

MICHIGAN'S NATIVE AMERICANS

The first people to live in Michigan arrived about 12,000 years ago.

They followed big animals that traveled in herds, like **caribou**. They hunted the animals for

food, used the skins for clothing, and made tools from the bones. Over thousands of years, the kinds of plants and animals living in this area changed. The Native American way of life changed too, as people hunted different animals, made new kinds of tools, and later began growing crops.

Archaeologists

Archaeologist

People who study those who lived in the past through the items they left behind

divided these different ways of life into time periods. The timeline at the bottom of this page shows the different periods.

For thousands of years, Native Americans did not have a written language. We learn about them from the clues they left behind, such as fragments of pottery, spear points made of stone, and tools made of animal bone.

The first European came to Michigan about 1620 and others soon followed. Some Europeans kept journals that tell about the land they explored and the people they

met. Archaeologists call this the Euro-American period. During this time,

Europeans began recording stories about Native Americans. Sometimes, these stories showed how little Europeans understood Indian culture.

This issue of *Michigan History for Kids* focuses on Native Americans after 1620. It is important to remember that Native Americans have not disappeared. There are about 60,000 Native Americans in Michigan today. They live and work in many Michigan cities, own businesses, and take active roles in politics and government. The Native American way of life is kept alive as parents continue to pass traditions, customs, and language on to their children.

12,000-9,000 years ago

Prehistory

Paleo-Indians in the Great Lakes region hunt caribou, mammoths, and mastodon.

9,000-3,000 years ago

Archaic

Indians learn new hunting and gathering skills in the forests that replace the retreating glaciers.

3,000 years ago
- early 1600s

Woodland

Indians use nets to fish. They also begin farming and building burial mounds.

1600s to present

Euro-American

With the arrival of the Europeans, Native Americans see their way of life greatly changed.



the 3 Fires

Three of the best-known tribes in Michigan are the Ojibwa (also called the Chippewa), the Odawa (also called Ottawa) and the Potawatomi. Together they formed a loose **confederacy** known as the Three Fires. They spoke a common




Confederacy

A group of people joined together for a common purpose

language and shared many beliefs and customs. They were like a family. The Ojibwa were thought of as the eldest brother, the Odawa were the middle brother, and the Potawatomi were the youngest brother. These tribes were known as the Anishinabek.

Ojibwa means “puckered up” and refers to the unique style of **moccasins** these Native Americans wore. The Ojibwa moved into Michigan from the northern shores



Native Americans used materials that grew naturally in their area to build the things they needed. Michigan had many birch trees. The bark of birch trees peels off easily and can be used to make canoes. Birchbark canoes were waterproof, lightweight, and easy to steer.

Michigan Native Americans lived in dwellings called wigwams. Thin branches were stuck into the ground and tied together to create a frame. Sheets of bark taken from large birch trees were placed over the frame. When a family moved to a new place, they rolled up the bark and took it with them. They left the frame behind.



of Lake Superior and Lake Huron around 1700. There were about 4,000 members of the Ojibwa when Europeans arrived in Michigan. Fishing was important to the Ojibwa. Each fall, many of them gathered at Sault Ste. Marie to catch whitefish in the rapids of the St. Mary's River.

Odawa means "to trade." The Odawa were important trading partners with the French. They built birchbark canoes that allowed them to transport furs and trade goods over great distances.

The Odawa moved into the Lower Peninsula shortly after the arrival of Europeans in the mid-1600s. There were about 5,000 members of the

Odawa when Europeans arrived in Michigan.

The word Potawatomi means "people of the place of fire." They were some of Michigan's earliest farmers. The Potawatomi grew squash, corn, beans, and tobacco. They also hunted and fished. There were about 4,000 members of the Potawatomi when Europeans arrived in Michigan. Their villages were in southwestern Michigan along the St. Joseph River and the Grand River, and near the Lake Michigan shoreline.

The tribes of the Three Fires shared certain beliefs: 1) spirits were more powerful than men; 2) nature belonged to everyone; 3) no one had the right to run another person's life.

Everyone living in an Indian village


Moccasin

Shoes made of soft leather that fit like a slipper

worked. Women and girls did most of the chores. They softened animal skins (called tanning), wove fishnets, chopped wood, grew crops, and cooked. They gathered berries, nuts, and wild rice and grew corn, beans, and squash in gardens.

Men and boys hunted and fished. They made bows and arrows, animal traps, wooden tools, and canoes. They hunted bear, moose, deer, wolf, and fox.

Great Lakes Indians lived in dome-shaped houses called wigwams, not teepees. Michigan Native Americans did not wear feathers in their hair. They wore their hair long and sometimes braided it. In summer, they wore a **breechcloth** and **moccasins**. During cold months, they wore fur hats, moccasins, leggings, and shirts. Women also wore knee-length deerskin skirts.

When French explorers and fur traders came to the Great Lakes area in the mid-1600s, Native Americans began to trade and talk with them and live near them. Over time, Indians began to live more like their white neighbors. 

Breechcloth

A small cloth tied at the waist, usually made of animal skins

Longhouse

A dwelling similar to a wigwam, but longer.

Nobody knows for sure how many other tribes may have lived in Michigan. Indians traveled often to search for animals to hunt, good soil for crops, or simply to be closer to or further away from other tribes. Below are five tribes that we know lived in Michigan.

Huron (also called Wyandotte)

The name Huron is a French word that means “a wild boar.” Frenchmen may have named this tribe after the hairstyle that men wore at the time. The Huron built villages. They lived in **longhouses** surrounded by a type of fence. Many relatives lived together in one house that was 25 feet wide and anywhere from 30 to 200 feet long

Menominee

The Menominee are known as the “wild rice people” because wild rice was an important food for them. Their language was similar to the Sauk and Fox, which means that at one time they might have all belonged to the same tribe. An early explorer wrote that they were “very fine men.”

Fox

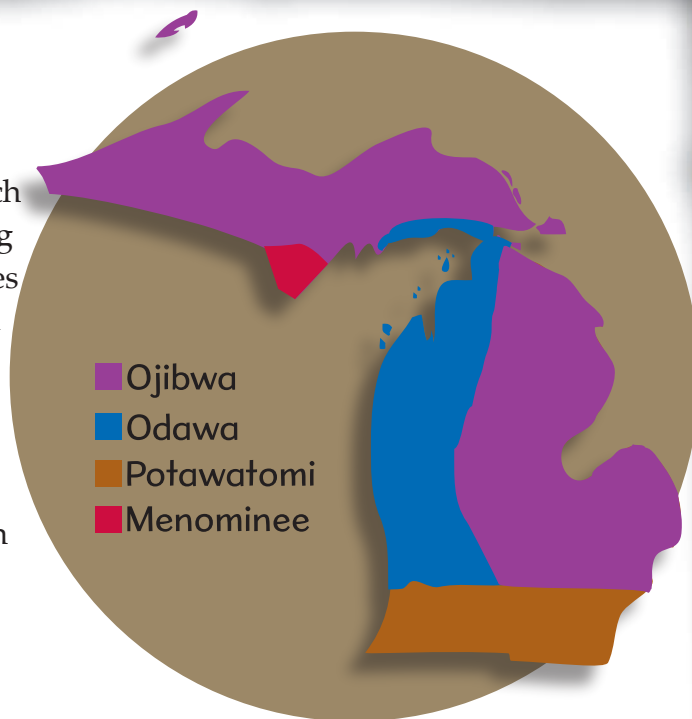
The Fox called themselves *mesh-kwakihug*, meaning “red-earth people.” They fought with the French and were angry with them for giving guns to the other Indian tribes. Tribes that lived near them described them as quarrelsome.

Miami

The Miami lived in southwest Michigan and near Detroit. A French priest who visited them said that they “love to hear the Europeans talk” and that they were so curious that they often woke the priest to ask him questions. Men were fast runners and many were tattooed from head to foot.

Sauk (also called Sac)

The name Sauk means “people of the yellow earth.” They lived in the Saginaw Bay area and along the eastern Lower Peninsula. It is believed that the name Saginaw means, “the place of the Sauk.”



This map shows where Native Americans lived in 1768. The Fox, Miami, Sauk, and Huron were in Michigan when the French arrived in the 1600s. They moved out by the mid-1700s.



Teachers! This will assist you in teaching GLCEs 3-H3.0.2, 3-H3.0.6, 4-R.IT.04.01 and 4-G5.0.1

Teachers! The Ziibiwing Center in Mount Pleasant enlightens and educates visitors in the rich culture, heritage, and history of the Anishinabek people of the Great Lakes. Visit www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing or call (800) 225-8172.

