

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe the potential routes the first people took to arrive in North America
- Develop and defend an argument based on facts regarding the first migration into North America
- Summarize the origin stories of several groups of Native people

Connection to Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- 3rd grade: 1.1.b, 1.1.c, 1.2.b, 1.2.c
- 4th grade: 1.1.c

Materials: Access to internet or library resources, pencils/pens; writing paper

Time: 3 class periods

Background

Scientists are uncertain how Paleoindian people made their way into North America. With new discoveries pushing the date of first arrival further and further back, most archaeologists have come to accept that there were likely multiple entry sites via different modes of transportation. These modes of transportation can be divided into two main groups: travel on foot via an ice-free corridor and travel by boat via the North Pacific coastal route.

Ice Free Corridor Route

During the last glacial period two large glaciers covered most of what is now Canada and northern United States. These ice sheets were called the Laurentide ice sheet to the east and the Cordilleran ice sheet to the west. According to the ice-free corridor hypothesis, there was a gap between the two ice sheets that remained glacier free for all or part of the last glacial period, and that gap acted as a passageway for early humans to travel into North America. In this scenario, because sea-level was lower, humans would have been able to cross the Bering Strait via a land bridge and follow game animals into the non-glaciated parts of North America.

There are several problems with this hypothesis that have not been resolved by scientists. New scientific discoveries have shown that humans arrived in North America earlier than previously thought. How would these people have arrived if sea level was higher or there was no ice-free corridor? Also, no archaeological sites have been found along the ice-free corridor route that are earlier than the Clovis sites to the south. Is it possible that sites have been swept away by floods produced by melting ice or buried under glacial sediments?

North Pacific Coast Route

This hypothesis is based on the idea that the first people to inhabit the Americas traveled via boat from northeast Asia following the coast. It is likely that people traveling along the coastline would have fished and hunted sea mammals. These people would have settled in ice-free areas of land along the way, and once they reached

lands south of the glaciers, some groups would have made their way inland. It is possible that these people were ancestors to the Clovis people. This would explain the existence of archeological sites that are older than when the ice-free corridor would have opened.

However, there are also problems with this hypothesis. During the ice age, sea level was much lower because a lot of water had been frozen into glaciers. As the glaciers melted, sea level rose. This would have flooded many of the potential archaeological sites along the coast. Also, while there is evidence of people like the Polynesians who could make their own boats and navigate using the stars, scientist have not yet found evidence that people living in northeast Asia had that technology at the time.

Native Origin Stories

On the other hand, Native people believe that they have always lived in North America. In many of the origin stories, Native people sprang from the ground in the regions they call home. For more information regarding the origin stories of tribes that once lived in or near western Colorado, see the following:

- Southern Ute origin story: <https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/history/ute-creation-story/>
- Hopi origin story: <https://www.pbs.org/video/hopi-origin-story-dc0awe>
- Dine' (Navajo) origin story: <https://www.discovernavajo.com/navajo-culture.aspx>

Suggested Procedure:

1st Class Period:

1. The instructor will show the students the following video: *Paleoindians* <http://www.rmpbs.org/colorado-experience/early-colorado/paleo-indians/>
2. The instructor will use the remainder of the class time to discuss with students how they think the first people arrived in North America.

2nd Class Period:

1. The instructor will divide the class into thirds. One third will be Paleoindians taking the ice-free corridor route into North America. The second third will be Paleoindians taking the North Pacific coastal route into North America. The final third of the class will serve as judges for the debate.
 2. Students will debate which route for migration would be most likely for the first inhabitants of North America.
 3. Each team will have one class period to research their point of view and plan their strategies for the debate. The last third who will be the judges will research Native American origin stories to learn where Native people believe they came from. (It is suggested that students look at origin stories of tribes that have lived in or near western Colorado such as the Ute, Dine' (Navajo) or the Hopi etc.)
- * Note if you would prefer to use pre-selected articles and images instead of allowing students to conduct library or internet research, contact the Education Department at Museums of Western Colorado

4. Allow students the opportunity to view the ice sheets expand and shrink using the Earth Viewer website and selecting “Ice Age Earth” <https://www.hhmi.org/biointeractive/earthviewer>

3rd Class Period:

1. The two groups of students will debate the issue with the instructor acting as the moderator.
2. The final third of the class will come to a decision based on the strength of the debaters’ arguments. Once they have reached their conclusions, they will defend their decision to the rest of the class and discuss how their decision relates to the origin stories. Students can decide that either one method of travel was most likely or that both methods were used.