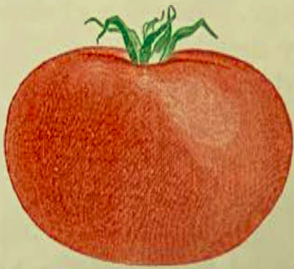


# 4 How the First Americans Became Indians



First Americans grew tomatoes long before they were brought to Italy to become an ingredient of spaghetti sauce.

Those first Americans were on their own in the New World. Thousands of years would go by before Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from distant Europe. Columbus called the First Americans “Indians” because he thought he was in the Indies—way over by China. That was a big mistake. But it would be a long time before anyone realized how wrong Columbus was. So the

name *Indian* stuck. It’s what we use most often today.

Some people use *Native Americans* instead of Indians, although the word *native* is confusing. It has two meanings. Anyone who is born in a country is a native of that country, so many of us are native Americans. “Native” also means to have an origin, or beginning, in a country. As far as we know, no people is native to America. Our ancestors all came from somewhere else.

Still, the people who came over the Bering Strait were here long before anyone else. So you can see why it makes sense to call them Native Americans. Indians, First Americans, or Native Americans—they are all good names. (Most Indians call themselves simply “the people” in their various languages.)

If we go back in time 10,000 years, those First Americans, who now were spread out over the two American continents, were beginning to do some remarkable things.

Most of them continued to hunt—they were good at that. They knew how to make animals stampede into deep ditches or watery bogs, where they could be easily speared.

When it came to spearheads, theirs were the best. They made them

**Some historians** think that by the time Columbus got here, there may have been as many as 75 million Indians living in South and North America. That is a lot of people—almost a third of the population of the United States today. But no one knows what the actual number was.



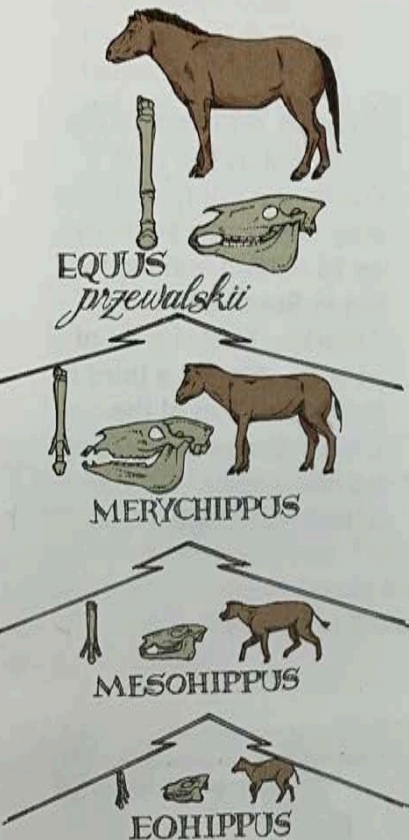
The atlatl threw arrows faster and more accurately than people could throw them by themselves.

A **stampede** is a wild rush of animals.



## A lot of Indian

peoples had a weapon like the atlatl, but they didn't all call it that, because they spoke many different languages. "Atlatl" was its name in the Uto-Aztecan languages, which are spoken by tribes in Mexico, New Mexico, and Arizona.



Eohippus, the horse's ancestor, lived in forests and had sharp teeth for pulling leaves off bushes. It had four toes, for running in mud. As time went on, eohippus grew bigger and moved to drier, grassier lands. Its toes fused into a hoof; its teeth got larger and flatter, better for eating grass.

of flint, a hard stone they chipped at until it was sharp and deadly.

They invented a dart thrower: a wooden handle with a hooked tip that worked like a missile launcher. It was called an "atlatl." The hunter would throw the atlatl as a ballplayer throws a pitch. That meant he no longer had to creep up and stab or choke his prey. The atlatl probably saved a lot of human lives; it didn't do much for the animals.

In fact, so many animals got killed that some of them became extinct. (That means they all died out.) But, in most cases, their disappearance wasn't because of hunters. The mammoths, for instance, were just too big. After the end of the Ice Age, when the climate warmed up, mammoths couldn't adjust. They drank huge amounts of water; a family of thirsty mammoths could drain a pond. Scientists think they couldn't find enough water to drink or grass to eat.

More than 100 species of animals (SPEE-sheez—it is the scientific word for groups of plants and animals) became extinct between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. No one knows why all of them died. Perhaps they were infected by germs carried by humans. Maybe hunters killed too many of some species.

That was too bad, because there was so much food on the land that people could make choices: to catch fish or dig for clams and oysters or gather nuts and berries and roots. And some tribes did just that. They became gatherers.

Others became farmers—among the best in the world. They took wild plants and bred them, and they developed corn, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and squash. They learned to make chocolate from the cocoa plant. They found corn kernels that popped when heated. They discovered plants and herbs that could heal sickness. They grew tobacco and peppers and tomatoes. None of these plants was known in other parts of the world.

Indian basketweavers wove baskets so tight that they could hold liquids and so handsome that people in later generations put them in museums. Potters learned to make sculptured figures and useful pots and bowls. Weavers designed colorful rugs.

Native American thinkers created mathematically precise calendars. Goldsmiths made some of the most beautiful jewelry the world has ever seen. Indians invented the hammock, the canoe, snowshoes, and a game called lacrosse. They learned to gather rubber from rubber plants; they made rubber balls and played ball games. They built pyramids and temples and cities.

But no single tribe of Indians did all those things. Native Americans developed different lifestyles and different languages, just as Europeans and Africans and Asians did. It all depended on who





their leaders were and where they lived.

One thing Indians never did was to make good use of the wheel. Their lives would have been easier if they had. In Mexico the Indians put wheels on their children's toys, but they never made wheeled wagons for themselves. Perhaps that was because they didn't have horses to pull them.

When people came from Spain to America (at the end of the 15th century), they brought horses and mules and oxen. In the 16th century, horses completely changed Indian life, just as the automobile and airplane changed life in 20th-century America. (Can you imagine hunting buffalo on foot? Now jump on horseback and see the difference it makes.)

When the horse came to America, it was returning home. A tiny horse ancestor had lived in America in Ice Age times. Some of those ancient, dog-sized horses had trotted across Beringia to Asia. In Asia they grew large and galloped on—to Europe and Africa. Those that stayed in America became extinct.

These are pictures made centuries ago by European explorers in America. The pictures show a few of the ways that some Indian peoples hunted and trapped animals. Check the top right-hand corner. What do you think of the contest between the deer and the hunters? How would you like to be that deer?



## Some Thoughts on Dinosaurs and the Earth



The supercontinent Pangea, 200 million years ago, before the land split up.

Have you been wondering about dinosaurs? Did you know they once dwelled on the American continents—perhaps right where you live? That was long, long ago—about 200 million years ago, way before people and most mammals existed.

It was a time when North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Greenland, Australia, and Antarctica all made up a huge supercontinent. (Scientists have named that supercontinent Pangea, a Greek word that means “all lands.”)

Big and little landmasses had moved together to form Pangea. Then they began moving apart. A space opened up between parts of Pangea. That kind of space is called a “rift.” The rift got very wide, filled with water, and became the ocean we call the Atlantic.

Yes, continents do move. North America is moving right now—right under your feet. Don’t run outside to watch it—progress is slow: this continent is moving at about the same rate as your fingernails grow. If you happen to have some time to spare—maybe

a million years or, better yet, 50 or 100 million years—you may see real changes. People who study the earth—scientists called “geologists”—say that southern California could end up attached to Alaska someday. Some say that California may split and form a land of its own.

Weird? Not really. Geology is surprising. If you read about it, you may soon be fascinated.

For instance: did you know the center of the earth, called the *core*, is blisteringly hot and mostly made of iron? An inner core (about 800 miles or 1,237 kilometers in diameter) is thought to be a solid spinning ball and nearly as hot as the sun’s surface. The outer core (diameter about 1400 miles or 2,253 km) is iron and nickel in liquid form.

Circling the earth’s core is a layer of metals and minerals called the *mantle*. The mantle (about 1,802 miles—2,900 km thick) is hot and gushy, but not as hot as the core.

The third earth layer, the one we live on, is the *crust*. It is a skin that stretches around the globe. The crust varies from a few miles thick beneath the oceans (and mostly made of basalt rock), to about 40 miles thick (64 km and made of rocks like granite), beneath the continents.

The liquid rock is called *magma*. Sometimes it explodes out of the earth as lava.

Let’s focus on the crust. The crust is not smooth. It is wrinkled, cracked, and broken up into *plates*—seven giant plates

and some small ones. Those plates are like rafts floating on the liquid mantle. They move, they crash into one another, they slide on top of each other. (Some plates are under the sea; some hold the continents.)

Look at a map of Asia. Do you see India? India is a *subcontinent*. It was once a separate continent, far south, below the equator. Then it moved north. (It moved quickly in geological time: it took only 30 million years.) When the Indian plate hit the Eurasian plate, it didn’t stop. It rammed Asia. That ramming action pushed, lifted, wrinkled the earth, and formed the Himalayan Mountains.

The Appalachian Mountains in North America were made in a similar manner. They were lifted out of the earth when landmasses crashed into each other as Pangea was forming. Those ancient Appalachians were huge when they were new—450 million years ago. Glaciers, wind, and rain have worn them down.

The center of this country happens to rest on especially thick crust. In dinosaur days it supported an inland sea. On either side of that crust are thin areas. Imagine the continent pushing west, which is the direction it is still traveling. Now try pushing the skin on your hand. Do you see it wrinkle? That is what happens to the earth. The earth’s “wrinkles” are mountains. The Rockies are layers of thin, wrinkled crust thrust up from a former ocean bottom. Our central plains sit



on smooth, thick earth crust.

Remember, the crust is floating on a sea of molten rock. When a crack—or fault—appears in the crust, some of the heat and energy of the magma can escape, and that may start things moving. When that happens, you have an earthquake along the fault.

The earth also has hot spots, which are like chimneys for interior heat and energy. Sometimes magma explodes out of the crust at a hot spot. That's what a volcano is all about.

The Hawaiian Islands came into being when a series of undersea volcanoes erupted. The Hawaiians are the world's tallest mountains, if you measure them from their base on the ocean floor.

**B**ut we started this discussion with dinosaurs. Do you know why they died out? Today's scientists think a giant meteorite fell to earth 65 million years ago with enough force to trigger tsunamis (giant ocean waves) and major earthquakes and to send dust and debris into the atmosphere creating an earth-hugging black cloud. That cloud may have blocked the sun's rays long enough to kill plants and fish and animals, totally disrupting the food chain. And that finished off many species, especially dinosaurs (which left room for tiny mammals to survive). A huge impact crater, the imprint of a celestial object that was about the size of Haley's Comet, has been found on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico (known as the Chicxulub Crater).



*The green parts show how the land that became North America looked 75 million years ago. Can you find the huge inland sea that is now the Great Plains?*

## The First Americans

### Chapter 4: How the First Americans Became Indians

**Partner Read:**

**Use a yellow highlighter to locate evidence to answer the following questions:**

- 1.) How was the term "Indian" developed?
- 2.) What does "native" mean?
- 3.) Why were the First American probably good at hunting?
- 4.) What happened to animals as a result of better hunting skills?
- 5.) Locate two examples to prove that the natives had a surplus of food.

**Insert a text box to type an answer to the following questions.**

- 1.) What does Hakim mean when she writes, "As far as we know, no people is native to America"?
- 2.) In which ways would the Indians way of life have been different if they invented the wheel?
- 3.) How did the introduction to horses change the way of life for the Indians?

**On the last sections, "Some Thoughts on Dinosaurs and the Earth," make at least 2 annotations per page. Use the highlighter and text boxes for each annotation.**