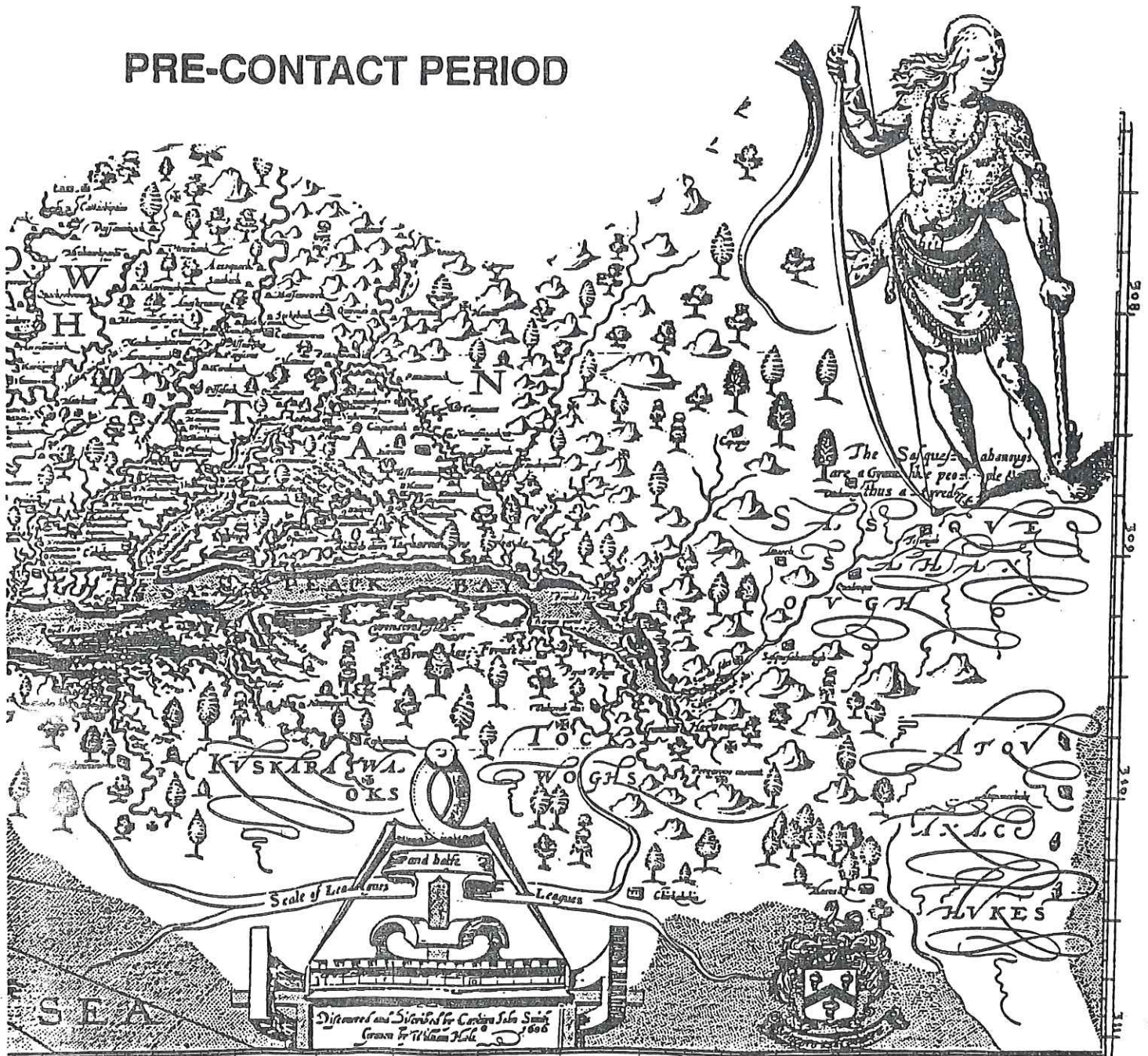


Kerb

AN OVERVIEW OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN MARYLAND

PRE-CONTACT PERIOD



NATIVE AMERICANS IN MARYLAND

OVERVIEW — TEACHER BACKGROUND

This packet will present information about Native American populations that once inhabited Maryland. For purposes of this study, *aboriginal* Maryland will include the area from the Atlantic Seaboard westward to the Appalachian Highlands and south from Pennsylvania to the Potomac River. Maryland Indians were part of two major language groups. Indians located in the Upper Chesapeake Bay area were part of the Iroquois language group, while Indians in the middle and lower Chesapeake Bay areas were part of the Algonquian language group. Although Maryland tribes spoke a variety of languages, they shared many common *cultural* traits. They were organized into independent village communities dependent on agriculture, supplemented by hunting and gathering. Groups fed, clothed, and sheltered themselves and defended their lands and customs against other native peoples and Europeans. Diseases introduced by European explorers and wars dramatically reduced their population. Most tribal groups were completely annihilated by the mid-eighteenth century. Today, some remnant groups still exist in the state and in other parts of the country.

The Maryland culture area includes three distinct natural regions. These include the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Piedmont Plateau, and the Appalachian Highlands. Within these three regions was a wide variety of habitats and resources available to support Native Americans. Each region offered unique opportunities for *utilization* of its resources. Many tribal groups lived within

these three Maryland regions. Exact boundary lines between tribes were vague and continually changing. This made it relatively easy for groups to interact, exchange goods, and *assimilate* cultural ideas. Indians possessed many survival skills, a rich symbolism, expressive style of art, and a complex system of spiritual beliefs about their world.

Most of what we know about the Indians of early Maryland comes from the journals of Captain John Smith, who visited the Chesapeake Bay area in 1608. He made several observations about his interactions including the fact that most groups were hospitable and highly proficient merchants, and their manufactured goods were of high quality. (It should be remembered that prior to the contact period, Eastern Indians did not have metal tools, weapons, or implements. They had no glass or woven cloth; they had no horses nor any vehicle with wheels; they had no money; they had no written laws, no jails, no courts of law, no police, and an entirely different concept of land ownership from that of Europeans.)

Archaeological studies, oral history and traditions, journals, and government documents combine to tell the story of Maryland Indians.

Note to Teacher:

The Fifth Grade Nanticoke Student Publication contains graphic representations that could be used to illustrate much of the information included in this publication.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW NATURAL VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

COASTAL PLAIN

The coastal plain was rich with edible wild vegetables and fruits, including cherries, raspberries, blackberries, gooseberries, melons, plums, and varieties of acorns, prickly pears, and several plants from which the Indians obtained usable roots. The Indians also hunted the many mammals and birds that lived on the coastal plain. The deer was the most important game animal. Its flesh was used as food, its skin for clothing and leather articles, its horns for arrowheads and glue, its hooves for rattles, and its bones for a variety of tools such as needles, awls, and fishhooks. The bear was another important source of food and skins. Indians extracted an oil from bear fat that they ate and used for a cooking oil and a cosmetic. Small animals, including beaver, otter, raccoon, muskrat, opossum, squirrel, and rabbit were also utilized. Turkeys thrived in the coastal area and provided the Indians with food and feathers. In certain seasons, immense numbers of waterfowl occupied the coastal region, particularly along the coastal flyway. Many other animals, such as snakes, turtles, terrapins, crabs, clams, mussels, and oysters were also used for food and other purposes, such as shell ornaments and utensils.

PIEDMONT

The Piedmont, a band of hilly uplands between the Appalachian Mountains and the coastal plain, was another important resource region for Maryland Indians. The Piedmont is separated from the coastal plain by the *Fall Line* where rivers fall abruptly from the uplands forming rapids on their way to the Chesapeake

Bay. The dominant trees in the Piedmont were oak and hickory, but also abundant were pine trees and other hardwoods, such as sassafras, poplar, hackberry, and sweetgum. Many animals of the coastal plain were also abundant in the Piedmont.

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS

The third region included in the Maryland culture area was the Appalachian Mountains. This area was densely forested with rugged landscape. The mountains provided a *habitat* for an abundance of turkey, deer, bear, and a wide variety of other birds and animals. It was also a habitat of the eagle, whose feathers were prized by Native Americans. The mountains provided inexhaustible supplies of protein-rich chestnuts, hickory nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, butternuts, and chinquapins. The large poplar trees were used to make dugout canoes. Resources for making projectile points (arrowheads), knives, and axes were also available.

LIFESTYLE OF MARYLAND INDIANS

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND CLOTHING

In general appearance the typical Indian of Maryland had brown or copper-colored skin with hair that was straight and black. Skeletal remains, uncovered by archaeologists excavating burials, indicate that Indians had high cheekbones, averaged five feet, seven inches in height, were reasonably healthy, but suffered some dental problems.

All Indian clothing was manufactured from animal skins until the introduction of cotton and wool by Europeans. In summer, only loincloths were worn while exposed skin was smeared with animal grease for repelling insects. In winter, they wore deer and bear robes and leggings for warmth. Moccasins were used to cover their feet. Maryland Indians did not wear ornate feather war bonnets characteristic of midwestern tribes.

Indians did pluck hair from their faces to make it easier to apply face paint for special occasions. They also tattooed their faces and bodies using bone needles and rubbing vegetable dyes into the punctures.

Stone and shell pendants, armbands, necklaces made of shell beads, and ear ornaments of animal claws and animal teeth were worn by both sexes.

John Smith's comment on the skills of the coastal tribes in making shell beads refers to beads known as "*wampum*," a contraction of an Algonquian term meaning "a string of white beads." Among Maryland Indians, *peake* was an abbreviation of this word, and the term "*roanoke*" was used to designate certain beads. Wampum was always in demand, both for personal decoration and ceremonial use. Indians made belts consisting of rows of wampum beads to record events, as tokens of tribute, and for intertribal diplomatic affairs.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The majority of Maryland Indians made their homes along streams in villages that served as the main form of social organization. Waterways were the main avenues of travel, while "Indian paths" were used by hunters and as overland trade routes between towns. Palisades (stockade fence) enclosed many of these settlements offering protection from hostile attacks.

Most buildings were rectangular in shape. Walls were constructed with a series of narrow posts set in the ground. Then split saplings were interwoven with the posts, and then the walls were covered with dried grass or tree bark. The roof, supported by the walls, rafters, and interior posts, were also made of interwoven split saplings and covered with grass or tree bark. A typical structure provided ample protection against the weather. Doors were low and narrow, and the only ventilation came from a smoke hole in the roof. An open fire on the earthen floor provided heat in the winter and fire for cooking. Since a fire was continuously burning, the dwelling was both smoky and hot. Fire was made by a friction bow using a tinder of dry grass and small twigs. There were no window openings in the structures. Essentially the house was a place of shelter in bad weather and a place where the family slept. In good weather, food was cooked outside, and the family ate their meals using wooden bowls and shell spoons. Captain John Smith records that Indians ate when they felt hungry and had no set schedule for meals.

Furniture within the dwellings was generally limited to platforms used for both sitting and sleeping. The platforms were set on posts that raised them several feet above ground. The tops of the platforms were covered with mats of cane and animal skins. The dwellings were not built as permanent and durable structures and constantly had to be maintained or rebuilt. Food was stored on poles extending across the ceiling of the dwelling. Dogs served as scavengers to clean up garbage inside and outside of the building. John Smith records that dogs were used as a food source when food was scarce.

POLITICS

At the time of European contact, Maryland Indians lived in independent village communities or towns controlled by a *paramount* chief. Each clan or tribe had a social order in which a person's place was determined by achievements in war or in other pursuits, such as hunting, religion, or healing. Tribal chiefs led by personal example and persuasion rather than by force. By custom, the words of community leaders carried more weight in council than those of warriors. The leaders of the community, including women, chose the head of each village, and a leader's power was subject to tribal traditions and the will of the group.

Community councils met to discuss issues of all kinds. The council's goal was to reach general agreement, and all tribal members could speak and would be listened to with respect. If a member did not agree with a decision, he withdrew and said no more. No force was used, and no one was punished for refusing to go along with the majority opinion.

KINSHIP

Maryland Indian life was largely regulated by *kinship*. The kinship system could determine enemies, allies, marriage partners, and other social interactions; its importance cannot be overemphasized. Indians traced their relationships from their mother's heritage. The son of a married couple was considered the mother's child and only casually related to his father. His maternal uncle, considered his closest male relative, taught him the communal games, hunting, fishing, art of war, and other skills. The boy's father performed these duties for his sister's sons. Daughters were trained by their mothers and maternal aunts. Indians had a wide association based upon the mother's kin. Each belonged to a clan whose members were all related.

Each clan was associated with an animal or natural phenomenon. Many villages used the same clan names. If a male member of the Bird clan met a member of the Bird clan from a distant town, they called one another brother. If one clan member killed a member of another clan, the victim's clan sought revenge by killing the murderer or someone in the murderer's clan. As a rule, marrying a member of one's own *lineage* or clan was punishable by death. When a boy became interested in a girl from another clan, he sent his mother's sister to discuss their possible marriage with the girl's aunt on her mother's side. Fathers, because they were not considered blood relatives, were not consulted. Although marriages were arranged, they were not forced and could be dissolved at the annual Green Corn Ceremony, the most important ceremonial event of the year. It served as a time for purification and renewal.

RELIGION

Native Americans believed that the universe was an orderly place in which every human, animal, and element of the physical environment had a spiritual role. Colors, numbers, and directions also had major significance. When disaster struck, Indians believed that someone had broken the harmony and that things were out of order.

Their universe was composed of three worlds. Above the sky was an Upper World, representing order and hope. Beneath this world lay the Under World, representing madness, disorder, change, and the future time. Indians thought they lived between the perfect order of the Upper World and the chaos of the Under World. Their universe was one in which opposites were constantly at war with each other. Thus, their goal was to achieve a natural balance between humans, animals, and plants. Until such a balance was achieved, Indians believed all elements would suffer.

SUBSISTENCE

All men and women shared responsibility for subsistence, although their roles were different. It was the men's responsibility to provide meat and clear the fields for farming; the women planted, tended the gardens, gathered food, and harvested crops. Women spent much time taking care of children, tending the crops, preparing meals, making pottery, weaving baskets and mats, tanning skins, and making clothing and shoes. Women owned both the food they produced and their houses. Crop fields were controlled by women, but all land belonged to the tribe.

Corn, planted in rows of little mounds, was the Indians' principal crop and staple food. When it sprouted, beans were planted on the same mounds, and the two crops grew together, the cornstalks providing support for the climbing bean vines. Squash, pumpkins, gourds, and sunflowers were also grown. Corn was often served hot on the cob, but it was prepared in a variety of other ways. Corn that had been pounded into flour was mixed with maple sugar to make a sweet, nutritious food. Dried berries and persimmons were also added to cornmeal. Succotash and hominy grits were also made. Parched corn was also eaten.

In the division of labor, elderly family members knitted fishing nets, assisted in making clay pottery vessels and stone tools, and scraped and cured animal pelts for use as clothing. Young children gathered berries and firewood and hunted small game.

Indian men were essentially hunters, trappers, and fishermen. Men were also responsible for family protection, teaching survival skills, and tool manufacture. The hunter carried a knife chipped from stone, a stone axe, bow and arrows, and a throwing spear.

Indian men generally conducted trade exchanges between groups throughout the state and surrounding regions. For example, the Nanticoke exchanged furs and shell beads for flint with tribes located in the Appalachian Highlands. Copper from the Ohio Valley was also exchanged for goods from the Maryland area.

WAR

Rules and rituals governed Indian warfare. Wars between Indians usually started because of disputes over hunting grounds, raids to acquire slaves and goods, and clan rivalry. Although warriors volunteered for battle, tribal councils decided whether the clan would go to war or not. Once the council made its decision, purification rituals followed, including drinking herbal teas, body purging, face and body painting, chanting, and dancing. Revenge was the main reason for war. Surprise attack and ambush were the Indians' main tactics. The success of a raid did not depend upon how many of the enemy were killed but on how many prisoners were taken. Prisoners captured in battle were adopted into the tribe.