

Name:

Date:

Native American Symbols and Their Meanings

Native American Reading Comprehension Passage

Across North America, many **Native American Nations** have used symbols to share ideas, tell stories, and express cultural traditions. Because every Nation has its own history and customs, symbols can have different meanings depending on the community. Rather than using written words, many symbols helped communicate important messages about nature, family, courage, peace, or daily life.

Some Native American symbols appear in pottery, beadwork, weaving, carvings, clothing, baskets, and artwork. Designs inspired by the **sun, moon, birds, animals, rivers, mountains, and plants** often represent a connection to the natural world. These artistic patterns celebrate the beauty of nature while reflecting the beliefs and traditions of individual Native American communities.

Animals are often featured in Native American artwork because they remind people of qualities such as strength, wisdom, patience, or teamwork. However, the meaning of an animal symbol is not the same for every Native American Nation. A symbol that represents one idea in one community may have a different meaning in another. Learning about symbols within their cultural context helps us better understand and respect Native American traditions.

Today, Native American artists continue creating beautiful artwork that includes both traditional and modern designs. Museums, tribal cultural centers, and Native American communities help preserve these artistic traditions while teaching future generations about their history and heritage. Studying Native American symbols encourages students to appreciate cultural diversity and understand that every symbol tells a meaningful story.

Vocabulary

Use the passage to define each word.

1. Symbol: _____

2. Tradition: _____

3. Heritage: _____

4. Context: _____

5. Diversity: _____

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Why did many Native American communities use symbols?

- A. To decorate only their homes
- B. To share ideas, traditions, and important messages
- C. To replace farming
- D. To build shelters

2. Where can Native American symbols often be found?

- A. Only on maps
- B. Pottery, beadwork, weaving, baskets, clothing, and artwork
- C. Only in books
- D. Only on flags

3. What does the passage say about animal symbols?

- A. Every Nation gives them the exact same meaning.
- B. They often represent important qualities, but meanings can vary among Nations.
- C. They are used only for hunting.
- D. They are always connected to one story.

4. Why is it important to learn the cultural context of a symbol?

- A. To guess its meaning
- B. Because the meaning may be different in different Native American Nations
- C. To make new symbols
- D. Because symbols never change

5. What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. Native American symbols have one universal meaning.
- B. Native American symbols help express culture, traditions, and history, and their meanings may differ among Nations.
- C. Symbols are only found in museums.
- D. All Native American artwork looks the same.

Short-Answer Questions

1. Name three places where Native American symbols can be found.

2. Why shouldn't people assume every Native American symbol has the same meaning?

3. How do Native American artists help preserve their culture today?

4. What can students learn by studying Native American symbols?

Context Clues

1. Learning the cultural context helps us understand a symbol correctly.

The word **context** means:

- A. The background or situation that helps explain something
- B. A type of artwork
- C. A farming tool
- D. A building material

2. Native American communities celebrate cultural diversity.

The word **diversity** means:

- A. Everyone is exactly the same.
- B. Having many different cultures, traditions, or ideas
- C. One type of language
- D. One style of clothing

Main Idea & Supporting Details

Main Idea

What is the passage mostly about?

Supporting Detail #1

Supporting Detail #2

Inference Question

Why do you think Native American artists continue using traditional symbols in their artwork today?

Text Evidence

Write one fact from the passage that shows Native American symbols can have different meanings.

Critical Thinking

Why is it important to learn about Native American symbols with respect and from reliable sources?

Answer Key

Vocabulary (Sample Answers)

1. **Symbol** – a picture, design, or object that represents an idea.
2. **Tradition** – a custom or belief passed from one generation to another.
3. **Heritage** – the history, culture, and traditions of a group of people.
4. **Context** – the background or situation that helps explain something.
5. **Diversity** – the variety of different cultures, traditions, or ideas.

Multiple Choice Answers

1. B
2. B
3. B
4. B
5. B

Sample Short Answers

1. Pottery, beadwork, baskets, weaving, clothing, carvings, or artwork.
2. Because different Native American Nations may give the same symbol different meanings.
3. They create artwork, teach younger generations, and preserve traditional designs.
4. Students learn about cultural traditions, history, artistic expression, and respect for different communities.

Main Idea (Sample)

Native American symbols express culture, traditions, and history, and their meanings can vary among different Native American Nations.

Supporting Details (Sample)

- Symbols appear in pottery, beadwork, weaving, and artwork.
- Different Nations may interpret the same symbol differently.

Inference (Sample)

Traditional symbols help preserve Native American culture and connect younger generations with their heritage.

Text Evidence (Sample)

"A symbol that represents one idea in one community may have a different meaning in another."

Critical Thinking (Sample)

Learning from respectful and reliable sources helps us avoid stereotypes and better understand the rich diversity of Native American cultures.