

# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

bowl with beans  
(Haudenosaunee)



# HALL OF Eastern Woodlands Indians



a group gathers at the Tuscarora Reservation to braid dried corn for winter storage

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pack basket used in harvesting (Choctaw)

stirring paddle (Ojibwa)



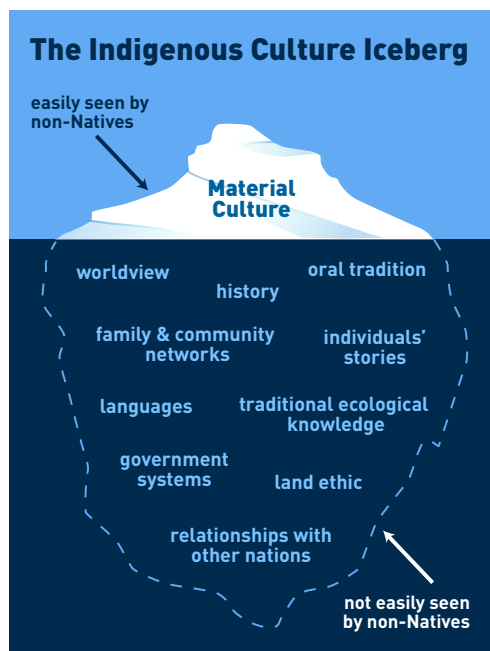
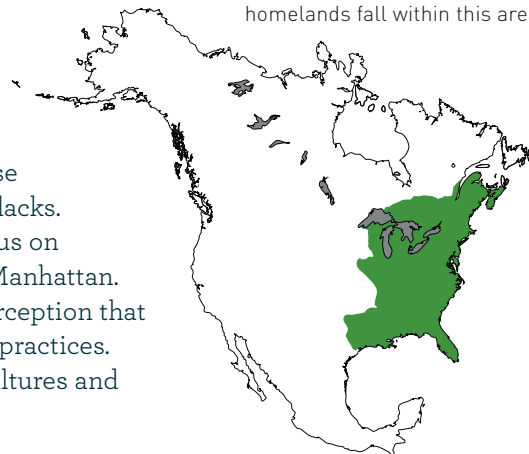
mural of an Ojibwa family collecting maple tree sap

# ESSENTIAL Questions

## Who are the people represented in the Hall of Eastern Woodlands Indians?

“Eastern Woodlands Indians,” a term invented by anthropologists in the early 1900s, typically refers to **Native people** whose **homelands** extend from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean, south to the Gulf of Mexico and north to the boreal forests that stretch across Canada. The objects displayed in the hall come from an even larger area that extends from the southeast of Canada down to Florida. This vast region encompasses what is currently all or parts of 27 states and parts of four Canadian provinces, a diverse landscape filled with ecosystems as distinct as the Everglades and the Adirondacks. It includes the homelands of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), whom we will focus on in this guide, and the Lenape, the original inhabitants of what is today called Manhattan. Seeing a large variety of **Native Nations** grouped together can create a misperception that the people from this expansive region all shared the same beliefs and cultural practices. In fact, the Native Nations portrayed within this hall each have rich, diverse cultures and histories that are worthy of individual study.

■ The hall has objects from roughly half of the Native Nations whose homelands fall within this area.



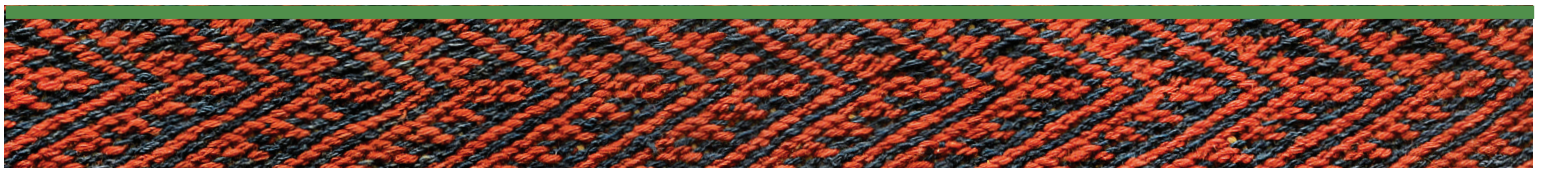
**The Indigenous Culture Iceberg**  
“Above the surface” are those things that can be seen, or the material culture created by a group of people, including architecture and functional objects. “Below the surface” are the components of a culture that are less visible, including human relationships, history, and knowledge, that are necessary to contextualize material culture.

## What defines a culture?

To learn about any culture, including the one that you belong to, it is useful to first think about what defines a culture. In **anthropology**, what we call “**culture**” is everything that makes up the way a group of people live. It includes their perspectives, values, institutions, and traditions. The Indigenous Culture Iceberg graphic illustrates the components of every culture, from language to government systems. The connections between these components form a complex web within a culture and permit the members of a community to function in a sustainable way. In studying other cultures, we begin to realize that things that we have done one way all our lives may be accomplished quite differently in another culture. No one way of doing things is necessarily more right than another. Cultures are not monolithic; individuals from any group will always have diverse viewpoints, but there are commonalities in shared history and **worldview** that make some generalizations possible.

## How do we learn about Native Nations?

In order to learn about the cultural components in different Native Nations, there are innumerable articles, books, films, and exhibitions. No one form of media can tell the whole story of a people, and each source needs to be examined critically for accuracy. The approach taken within the Hall of Eastern Woodlands Indians is to show the **material cultures** of the Native Nations represented. Material culture encompasses all the things a group of people create, including architecture and functional objects. The function of these objects is occasionally illustrated in the hall by miniature models and explained through wall text that provides information about the objects’ origins and use. The Indigenous Culture Iceberg illustrates the complexities of a culture that cannot be seen solely from looking at such objects. The human relationships, history, and knowledge “below the surface” are necessary to contextualize the role these objects served and continue to serve within a Native Nation.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The Importance of Names

The words “Native American” and “Indian” are used to describe diverse groups of people whose ancestors lived in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans and subsequent groups. Other terms widely used are Native people, American Indians, Indigenous people, Aborigines, and First Nations. Native people generally identify themselves by their specific Nation or “tribe,” and today many use the names their ancestors used in their own languages (for example, Haudenosaunee instead of “Iroquois,” a name given by the French). There is no single term that all Native people prefer, but “Indian” has fallen out of favor, partly because it comes from Columbus’s error about where he landed. Also, like most people, Native people prefer using their own names to being named by others.

### The Arrival of Europeans

Native American history did not begin with the arrival of Europeans. The encounter between British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and other colonists and the Native populations of the Americas was a meeting of very different but equally complex societies. Two points need emphasizing. On the one hand, contact between these societies took a far heavier toll on the Native populations—a huge percentage of Indigenous people died from a combination of violence, enslavement, disease, and demoralization within 100 years of the arrival of Europeans. On the other hand, relations between Europeans and Native Americans were extremely complex. Certain Native American groups attempted to further their own interests by entering into strategic military and trading alliances with the competing colonial powers—a policy that proved successful for some until the close of the French and Indian War in the 1760s. Many Europeans and Africans married into Native societies, and many northeastern Native people fought in the American War of Independence. The encounter wasn’t simply a history of conquest. It was also a process of cultural interchange that continues today.

## GLOSSARY

**anthropology:** the study of people and cultures in the past and today. Though the field of anthropology was once focused on the study of non-Western societies, today anthropologists study people from all cultures.

**Confederacy:** the Iroquois Confederacy, or Haudenosaunee, specifically refers to the alliance of six Native Nations—the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora—for political purposes

**culture:** everything that makes up the way a group of people live, including their perspectives, values, institutions, and traditions

**homelands:** the original lands where a Native Nation resided prior to contact with Europeans

**Native peoples:** synonymous with Indigenous peoples, the original inhabitants of a region

**material culture:** the objects and architecture created by a people, including functional and artistic creations

**Native Nation:** a group of Native people who share common ancestry and political organization. Native Nations are often associated with a land base known as a reservation, though members of the nation may or may not live there. This land base is not necessarily the same as a Nation’s homelands, as many Native people were displaced by settlers.

**non-Native:** a person whose ancestry is not indigenous to a region

**society:** people living together in a more or less ordered community

**worldview:** a set of beliefs or a philosophy that shapes an individual’s or a group’s perception of the world

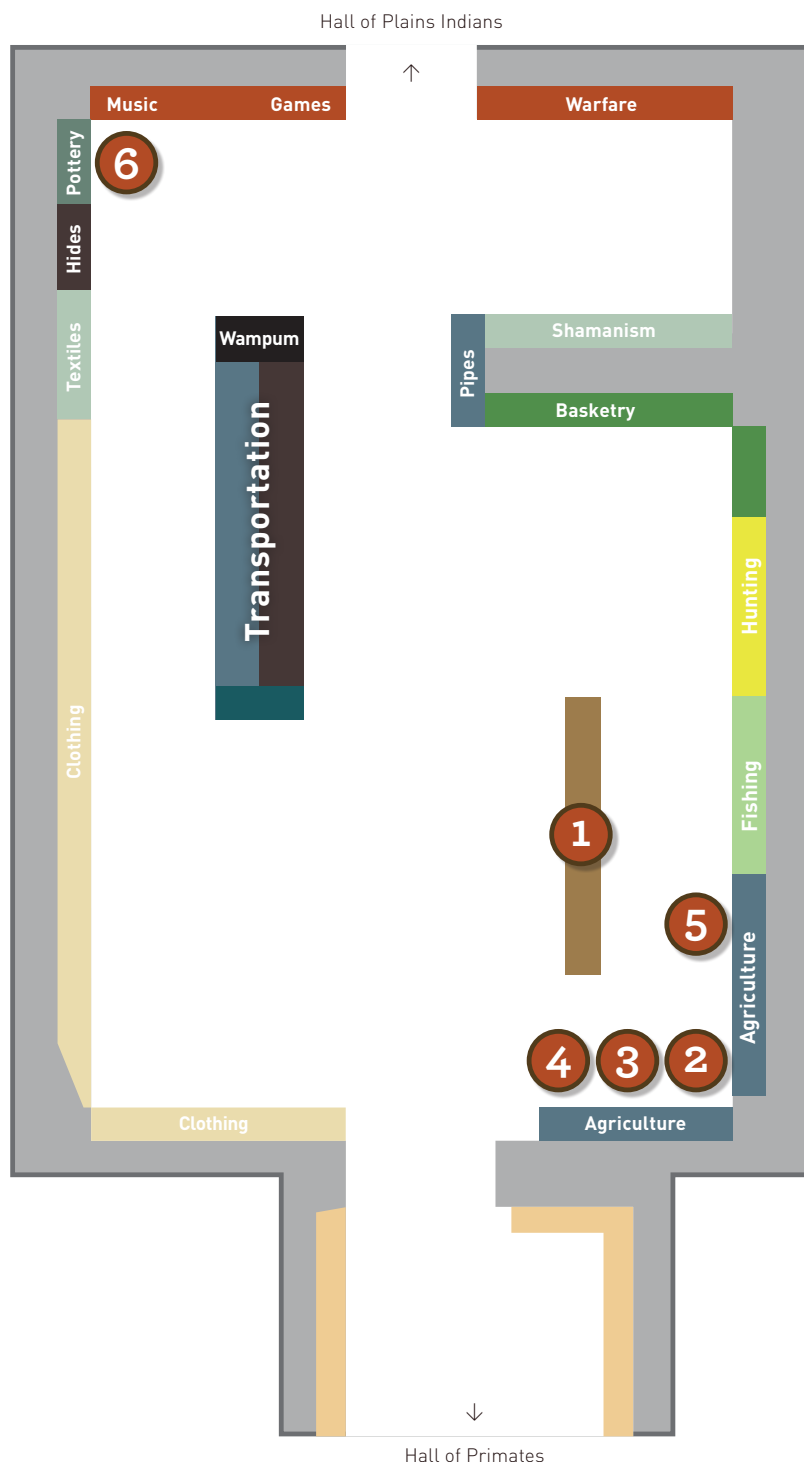
# MAP of the Hall

## A GUIDED TOUR: Agriculture of the Haudenosaunee

1. Housing
2. Agriculture
3. Corn Preparation
4. Land Settlement Patterns
5. Maple Sugaring
6. Pottery

### History of the Hall

The original Hall of Eastern Woodlands Indians was first installed by a team of anthropologists, exhibit designers, and other museum staff in 1909, and then renovated and moved to its current location in 1966. The voice and viewpoint presented in the hall appears as those of outsiders observing “other” cultures; direct perspectives of Native people are absent, though some had substantially informed the creators of the hall. In 1909, it was common practice to display non-European cultures, including North American Native peoples (and also ancestral European cultures) in natural history museums. “Natural history,” a 19th century concept, meant scientific study of the natural world—including the human species—although in practice it was mostly non-Western cultures who were displayed in natural history museums. In that way, where they were shown in close proximity to dinosaur fossils, meteorites, and taxidermied animals, the impression was given that Native peoples and cultures were relics of the past. The hall still leaves visitors with the impression that these cultures are static and that they don’t exist today. The hall has changed little since 1966, but since then the thinking about representation of cultures in museum settings has changed substantially. It has now become increasingly and overtly collaborative, involving direct input from Native scholars and curators. Until such time as this hall is renovated, however, it will continue to represent an earlier style of museum practice, an artifact of past methods of display that bears examining as much as the objects within it.



# TEACHING in the Hall

Tuscarora  
flour corn



Buffalo Creek  
squash seeds



cranberry  
bean

## A GUIDED TOUR: Agriculture of the Haudenosaunee

Food is central to shaping all cultures. The growing, preparation, and consumption of foods indigenous to the Haudenosaunee homelands have always been vital to the culture. The continuation of these growing and cooking practices to the present with modern adaptations reflects the persistence of Haudenosaunee culture. The six suggested stops and supporting content in this guide will offer students an in-depth understanding of this important component of one culture as a window into the complexity that exists within each Native Nation.

*“More than any other single aspect of Haudenosaunee life, corn reflects the persistence of Haudenosaunee people, the complexity of their cultural institutions, and their enormous contributions to contemporary life in the region.”*

—Jane Mt. Pleasant (Tuscarora scholar)

### Haudenosaunee Basics



The Hiawatha Belt is a wampum belt that represents the original Confederacy of five Native Nations. The shapes represent in order the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk Nations.

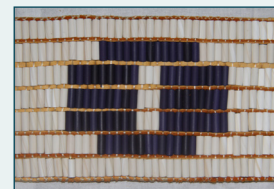
The Haudenosaunee (ho-dee-no-SHOW-nee), also known as the Iroquois to the French and Six Nations to the English, are a Confederacy of six Native Nations that have homelands in what is today New York State and southern Ontario. In the 15th century, prior to contact with Europeans, the region they lived in ranged from the St. Lawrence River in the north to the Susquehanna River in its southern regions, and from the Genesee River eastward to the Adirondack mountains. The story of the Confederacy’s formation is long and complex. In short, the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk Nations joined forces to create a political alliance. The time when this occurred is unresolved, but there was already a well-established governing structure in place by the time Europeans arrived. The Tuscarora became the sixth Nation in 1722 after a lengthy migration from North Carolina.

United, the Haudenosaunee could make decisions collectively, based on consensus. Clan Mothers from each of the Nations appointed men from within their clan to be Chiefs on a council, based on their character,

to ensure that decisions affecting the Confederacy would be in everyone’s best interest. Though some of the Native Nations within the Haudenosaunee have moved to an elected government system, the traditional Council of Chiefs still meets and decides issues that affect the Confederacy as a whole. The different Nations that make up the Haudenosaunee share components of their culture, such as traditional foods, regalia, and music styles, but each Nation has its own unique language and history.

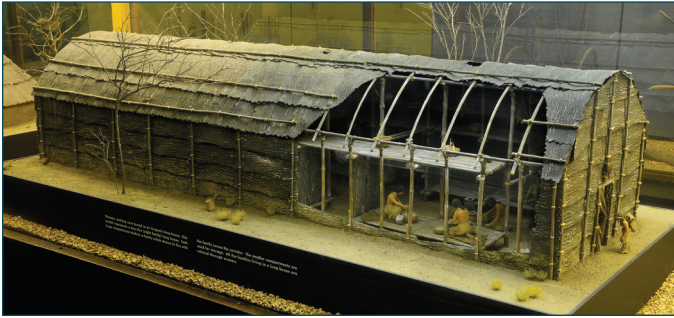
Prior to contact with Europeans, the Haudenosaunee were productive agriculturalists, tending large-scale gardens to feed their people, as well as hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods. The Haudenosaunee lived in bark-covered longhouses in well-established villages. Surrounding the villages were vast areas of cultivated crops like corn, beans, squash, melons, sunflowers, and Jerusalem artichokes. Surrounding the gardens were fields with wild plants such as strawberries, raspberries, and root foods. Beyond the fields were lush woods that provided birds, game, and firewood. Nearby were waterways filled with fish, turtles, and clams, as well as water plants that served as food.

According to Haudenosaunee worldview, the earth is made up of an interconnected web of life that supports humans, who in turn have a responsibility to respect and honor the foods that sustain them. An annual cycle of ceremonies is conducted to express gratitude when the various foods become available. In this way, the natural world is envisioned as a great dish from which food and medicine are offered to sustain human health. It requires that people share, not waste, and be thankful for what is in the great dish.



Detail of the Dish with One Spoon wampum belt, which represents an agreement between Native Nations to share hunting grounds and the bounty from nature.

## 1. Housing



In this **bark longhouse model** on display in the hall, students can examine its exterior and interior and observe the multiple ways that tree products were used within it.

“Haudenosaunee” translates loosely as “people who build an extended house,” referring to a bark-covered longhouse that symbolically extends across all Haudenosaunee territories, representing the Confederacy as a whole.

Haudenosaunee oral history says that bark longhouses feature in the story of the earth’s creation. Archaeological records show physical bark longhouses, like the one represented by the hall model, date from ca. 1200 CE. They were common homes for Haudenosaunee people into the 18th century, typically 18 feet wide and about 80 feet long, with some approaching 300 feet in length. Longhouses were organized by clans, a matrilineal structure where the eldest woman of a clan and her descendants lived together.

Within the longhouse model, you can see fire pits along the center where families could cook and keep warm. Beside one firepit a woman makes cornbread with an ancient type of corn that is still grown in Haudenosaunee communities today. This corn would have been dried and hung in large braids from the rafters of the longhouse, similar to those seen in the model, for use during the long winters of the region.

During the Colonial period, as trade and proximity to Colonial settlements increased, Haudenosaunee people adapted their building materials and housing styles. Following the Revolutionary War, missionaries and U.S. officials urged Native people to adopt single-family homes. Longhouses were slowly replaced by log cabins and subsequently by the modern houses that most Haudenosaunee people live in today.



**Braids of corn grown by a Tuscarora farmer in western New York in 2018 are hung to dry in a shed similarly to how they would have hung in a bark longhouse.**

## 2. Agriculture



In this **crop care model**, students can observe the traditional crops being grown (corn, beans, squash, sunflowers).

Haudenosaunee culture continues to be intimately connected to the growing and harvesting of traditional crops. From a Haudenosaunee perspective, the origin of their seeds can be traced back to the story of how the world was created, in which the original woman, known as Sky Woman, brought seeds with her from the Sky World. The sustenance of the people was based on the yearly agricultural cycle of planting, crop care, and harvest.

The “Three Sisters”—corn, beans, and squash—are well-known staple crops that sustained Native people throughout the eastern region. Haudenosaunee farmers and gardeners today grow the same diverse species of corn, beans, and squash as their ancestors, thanks to the seed-saving efforts of countless generations of Native farmers. There are over a dozen varieties each of Haudenosaunee corn, beans, and squash, as well as many other fruits and vegetables cultivated from surrounding meadows and woods. Corn, beans, and squash provide a healthy, balanced diet. They also demonstrate the sophistication and sustainability of the agriculture practiced by Native people for thousands of years. Archaeo-botanical record shows that corn, for example, dates from 6700 BCE in what is now Mexico and had spread to the eastern region around 200 CE, with widespread use in the northeast since about 900 CE.

The model in the hall shows corn, beans, and squash, growing together in mounds about three feet apart. Cornstalks provide support for bean vines, and the leaves from squash grow low to the ground, giving shade, trapping moisture, and preventing weed infestation. Bacteria on bean roots provide the high levels of nitrogen required by corn. This mutually beneficial relationship allows these crops to be grown year after year without depleting the soil’s nutrients.



**These are stalks of Iroquois white corn grown by students from the Seneca Nation in 2017.**

### 3. Corn Preparation



In this section of the hall, students can examine different kinds of tools for processing and cooking corn, such as these **baskets** and the **mortar and pestle**.

The corn grown by Haudenosaunee farmers in the summer is hung to dry in braids in the fall. In its dried state, corn can last all year long, providing nourishing meals through the winter months. It cannot be eaten dried, though, and cooking whole dried kernels can take eight hours. It can be processed to speed its cooking time, using tools such as those in the display case.

The whole dried corn kernels can first be cooked with wood ash to shorten the overall cooking time and improve their nutritional value. Cooks use corn-washing baskets (A) as strainers to rinse the ash off the corn. The rough surface of the basket's ash splints serves to remove the corn hulls. The corn is then either boiled again into foods like soups and stews where it is enjoyed whole, or crushed in a mortar and pestle (B). The baskets for sifting corn (C) are used to yield a flour that can be cooked into a creamy porridge or made into a boiled cornbread.

Today, when Haudenosaunee people gather for large events, corn soup or corn bread is often on the menu. While metal pots have replaced clay pots for cooking, the corn is still prepared much as Haudenosaunee people have done for generations.



Contemporary Seneca cook on the Allegany reservation rinsing off Iroquois white corn that has been boiled in wood ash, in a corn-washing basket.

### 4. Land Settlement Patterns



Students can observe the **painting of men removing bark** from a tree to kill it, to clear the land for planting. Students can then consider the tools and knowledge necessary for completing this task.

Haudenosaunee people moved their villages when firewood became scarce and local resources depleted. Historians estimate that this took anywhere from 25 to 50 years. This regular moving assured a sustainable use of the land, where no one area was continually depleted. When it was time to move and choose a new site for settlement, it was essential that they select a location with ample fertile soil for agriculture and access to water both to drink and to water the crops. If the best site for a field already contained trees that would obstruct vegetable production, the trees would have to be removed through a process known as girdling, where the bark is removed to kill them, as illustrated in the murals at the back of this case. To the left of the bark-removal mural, women are shown using tools to break up the earth to prepare it for planting. Women traditionally did the majority of the fieldwork to raise and harvest the crops. Their efforts determined the food security of the community, so this work was respected and revered.



In this painting by Ernest Smith (Seneca) from the 1930s, three Haudenosaunee women work together removing weeds and planting beans and squash seeds that will grow alongside the corn stalks emerging from the mounds.

## 5. Maple Sugaring



In the hall, students can look at the **painting of a woman boiling sap** in kettles over an open flame, a process that can take 10 hours. At a rate of about 25 logs an hour, how many logs do students think would be needed to boil the maple sap that would fill the four kettles shown?

The sugar maple is the only specific species of tree honored within the Haudenosaunee offering of gratitude, known as the Ganö:nyök (guh-NO-nyok) or Thanksgiving address. It holds this distinction because of the sap that forms within it each spring when the days are warm and the nights are cold. Buckets, like those in the lower portion of the case, made from folded birch or elm were used to gather the maple sap, which was then boiled down into syrup or further boiled and left to harden in trays as maple sugar. This tradition of coming together to participate in the annual sap boiling continues today in many Native communities in the Northeast, wherever the sugar maple tree thrives.



A Native family gathers in the transition from winter to spring in 2015 to tap maple trees.

## 6. Pottery



In these **illustrations of coiled-pot making**, students can explore the steps needed to create a coil pot and consider the pros and cons of using metal versus clay pots.

Pottery made from coiled clay served as the main cooking vessel for Haudenosaunee people prior to contact with Europeans. Corn mush, corn bread, and corn soup would have all been boiled in a vessel similar to those shown in this section. Pots were supported by stones and placed directly over burning embers. In most longhouses, a pot of soup was cooking all day, available to whoever was hungry, and offered to any guest who happened to pass through.

Pottery breaks easily, so when copper kettles became available through trade with Europeans, Native cooks readily adopted the new material into their cooking routines. This led to the decline in clay-pot production, but some Haudenosaunee artists continue the tradition of making coiled pots today.



Mohawk artist Natasha Smoke Santiago serving soup cooked in a clay pot she created.



## COME PREPARED CHECKLIST

- Plan your visit.** For information about reservations, transportation, and lunchrooms, visit [amnh.org/plan-your-visit/field-trips](http://amnh.org/plan-your-visit/field-trips)
- Read the Essential Questions** to see how themes in the hall connect to your curriculum.
- Review the Teaching in the Hall** section for a special guided tour about the agriculture of the Haudenosaunee.
- Download activities and student worksheets** at [amnh.org/ewi-educators](http://amnh.org/ewi-educators). They are designed for use before, during, and after your visit.
- Decide how your class will explore the hall:**
  - You and your chaperones can facilitate the visit using the Teaching in the Hall section.
  - Students can use the worksheets and/or maps to explore the hall on their own or in small groups.

## CORRELATION TO STANDARDS

### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

#### Theme 1: CULTURE

Human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture.

#### Theme 2: TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

Studying the past makes it possible for us to understand the human story across time.

#### Theme 3: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

The study of people, places, and environments enables us to understand the relationship between human populations and the physical world.

Classroom and Museum visit activities, available online, are correlated to the **New York State Social Studies Standards**.

## CONNECTIONS TO OTHER HALLS



### Teaching the Old New York Diorama

[amnh.org/old-ny-educators](http://amnh.org/old-ny-educators)

In 2018, the Museum added new display text to help visitors re-examine the encounter depicted in the Old New York diorama and to correct misrepresentations of Native people and their relationship with colonists. Suggested activities in this guide will help students explore two different perspectives on the same historical event to explore how interpretation affects understanding of history.

## CREDITS

This Educator's Guide was developed in collaboration with and written by Marissa Maniwabi (Seneca), with contributions and input from Rick Hill (Tuscarora), Chandra Hill (Mohawk), Meredith Palmer (Tuscarora), Mary Ahenakew (Cherokee/Piscataway), Michael Galban (Washoe/Mono Lake Paiute), Gaetana De Gennaro (Tohono O'odham), and Leonard Corwin.

## Photo Credits

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