

# Essential Understanding One Lesson: Understanding Tribal Diversity

Dear Students,

Thank you for your interest in learning more about Montana American Indian tribes. The Essential Understandings came about after a group of tribal members representing many of Montana's tribes came together and decided on the most important things for you to learn about them. The very first Essential Understanding is about tribal diversity. In this lesson you will read about Essential Understanding One, watch a video with greetings from Montana students in their languages, and complete an online activity to learn the original names that tribes have for themselves. We hope that this will further your understanding of just how varied and diverse each tribal nation is.

## Directions

Complete the following four activities:

1. Read about Essential Understanding One
2. Watch the [video](#)
3. Complete the [Essential Understanding 1 Activities](#): Name Dropping and Who's Who. Be sure to listen to tribal members saying the name of their tribe after the matching activity.
4. Answer the questions provided at the end of the assignment

1. Read

## Essential Understanding One

There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

## KEY CONCEPTS

- The twelve sovereign tribes, located in what is now the state of Montana, are distinct from one another in their history, culture, and language.
- Tribal sovereignty is the inherent right of tribes to independent self-governance.
- Tribal governments are fully functioning governments that provide an array of services similar to those of federal, state, and local governments.
- The political, demographic, and cultural landscape of Montana has rapidly changed in the last two hundred years.
- American Indian individuals and tribes are still here with distinct and intact governments, languages, and cultures that contribute to modern Montana.

## BACKGROUND

As sovereign nations, the tribes in what is now Montana successfully governed themselves since time immemorial, employing a diverse array of social, cultural, and political mechanisms for maintaining internal order among their members and interacting with other nations, including other tribes and European and American governments. Each tribal nation in Montana continues to maintain its own form of government, though they look very different from those of the past. Today, the tribes each have a constitution and are governed by elected bodies, usually referred to as tribal councils. They also have independent judiciaries and some have legislatures. For tribes without legislatures, the tribal council fills both the legislative and executive roles.

Today, the twelve sovereign tribes in Montana are organized politically into eight federally-recognized nations. State and federal recognition differ from tribal sovereignty in that sovereignty is the inherent right of tribes to govern themselves. Tribal sovereignty derives from what scholars call the collective natural law rights of individuals comprising tribal communities.

Federal recognition is an acknowledgement of a special federal-tribal relationship that was most often established through the signing of a treaty. Federal-tribal treaty-making ended in 1871; however, today, tribes can receive federal recognition through other means, including acts of Congress, presidential executive orders, federal court decisions, or through a rigorous federal acknowledgment process. The Little Shell Tribe, for example, has been seeking federal recognition since the late 1970s via various routes and finally received federal recognition in December of 2019. Federal recognition gives tribes the ability to engage in government-to-government relations with the U.S. government, as well as the right to access certain federal benefits, services, and protections. As of 2020, there were 574 federally-recognized tribes and ninety-five state-recognized tribes in eighteen states that had established formal recognition programs.

Each of the tribes in Montana are now known by names that have been given to them by others, though they each have a name for themselves in their own language. For example, the Qlispé tribe is known as Pend d'Oreille, which derives from the French word for the pendant earrings worn by men and women of that tribe.

Like other governments, tribal governments have the inherent power to regulate their members and territory. They also provide important services and perform essential governmental functions for the benefit of their members. Through these efforts, tribes contribute significantly to the overall state economy. According to the most recent data, tribes brought over \$1 billion annually into the state for 2003-2009. They also bring a deep, rich history and culture that contributes to Montana's cultural heritage and contemporary identity.

Historically, Montana was not the homeland of all the tribes located here today. Likewise, there were tribes such as the Shoshoni and other bands of Chippewa in this area that are no longer here. As settlers moved into the eastern United States, eastern tribes were pushed west. Eventually, this brought new tribes and settlers into the area, displacing other tribes along the way. To contextualize this rapidly changing cultural and political landscape, one significant non-Indian presence in what is now Montana was the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805, only a little over 200 years ago, and the first treaties between the federal government and tribes in this area were signed in the 1850s.

Much has changed in the last two hundred years. For one thing, in 1805, American Indians comprised one hundred percent of the population. Today, they comprise almost seven percent, with about sixty percent living on the seven reservations in the state.

Like all reservations across America, these reservations are territories reserved by or for tribes for their exclusive use as a permanent tribal homeland. Some were created through treaties while others were created by statutes and executive orders for tribes forcibly removed from their homelands. Today, non-Indians, as well as Indians from other tribes, reside on all the reservations in the state. For example, non-Indians comprise as much as seventy-three percent of the population on the Flathead Reservation and as little as four percent on Rocky Boy's Reservation.

**Urban Indians and Other Tribes in Montana** About forty percent of Montana's American Indian population do not live on reservations. Instead, they reside in the small communities or urban areas of Montana. Besides American Indians from the twelve tribal nations, numerous other American Indians representing other tribes also reside or have resided in Montana.

2. Watch the [video](#).
3. Complete the [Essential Understanding 1 Activities](#): Name Dropping and Who's Who. Be sure to listen to tribal members saying the name of their tribe after the matching activity.
4. Answer the following questions in the format required by your teacher:

Do you speak, read, or listen to any other languages besides English? Which language(s)?

What did you find interesting when learning about Essential Understanding One?

What would you like to learn more about? Individual tribes? Individual stories about what it is like to be from a tribe?