

## THE FIRST AMERICANS



Although the Vikings and Columbus were the first Europeans to come to America, the "first Americans" were the Indians. About 20,000 years ago, Indians migrated from Asia to North America. They crossed from one continent to another over a narrow land bridge which at that time connected Asia with North America. Today the two continents are separated by the Bering Strait.

It is believed that the Indians came in search of animals for food. For several thousand years they lived by hunting and fishing. Eventually they learned how to raise corn, beans, potatoes, squash, and other plants.

Ways of living often varied from one tribe to another. There were differences in family life, clothing styles, types of housing, government, recreational activities, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, and transportation and communication. Some tribes maintained a simple way of life. Others developed advanced ways of living. The Maya, Aztec, and Inca Indians built permanent houses and towns, organized governments, held regular religious ceremonies, and had time for arts and crafts.

When Columbus reached the New World in 1492, there were hundreds of tribes and millions of Indians living there. Since Columbus thought he was in a part of Asia known as the "Indies," he called the people he met "Indians." Other early explorers called the first Americans "redskins," because their brown skins seemed to have a reddish tint.

Columbus and the other explorers who came to America were soon followed by a wave of colonists. The arrival of the white man greatly affected the lives of the Indians. Land was often taken from the Indians without payment. Some people wanted gold and quick profits, and ignored Indian rights. Thousands of Indians died from such white man's diseases as smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, and influenza. Strong liquor brought by the settlers ruined the lives of many Indians. Traditional ways of living sometimes broke down. Many Indians were killed in battles with the newcomers. In the Spanish colonies, conquered tribes were forced to provide slave labor on large estates that had been set up. Thousands died from the harsh working conditions. Some tribes were completely wiped out.

While many Indians soon became victims of the white man and his ways, other Indians maintained friendly relations with the Europeans for many years. Indians helped the Pilgrims and other colonists through the first difficult years in America. Indians showed the white settlers the easiest trails over mountains and across rivers. They pointed out mineral springs and deposits of copper, gold, silver, and other minerals. They taught the white man how to use canoes and snowshoes. The Indians also invented the hammock, parka, pipe, and toboggan. From the Indians, the settlers learned how to grow corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, peppers, pineapples, tomatoes, peanuts, and tobacco. They were shown how to make chocolate, maple syrup, grits, hominy, popcorn, succotash, and tapioca.

### Questions

(1) When, why, and how did the first Indians come to America?

When:

Why:

How:

- (2) The Indians lived in the New World for thousands of years before the white man arrived. Do you think that European settlers had the right to start colonies in America? Explain your answer.

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- (3) Briefly describe 5 ways in which the coming of the white man affected the lives of American Indians.

(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

(e) \_\_\_\_\_

- (4) The Aztec and Inca civilizations were at their peak when European explorers came to the New World. What advanced ways of living had been developed by the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru?

(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

- (5) Why were the first Americans called "Indians"?

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- (6) The map on page 30 shows the Indian tribes that lived in the United States when the explorers and colonists came to the New World. Give the names of 3 tribes from the part of the United States where you now live.

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- (7) In the boxes which follow, draw 2 sketches which show contributions of the Indians to American civilization. Inside of each box, tell what you have drawn.



