

# Native american culture essay examples

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



This paper discusses an issues related to Native American culture, namely the history of the flute. The paper discusses, first, the Native American peoples living in North American and then move on to discuss the common characteristics of all North American tribes. Some of these common characteristics include similar styles of music and the occurrence of the Native American flute. The paper then moves on to discuss the development of the North American flute, including its particular form and the ways in which it is crafted. The paper then moves on to discuss popular Native American flute players and the tradition of flute making across Native American tribes.

“ Native Americans” is the name given to the indigenous peoples of North America, of which there are many distinct groups including the Aleuts and Inuit amongst other tribes (Johansen, 2006). It is thought that there are around 5. 2 million Native Americans in North America, with the Navajo being the largest single Native American tribe (Pritzker, 2000). Native American tribes suffer from a variety of problems including poor economic development and the problems associated with cultural assimilation, with these problems causing Native American groups to suffer from unusually high rates of mental health and substance abuse problems (Ishii, 2008).

Native American groups have a variety of different cultural characteristics although music is common across all groups. Music is, therefore, important to all Native American tribes. In general, Native American music includes some form of rhythmic drumming accompanied by the playing of flute. These flutes can be made of a variety of different materials, including wood or bone (Vames et al., 2007). It is believed that the current form that the flute

assumes was originally developed by the ancient Pueblo peoples, derived from Ancient American designs for musical instruments. The oldest known flute is dated to around 1000 CE and is known as the Breckenridge Flute after the place it was discovered (Flutopedia, 2012a). Native American storytellers tell how the sound of the flute was inspired by hearing woodpeckers knock on wood and hearing the sound of the wind rushing through the holes the woodpeckers had made. The Native Americans who developed the flute wanted, it is said, to replicate this sound of the wind rushing through the holes made by the woodpeckers.

The flute was generally used, among Native American people, to sound out and alert members of the tribe to battles, or was used to court a partner. Recently, however, the Native American flute has become popular in New Age music (Vames et al., 2007). There are currently many famous Native American flute players, including R. Carlos Nakai, who has heritage from the Navajo-Ute tribes. R. Carlos Nakai has released over 30 different albums of Native American flute music, since his first album, *Changes*, in 1983 (Nakai, 2010). Nakai (2010) discusses how his cultural heritage allows him to develop and to play beautiful music with his Native American flute. Other famous Native American flute players include Joseph Firecrow and Douglas Bluefeather, amongst others. All of these Native American flute players note how they aim to maintain their cultural heritage through playing the flute, either by transmitting, orally, the songs of their tribe or making recordings of these songs so that the songs are passed down the generations in this manner.

It is thought that the Native American flute is a variation on the ancient duct

flute (Flutopedia, 2012b). In terms of how Native American flutes are crafted, the flute has two air chambers, the slow air chamber and the sound chamber, which are connected by a thin channel (Vames et al., 2007). The Native American flutes are crafted on the basis of measurements taken from the human body: the flute length is, generally, equal to the distance from the elbow to the index finger tip of the player and the distance between the holes on the flute is generally the same as one thumb width, allowing the player to be able to move their fingers easily between the holes (Vames et al., 2007). In this manner, Native American flutes are highly personalised instruments, fitted to the measurements of each flute player.

There are several different kinds of flute, including plains, woodland and drone flutes (Flutopedia, 2012b). Each different kind of flute has a different type of sound, the plains flute having a very woody sound and the drone flute having a more resonant type of sound. It is the flute players personal preference that dictates which flute he will play, although these personal preferences are determined, to a large extent, by the flute players heritage. The different kinds of sounds come from different configurations of the chambers within the flute (Vames et al., 2007). The different woods the flutes are made from also affects the sound the flute makes: soft and hard woods are both used to make the flutes and these different kinds of wood affect the sound the flute makes. Tribal traditions and preferences dictate which type of flute the flute player will play.

Native Americans have a culture of flute making, as much as they have a culture of flute playing. The United States has recently passed a law to ensure that only flutes made by authentic Native Americans are labelled ‘

Native American flutes', in order to ensure that the cultural knowledge of making the flutes and playing the flute is owned by Native Americans and that this knowledge does not become contaminated by cultural assimilation (Johansen, 2006). Different Native American tribes have their own ways of making flutes and their own special secrets for flute making that are passed down the generations. This means that, whilst the basic flute design is the same for all Native American flutes, there is great variation in the actual flutes produced across all Native American tribes. Some tribes prefer certain woods or certain forms over others and each tribe tends to produce very similarly designed flutes.

This means that there is a great cultural heritage surrounding flute making and that there is ongoing creativity and innovation in the flute-making arena within Native American tribes (Flutopedia, 2012b). Different flute making techniques lead to flutes that have slightly different sounds and ranges with different flutes from different tribes having different fingering patterns and voicing (Flutopedia, 2012b). Flute making is, in fact, knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, flute makers in many tribes being able to make a living using their knowledge to make flutes for the community and larger audiences. Little Leaf (2012) provides a list of all of the known Native American flute makers.

In conclusion, the Native American flute has a very long history, dating from many thousands of years ago. Knowledge of how to make Native American flutes is passed from generation to generation, as is the knowledge of how to play the North American flute and the songs that are played on the North

American flute. The flute is, therefore, part of Native American cultural heritage.

## References

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