribes. Consequently, the tribes were often dealt with from non-Indian expectations and points of view. However, the federal government did understand that these tribal groups were sovereign nations and that they needed to enter into treaty negotiations with the tribes.



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## Essential Understanding 5

**Federal policies, put into place throughout American history, have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods:**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Colonization Period*** | ***1492 -*** |
| ***Treaty Period*** | ***1789 - 1871*** |
| ***Allotment Period*** | ***1887 - 1934*** |
| ***Boarding School Period*** | ***1879 - - -*** |
| ***Tribal Reorganization Period*** | ***1934 - 1958*** |
| ***Termination Period*** | ***1953 - 1988*** |
| ***Self-determination*** | ***1975 – current*** |

*See* the OPI Publication A History and Foundation of American Indian Education Policy at http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/Resources/Indpolicyhistory.pdf

### BACKGROUND

Public schools began to operate on Indian reservations in Montana in the early 1900s. Although public schools were originally opened to meet the educational needs of non-Indian children residing on Indian reservations, Indian students began to enroll almost from the beginning. The public schools provided an opportunity for Indian people to receive an education in their local communities. The curriculum and instruction in public schools was, and continues to be, designed to meet the standards of the state education system. However, the curriculum offered limited information on the local Indian culture, history, and traditions of the local tribal groups, and it did not encourage participation from local tribal government officials in its decision-making policies. Now this trend is changing as Indian people become empowered to lead and make decisions about their local schools. Indian people are involved in the system as teachers, administrators, and school board members who are cognizant of the fact that communities and schools must be linked together in order to improve educational outcomes for Indian students.

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## Essential Understanding 6

**History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.**

### BACKGROUND

Much of America's history has been told from the Euro-American perspective. Only recently have American Indians begun to write about and retell history from an Indigenous perspective.

Books such as Lies My Teacher Told Me by James W. Loewen expose the underlying bias within much of our history curriculum that has excluded certain voices. In examining current curriculum content, it is important to keep the following in mind:

> Children's history books use terms such as "westward expansion" and "Manifest Destiny" to describe what would be more accurately called ethnic genocide. These books alternately portray Indians as "noble savages," "faithful Indian guides," or "sneaky savages" who lead "ambushes" and "massacres," while in contrast, cavalrymen fight "brave battles." These books propagandize the "glory and honor" of taking land and oppressing native people for European purposes that are portrayed as holy and valid (Loewen, 1996).

A transformation such as the following would benefit all Americans as we work on building a free and democratic society for all:

> A multicultural history curriculum, by focusing on the experiences of men and women of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups in United States history, will provide students with a historical context in which to situate and understand the experiences and perspectives of these groups in American society today. ("Ethnographic Studies of Multicultural Education in Classrooms and Schools" by Hugh Mehan, Angela Lintz, Dina Okamoto, and John S. Wills; Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education, 1995).

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## Essential Understanding 7

**Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.**

### BACKGROUND

Mark A. Chavaree, Esq., "Tribal Sovereignty," Wabanaki Legal News, Volume 2, Issue 1, winter 1998:

> Before colonization, Indian tribes possessed complete sovereignty. However, given the governmental structure of the United States and the complex history of tribal-federal relations, tribes are now classified as domestic dependent nations. This means tribes have the power to define their own membership; structure and operate their tribal governments; regulate domestic relations; settle disputes; manage their property and resources; raise tax revenues; regulate businesses; and conduct relations with other governments. It also means that the federal government is obligated to protect tribal lands and resources; protect the tribe's right to self-government; and provide social, medical, educational, and economic development services necessary for the survival and advancement of tribes.

A very important but often unappreciated point is that tribal sovereignty does not arise out of the United States government, congressional acts, executive orders, treaties, or any other source outside the tribe. As Felix Cohen puts it, "perhaps the most basic principle of all Indian law... is that those powers which are lawfully vested in an Indian tribe are not, in general, delegated powers granted by expressed acts of Congress, but rather inherent powers of a limited sovereignty, which has never been extinguished." *See* Native American Rights Fund http://www.narf.org.

Sovereignty can be defined as "The supreme power from which all political powers are derived." It is "inherent"--- It cannot be given to one group by another. In government-to-government negotiations, states and Indian nations exercise or use their sovereign powers.

Sovereignty ensures self-government, cultural preservation, and a people's control of their future. Sovereignty affirms the political identity of Indian Nations --- they are not simply a racial or ethnic minority.