Student Name: _____

Words from Native Languages

About half of the 50 states have names that come from Native languages. So do many cities, animals, and foods. Each word below comes from the language of a Native nation that is still here today.

States

Alaska · from Unangam Tunuu (Unangax̂, also called Aleut) · "mainland"

Connecticut · from Mohegan · "beside the long tidal river"

Massachusetts · from Wôpanâak (Wampanoag and Massachusett) · "at the great hill"

Michigan · from Ojibwe · "large lake"

Minnesota · from Dakota · "water that is cloudy" (some speakers say "clear")

Missouri · from the Illinois language (Miami and Peoria nations) · "people who have dugout canoes"

Oklahoma · from Choctaw · "red people," a name proposed by Choctaw leader Allen Wright

Texas · from Caddo · "friend"

Cities

Chicago · from Myaamia (Miami) · named for the wild leeks, a kind of wild onion, that grew along the river

Omaha · from Umoⁿhoⁿ (Omaha) · "against the current," the Omaha Nation's own name

Tucson · from O'odham (Tohono O'odham) · "at the base of the black hill"

Animals, food, and everyday things

caribou · from Mi'kmaq · "snow shoveler," because caribou dig through snow to find food

kayak · from Inuit and Yup'ik · a one-person boat

moccasin · from Powhatan (Virginia Algonquian) · a soft leather shoe

moose · from Abenaki · possibly "he strips bark"

pecan · from the Illinois language (Miami and Peoria nations) · "nut"

raccoon · from Powhatan (Virginia Algonquian) · probably "he scratches with his hands"

squash · from Narragansett · probably "things that may be eaten raw"

toboggan · from Mi'kmaq · a sled

Bringing a language back

The name Massachusetts comes from Wôpanâak, the language of the Wampanoag people. After the mid-1800s, no one spoke it for more than 150 years. In 1993, Wampanoag linguist jessie little doe baird and her community began bringing it back, working from documents written in the language centuries ago. Hundreds of people have now studied it, and young children learn Wôpanâak language and culture at a tribal school.

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