

Indigenous Peoples Day

Katie Moody

I learned about Christopher Columbus in middle school. I don't remember exactly what I learned, but I know that it was all positive. He was an Italian explorer. The Spanish kingdom hired him to sail to India and return with riches. Instead, he landed in the Caribbean, which became known as the "New World." That's it! My teachers did not mention how Columbus brought genocide to the Native Americans who lived here before he "discovered" it.

It wasn't just the history books that gave me a warped idea of Christopher Columbus. In the United States, we have a federal holiday to celebrate him. In 1934, the U.S. Congress made the second Monday of October a national holiday. This

just reinforced my limited understanding of Columbus; in his honor, I got a day out of school!

Over time, I slowly began to question the real impact of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. For example, I remember

in 1976, a traveling history museum came to my town. My class went to visit it. I remember walking out of that museum and wondering why none of the exhibits mentioned the people and cultures that thrived here before the U.S. was established.

Later, I learned that the Indigenous people of the northeast were protesting in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on Thanksgiving Day. They were telling a very different story about Thanksgiving than the one I learned as a child. This new perspective piqued my interest. I started making an effort to read books — both fiction and non-fiction — written by Indigenous people. I got involved in efforts to promote and share Indigenous perspectives and

voices. We cannot heal from the past without listening deeply to the pain and suffering endured by so many.

For decades, many Indigenous people have been calling for an end to Columbus Day. They say that instead we should have a holiday celebrating Indigenous people. Re-naming the holiday would be a first step toward changing how we tell U.S. history. The first city to make the change was Berkeley, California. They started celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day in 1992 — on the 500th anniversary of Columbus invading the Americas. Since then, more than 100 cities and states have officially changed the second Monday of October to Indigenous Peoples Day.

I wonder how my school years would have been different if we had Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day. Maybe I would have learned more about the survival, resilience, diversity, and strength of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Hopefully, this shift to recognize Indigenous peoples will continue to spread, and future school kids will learn a more balanced and accurate history than I did!



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AFTER YOU READ:

- 1.** Find out whether your state or city officially celebrates Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day. Read more articles in this issue and consider writing a letter to your city or state government and say how you feel about the holiday.
- 2.** How did Katie Moody and Sterlin Reaves (p. 34) educate themselves about Indigenous peoples?