



**For Indigenous peoples,
for nature,
for all humanity**

Uncontacted Indigenous peoples

(for learners aged 11-18)

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 guide, aimed at young people aged 11-18, intends to foster students' understanding of who uncontacted peoples are and what threats they face. It consists of the following sections:

1. Who are uncontacted Indigenous peoples?
2. Where do they live?
3. How do they live?
4. The world's most vulnerable peoples
5. What are the main threats?
6. Why do they choose to remain uncontacted?
7. Five things you can do to help support them

Before you use this guide with your students, you may want to take a look at our Introduction to [Indigenous peoples](#) for learners of all ages.

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 connection to their land. Many Indigenous peoples rely on their land for their livelihoods and are largely self-sufficient. They have developed intricate systems to live sustainably on their land, fostering 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 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](#).

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

1. Who are uncontacted Indigenous peoples?

Uncontacted Indigenous peoples, also known as uncontacted tribes and Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, have chosen to live independently from the industrialized world, avoiding contact with people who do not form part of their community. Their decision to remain uncontacted is a deliberate act of self-protection, based on experience with the violence and disease brought by outsiders.



They give clear signs to the outside world that they want to remain uncontacted, sometimes pointing arrows at planes that pass overhead, or making barriers out of branches or spears as a sign not to enter their territory.

Uncontacted peoples are the most vulnerable peoples on the planet: with little or no immunity to common outside diseases, any encounters with outsiders who invade their land can be fatal.

Uncontacted Indigenous people live rich, self-determined lives: caring for their homes and their land, nurturing their families, and sharing knowledge. They want to live well and in peace. Where their rights are respected, they continue to thrive. But when outsiders intrude, the consequences are catastrophic – which is why it is so important to fight to protect their land.

2. Where do they live?



There are more than 150 uncontacted peoples around the world, the vast majority of whom live in the Amazon rainforest. Other uncontacted peoples live in India, Indonesia, Paraguay, Papua New Guinea, and West Papua.

Of course, to ensure that no-one tries to visit them it is important that the exact location of uncontacted peoples isn't made public. Survival International only publicizes their rough location when it is needed to protect their land.

Most of the world's uncontacted peoples live in the Amazon

3. How do they live?

Land is life



Uncontacted peoples can thrive thanks to their incredible understanding of nature. They depend solely on the forest for everything they need: it's their ultimate supermarket! From crafting houses and hammocks with materials from the forest, to fashioning blowpipes whose darts can be fired accurately into the treetops, uncontacted people's ingenuity knows no bounds. Some make ropes from vines for climbing trees to harvest fruits; others make intricate fish traps from natural fibers. In the Amazon, some uncontacted Indigenous peoples craft torches by

burning a specific type of tree resin – a sustainable, forest-based technology for lighting up dark nights. The annatto berry stands out amongst the many plants they use: it serves as a natural body paint, insect repellent, and sunscreen – all in one!

That's why it's crucial to protect the lands of uncontacted peoples. Their land is their life. If their lands are destroyed, there's a real risk the people would die too.

Nature's best guardians



Uncontacted peoples, like many other Indigenous peoples, take great care of their land – it's their lifeline. They're incredible at conserving nature, protecting some of the world's last and most biodiverse forests. As hunter-gatherers, they know their environment inside out, with an astounding knowledge of plants and animals.

Evidence shows that the best barrier to deforestation in the Amazon is protecting the territories of uncontacted peoples. As you can see in this satellite picture, the Tanaru Indigenous Territory, Brazil land where a man known as "[The man of the hole](#)" lived is like a green island amid a sea of deforestation.

The good life



Everything suggests that where their land is protected, uncontacted peoples don't just survive on their land, they thrive.

Whilst some people may think that uncontacted peoples are simply unaware of the "benefits" of the outside world, this isn't the case; Wamaxua, a recently contacted Awá man, explains in a [video](#) how uncontacted people are aware of other possibilities but deliberately choose to live apart from the dominant society as an opportunity for a better life or to avoid further massacres.

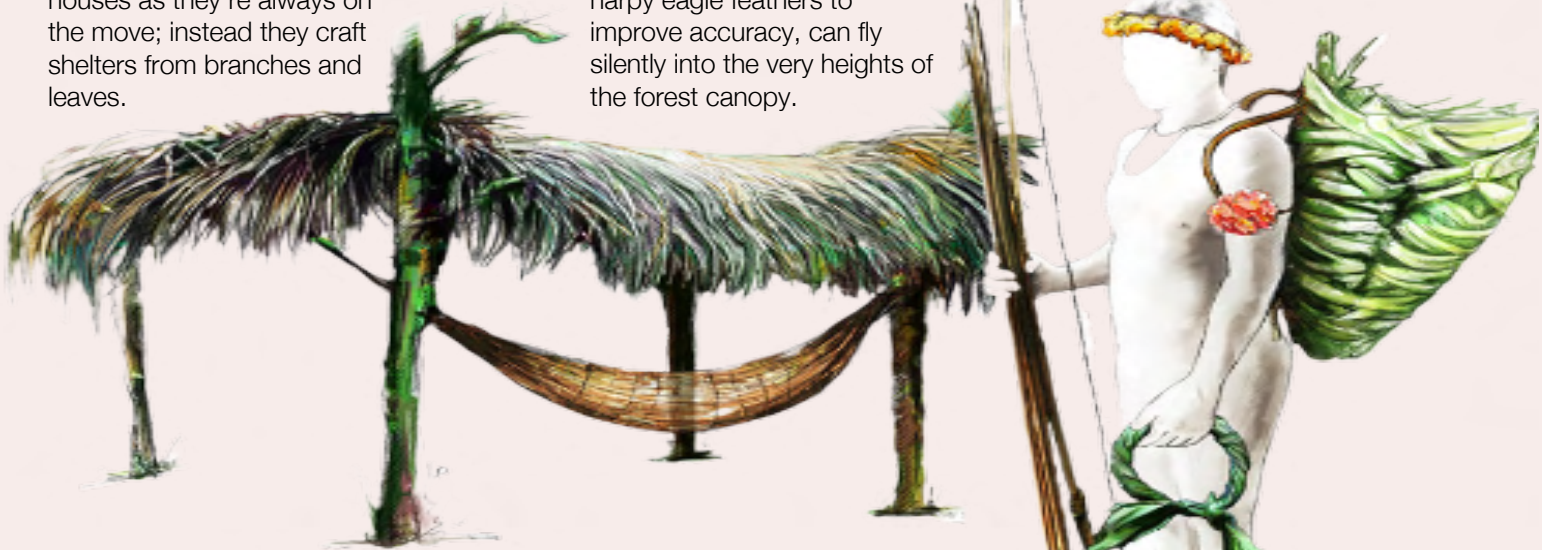
The worldly possessions of a nomadic hunter gatherer

The uncontacted Awá: Brazil

The nomadic uncontacted Awá don't need permanent houses as they're always on the move; instead they craft shelters from branches and leaves.

The uncontacted Awá craft 2-meter (6-foot) bows for hunting. Arrows, fitted with harpy eagle feathers to improve accuracy, can fly silently into the very heights of the forest canopy.

After a successful hunt, uncontacted Awá craft backpacks from palm leaves, a skill also practiced by their contacted relatives – check out the video below!



The Awá make hammocks from palm tree fibres for sleeping in.

With loops of vine like this, uncontacted Awá show incredible climbing skills, reaching the treetops to find honey.



The Awá don't need any lessons in sustainability: [watch](#) how the contacted Awá turn leaves into an eco-backpack in just a few minutes – just as their uncontacted relatives do!

To discuss:

- Consider your day-to-day life. Where do you get your food, your medicine, and all you need to survive? Do you think you could survive living from the land as uncontacted peoples do? Why/ why not?
- Some view uncontacted peoples as “backwards” or belonging to the “stone age”. Having watched the videos, do you think this is fair? Why do you think people might think like that?
- At Survival International, we believe that the industrialized world has so much to learn from uncontacted peoples – do you agree? What do you think we could learn from how they live?
- In 2015, anthropologists¹ [published a paper](#) in which they suggested uncontacted peoples should be contacted, even though uncontacted peoples have expressed *no* desire for contact.

Numerous Indigenous rights groups, including Survival International, strongly opposed, calling on the anthropologists to immediately retract this statement. Why do you think this was?

Uncontacted peoples have the right to live without interference. Why is it important to respect this right – even if others argue it's for “their own good”? Who should get to decide what's best for uncontacted peoples: outsiders or the peoples themselves? Why?

- So far, we have focused on the positive aspects of uncontacted people's lives but before we move onto the next section, what challenges do you think uncontacted peoples may face?

¹ “Anthropology is the study of human beings and their cultures, from prehistoric times to today. The people who practice anthropology are called anthropologists.” (Source: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/anthropology/399339>)

4. The world's most vulnerable peoples

More than 150 uncontacted peoples live across the world. Where their rights are respected, they continue to thrive. But across the world, many face ongoing threats, such as land theft, diseases, and forced contact by missionaries that could continue to devastate their communities.

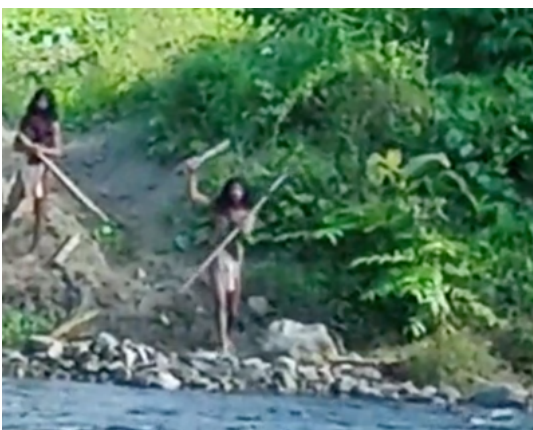


The situation of uncontacted peoples in Brazil highlights the urgent need to support them globally. In 2022, the last member of one people in Western Brazil passed away after decades of living alone, marking the tragic end of his people's existence following a series of massacres dating back to the 1970s. In 2024, only three Akuntsu people are left in Western Brazil and possibly just a few dozen Kawahiva remain, who are surrounded by loggers desperate to make profit from their forest.

5. What are the main threats?

Land theft for profit

Worldwide, the lands of uncontacted peoples are being invaded, stolen, and destroyed for profit by activities like cattle ranching, logging, oil drilling, and mining. Here are some current critically urgent cases:



Indonesia: the threat of mining

The rainforest where the uncontacted Hongana Manwaya live is being destroyed for nickel mining, used in electric car batteries. Hugely powerful international companies are involved.

To learn more about Survival's campaign [go here](#).

Uncontacted Hongana Manyawa warn logging company workers to stay out of their territory.



India: the threat of “development”

The Shompen are a largely uncontacted people, some 300-strong, who live on Great Nicobar Island. They are in grave danger from a huge “development” plan to turn their island home into “the Hong Kong of India”. If it goes ahead, their rainforest home will be destroyed to make way for a mega-port, new city, international airport, power station and 650,000 settlers.

To learn more about Survival’s campaign [go here](#).

Members of the Shompen in the Great Nicobar Island rainforest



Paraguay: the threat of cattle-ranching

The last uncontacted people in South America outside the Amazon, the Ayoreo, are holding out in an ever-shrinking island of forest, as bulldozers clearing land for cattle ranchers rapidly close in on them.

To learn more about Survival’s campaign [go here](#).

“We knew how to hide, and that's why no-one saw us, even though we could see them.”
Catebia Pinanere, Ayoreo woman contacted in 2004.

Disease brought in by outsiders



Uncontacted peoples are extremely vulnerable, and any contact with outsiders greatly endangers their lives. When they come into contact, it is very common for 50-100% of the people to die, often due to diseases they have no immunity to, like the flu.

In this [video](#), Tainaky Tenetehar explains why his uncontacted relatives are choosing to remain uncontacted: they are trying to avoid disease, violence and death.

Missionaries

Although some missionaries are radical and progressive, and spend their lives fighting alongside Indigenous people to advance their rights, other – mostly fundamentalist, evangelical missionaries – believe in forcibly contacting uncontacted peoples, and stop at nothing to do so. This is always disastrous, as this example shows:

The case of Ethnos 360

Formerly called the New Tribes Mission (NTM), Ethnos 360 is a fundamentalist missionary organisation aiming to spread the word of God to all “unreached peoples.” As its Chairman explains, “We can work to reach a new tribal group every 30 days — then every 20 days — then every 10 days... That’s what it will take to achieve this powerful vision — reaching them all.”² The organization openly fundraised for a helicopter aiming to help missionaries in the Javari Valley region of Brazil – home to more uncontacted peoples than anywhere else on Earth – reach “ten additional people groups living in extreme isolation.” All this despite them being aware that previous such attempts have had disastrous impacts on uncontacted peoples, as recent history shows.

- In Brazil, about a quarter of Brazil’s Zo’é people died from diseases introduced when NTM missionaries attempted contact between 1982 and 1988.
- In Paraguay, the NTM helped organize ‘manhunts’ of the Ayoreo Totobiegosode people, forcibly bringing them out of the forest for conversion. Many Ayoreo Totobiegosode people died both during and after these episodes.

Just remember: the threats to uncontacted peoples aren’t what you may think:

For uncontacted Indigenous peoples, the rainforest isn’t a place to fear: it’s their home, and they have a deep knowledge of the land, plants, animals and cycles from generations of living there. The greatest danger to uncontacted Indigenous peoples doesn’t come from wild animals or insects. It comes from outsiders: illegal loggers, miners and missionaries that invade their land and ignore their right to remain uncontacted.



Natural disasters are not the main problem that uncontacted peoples face either. In 2004, people thought that the uncontacted Sentinelese people would have been wiped out by the tsunami in the Indian ocean, which killed more than 200,000 people. But when a helicopter flew over the Sentinelese’s Island some days later, a man was photographed aiming an arrow at the pilot in a clear signal to stay away. The Sentinelese needed no help: they knew to read the signs of the sea that a tsunami was on its way, and head for higher ground.

² Source: <https://ethnos360.org/stories/story/a-vision-that-every-tribe-will-hear>

The case of the Sentinelese people and John Allen Chau



The Sentinelese, Andaman islands.
© Christian Caron – Creative Commons A-NC-SA

mostly from diseases to which they had no immunity.

In 2018, this did not stop a 26-year-old American missionary, John Allen Chau, repeatedly trying to reach North Sentinel Island in order to spread the “word of God” to the Sentinelese people living there. The Sentinelese were known to be “hostile” to outsiders and Chau knew the risks that he was facing.

Chau attempted to visit the island twice and the Indigenous people fired warning arrows; tragically, he was eventually killed by the Sentinelese.



John Allen Chau
© REX/Shutterstock

Below is the letter³ he wrote to his family before embarking on his fatal journey to North Sentinel Island.

Bryan and Mary and Mom and Dad,

You guys might think I am crazy in all this but I think it's worth it [going to the island] to declare Jesus to these people.

Please do not be angry at them or at God if I get killed [...]

This is not a pointless thing-The eternal lives of this tribe is at hand and I can't wait to see them around the throne of God worshipping in their own language as Revelation 7:9-10 states.

I love you all and I pray none of you love anything in this world more than Jesus Christ.

Glory to God!

Questions for debate and discussion on the Sentinelese and John Allen Chau:

³ Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/world/asia/andaman-missionary-john-chau.html>

- Should John Allen Chau have faced legal consequences if he had survived? Justify your answer.
- Following the incident, the Sun newspaper [published this headline](#): “TRIBAL INSTINCT: World’s most ruthless tribe that killed US tourist...” To what extent do you think this is a fair assessment? What would your headline have been if you had been a journalist?

6. Why do they choose to remain uncontacted?

No means no

Entire uncontacted peoples have been wiped out by genocidal violence from outsiders who steal their land and resources, and by diseases like flu and measles to which they have no resistance. Whatever their reasons for doing so, uncontacted peoples have the right to live as they choose, avoiding contact with outsiders. They are making it clear that they want to be left alone and it is not for the industrialized world to question that choice – we should respect their decision. Instead, we can support them in that decision by helping to protect their land and keep intruders out, giving Indigenous peoples the chance to choose what’s best for their future.

The dangers of contact



Forced contact has had devastating consequences for uncontacted peoples throughout history. Millions of Indigenous people have died during the forcible “conquest” of the Amazon, now there are approximately only 1.5 million Indigenous people left.

Given the unimaginable past horrors experienced by uncontacted people, it’s understandable that some may want to remain isolated. In this [video](#), Kamutaja Āwa, a relative of the uncontacted Āwa, outlines the tragedy that followed forced contact with her family, and asks for the rights of her uncontacted relatives to be respected.

The story of the Āwa is just one in a long line of tragic histories, some of which are outlined below.



In this [video](#), Alex Tinyú, an Indigenous Nukak person from Colombia, recalls the story of when his people were forced out of their forest more than 30 years ago.

The Nukak's territory was invaded by missionaries, coca growers, settlers and armed groups. After contact, more than half of their people died from disease and violence.

A history of genocide against uncontacted peoples

a) Christopher Columbus and the “discovery” of South America

For generations, schoolchildren have been taught that Christopher Columbus was a heroic explorer who “discovered” the so-called “New World” in 1492, returning to Europe with gold, silver, and other riches. But what Europeans labeled a “New World” was, in reality, the ancestral homeland of millions of Indigenous peoples, who soon died in their millions from introduced diseases such as influenza, measles and chickenpox. Many others were enslaved, displaced, or killed. The wealth extracted by Columbus and those who followed was not discovered – it was taken by force. This was not a heroic age of exploration; it was a violent process of colonization and genocide, wiping out 90% of the Indigenous population of the Americas.

b) Mayflowers Kill

Some 400 years ago, in 1620, an English ship, the *Mayflower*, set sail from Plymouth, on the south coast of England, carrying 100 Puritan⁴ refugees who sought to escape persecution by journeying to North America. On arrival, they were helped by Indigenous people to survive and adapt in this new land. But the welcome given to the “Pilgrims” was not returned by them. The *Mayflower* landing led to centuries of invasion, war and disease which killed tens of millions of Indigenous people.

c) The violence of the rubber trade

Rubber, commonly used in everyday items like rubber bands and car tires, has a terrible history. With the invention of the motor car at the end of the 19th century, demand for wild rubber, harvested from the rubber trees that grow in Amazonia, increased exponentially. Virtually the entire Indigenous population of the western Amazon was enslaved to collect the rubber.

⁴ “Puritans were people who wanted to “purify,” or simplify, the Church of England. This church had broken away from Roman Catholicism during a period called the Protestant Reformation.” “In 1620 a group of Puritan Separatists, now called the Pilgrims, left England to escape mistreatment. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a ship called the *Mayflower*.” (Source: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Puritans/353681>)



Thousands of Amazonian people were enslaved and killed during the rubber boom

© W Hardenburg

During this period more than 90% of the Indigenous population were killed or displaced from Western Amazonia. A historic report into the activities of a British-registered rubber company, the Peruvian Amazon Company, submitted by Irish investigator Roger Casement found that in the space of just 12 years, around 30,000 Amazonians endured enslavement, torture, sexual violence, and starvation.⁵

Casement's report revealed that company employees committed crimes "of the most atrocious kind", including murder, rape, and frequent floggings. Today's uncontacted peoples of the western Amazon are the descendants of the survivors of the rubber boom, who fled into the remote headwaters of the rivers to escape the atrocities.

To discuss

- Why do you think it is important to learn about the histories and on-going struggles of Indigenous peoples?
- Do you think it's right for countries with a history of colonialism to have national holidays celebrating figures like Columbus? Why or why not? What could a different way of remembering history look like?
- Prior to this lesson, what did you know, or not know, about Western colonialism impacting Indigenous peoples in the past and the present? If you were lacking knowledge, why do you think that is?
- How do TV, movies and the media affect how we see Indigenous peoples? Who gets to tell the stories of Indigenous peoples?

7. Five ways to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples

1. Tell people about what you've learned

Could you organize an assembly to share what you've learned? Is there a school society or club you could give a talk to, or a school magazine you could write an article for? We're happy to send you leaflets and other information materials.

2. Share videos like [this](#) on social media

⁵ Source: www.survivalinternational.org/articles/3104-why-do-they-hide; <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/7092>



3. Sign the pledge

Join our call for governments to protect the lands of uncontacted peoples, so they can survive and choose their own futures. [Sign our pledge](#) for uncontacted peoples. Motivate your classmates and teachers to do the same!

4. Save the date for events and fundraising

There are countless opportunities throughout the year to shine a spotlight on the situation of uncontacted peoples worldwide and the vital role they, along with other Indigenous communities, play in safeguarding our planet. How about organizing an exciting event at your school on one of these special days? You can even collect vital funds for Survival's work by organizing a bake sale or an information stand with a raffle.

- 5 June, World Environment Day
- 21 May, World Day for Cultural Diversity
- 22 June, World Rainforest Day
- 9 August, International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
- 5 September, Amazon Day
- 12 October, Indigenous Peoples Day (formerly known as "Columbus Day")
- Fourth Thursday in November, Thanksgiving

5. Organize a sponsored run, walk or hike

Motivate your classmates and teachers to take part in a charity run or a ["trail for Indigenous peoples"](#). "Sponsors" from your family and circle of friends can support you with a predetermined amount per kilometer covered.

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!