

# Classroom uses for the Native Communities Research Guides beyond the Citizen Archivist Program

Strategies for Finding Other Primary Sources in the National Archives Online Catalog  
Providing Documents for Teaching Critical Thinking  
Teaching the True Nature of Native America  
Adding Specific Native American/ Alaska Native Materials to a more General Lesson Plan or DocsTeach Activity  
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## STRATEGIES FOR FINDING PRIMARY SOURCES IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLINE CATALOG

The [Native Communities' Research Guides](#) are designed for teachers, students, and historians. They provide research strategies specifically for searching American Indian records, but the principles illustrated within them provide a model for other research topics as well.

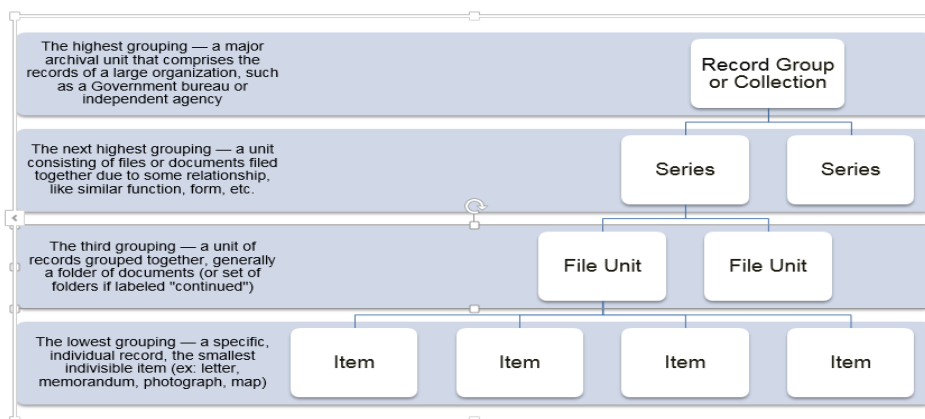
**Each search term or search string included in the Research Guide has been tested for its usefulness in the Online Catalog.**

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. Simple one-word subject searches (using a word from a federal agency or the most consistent word in a tribal name).  
*This search can return thousands of unrelated records.*
  - a. Example: **Choctaw**
2. A combination of two words to refine the search. Often this is the most consistent word from the tribal name plus the term "Indian" because so many records are from the Bureau of **Indian** Affairs.
  - a. Example: **Choctaw Indian**
3. Multiple-word searches enclosed in quotation marks. This can return completely different records.
  - a. Example: **"Choctaw Indian"**
4. Boolean searches to eliminate certain groups of records.
  - a. Example: **"Choctaw Indian" NOT motorcycle AND NOT Defense**

### Rationale

Searching for primary sources can be a daunting task for students (and sometimes for teachers), particularly when looking for records that are "buried" in somewhat obscure archival filing systems. The National Archives files their records at the highest level by Record Group number. Each number usually represents a single United States Federal agency or a section of an agency. Without knowledge of all the Federal agencies that have existed since 1776, valuable information is often "hidden" from any sort of topic search most familiar to academic researchers.



Because of the above, it is particularly difficult to search for American Indian / Alaska Native records since they are scattered through many, many different Record Groups, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Record Group 75), the National Park Service (Record Group 79), the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of Ethnography (Record Group), the U.S. Army Signal Corps (Record Group), the Native American Arts and Crafts Administration (Record Group 435), and the General Records of the United States Government (Record Group 11). This is only a few of the possible agencies where records can be found.

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## PROVIDING DOCUMENTS FOR TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Any group of primary sources can be used to teach and reinforce the principle of critical thinking. Allowing students to compare two documents from a specific time-period that illustrate opposing points of view, for instance, is one of many approaches that can spark creative and critical thinking.

For an example of the use of American Indian documents to teach critical thinking, see “Using the Indian Removal Act to Teach Critical Thinking,” *Journal of Social Education*, November/December 2017. In this example, a “detective” approach is used to analyze National Archives records to decide what tribes were actually affected by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and how their neighbors may have actually felt about them at the time.

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## TEACHING THE TRUE NATURE OF NATIVE AMERICA

The Native Communities Program stresses the separate and distinct nature of the more than 500 Native American / Alaska Native communities in the United States. In fact, searching in the National Archives Online Catalog is ineffective unless each distinct tribe is approached in a singular way.

- There are 535 (as of 2018) separate and distinct Federally Recognized Native American / Alaska Native communities in the United States today.
- Each Native group has a separate history and faced unique challenges in the past.
- Each community contributes to the health of our society today in a special and unique way.

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## ADDING SPECIFIC NATIVE AMERICAN / ALASKA NATIVE MATERIALS TO A MORE GENERAL LESSON PLAN OR DOCSTEACH ACTIVITY

A simple way to add a tribally specific element to any lesson plan or DocsTeach activity is to assign or ask students to choose a Native American / Alaska Native community to examine as part of the lesson. Each community page of the Research Guide can simply be assigned or printed out and handed to the student in class. Elements included in the Guides provide the following:

- Contact information for the community itself
- The most effective and specific National Archives Online Catalog research strategies
- A list of Bureau of Indian Affairs offices that created records about the specific community
- Links to Native language, law and other relevant sources of information, including the Federal Register and the Library of Congress.
- Email addresses National Archives professionals to assist in further research about the specific community

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## RELATED NATIONAL ARCHIVES RESOURCES

- **DocsTeach** American Indian documents and classroom activities: <https://www.docsteach.org/topics/american-indians>
- **DocsTeach** document analysis tools: <https://www.docsteach.org/tools/analyzing-documents>
- **Education Updates** blog: <https://education.blogs.archives.gov/>
- Information about American Indian / Alaska Native records: <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans>
- More information about Native records: <https://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/native-americans.html>
- Questions and answers about records on History Hub: <https://historyhub.history.gov/community/american-indian-records>