

Introduction to Indigenous peoples

(for learners of all ages)

Dear educator,

Thank you very much for choosing Survival International's educational resources. A core part of our mission is supporting teachers in introducing Indigenous rights to young people. Our engaging resources are designed to make learning about the struggles and rights of Indigenous peoples accessible and meaningful for students of all ages.

This resource serves as an introduction to who Indigenous people are and the problems they face worldwide. Select the activity (A or B) that is most appropriate for your students.

Please feel free to use this resource to best suit your students' needs. All we ask is that you reinforce **three key messages**:

1. There are more than 476 million Indigenous people worldwide, who form part of extraordinarily diverse societies with ways of life that are just as modern as anyone else's. They have technologies, laws, education, religions, and complex social, political, and economic structures. Like all societies, Indigenous peoples continually evolve – embracing tools like mobile phones and social media while adapting their ancestral techniques to challenges such as climate change. This doesn't make them any less Indigenous.
2. Indigenous identity is deeply rooted in their reciprocal relationship with the land. Indigenous peoples rely on their land for their livelihoods which are largely self-sufficient. The intricate systems they have developed to live sustainably on their land foster strong community ties. Indigenous peoples actively shape and safeguard some of the planet's most biodiverse regions, preserving them for future generations.
3. Indigenous peoples around the globe show remarkable resilience in the face of systemic racism, land theft, forced development, and genocidal violence. They fight tirelessly and strategically to defend their rights, territories, and ways of life. Supporting their struggle and standing in solidarity with their pursuit of justice and self-determination is essential.

To learn more about how to teach about Indigenous peoples' rights and struggles in a culturally sensitive manner, we invite you to look at our [Teaching guidance Indigenous peoples: Dos & Don'ts](#).

Your Survival education team

About Survival International

Survival International is the global campaigning movement for Indigenous peoples' rights. Since 1969, we've been working to prevent their destruction and give them a platform to speak to the world about the genocidal violence, slavery and racism they face on a daily basis. By lobbying the powerful, Survival helps defend the lives, lands and futures of people who should have the same rights as other contemporary societies. Unlike many other organizations, Survival refuses government money and does not take donations from companies that might violate the rights of Indigenous peoples. To learn more, visit www.survivalinternational.org

Activity A (for students aged 5-11 years)

Length: 45-50 minutes

Materials: Pictures of Indigenous people¹ (see [presentation](#) or appendix a), three videos, projector, whiteboard, world map

Learning objectives: Students learn about who Indigenous peoples are, where they live and their special connection they have to their ancestral land.



- Ask your students to look at these pictures of different Indigenous people (see appendix or presentation for easier projection) all around the world. Each photograph represents people from

¹ From top left to bottom right: Baka people (Republic of Congo) © Guillaume Beaudoin; Guarani people (Brazil) © Survival; Dongria Kondh people (India) © Survival; Matsés people (Peru) © Survival; Nenets people (Russia) © Survival; Innu people (Canada) © Survival; Hongana Manyawa people (Indonesia) © AMAN; Gana, Gwi and Tsila peoples © Survival (Botswana); Yanomami people (Brazil)

Indigenous communities who have their own language, culture, and relationship to land. Use them to discuss the following questions with your students:

- Which of these Indigenous peoples do you recognize? (→ If students don't recognize any of them, they might be familiar with other Indigenous peoples)
- What do you know about the lands, ways of life, and histories of the communities pictured here? And if you are not familiar with any of these communities, what questions would you ask them if you could?
- From the surroundings, the types of plants, and climate, seen in the photos, where do you think they live? What is their relationship with the land? (→ Students could come to the front and show the region/ country/ continent on a world map)

b) After the discussion, watch the following videos with your class to learn more about Indigenous peoples' deep connection to their ancestral lands and the environment:

“We’re happy now: the forest is ours!” (2.13 min)



This upbeat [video](#) highlights how Indigenous peoples can thrive living on and from the land: in the case of the Awá, the rainforest provides them with everything they need to survive and live well. Though often described as ‘poor’ in economic terms, Indigenous peoples living on their land hold wealth in community relationships, knowledges, and sustainability, which are ways of prospering that challenge narrow definitions of success. But critical to preserving their way of life is stopping outsiders from invading and destroying their territories.

“What do we feel living in the rainforest? We feel free” (2.36 min)



[Here](#), Nixiwaka, of the Yawanawá people in Brazil, explains the importance of the Amazon rainforest to him and to all the 1.5 million Indigenous people who live there. Nixiwaka highlights the crucial role Indigenous people play in protecting it. Satellite images show that protected Indigenous territories are a key barrier to deforestation, and hearing Nixiwaka testimony, it’s easy to understand why.



How to make a rainforest shelter! (1.09 min)

The Baka people in Cameroon [show you](#) how to make a *mongulu*, a rainforest shelter, using just leaves and plants from the forest.

In groups, have your students think and discuss the following:

- What have you learned about the lives of Indigenous peoples in the world's rainforests?
- What significance does the environment hold for you? What do you use the natural world around you for, and how do you interact with it?

→ Emphasize that Indigenous peoples are incredibly diverse, with different languages, histories, values, and ways of life. At the same time, all communities, including our own, share common human experiences: caring for family, passing on knowledge, adapting to change, and imagining the future.

→ Help students understand that their own way of life or view of the world is just one among many, it is shaped by their particular culture, history, and environment. There is no single "normal" way to live.

To wrap up the discussion: What similarities and differences did students notice between their own lives and the lives of the communities shown?

c) Below are some imagined student responses. With your class, explore which of these are based on stereotypes, which show understanding, and how we can think more critically about their responses.

Wording aids

I agree with X because...

I disagree with X because...

An Indigenous people is a group of people who don't wear clothes. They wear feathers and headdresses instead. **Sarah**

Many Indigenous peoples live and depend on rainforests. If we protect the rainforests we're protecting them too. **Aliyah**



Activity B (for students aged 11-18 years)

Length: 90-100 minutes

Materials: Internet, videos, projector, whiteboard, paper, pens, pictures of the Yanomami, Ayoreo Totobiegosode, Hongana Manyawa and Baka people (Appendix b)

Learning objectives: Students learn about the ways of life of different Indigenous peoples, how they protect their land and the threats they face.

- a) Divide your class into four groups. Ask them to research the challenges faced by an Indigenous people and how they resist or respond to them:
 1. the Yanomami in the Brazilian/Venezuelan Amazon region, whose lives are threatened by illegal gold mining
 2. Ayoreo Totobiegosode in the Paraguayan Chaco, whose forest has the fastest deforestation rate in the world
 3. Hongana Manyawa on the Indonesian island of Halmahera, whose home is being destroyed by mining
 4. the Baka in the Congo Basin, whose human rights are being violated in the name of nature conservation

Your students can decide for themselves how to present their research (poster, photo story, talk, etc.).
→ They may also use the pictures in appendix b) for their presentations.

For their research, your students may find these Survival pages useful:

<https://survivalinternational.org/tribes/yanomami>

<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/ayoreo>

<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/honganamanyawa>

<https://www.survivalinternational.org/campaigns/green-genocide>

b) After the presentations, watch these videos with your class to learn more about Indigenous peoples' deep connection to their land and how they're protecting it:

“Without our forest we are nothing” (3.28 min)



Across the world millions of Indigenous people depend on forests for their survival. Who better to explain the devastating consequences of deforestation to your students? [Here](#), Hamangai, Tainaky, Suzanne, and Temenggung explain how the forest is so much more than their home: it is essential to their lives and livelihoods.

“We have to face those monsters” (1.54 min)



In Brazil, the Munduruku, Yanomami, and Kayapó are among the Indigenous peoples most affected by illegal mining. It's destroying their people, as well as uncontacted Indigenous peoples living in the same territories. Alessandra Munduruku doesn't hold back and [tells how](#) countries and companies that buy Brazilian gold without checking where it comes from are also complicit in crimes against Indigenous peoples and nature.

Based on what your students have seen and learned so far, discuss the following questions:

- Why is a healthy environment crucial for the ways of life of many Indigenous peoples?
- In comparison, to what extent are people in industrialized societies dependent on their environment and natural resources?
- In what ways are people in industrialized societies connected to the problems of Indigenous peoples?
- What can people in industrialized societies learn from Indigenous peoples?

The diversity of Indigenous peoples

According to the United Nations², there are more than 5,000 different Indigenous peoples around the world comprising over 476 million people. They live in more than 90 countries and speak more than 4,000 languages.

Indigenous peoples, who inhabit regions across the globe from the Arctic to the South Pacific, maintain a historical continuity with the societies that existed before colonization or the rise of the now-dominant societies.

While there is no universal definition, they can be identified in certain cases by various characteristics: their descent, unique characteristics that distinguish them from those who arrived later – such as language and ways of life – and their own self-identification as Indigenous.

Many Indigenous peoples continue to be self-sufficient, maintaining a profound relationship with their ancestral territories. Their land is essential to their survival, well-being, and identity.³

According to the International Labour Organization, the Asia and the Pacific region is home to the largest number of Indigenous peoples, 70.5 percent of the total Indigenous population in the world live there (mainly in India and Indonesia). 16.3 percent live in Africa, 11.5 percent live in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1.6 percent live in Northern America and only 0.1 percent live in Europe and Central Asia (the largest Indigenous people being the Sámi who inhabit parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia).⁴

Indigenous peoples live in very diverse ways. The Quechua and Aymara in the Andes, for example, make up much of the rural, agrarian population in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia and are often integrated into the national economy. They and other Indigenous peoples are therefore fully or partially integrated into majority societies, although they still often experience exclusion and racism. In contrast, more than 150 uncontacted peoples live in isolation. They're Indigenous peoples who avoid contact with outsiders by choice. They reside in remote forests, rich in natural resources, in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, India, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and West Papua.⁵ Some uncontacted peoples are nomadic hunter-gatherers. Others live in semi-permanent villages. We know very little about uncontacted peoples, but we do know they have vast botanical and zoological knowledge as well as a unique understanding of sustainable living. There's irrefutable evidence that their territories are the most effective barrier to deforestation, particularly in the Amazon rainforest.

Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, Indigenous peoples do not consist of static societies living in the past. They have always adapted to the changes around them just like every other society. Notions that they 'live in the stone age' or are 'primitive' are false and racist. Indigenous peoples are contemporary peoples. They have technology, laws, education, religions, and social, political and economic structures. They contribute and have developed many of the medicines now used by industrialized societies and have introduced principal staple foods like maize and potatoes that now feed millions. Indigenous peoples understand the natural world and are expert conservationists. They do not oppose change and development, but they prioritize their land because their Indigenous identity is deeply rooted in their connection to their land. Numerous Indigenous peoples rely on their lands for their livelihoods and are largely self-sufficient. The intricate sustainable systems they have developed on their land also foster strong community ties. In addition, Indigenous peoples continue to actively shape and safeguard some of the planet's most biodiverse regions, preserving them for future generations.

² <https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples/>

⁴ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_735607.pdf, page

¹³ <https://assets.survivalinternational.org/documents/2788/original-b24f435d70d2e27876b53452d615b1a4.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/desa/protecting-rights-indigenous-peoples-voluntary-isolation-and-initial-contact>

Indigenous peoples around the world are standing up against land theft carried out under the guise of development and conservation. They are courageously exposing the genocidal violence and systemic racism they endure daily, resisting the destruction and theft of their territories and tirelessly advocating for their land rights.

Indigenous peoples want to be respected as contemporary societies and want to have their human rights protected.

Appendix

a) Pictures of Indigenous people⁶



⁶ From top left to bottom right: Baka people (Republic of Congo) © Guillaume Beaudoin; Guarani people (Brazil) © Survival; Dongria Kondh people (India) © Survival; Matsés people (Peru) © Survival; Nenets people (Russia) © Survival; Innu people (Canada) © Survival; Hongana Manyawa people (Indonesia) © AMAN; Gana, Gwi and Tsila peoples © Survival (Botswana); Yanomami people (Brazil)

b) Pictures of the Yanomami, Ayoreo Totobiegosode, Hongana Manyawa and Baka people



Nomadic Hongana Manyawa group in the Halmahera rainforest. © AMAN



Yanomami women and children gathering leaves to turn into timbó, a poison used to fish, 2010. © Survival



Ayoreo children Edison, Hugo and Eber play in Totobiegosode community of Arocojnadi. 2019. © Survival



Baka community near Lobéké National Park, Cameroon. © Survival

Learn more about Survival International's work and how to promote Indigenous peoples' rights

We love hearing from you and your students!

- Does your class have questions on this topic? Would they like to have a brief virtual meeting with a Survival International staff member?
- Do you want to have a Survival International staff member speak at a school assembly?
- Would you, your colleagues, or other educators you know, like to receive more Survival International educational materials? We have materials suitable for groups aged 5 to 18 years.
- Would you like your school to be involved in supporting Survival International's work in partnership with Indigenous peoples?

If the answer is yes, then please get in touch with our team at info@survivalinternational.org

We can't wait to hear from you!