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Wassaja

The year was 1871 and the location was the Arizona Territory. Five year-old Wassaja lived with his parents, two young sisters and a baby brother in a small village of about 150 people. His Native American people were a small tribe known as Yavapai. This nomadic tribe roamed throughout the desert area of modern day central and western Arizona. They lived as hunter-gatherers and would settle in a location for awhile. They built small grass shelters called oo-wahs. When food became scarce, they moved elsewhere and built new shelters.



The Yavapai and the Pima were longtime enemies and fought often. In October 1871 Wassaja's father and other men of the village had left to sign a peace treaty with the U.S. Army. In the middle of one night while the men were gone the village was wakened by the sound of gunshots. Pima warriors attacked. Wassaja's mother and siblings were able to run away but Wassaja was captured and brought to the Pima village two days of horseback riding away.

By mid-November Wassaja was brought to a nearby town to be sold as a slave. The Civil War ended slavery for African Americans but not for Native Americans. Wassaja was bought by an Italian immigrant named Carlos Gentile. Mr. Gentile was

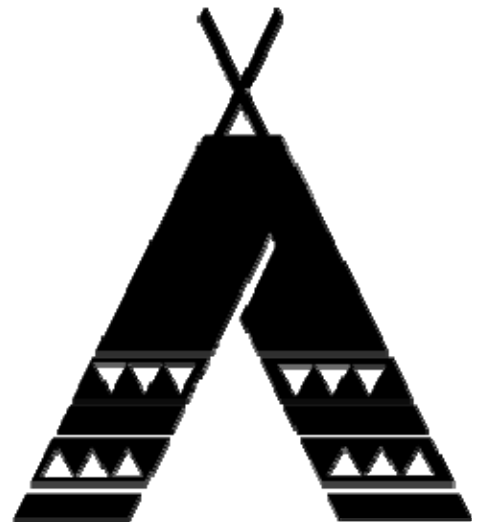


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a photographer who was traveling in the Southwest to take photos of the scenery and American life in the Arizona Territory. He named Wassaja Carlos Montezuma. They traveled together around the United States as father and son while Mr. Gentile earned a living as a photographer.

In 1872 the pair joined Buffalo Bill Cody's stage show for just three weeks. Wassaja played an Apache boy in the show and Mr. Gentile took souvenir photos. Finally they settled in Chicago so Wassaja could attend school. Of course he enrolled in school as Carlos Montezuma, the name his new father gave him. Carlos excelled in school and he graduated at the normal age of fourteen. He then attended the University of Illinois and after graduating from there, he attended Chicago Medical College and became a doctor.

Carlos Montezuma treated patients and became a professor who taught medical students. However, he is remembered as an advocate for equal rights for Native Americans.



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Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Where was Wassaja born?
 - a. Illinois
 - b. Arizona
 - c. New Mexico
 - d. Mississippi

2. Wassaja's tribe the Yavapai were
 - a. Farmers
 - b. Hunter-gatherers
 - c. Settlers
 - d. None of the above

3. The Yavapai's enemies were the
 - a. Apache
 - b. Arapaho
 - c. Pima
 - d. None of the above

4. What country did Mr. Gentile come from?
 - a. Italy
 - b. France
 - c. Germany
 - d. Spain

5. How did Mr. Gentile treat Wassaja?
 - a. As a slave
 - b. As a worker
 - c. As a son
 - d. With neglect

6. Wassaja eventually became
 - a. A banker
 - b. A photographer
 - c. An actor
 - d. A doctor



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Short Answer Questions

1. Locate Arizona and Chicago on a map of the United States.
2. Mr. Gentile and Wassaja traveled around the country by Iron Horse. What is an Iron Horse? Describe an Iron Horse in detail. If you don't know the answers, look them up.
3. The U.S. Army encouraged the Pima to fight against the Yavapai. How do you think that the Pima knew there were only a few men left to defend Wassaja's village?
4. The Yavapai lived as hunter-gatherers. What does this mean? If you don't know the answer, look it up.
5. Mr. Gentile gave Wassaja his same first name and Montezuma as the last name because Montezuma's Castle was near to Wassaja's home territory. Do some research and write a short report about Montezuma's Castle.
6. What is an advocate? If you don't know the answer, look it up.
7. When he was captured Wassaja did not speak the Pima language and he did not know English. How would you feel about not understanding what people around you were saying? How would you go about learning a new language if you didn't know how to read either?



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Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. b.
2. b.
3. c.
4. a.
5. c.
6. d.

Short Answer

1. Individual response
2. Individual response
3. The army told the Pima that the men were away.
4. Hunter-gatherer: people live by hunting game and gathering edible plants only, and grow no crops and raise no livestock.
5. Individual response
6. Advocate: somebody who supports or speaks in favor of something.
7. Individual response

