



WSU's campuses are on ceded land belonging to the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) Tribe and Palus people, traditional Cowlitz lands, traditional lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and historical Spokane Tribe lands. This story was written on land belonging to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Native American Heritage Month

November is a great time to honor historical figures and Native American scientists changing the world right now.

I talked about this with Sara Mills, a [Prevention Science](#) graduate student at Washington State University. She's a member of the [Colville Confederated Tribes](#).

Mills' research centers Native American student voices. She wants to figure out what makes those students feel like they belong.

"Representation is huge," she said. "If you can see yourself in these spaces, then you're more willing to put yourself out there and be in those spaces. I met Native American faculty right away when I got to WSU. I don't know if I would have been able to visualize myself here if I hadn't."

Some schools have agreements with local tribes. They build relationships and provide scholarships and leadership programs for Native American students.

"It's important that we recognize this land was taken from Native Americans," Mills said. "The least we can do is support those students when they're here."

One way to do that is a [land acknowledgement](#). This names the tribes whose traditional homelands are being used by other people. It recognizes that the land was taken in unjust and violent ways.

Schools can also include Indigenous knowledge in classes. They can show Native Americans working in STEM or other fields. That helps all students. Mills said sometimes non-Indigenous students in her classes thought Native Americans only existed in the past. The truth is there are more than 6 million Native Americans in the United States right now.

“There's research to support the idea that, even if you're not Native American, you can help Native Americans by listening and by being there and integrating things to support them,” Mills said.

Here are a few Native American scientists to get you started—and some activities to explore the kinds of science they do or did.

Climate & Environmental Biology

Xiye Bastida (Otomi-Toltec Nation in Mexico) is a climate justice activist. She centers Native voices in the climate movement. She spoke to the United Nations about how the climate crisis isn't fair to young people and how it affects some people more than others.



Robin Wall Kimmerer ([Citizen Potawatomi Nation](#)) is a biologist. She studies living things and their environments. She's best known for her books “Braiding Sweetgrass” and “Gathering Moss.” She says we need to learn from plants like teachers. We need to heal our relationships with the land.

- Check out Bastida's [Re-Earth Initiative](#) and [watch her Ted Talk](#) about how she began changing the world at 15
- Listen to Wall Kimmerer's [video message for young people](#)
- Learn about [climate change](#) from NASA
- For ecologists, finding lots of species in an area is a great sign of a healthy ecosystem. Make Science Buddies' [bug vacuum](#) and see how many species you can find in one area.
- Check out these [plant science activities](#) from the California Native Plant Society.

Space

The first Native American person to go to space—and walk in space!—was **John Herrington** ([Chickasaw Nation](#)). He visited the International Space Station for 13 days. He took six eagle feathers, two arrowheads, a braid of sweet grass and the Chickasaw nation flag with him to honor his heritage. He also lived underwater for 10 days to study how humans handle extreme environments.



Mary Golda Ross ([Cherokee Nation](#)) was the first Native American aerospace engineer. Her work helped the Apollo mission take astronauts to the moon. A lot of her work is still top secret. She wrote NASA’s Planetary Flight Handbook. It includes space travel plans for Venus and Mars.

- Check out this [Cherokee space poster](#) and [other posters](#) from Cherokee Nation
- [NASA Native American Heritage Month](#)
- Planetary Society’s [Space for Kids](#)
- Make a [paper rocket](#) with Science Buddies

Medicine

When **Susan La Flesche Picotte** ([Omaha Nation](#)) was a child, she saw an Indigenous woman die because a white doctor wouldn’t help her. She became the first Native American medical doctor. La Flesche Picotte built the first private hospital on a reservation.

Lori Alvord ([Diné/Navajo Nation](#)) was the first Diné woman surgeon. Her book “The Scalpel and the Silver Bear” talks about her work to use traditional healing and Western medicine together. She was nominated to become U.S. surgeon general in 2013. She works at Dartmouth Medical School.

- [Make a stethoscope](#) or [fake blood](#) with Science Buddies
- Crayola’s [Anatomy Coloring Pages](#)

Physics, Engineering & Cleaner Energy

Fred Begay ([Diné/Navajo Nation](#)) was a nuclear physicist. He studied atoms and how to make clean energy. Begay said his culture made it possible for him to think in a way that made him a fantastic physicist.

Sandra Begay-Campbell ([Diné/Navajo Nation](#)) is a mechanical engineer. She's bringing solar power to remote parts of the Navajo nation.

Bernadette Tsosie ([Diné/Navajo Nation](#)) is an engineer and water scientist. She protects clean water for everyone. She also made sure her people had fair access to the San Juan River.

- Listen to [We Are Water Protectors](#) and [pledge to protect water](#)
- Learn about [Native American Code Talkers](#) then [break this code](#)
- Watch this [nuclear energy video](#) from National Nuclear Laboratory
- Check out this [nuclear energy explainer](#) from Earth.org
- Cook s'mores with Science Buddies' [solar-powered oven](#)

Anthropology & Archaeology

Bertha Parker ([Seneca Nation](#)) was the first Native American woman archaeologist. She found a giant ground sloth skull from the Ice Age. It was near early human artifacts. That helped scientists figure out when humans first showed up in North America. Parker also studied Indigenous tribes in California.

Ella Cara Deloria ([Yankton Sioux Tribe](#)) studied human cultures and languages. She translated Indigenous languages and preserved oral histories. She also published a novel called "Waterlily" about a Teton Sioux woman.



- American Museum of Natural History's [Anthropology](#)
- Check out the [giant ground sloth](#) from Animalogic.
- American Museum of Natural History's [Archaeology Resources](#)
- National Park Service's [Archaeology for Kids](#)
- Solve [Archaeology Mysteries](#) with SciShow
- Nat Geo's [Archaeology Playlist](#)
- [Mummify a Hot Dog](#) with Science Buddies

Learn More

- Use this [Native Land Digital map](#) to find out whose land you're on. Then, click on the links on the left to learn more.
- Learn about the [Chinook Indian Nation](#) and their work to get fair treatment today.
- Explore different tribes with the [National Congress of American Indians](#)

Look for these Books at your Library

- [Books by Indigenous authors and illustrators](#) from King County Library System
- More [books by Indigenous authors](#) from Seattle Public Library
- [Recommended reading list](#) from First Nations Development Institute
- [Kids' books](#) from the Los Angeles Public Library
- [Read-aloud recommendations](#) from the Children's Literacy Initiative



