

Unit Overview: Parent Guide

The Birchbark House, Grade 5

What is the goal of this unit?

- Your child will read fiction and nonfiction texts about how Native Americans and global explorers laid the foundation for the United States. Your child will explore how we learn about our past and how that impacts who we are today.

What topics and skills is your fifth grader learning in this unit?

- Native Americans
- Colonization
- Global Exploration
- Character development
- Theme development
- Point of View
- Informational writing
- Research

What tasks will your child engage in to help them consider the topics and skills of this unit?

- **Culminating Writing Task:** Your child will bring together all her learning near the end of the unit by writing an essay in response to the question: *How do the main events of each season of The Birchbark House prepare Omakayas to gain strength and understand and accept her past?*
- **Extension Task:** Your child will extend her learning by working in a small group to conduct research and write a response to the question: *Describe the changes as a result of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World. What effect did Columbus have on the New World?*

Your child will read these texts, watch these videos and listen to these audio clips:

Text Title	Author/Source	How it is used in the Unit
<i>The Birchbark House</i>	Louise Erdrich	Main text of the unit
Ice Age (specific clips)	Michael J. Wilson	Read aloud
The First Americans: Prehistory-1600 (A History of US, Book 1) - Chapters 3, 4, 9	Joy Hakim	Student text

and 15-16		
Before Columbus: The Americas of 1491 - "Who Were the First Americans?" (pages 53-54) "Controlled Burning" (pages 91-92), "A Changing Landscape (page 97), "A Garden Without Gardeners" (pages 104-108), "High Risk" (pages 70-71), and "How Many Died?" (page 76)	Charles C. Mann	Read aloud
Excerpt from "A Letter to the Treasurer of Spain"	Christopher Columbus	Student text
"The Columbian Exchange"		Student text
"Columbus"	Joaquin Miller	Student text
" <i>Images of Christopher Columbus and His Voyages</i> "	Library of Congress	Read aloud

Ideas for discussing Native Americans and early exploration

**Note: Native Americans is a broad term that encompasses a diversity of tribal nations.*

- Who were the Native Americans?
- What can we learn from Native Americans and their way of life?
- Who was Christopher Columbus?
- How did early settlers impact the life of Native American nations?
- Why did people start exploring other parts of the world?
- Why do we explore different parts of the world today?

Want to deepen your and your child's knowledge on the topic being studied?

Here is a suggested book list:

Title	Author
<i>Black Elk's Vision: A Lakota Story</i>	S.D. Nelson
<i>A Timeline History of Early American Indian Peoples</i>	Diane Marczely Gimpel

<i>Native Americans in Early America</i>	Mark and Therese Harasymiw
<i>Encounter</i>	Jane Yolen
<i>When they Came: A Chronology of North American Exploration</i>	Sarah Powers Webb
<i>Early Explorers</i>	Torrey Maloof

What does independent reading look like at home?

Independent reading gives your child the opportunity to read and interact with books that are on her reading level and that address topics that she chooses. Supporting independent reading at home helps build your child's confidence with reading, her reading stamina and reading achievement, and will help her do better in school.

Here are some ways you can encourage independent reading at home:

- Let your child pick out books that she finds interesting
- Prioritize reading. Protect time every day for reading (weekends and school breaks too!). Before bedtime is a great time to read.
- Read together
- Read aloud
- Discuss your child's reading. Ask questions like:
 - What was that book about?
 - What did you like about it?
 - What didn't you like about it?
 - What did you learn?
 - What questions do you have about what you read?
 - What didn't you understand about what you read?
 - What do you want to learn more about after reading the book?
 - How does this book connect to other books you've read?