THE FIRST AMERICANS

Leif Ericson and the Vikings and Christopher Columbus were the first Europeans to come to America, but 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 in the Americas. 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 Americas “redskins” because their brown skin seemed to have a reddish tint.

Columbus and the other explorers who came to North America and South 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 them 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 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. Thousands died from the harsh working conditions. Some tribes were completely wiped out.

While many leaders became victims of the white man’s ways, others 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 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 canoe 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.

**Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper in COMPLETE SENTENCES.**

1. When, why, and how did the first Indians come to America?
2. Indians lived in the “New World” for thousands of years before the white man arrived. Do you think European settlers had the right to start colonies in America? Why or why not?
3. Briefly described FIVE ways in which the coming of the white man affected the lives of American Indians.
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?
5. Why were the first Americans called “Indians?”
6. Using the attached map, give the names of 3 tribes who homelands were in the part of the United States where you now live.
7. Draw EIGHT sketches which show contributions of the Indians to American civilizations.

**Place Names**

About half of our states and hundreds of mountains, rivers, cities, and towns have Indian names. See if you can identify the places being described.

1. State name from the Chippewa Indian word “michigama,” meaning “large water.”
2. State whose name comes from the Chippewa Indian words “mici,” meaning large,” and “zibi” meaning river.
3. “Tanasi” was the name for Cherokee villages located there.
4. State that got its name because the Indians lived there.
5. From the Indian name “Wauregan,” meaning “beautiful water,” referring to the Columbia River.
6. Names after a Shoshone tribe known as the Utes.
7. Capital of Wyoming.
8. Body of water between Lake Superior and Lake Erie.
9. City in Illinois whose name comes from an Algonquin word meaning “garlic field.”
10. City that combines the Indian word “minne,” meaning “water,” and the Greek world “polis,” meaning “city.”