

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

6-8

Subject

Social Studies

Lesson Title

First Nations' Names for Famous US Landmarks

Activity Description: Before colonial interaction, First Nations tribes inhabited the lands of North America. Famous landmarks such as the Grand Canyon, Mt. McKinley, and Yellowstone National Park held sacred names given by tribes in those regions until the US federal government declared their "official" names. This activity explores some landmarks that hold government and Native names and what is being done to change them. Also included is a list of states with names that originated from First Nations.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi access (recommended)
- Paper and pen/pencil
- All articles from the main activity can be printed if necessary
- Digital or print version of a cultural [quiz from Teaching Tolerance](#)
- Digital or print version of "[6 More Landmarks that Should Have Their Indigenous Names Restored](#)"
- Digital or print version of "[Origins of the Names of 28 States](#)"

STEPS

Because of the large number of tribal nations in North America, many people do not realize the vast impact of tribes on US History and culture. Before reading the articles in the activity, take this [short quiz](#) (answers at the bottom of the page) from Teaching Tolerance to see how much you already know. Then follow these steps:

Activity Steps:

1. Read [this Huffington Post article](#) on landmarks that should have their Native names restored.
 - a. Questions for discussion: What is your opinion on restoring the names of these landmarks back to First Nations' names?
 - b. How does the original name demonstrate a tribal connection to the landmark and land around it?
2. Read this [list of US state names that came from Native nations](#)
 - a. Questions for Discussion: Ask family and community elders if there are landmarks in your region that have traditional First Nations names different than the "official" name. What do those names mean? Ask how the landmarks received those names?
 - b. If landmarks have more than one name, what could your community do to restore the Native names?
 - c. How could you help other young people understand the important influence First Nations had on US history and culture?

Extended Activity:

1. If you have WiFi access, research one or more of these US landmarks to learn the history of which First Nations lived close to the land mark and if it had an original name given to it:
**Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota* **The Everglades in Florida* **Mt. Washington in New Hampshire*
2. Write a list of the information you find. If there is still disagreement about the landmark or its name, add that information to your list as well.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: This activity may bring up questions about why First Nations names are not federally recognized or valued. It can also lead to a conversation about misuse and misrepresentation of Native American names, symbols, or images such as team mascots and names. For a deeper discussion, consider these talking points.

- There have been many changes already by removing Native logos or names from sports teams, products, or schools; however, there are still more to address. Visit the National Congress of American Indians site ["Ending the Era of Harmful 'Indian' Mascots"](#) for a video presentation and more discussion points
- If applicable, encourage your child to use traditional and sacred names when referring to landmarks, community places, and individuals and be proud of their cultural heritage and representation.
- To sign a pledge and use materials to help recognize and honor Native lands, join the [Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment](#) movement

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and educators: If families want to learn more about other landmarks with possible name changes or how to address discrimination like misuse of Native American symbols or terms, visit the links below:

- To learn more about the name change of Mt. McKinley to its Athabascan name *Denali*, read this article ["Decolonize the land: Native people welcome Mt. Denali name change"](#) from *People's World*
- For examples on how some Native Americans are using social media to counter stereotypes and misuse of cultural images, read this article [#DearNonNatives from VOA News](#).

Activity Adapted from:

- "Test your knowledge of Native American Influence in US History and Culture" quiz from Teaching Tolerance <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/native-american-influences-in-us-history-and-culture>
- "6 More Landmarks that Should Have Their Indigenous Names Restored" by Julian Brave NoiseCat on the Huffington Post https://www.huffpost.com/enr/landmarks-denali-indigenous-names_n_55e5f674e4b0aec9f354c572
- "Origin of the Names of 28 U.S. States" from American Indian Source <http://www.americanindiansource.com/indianed/statesnames.html>

Additional Resources:

- "Ending the Era of Harmful "Indian" Mascots" by the National Congress of American Indians <http://www.ncai.org/proudtobe>
- Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement sponsored by the US Department of Arts and Culture <https://usdac.us/nativeland>
- "Decolonize the land: Native people Welcome Mt. Denali Name Change" from People's World <https://peoplesworld.org/article/decolonize-the-land-native-people-welcome-mt-denali-name-change/>
- "#DearNonNatives: What Native Americans Want Non-Natives to know" by Cecily Hilleary fro VOA News <https://www.voanews.com/usa/dearnonnatives-what-native-americans-want-non-natives-know>