

Native America and the USA

The Palouse region has been home to Native Americans since **time immemorial**. Native People of North America and the United States have had a long and complex relationship, which is why this year's Visual Arts Competition theme centers around understanding this government-to-government relationship, and celebrating Native American cultures and their continuing contributions.

Native American tribes were sovereign nations with their own ways of making decisions together long before the European settlers. Early in the United States' relationship with Native Americans, **treaties** were created outlining peace terms, trade regulations, and requirements for Native peoples to give up most of the land they inhabited in exchange for promised hunting, fishing, healthcare, education and move to reservations keeping their **sovereignty** within those boundaries. Many of these treaties, which were often made under duress, were later broken or ignored by the U.S. government leading to significant loss of land and freedoms for Native American tribes.

Important Definitions

Time Immemorial: Events that happened long enough ago that no one still remembers them.

Treaty: An agreement between governments.

Sovereignty: The right to make your own laws, and to be recognized as independent.

Native peoples' lives were shaped by the natural world. They made their homes, clothing, and other necessities from natural resources. Tribes hunted, gathered, and fished on shared lands and had networks for trading and interacting with each other. Native tribes didn't believe that land had owners. They collectively managed these natural resources. However, the American government at the time did not recognize or respect this way of life, so they tried to make the Natives live like they did. They sent Native children to boarding schools, where they couldn't speak their own language, divided shared tribal land into individual plots, and sometimes arrested Natives for fishing or hunting in the places they always had.

Treaties are considered in the U.S. Constitution to be "the supreme law of the land." No matter how many times a treaty is violated, it's still law. In the 1970s, there was a strong shift towards enforcing this law, including the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975. This act gave Native American nations the power to negotiate and advocate for themselves. This included running their own medical, education, and judicial systems. Then, in 1979, the Supreme Court ruled that federal and state governments had to keep *all* the promises made in the treaties, including allowing Native people to govern themselves. This was a radical shift in the United States' relationship with Native nations.

In 1989, Washington State wanted to improve its relationship with Native Americans and created the Centennial Accord. This agreement stated that Washington would honor the Native Americans' sovereignty, respecting them as fellow nations. The state agreed to work more closely with Native governments, to include them in decision-making, and to educate state agencies on tribes and their history. All state agencies in Washington have dedicated Native Ambassadors and Tribal Liaisons, who are tasked with communicating and coordinating with Washington's 29 Federally Recognized Tribes to make decisions together.

It is essential that Native American tribes are recognized as sovereign nations. Our state collaborates with tribes to address shared challenges, much like it would with any other nation, government to government. Tribal governments are involved with issues such as saving wild salmon, protecting the health of our rivers and streams and managing urban growth, improving education, and creating jobs, to name a few. This unique relationship is worth honoring, respecting and celebrating.