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zoom

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

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Chief Crazy Horse. Photo: Wikimedia

In this issue: FAMOUS NATIVE AMERICANS

Zoom in on America

POCAHONTAS

Pocahontas is one of the best known Native American women in history; so popular in fact that her life story has acquired legendary status.

Pocahontas's real name was Matoaka. She was born around 1596. Her father, Powhatan, was a powerful Indian chief who ruled over a chiefdom comprising about 30 tribes living in the Tidewater region of present day Virginia. The name by which she is remembered, Pocahontas, means "playful" or "mischievous one" in the Algonquian language. According to a much questioned account by the Englishman John Smith, a leader of Jamestown colony, Pocahontas saved his life by placing her head over his just as Powhatan was about to club his head on a stone. Smith's account, written much later, claims that this event took place in 1607, when Matoaka was only 10 or 11 years old.

Smith's account has served as the basis for works by many artists, including writers, painters, and, more recently, screenwriters who romanticized the relationship between Smith and Pocahontas. Pocahontas was very interested in the English settlement and she occasionally visited the Jamestown colony. The settlers of Jamestown often suffered from food shortages; Pocahontas often brought food to the colony as a gift from her father. As the English settlement spread, the Powhatan people saw their increased presence as a threat to their lands. Good relations between Virginia Indians and the English settlers

deteriorated. Pocahontas stopped paying her visits to Jamestown.

Using a trick and helped by the chief of the Patawomeck tribe, which was not very loyal to Powhatan, English Captain Sir Samuel Argall captured Pocahontas in the spring of 1613 and imprisoned her on his ship. In exchange for Powhatan's beloved daughter, he demanded the return of English prisoners and stolen English weapons. Powhatan released some prisoners but he didn't return all the weapons. Argall did not return Pocahontas. Instead, she was taken to a settlement named Henricus.

Most records indicate that she was treated with respect and courtesy there. She was taught English and, having been converted to Christianity, she was baptized Rebecca. In the spring of the following year, Pocahontas accepted a marriage proposal from John Rolfe, who grew tobacco in Virginia. Chief Powhatan agreed to the marriage, which took place in April 1614. The marriage brought peace between the English settlers and the Indians as long as Powhatan lived. In the spring of 1616, Pocahontas, her husband, and their one year-old son, Thomas, sailed with a group of other Native Americans to England. Pocahontas was received with honors and entertained at the English court and, even if involuntarily, she promoted the idea of English settlement in America. Pocahontas fell ill while preparing to return to America. She died before leaving England in 1617 at around 21 years of



The Abduction of Pocahontas, copper engraving by Johann Theodore de Bry, 1618. Photo: Wikimedia

PONTIAC

Pontiac, or Obwandiyag, was a member of the Ottawa tribe born around 1720. He died on April 20, 1769, murdered by a Peoria warrior. He is known for his role in an uprising against British military occupation of the Great Lakes region.

After defeating France in the Seven Years' War (also known as the French and Indian War), in 1763 the British took control of some French territory in the Americas. Many Native American tribes in the region had fought on the side of the French. After the war, relations between the British and Native Americans got worse. Responding to harsh treatment of Indians by the British and the expansion of British settlements, tribes such as the Ottawa, Huron, Potawatomi, and Chippewa in the Lake Superior region united to fight against the British.

Pontiac's forces began by attacking Fort Detroit in May 1763. While Pontiac failed to capture Fort Detroit, word of his actions spread and inspired attacks on other British military forts such as Sandusky, St. Joseph, Miami, and Michilimackinac. By the end of June all British forts west of Fort Pitt, except Detroit, were under Native American control.

The British decided to try to negotiate with Pontiac. In 1766, they reached an agreement and Pontiac ended his fight against Britain.

Pontiac has a city named after him in Michigan and General Motors produced the famous Pontiac brand of cars until 2010.

TECUMSEH

Tecumseh (March 1768 - October 5, 1813) is considered one of the greatest Native American leaders of his time. Tecumseh was an educated man. He had studied American and world history as well as literature.

Inspired by the vision of Indian unity, Tecumseh tried to unite Native American tribes into a single Indian nation. He considered himself first a Native American and only then a Shawnee. At a time when millions of hectares of Indian land were being sold, Tecumseh believed that land was a gift of the Great Spirit to everybody and so no one really owned it. In 1808, Tecumseh and his brother founded Prophetstown, a village in Indiana Territory. Indians from many tribes came to hear the two brothers speak about politics and religion. They encouraged Native Americans to oppose the ways of the European settlers and to unite in an intertribal confederacy of Indians. However, Tecumseh did not feel ready for military action yet.

At a time when Tecumseh was away from Prophetstown, William Henry Harrison attacked and burned down the village. During the war of 1812, Tecumseh sided with the British against the United States and aided the British in capturing Detroit. On October 3, 1813, Tecumseh died during the Battle of the Thames; his dream of a pan-Indian confederacy died along with him.



The hood ornament of a 1953 Pontiac Chieftain. AP Photo

SACAGAWEA

While Sacagawea's name is spelled in a few different ways and the dates of her birth and death are uncertain, there is no question that this simple woman left her mark on the history of America.

Today, a 48-kilometer river in Montana, a lake and state park in North Dakota, a U.S. Navy ship, a "golden dollar coin" first minted in 2000, a mountain peak and glacier in Wyoming (4,136 m), and even a volcanic crater on the planet Venus all are named in honor of Sacagawea.

She was born c. 1788 into the Salmon Eater or Agaidika tribe of Lemhi Shoshone near the Continental Divide at the present day border between Idaho and Montana. Her real name was Boinaiv, but when she was about 12 she was captured by a Hidasta raiding party and taken to their village near present-day Bismarck in North Dakota. She was given a new name - Sacagawea (also spelled Sacajawea or Sakakawea), which might be translated as "Bird Woman". Later she was purchased by French Canadian fur trader Toussaint Charbonneau and became one of his wives. Soon after that, explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark hired Charbonneau as an interpreter for their expedition to the Pacific Ocean.

Sacagawea was pregnant at that time, but she also joined the expedition as Clark knew that having an Indian woman among the party would be a sign of the explorers' friendly intentions. He said that "no woman ever accompanies a war party of Indians in this quarter," and "a woman with a party of men is a token of peace."

In this way, Sacagawea became part of the most famous exploration expedition in the history of the United States. She traveled thousands of miles from the Mandan-Hidasta villages in the Dakotas to the Pacific Northwest from 1804 to 1806. As a speaker of Shoshone, she communicated with the tribe to acquire horses for the expedition and to cross the mountains. At one point when the party was traveling by river, the boat in which Sacagawea was traveling nearly capsized. Sacagawea saved important papers, instruments and supplies that were in the boat. To express his gratitude, Clark named the river after her. Sacagawea helped the expedition in many other ways, such as by finding edible plants, making clothes and moccasins, and safeguarding the passage of the expedition through Indian territories. It is believed that Sacagawea died on December 20, 1812 in Fort Manuel, on the Missouri River.



Jessica Grinnell, playing the role of Sakagawea, and re-enactor Bryant Boswell, second from right, disembark at the Four Bears Casino Marina just west of New Town, North Dakota, Thursday, Aug. 17, 2006. AP Photo

SITTING BULL

A Lakota Indian, Sitting Bull was born c. 1831, near Grand River, in present day South Dakota. He was a holy man and a Teton Dakota Indian chief who managed to unite the Sioux tribes in their mid-19th century struggle for survival. He opposed the idea of selling Indian land to the U.S. Government. He began earning his reputation as a fearless warrior during his first war party when he was only 14 years old. Later, he worked to extend the Sioux hunting grounds westward.

In 1863 the U.S. Army invaded the Sioux hunting grounds. Together with the leader of Oglala Sioux, Crazy Horse, he was the leader of the northern Sioux. In 1867 he was made principal chief of the entire Sioux nation. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty guaranteed the Sioux a reservation in the tribe's sacred Black Hills (Paha Sapa) in what is now southwestern South Dakota. However, after an expedition led by Colonel George Armstrong Custer discovered gold in the area, a large number of white gold prospectors sought to settle on the land.

The U.S. government wanted to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux, but there was no agreement among chiefs. Instead, the U.S. government ordered the Lakota to abandon their hunting grounds and return to their reservation by January 31, 1876 or be considered as "hostiles." Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and others refused to follow this order and decided to stay in their hunting grounds, where they could find buffalo.

U.S. soldiers commanded by General George Crook

prepared to fight against the "hostiles" while Sitting Bull summoned the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho to his camp in Montana Territory to prepare for battle. The Battle of Rosebud on June 17 ended with a victory by Sitting Bull over Crook's troops. Soon after that Sitting Bull performed the traditional Sun Dance. He said that he had a vision during the ceremony of "falling into his camp like grasshoppers from the sky."

On June 25, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer attacked the Indians in the valley of the Little Bighorn River. Before the day was over Custer and his 215 men had all been killed. Even though Indian warriors won many battles, they could not win the war: they surrendered on July 16, 1877. Cold, hunger, and disease played an important part in their decision. For Sitting Bull, however, it was not yet the time to surrender. He led his men into Canada and stayed there for four years. In the end, they could not escape hunger or disease either and finally decided to return and surrender.

In 1885 Sitting Bull joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, in which he gained international fame. In 1890, fearful of an uprising sparked by the Ghost Dance movement, thousands of additional soldiers were deployed to Sioux Indian reservations. Believing that Sitting Bull was leader of the Ghost Dance movement, authorities ordered his arrest. In a scuffle between the police and the chief's warriors, Sitting Bull was shot and killed.



(left): Tecumseh (right): Sitting Bull. Photos: Library of Congress

CRAZY HORSE

Crazy Horse, a Sioux chief of the Oglala tribe whose Sioux name was Ta-Sunko-Witko, was a contemporary of Sitting Bull and a fellow leader of the Indian resistance against the white man's invasion of the northern Great Plains. Crazy Horse was born around 1842 near present-day Rapid City in South Dakota. He died on September 5, 1877 in Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The 1860s and 1870s were a time of fighting and defiance for Crazy Horse and his men. He opposed U.S. plans to build a road to the gold mines in Montana. Rejecting the provisions of the Second Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868), he rode with his men to buffalo country, where they could hunt and fish.

When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, white prospectors started to settle in the area, even though according to treaties the land belonged to the Sioux tribes. Crazy Horse moved deeper into the hills and joined Cheyenne forces. Heading north, he joined Sitting Bull at the main Sioux encampment on the banks of the Little Bighorn River. Crazy Horse and his men played a crucial role in the defeat of Custer's forces during the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Crazy Horse continued his fighting but in the end, overcome by cold and hunger he surrendered and was confined to Fort Robinson, where he was killed in a scuffle with soldiers who were trying to imprison him.

Today, a still unfinished rock memorial carved out of a mountain commemorating American Indian chief Crazy Horse overlooks Custer, a city that bears the name of Colonel George Armstrong Custer.

GERONIMO

Geronimo, whose Indian name was Goyahkla ("He Who Yawns") was born in June 1829 in No-Doyohn

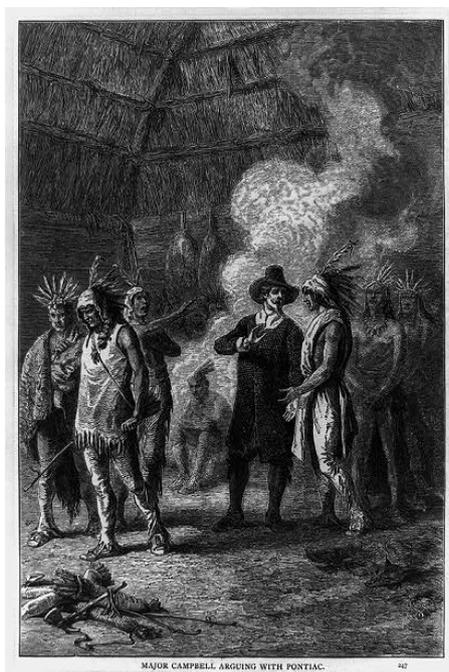
Canyon in Arizona and died on February 17, 1909 in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was leader of the Chiricahua Apache.

"One Who Yawns" became a member of the warriors' council in 1846 and fought against white colonization by Spaniards and North Americans. He took part in raids into Sonora and Chihuahua in Mexico. But a major change in his life came when his mother, wife, and children were killed by Mexicans in 1858. From then on he used the name by which he is remembered, Geronimo. He became leader of a band of warriors in raids of vengeance on Mexicans. He exhibited extraordinary courage and determination in battle.

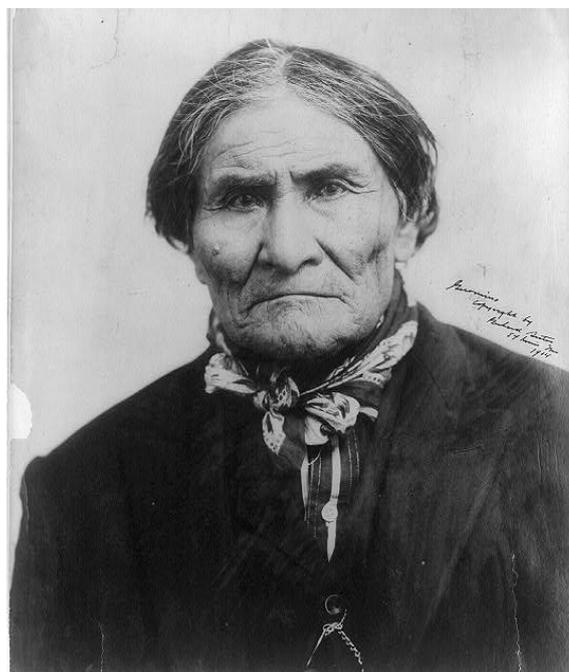
In 1874 a group of 4,000 Apaches who had been forced by U.S. authorities to a reservation Arizona, where they did not have enough food to live on, turned to Geronimo to be their leader. With hundreds of Apaches he left the reservation and waged a war against European settlers.

On March 27, 1886, Geronimo and his followers surrendered at Cañón de Los Embudos in Sonora. However, fearing that they would be murdered once they crossed into U.S. territory, Geronimo and a small band ran away. They were captured and Geronimo was promised that after two years of imprisonment he would return to Arizona: a promise that was not kept. Geronimo and his men were put to hard labor.

In May 1887, he was finally able to see his family. Toward the end of his life he tried to adapt to the settlers' ways: he farmed and even joined the Dutch Reformed Church. Geronimo later toured with a "Wild West" show. He was allowed to sell his photographs and his handiwork. Before he died, he dictated to S.M. Barrett his autobiography, *Geronimo: His Own Story*.



(left): Major Campbell arguing with Pontiac. (right): Geronimo. Photos: Library of Congress



Activity Page

Exercise 1 Scan read the articles on pp. 2-6 and insert the name of person who the sentence relates to in the blanks:

1. was a co-founder of Prophetstown.
2. earned his reputation of a fearless warrior already during his first war party when he was 14..
3. said “a woman with a party of men is a token of peace.”
4. was captured by a Hidasta raiding party when she was about 12 and taken to their village.
5. fought against white colonization by Spaniards and North Americans.
6. was allowed to sell his photographs and his handiwork.
7. was keenly interested in the English settlement and she occasionally visited the Jamestown colony.
8. A famous brand of cars produced by General Motors in Detroit was named after.....

Exercise 2 True or false:

1. Geronimo's first Indian name was Goyahkla (“He Who Yawns”).
2. Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his troops were defeated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.
3. Tecumseh joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, in which he gained international fame.
4. Pontiac was an Ottawa war chief.
5. Pocahontas was the daughter of Hiawatha.
6. Sacagawea was a guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
7. The rock monument carved out of a mountain in South Dakota honors Geronimo.
8. Sitting Bull led the Sioux resistance to being forced onto a reservation in 1876.
9. Tecumseh led a large force of Native Americans on the British side during the War of 1812.
10. The name given to Navajo speakers who took part in WWII and transmitted secret messages in their native language is Code Talkers. (See *Zoom in on America, May 2012.*)

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in on america

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People gather in the fog at the Crazy Horse Memorial near Custer, South Dakota. Photo AP