Historical supplements: Focus on the USA

Native American history at a glance

Before the white man

At the time Europeans first began to arrive in North America, there were about 7 million Indians in what is today the United States and Canada. They spoke hundreds of different languages and lived in different ways.

In the northeast the most powerful Indians were the Iroquois. There were six Iroquois tribes and they lived as farmers. With over 35,000 people they often defeated other Indian tribes in war.

In the Great Plains (from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains), most tribes, like the Sioux and the Cheyenne, were nomadic, i.e. they moved their teepees to where they could find and hunt buffalo. They ate the meat, used the skin and fur to make clothes and teepees, and made tools from the bones.

In the southwest, some of the Pueblo people, like the Hopi, lived in villages and grew vegetables. But the Navajo tribes, who came to this region from the north, were warriors who moved from one place to the next. They hunted buffalo, but they also attacked other Pueblo villages. When the Indians began to use horses – which they got from the Europeans – hunting buffalo became much easier.

Arrival of the English

When the English arrived in North America in 1607, they created the colony of Jamestown in the territory of the Powhatan Indians. Many of the white people died during the first year from disease and hunger. Four more ships of people soon came, but in the winter of 1610 the English still did not have enough to eat. Some went to join the Indians, who knew how to grow food on this land.

The Indians began to worry about the large number of people who were arriving. Although they liked to trade with the settlers for horses and guns, many of them had died from diseases that the white people had brought with them. They were also forced to leave their territory. So

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1. powerful /ˈpaʊəfl/ mächtig
2. Iroquois /ɪˈrɑːkwəɪs/
3. Sioux /sjuː/ a Indianer mit einem Wappen und einem Chieftain
4. Cheyenne /ˈtʃiːjən/ a Indianer mit einem Wappen und einem Chieftain
5. teepee /ˈtɪpiː/ Tipi (Indianerzelt)
6. nomadic /ˈnɒmədɪk/ nomadisch
7. tool /tuːl/ Werkzeug
8. bone /bou̯n/ Knochen
9. Navajo /ˈnævəhoʊ/ a Indianer mit einem Wappen und einem Chieftain
10. Apache /ˈæpəhɪʃ/ a Indianer mit einem Wappen und einem Chieftain
11. disease /ˈdraɪs/ Krankheit
12. hunger /ˈhʌŋgər/ Hunger
13. to trade /trɛd/ Handel treiben
14. right /rɑːt/ Recht
15. Massachusetts /ˌmæsəˈɛtʃəts/
The Trail of Tears

By 1733 there were thirteen British colonies on the eastern coast of North America and over 100,000 Europeans. The population by 1776, when the colonies had become an independent country called the ‘United States of America’, the Europeans had moved west of the Appalachian Mountains. The new Americans pushed many Indian tribes further and further west and tried to teach them white culture.

The Indians fought hard to save their homes and their way of life, but they could not defeat the settlers. When Andrew Jackson became president he gave the land west of the Mississippi River to the Indians; any Indians still in the east had to move there. The Cherokee tribe felt that they should be able to stay in the southeast because they had begun to live like the Americans. When they refused to leave, the army forced them out. While they were travelling west, 4,000 Cherokee died. Another 20,000 Indians from other tribes died, too. The Indians’ journey to the west is called the ‘Trail of Tears’.

About 90,000 Indians moved to the new Indian Territory in Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska. The Indians who already lived there were unhappy about the new Indians in their territory. The result: wars between the tribes.

The idea of ‘Manifest Destiny’

Many Americans believed very deeply that God had given them the right to settle in North America; God wanted them to settle the continent from coast to coast. This idea was called ‘Manifest Destiny’. That was one reason for moving West. Another was that people wanted land and adventure west of the Mississippi River, where Indian Territory began. In 1843, 1,000 people travelled to the Far West in covered wagons, on horses and on foot. Many hoped to find gold in California and Oregon. The journey was 3,200 km and by 1860 about 260,000 people had arrived in the Far West. By that time another 4.2 million Europeans had settled in the USA and they were also moving west.

Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee

In the 1850s more and more fights between Indians and white settlers broke out. The Indians had to move from place to place to find buffalo, and they often met white settlers who had crossed the Mississippi into Indian Territory, were killing all the buffalo and were taking the land they wanted. The Indians wanted to protect their land and their way of life, so they attacked the Americans.
In the 1870s, gold seekers entered Sioux Territory in South Dakota. Some of them were killed. The US Army was sent in to ‘punish’ the Sioux. One of the Army officers, George Custer, did not believe reports about a very large chief who defeated number of Sioux and other tribes in the area. At the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, 2,000 Indian warriors killed over 250 soldiers under Custer. It was the biggest triumph against the whites in Native American history.

But in the end, the US Army was too strong. At Wounded Knee, in 1890, fighting broke out for the last time and the Sioux chief and many men, women and children were killed. For the rest of the Sioux and many other Indian tribes, the only choice was to live on reservations.

A Native American woman performing a traditional tribal dance

In some places they have made money and even become quite wealthy from casinos. There are special laws in the United States that give Indian reservations privileges that non-Indian lands don’t have, e.g. running casinos.

Tourism is also an important way to earn money. But only some Native Americans make money this way. More than half of the Native American population now lives in big cities because they can have a better life there. In cities there are often Indian centers that help them find jobs and organize cultural activities, which are very important to most Native Americans.

Indian reservations are allowed to have their own government, and some people even feel that they should have their own nation. But Native Americans fight to be part of the national government, too, so they can protect their lands and their culture.
1  Understanding Indian life

a) Match the Indian tribe with the description.

1. Iroquois a. a nomadic tribe in the Great Plains that lived from buffalo
2. Sioux b. an aggressive tribe from the north that attacked other tribes
3. Pueblo c. a group of tribes in the northeast who were strong and powerful
4. Navajo d. a tribe from the southwest that lived in villages and grew food

b) What is the difference between a nomadic tribe and a farming tribe?

c) Why was the buffalo so important for many Indian tribes?

2  Reading comprehension

How much did you understand? Tick the correct answer.

1. Why did the Europeans join the Indians in 1610?
   a) They liked the Indians’ way of life.
   b) They needed help to grow food.
   c) They wanted to trade with the Indians.

2. Why did the Powhatan Indians attack the white settlers in 1622?
   a) The settlers attacked them first.
   b) They wanted to steal their horses and guns.
   c) Their people were dying from the settlers’ diseases and the settlers were taking their land.

3. What was the ‘Trail of Tears’?
   a) The Indians’ journey to the reservations.
   b) The Indians’ journey to their new land during which 4,000 Cherokee and 20,000 other Indians died.
   c) The Indians’ journey to their new land during which 90,000 of them died.

4. What does ‘Manifest Destiny’ mean?
   a) God gave the land in North America to the Indians.
   b) God gave everybody gold in the Far West.
   c) God gave the land in North America to the Americans.

5. Why did the Indians begin living on reservations?
   a) They were defeated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.
   b) The American army was too strong and they could not fight back anymore.
   c) They didn’t want to live on the same land as the white settlers.

6. Why do many Native Americans live in big cities today?
   a) They can find better education and better jobs there.
   b) They do not think Native American culture is important.
   c) They want to be part of the American government.
3 **Pros and Cons**

_A lot of white Americans are unhappy when Native Americans build casinos and develop the natural spaces on their reservations for tourism. Make a list of pros and cons. Should Native Americans be allowed to do these things?_

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**PROS**

- They can find jobs and make money.
- Americans can learn about Indian when they visit the reservation.
- In this way Native Americans won't forget their culture.
- It is their land and they can do what they want with it.

**Cons**

- Native Americans who work in casinos at a young age might not ever get the chance to receive a college education.
- Casinos are not good places; it is easy to become addicted to gambling _Glücksspiel_.
- Sometimes developments damage the environment.
- Developments don’t look as nice as the natural land.
- Native American culture becomes entertainment for Americans.

4 **Creative writing**

_Imagine you are a Native American. Write a letter to the American government and explain why your people should be allowed to have your own government and make money in your own ways._

Lösungen/Lösungsvorschläge

1

a) 1. c) 2. a) 3. d) 4. b)

b) A nomadic tribe usually moves their homes to where they can find food. Farming tribes live in villages and grow their own food.

c) The buffalo was used for everything. Indians needed them for food, clothes and teepees. They also made tools from the bones.

2

1. b) 2. c) 3. b) 4. c) 5. b) 6. a)

3 **Lösungsvorschlag:**

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4 **Individuelle Antworten**