



# Five Senses Literature Lessons

## *American History*

Indigenous People of  
North America and Hawai`i

**Level: Yellow**

A picture book history with  
developmentally appropriate, hands-on  
activities for children ages 6–10.

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Five Senses Learning, LLC

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# *Introduction*

This is a hands-on, easy-to-use, age-appropriate curriculum for children that focuses on the history of Native Americans and Indigenous People through picture books. You will read great children's books and do accompanying activities which teach a wide range of subject areas in a child-friendly manner by engaging your child's Five Senses.

This unit study of Native American history is divided into three sections. The sections are further divided into individual lessons. Each lesson is focused on a single nation and has at least one picture book recommended as the reading material for the lesson.

The first section is made up of historical fiction and traditional stories from a variety of nations across the North American continent. You will introduce the connection the Native Americans have with the earth, through a selection of traditional stories that have been handed down for many generations. The combination of historical fiction, traditional stories, and legends lays the groundwork for appreciating the way of life of the Native Americans before the arrival of Europeans on the continent.

The Lakota lesson transitions us into history with a story about Crazy Horse, a Lakota warrior and leader who lived in the second half of the 19th century. You have the option to take that lesson as far as your child's maturity allows with book suggestions for both sensitive children and those who are ready to learn more history.

The next lesson is a biography of a Hidatsa woman in the 1800's and depicts what life was like before and after the U.S. government forced her and her family onto a reservation.

You will teach the real history of how Hawai'i became a state and the people there who lost their independence as a result. The Native Hawaiians are not technically Native Americans or American Indians (they trace their heritage from the Polynesian navigators who first discovered the islands), but their story is important to include here, as a group of Indigenous People whose way of life was changed by the U.S. government.

You will learn about a real artist in Mexico, Juan Quezada, who revived an ancient form of pottery to lift his village out of poverty.

The third and final section is about modern day Native Americans. It is vital that children learn that Native Americans are not people of long ago. They are people of here and now.

These stories, do not tell the full story of Native Americans, but they are a starting point.

## *A Different Approach to Education*

Today, many curricula for children are not based on childhood development. They skip over the importance of play, and move into reading, writing, and math, even though those things require brain development that is very individual. Five Senses Literature Lessons will introduce your child to beautiful children's books, some new and some old. It will give you ways to play with your child to help them develop both their bodies and minds, whether they are ready for reading and writing or not.

Five Senses Literature Lessons is designed to be used with any child in the age range, regardless of where the child stands on academic readiness. Such flexibility is possible because the curriculum is developmentally appropriate. Average children, neurodiverse children, and those who are gifted are all learning about the world around them at this age, and need to experience it through play, hands-on activities, and fun stories. This is how children are made to learn.

As an occupational therapist, I have a unique perspective on child development. I have seen the benefits in therapy settings of using play and activities to help children learn, grow and develop. I have found that even children who show little interest in "academics" do like learning about people, places and the world around them. So I created a curriculum that teaches those topics. I also added hands-on activities that help children develop the motor skills they need. Many of the games, activities and art projects are things I draw on when working with children who need to improve hand strength and control. These activities benefit all children. The children who struggle with them, develop the skills they need, and the children who excel refine their skills, often doing the activity for longer or with more precision, also developing the skills needed for adulthood.

I took all that wonderful perspective on childhood development and put my ideas through the lens of a hard-working, homeschool mom. I wanted to create a curriculum you can use with minimal stress. Homeschooling is not for the faint of heart. Homeschooling multiple children means I don't have time for complicated directions, finding a million go-along activities with complicated supply lists, or learning how to knit before tomorrow's lesson. I wanted to create a curriculum that would give kids the most benefit with the least stress on mom, so that's what I've done.

In 2007, my first child became old enough for kindergarten. She was a bright child, but not ready for an extended school day or the academic rigor expected in modern kindergarten. I decided to homeschool her. I experimented with Waldorf, Montessori, Charlotte Mason, classical education, unschooling, and literature units. What I found was that my child needed the free space of an unschooler, but we were both happier when we had planned activities to help fill our days. Workbooks were boring; she hated doing the same thing twice, and yet she wanted to learn about the world. Thus, I began making up my own lessons, based on the children's books she enjoyed, the best ideas I had learned from my curriculum research, and my knowledge of child development.

Over the years, I taught my younger two children and many co-op classes with a range of ages. I realized that most young children enjoyed activities like graphing and science projects, singing songs and learning about the world around them, without the pressure to read or sit still for a long time. The children learned best through play so I created go-along play activities, ones that developed fine and gross motor skills that help children become coordinated people who can later read and write. I used my knowledge as an occupational therapist to make sure each activity was developmentally appropriate, and that we had hands-

on sensory experiences that help little minds learn more.

If you do this curriculum as suggested, it will not fill your whole day. It might not even fill your entire morning. You may wonder if it is “enough.” The truth is that it is and it isn't.

You are going to cover a wide variety of subject matter and tie it together in a way that makes connections in your child's brain that can last a lifetime. You will lay the foundation for learning more in every area, and that part of education is essential, and often neglected.

However, part of the goal of having an easy to use curriculum like this is that it gives you more time to do other things. The rest of your school day is yours and your child's. Go outside for recess. Work on a phonics program, if they need one. Use a math curriculum if you want. But also, take time to go on field trips, make weird art, make that slime your kid found on YouTube and won't quit asking about. Get out blocks and give your kids a building challenge. Can you make a block tower taller than the dog? Taller than you? Play board games to develop your child's reasoning and logic skills. Work puzzles to develop their visual perceptual skills. Cook with them. Sew with them. Explore their interests with them. Not every interest needs to be a lifelong passion either. It can just be something that is fun to do.

We want to take the pressure off of education and childhood so that you and your child can enjoy the process more. Children really do need time to play. Play develops social skills, motor skills, thinking skills, and imagination. Imagination can be almost impossible to cultivate in adults if they didn't get a chance to learn it in childhood. Give your child room to play. Play with them. Go on playdates. The joy of this curriculum is that it takes care of so many things at once, so there's more time to play.

## *Why start with Native Americans?*

When I decided to write a history curriculum, I knew I wanted to start by writing about Native Americans. Native American history is United States history. Native Americans were living in North America for many thousands of years before Europeans arrived and are still here today. Their story is an essential part of the history of the United States of America as a whole. That story is complex and exciting. There is so much to learn that it can be hard to know where to start and what to include when teaching children. There is not one single story to be told about Native Americans. There are many, many stories, and it would take years to cover anywhere near a majority of them. In this curriculum, I have done my best to gather a wide range of stories to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of Native Americans.

There are currently 574 Native American nations recognized by the United States federal government. There are many more nations of Indigenous People that are not formally recognized. This unit study cannot attempt to teach the long and complicated history of so many different peoples. The goal of this unit is not to be an exhaustive resource. The children's books included in this program have been carefully chosen to reflect a variety of literature styles while demonstrating the diversity of the Native American cultures discussed.

This program includes stories from a few of the many different Native American nations from distant regions of North America. There are stories from the east coast, west coast, southwest, middle of the country or the plains, Canada, Mexico, and Hawai'i. Please take your time as you start each unit to show your child on a map where the story takes place. This will expose your child to North American geography and the many biomes that exist here. In addition to the people in these stories, pay attention to the animals and land. Point out to your child the different plants and animals in the pictures and discuss what is different in each story.

If you have knowledge of or connections to Native American nations in your area, access to Native American museums or other ways to expand this learning experience, please take advantage of those opportunities. This unit is, hopefully, a jumping off point for your child's exploration of the people and topics introduced in these lessons.

## *Appreciation, Not Appropriation*

The goal of this program is to teach about Native Americans and Indigenous People, their history, their culture, their stories, and their traditions in a way that young children can appreciate. The crafts and hands-on activities for this program have been carefully chosen to bring your child a deeper understanding of the people they are learning about. You will tie jingle bells on your child's ankles so they can see what the little girl in *Jingle Dancer* means when she says that she makes music when she moves. We make pots and boxes and attempt weaving, to relate to the stories.

Hands-on experiences bring the literature alive to help your child make connections to the story and connect to the people you are reading about.

My goal is to guide you in respectfully learning about a culture different from your own while balancing the need for hands-on education. This is a hard balance to strike. The guiding principle I have come to learn, when it comes to Native American cultures, is to understand that the art, clothing, dances, ceremony and traditional stories are all an integral part of the expression of the individual Native American heritage and culture. That seems obvious but there is an important distinction to be made between this idea and how European-based cultures (including my own Eastern United States heritage) view their own traditions.

Consider, for example, your local Renaissance Fair. Mock jousts by pretend knights in medieval dress are a fun and acceptable way to experience aspects of Medieval European culture. This idea does not translate to Native American cultures. You may have been to a Powwow or other event hosted by Native Americans in your area. Although they often have a fun and festival-like atmosphere, such events are not a recreation and are not pretend. The experience people of European descent are trying to create with a Renaissance Fair has no analog among Native American cultures. Understanding that difference is part of respecting and appreciating the cultures we are learning about.

To stay on the side of respect, the arts and crafts activities strive to avoid trivializing Native dress, dance, ceremony or traditions. The activities in this program have been carefully chosen to teach appreciation, not appropriation. While we suggested wearing bells, for example, we do not recommend attempting to make a jingle dress or moccasins. Instead, we recommend learning more about sewing your own clothes, and we suggest teaching your child to sew a modern craft.

The artwork of Native Americans is presented in this program over and over. We choose to admire that work the same as the artwork of other cultures, peoples, and artists throughout time. The hands-on experience of making art is a universal truth of humanity, and hopefully, the children using this curriculum will come to a deeper understanding of the people they are studying, through the art projects presented in this unit study.

# *Histories and Biographies*

History is made up of the stories of individual people, some famous, and some who are everyday people. The stories in this section are about real people and their lives. Crazy Horse, Buffalo Bird Woman, Princess Ka'iulani and Juan Quezada bring our studies alive and teach historical stories often left out of elementary history programs.





# Hidatsa



## Primary Resource

***Buffalo Bird Girl: A Hidatsa Story*** by S. D. Nelson



## Supply List

- U.S. map that includes rivers (see map in the Appendix)
- Yarn in three colors
- Ears of corn in the husk (see the recipe for Roasted Corn)
- Beans
- Dirt
- Clear plastic cup
- Paper and pencil



## Memory Work

And then came the corn harvest,  
busiest and happiest time of all the year.  
– Buffalo Bird Woman

Discuss with your child that this memory verse is a quote from the biography. Discuss why the corn harvest was both busy and happy.



## Literature Notes

This book is a biography of a Hidatsa woman who lived from the 1840s until the early 20th century. Please note, in this story, there is an attack by one group of Native Americans on another, and a person is killed and scalped. The book is not graphic about it at all, and the event is only briefly mentioned. The book moves along in a way that some children may not think twice about it. However, if your child is sensitive, you may choose to edit yourself as you read aloud this part of the text.



## Teacher Resource

The original biography this book is based on was written in 1917 by Gilbert Wilson, and can be read for free online.



<https://5sensesll.page.link/BuffaloBirdWoman>

## *Geography*

In the front of the book is a map to help you with this lesson. The Hidatsa people lived in North Dakota along the banks of the Missouri River. Use a map of the US, and help your child find this river, trace it with a finger or with a pencil. Look at how the river winds through the state. The way it twists and turns would have created many places for communities to spring up that depended on the river for clean water and transportation.

The Hidatsa live in the same region of the United States as the Lakota people in the previous lesson. Take a moment to talk to your child about how many different nations lived close to each other, and had different cultures and traditions.

## *Arts and Crafts*

In the story, the girls and women braid the corn together so that they can hang in up. Learning to braid requires fine motor skills and planning that children need in other life skills. Have your child braid together strands of yarn to learn this skill and create simple decorations or belts.

**For a beginner:** Select 3 colors of yarn, you may choose to use only one strand of each or to use several, but use the same number of strands of each color. Cut the yarn to 1 foot or 30 centimeters, and tie a knot in one end, to hold all the strands together. Show your child how to spread the three colors out (center, right and left) then fold one side to the middle, and then the other to the middle to braid them together.



By using the three separate colors you should be able to instruct by color, and your child should see the pattern they are creating more easily. Hold the knot for your child while they work, if the rope moves too much. When your child has finished the braid, tie the end of the rope into a knot. Display your child's work.

**For an advanced project:** To make this project more challenging or interesting, you may choose to make the yarn longer, use more or less colors, or use a mix of colors of yarn that do not help the child to see which strand comes next. Use seasonal colors to create decorations or help your child to create a long rope that can be used in other games.

## *History*

The Hidatsa were pushed onto a reservation by the US government in 1885. At this time, the US Government was forcing many different Native American nations onto reservations. Discuss with your child that this forced relocation that Buffalo Bird Girl's nation went through happened to many other nations the United States.

Questions to discuss with your child:

- Do you think the Hidatsa (and other nations) were happy to give up their way of life to live the way the U.S. government said they should?
- Would you want to give up all you know and move into a different type of home and have to go away to school the way the Native American children were forced to do?
- Was this fair or right?

## *Language Arts*

This story is a biography, the story of the life of a real person, Buffalo Bird Woman. Explain to your child that this story is neither myth, legend, nor historical fiction, like most other stories you have studied about Native Americans. The things in this book did happen, and the story is the life story of Buffalo Bird Woman, with a focus on her childhood.

With your child, help them write a short version of their biography.

Here is a fill-in-the-blank version that you may choose to use if you and your child are not sure where to begin.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I was born \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

in \_\_\_\_\_ (place).

I live with my \_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite foods are \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite toy is \_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite game to play is \_\_\_\_\_.



There is a worksheet in the Appendix on [page 96](#) you can use with this activity.

## *Science – Farming*

This book has terrific details about how the Hidatsa grew, dried and preserved their staple foods of corn, beans, and squash. Growing your own garden, or sprouting some seeds, is a wonderful way for children to learn about the life cycle of plants. Corn can be tricky to grow, and squash of any kind requires a lot of garden space but it is very easy to sprout beans. You can purchase seed packets, and follow those directions, if you would like to have a crop. However, almost any dried beans you have in your pantry should sprout.

Plant beans against the side of a clear plastic cup, so that you can watch how the root grows down, and the leaf comes up. Water them daily and place them in a sunny spot. They should sprout in just a few days. Once they sprout, point out to your child the stem, leaves, and roots. These are the essential parts to most plants.

## *Math – Farming Continued*

Once your beans have sprouted, have your child measure the bean plant regularly to see how tall it is. At the end of the month, make a graph of the bean plant's growth.



There is a graph in the Appendix on [page 97](#) you can use with this activity.

## Life Skills – Food

Purchase corn that is still in the husk. Show your child how to remove the husk and silks.



This task requires hand-eye coordination and is a wonderfully unique experience in both a sensory and motor coordination way. Performing different tasks helps the brain and body connect and prepare to do other new tasks in the future.


Cook your corn and serve it with a meal.

### Roasted Corn

- \* 4 ears of corn, with husks and silks intact.
- \* Salt and pepper
- \* Olive Oil or butter
- \* Aluminum foil

Shuck corn to remove husk and silks. Coat corn in butter or olive oil. Add salt and pepper, or seasoning of choice. Wrap in aluminum foil. Bake in the oven at 450 degrees F for 30 minutes, or until done.

NOTE: You can use Italian dressing in the place of the oil, butter and seasonings. You can add garlic powder, Italian seasoning, or other seasoning blend to change up the flavors.





There is a copy of this recipe card on [page 98](#) in the Appendix.



## Science

Did you know that corn comes in many colors? While your local grocery store may only carry white and yellow corn, the kernels can be many colors including red, black and purple. Look at the picture of corn in the appendix with your child before doing the following art project and discuss how these are all still corn.



American farming practices have historically focused on promoting yellow corn, orange pumpkins and red tomatoes. However, the foods grown from saving seeds in a traditional way came in far more colors, flavors and sizes. In recent years, more local farmers are growing more varieties of fruits and vegetables in more colors. These seeds are often called “heirloom varieties” which is an interesting way to rebrand the crops grown by Native American farmers who have always grown their crops from saved seeds.

With your child, look for all the colors of tomatoes, peppers, apples and other foods available at your local grocery store. Consider having a taste test to see if the flavor changes with the color.



There are pictures of many different varieties of corn for you to look at with your child on [page 99](#) in the Appendix.

# My Biography

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I was born on \_\_\_\_\_

in \_\_\_\_\_.

I live with my \_\_\_\_\_

in \_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite foods are \_\_\_\_\_

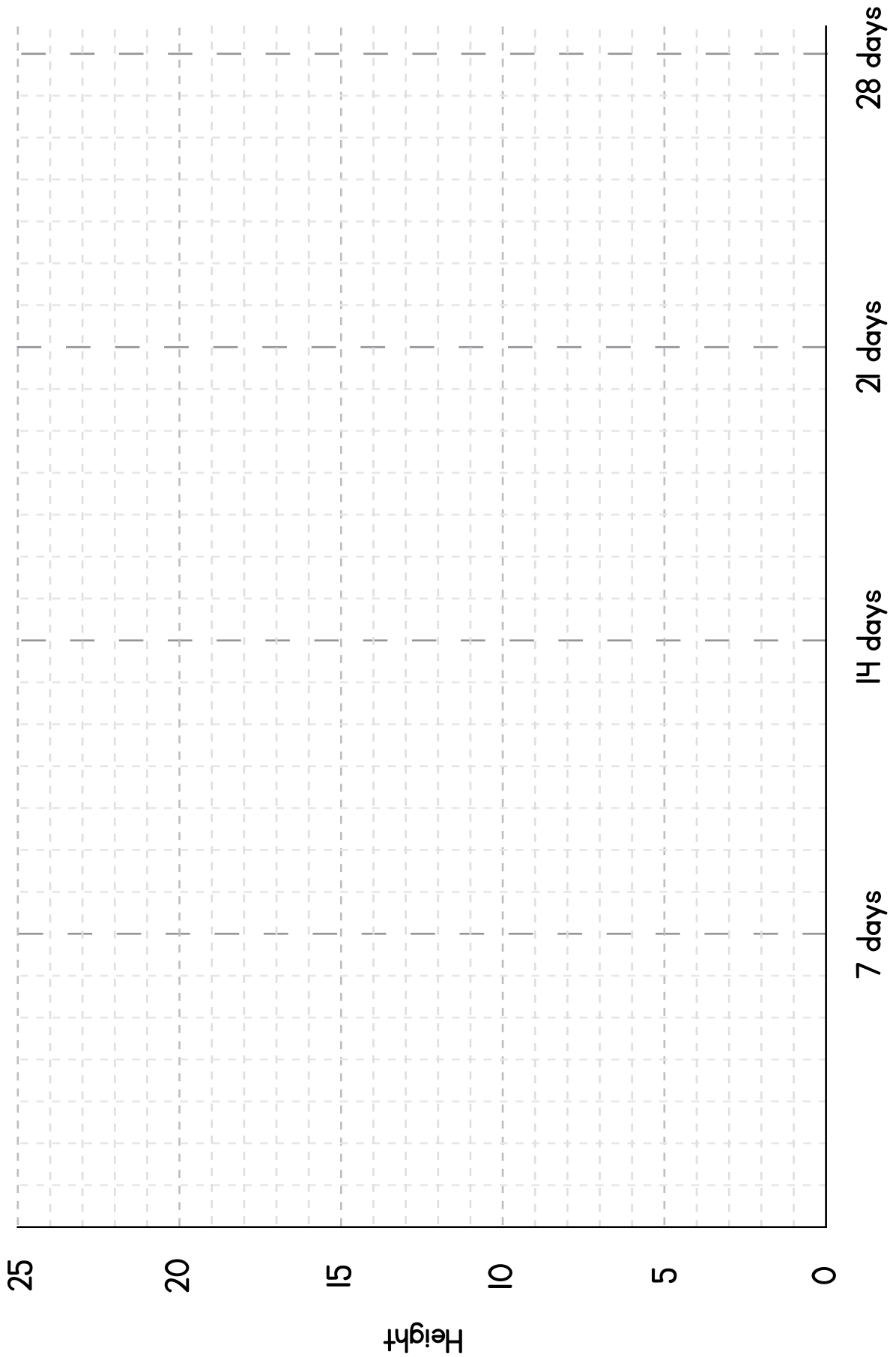
and \_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite toy is my \_\_\_\_\_

My favorite game to play is \_\_\_\_\_.



# Bean Growth Chart



## Roasted Corn

- \* 4 ears of corn, with husks and silks intact.
- \* Salt and pepper
- \* Olive Oil or butter
- \* Aluminum foil



Shuck corn to remove husk and silks. Coat corn in butter or olive oil. Add salt and pepper, or seasoning of choice. Wrap in aluminum foil. Bake in the oven at 450 degrees F for 30 minutes, or until done.

NOTE: You can use Italian dressing in the place of the oil, butter and seasonings. You can add garlic powder, Italian seasoning, or other seasoning blend to change up the flavors.







Corn, or maize as it is called outside the United States, is a type of grass in the same family as wheat, rye, barley, rice and sugarcane.



Maize was first domesticated in southern Mexico about 10,000 years ago.

