

MERIT BADGE SERIES



AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE



SCOUTING AMERICA
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Scouting  America.

Requirements

Always check [scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) for the latest requirements.

1. Identify the different American Indian cultural areas. Explain what makes them each unique.
2. Research an American Indian tribe, group, or nation. Tell your counselor about traditional dwellings, way of life, tribal government, religious beliefs, family and clan relationships, language, clothing styles, arts and crafts, food cultivation, foraging and preparation, means of getting around, games, customs in warfare, and where and how they live today.
3. Do the following.
 - (a) Learn 10 common terms in an American Indian language and their meanings.
 - (b) Identify the meaning of 10 place names of American Indian origin in the United States.
 - (c) Name five well-known American Indian leaders, either from the past or people of today. Give their tribes or nations. Describe what they did or do now that makes them notable.
4. Do the following:
 - (a) Describe how life might have been different for the European settlers if there had been no Native Americans to meet them when they came to this continent.
 - (b) Describe eight things adopted by others from American Indians.
 - (c) Learn a game played by a group or tribe. Teach and lead it with a Scout group.

5. Do ONE of the following:

- (a) Visit a museum either in-person or virtually to see American Indian exhibitions and collections. Discuss with your counselor what you observed or learned from two exhibitions and identify 10 artifacts by tribe or nation, their shape, size, and use.
- (b) Attend a contemporary American Indian gathering. Discuss with your counselor proper etiquette for attending as well as what you learned and observed during your visit.



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Introduction

What is the “typical” American Indian like? Although many of us try to classify all Indians into one group, the truth is that Indians are as diverse a group as one can find on this Earth.



Using the term “American Indian” to describe all of the native peoples of North America is like using “European” for all the nationalities in Europe. Swedes and Spaniards, Greeks and Germans, Britons and Romanians—all are Europeans, but all have distinctly different cultures and traditions.

So it is with American Indian tribes. American Indians have many different cultures, languages, religions, styles of dress, and ways of life. In fact, they were not “Indians” until Europeans called them by that general name. The original inhabitants of North America thought of each tribe as a separate nation, with different names, customs, and languages.

Therefore, as you work on the American Indian Culture merit badge, remember that there is no “typical” American Indian. There are Onondaga, Seminole, Dakota, Yakima,

Paiute, Navajo, Cherokee, Menominee, and scores of others from coast to coast. Most Indians today identify first as members of their tribe, and secondly as American Indians.

To learn about these different groups is to take an exciting journey of discovery in which you will meet some of America’s most fascinating peoples. In your journey, you will trace the footsteps of North America’s first *immigrants* (new arrivals). They inhabited its vast wilderness centuries before the first European set foot in the “New World.” (To Indians, of course, the “New World” wasn’t new; it was a land with a long history.)

You will learn about groups of people who are as varied as the land in which they settled; whose languages, religions, cultures, and ways of life reflect how they *adapted* to (learned to fit into) many different environments.

You will find that American Indians are far different from the stereotypes or common images that are portrayed on film, on television, and in many books and stories. You will learn how the contributions of American Indians helped to shape and influence many elements of life in the United States.

You will see how modern life is influenced by centuries-old Indian ideas about how humankind must coexist with nature and the environment to preserve Earth for future generations. Today, we call it conservation and ecology. To American Indians, respect for Earth and its resources is a basic value. For thousands of years, their traditional ways of life have functioned in harmony with nature.

In your journey, you will learn about American Indians of today, and those who lived years or centuries ago. Individually and as a group, these people have influenced the American way of life and the way in which America has evolved as a cultural, political, and economic world force.

A Scout Is Courteous

As you study Indian cultures, be alert to religious customs, rituals, and traditions, including ceremonies and prayers, dances, songs and music, special clothing, artwork, and even games. Sometimes these are part of sacred rituals. Be careful not to give offense by misusing anything of religious significance. Ask questions if you are not sure whether an item or activity you are portraying is part of a tribe's religious custom. Just as you might have ceremonies and rituals that are sacred to your faith and your religious practice, so do the Indian groups you are learning about.

Finding Your Way

Every trip begins with a first step. This pamphlet will help you take that important first step in your journey of discovery. Use the information here as a starting point to learn more about American Indians and American heritage.

You might want to focus on only one tribe to fulfill all of the merit badge requirements. You might want to learn more about Indian life in general before Europeans came, as well as after they arrived. You might also investigate how Indians live and work today and carry on their ancient traditions.

Ask for help. Ask your school or public librarian for books and other materials about different Indian groups. If you have a natural history museum in your area, ask the curator or person in charge for information.

See if your town or city has an American Indian center, or an Indian tribal council or similar governing group. Learn first-hand about tribes in your area and about Indian life today. If possible, talk with tribal members about their experiences.

Reality Versus Myth

What many of us know about American Indians comes from the movies, television, comics, and books. What we have seen or read has helped to shape how we think of American Indians. Much of that thinking comes from centuries-old misunderstandings, and prejudices or intolerance.

Misunderstandings started with Christopher Columbus. More than five centuries ago, Columbus thought he had found a shorter route to the Indies, in Asia. He named the group of islands he encountered in the Bahamas “the West Indies,” and called the natives “Indians.”

Europeans who followed Columbus added to the mistakes. America’s first settlers believed they had “discovered” a new, empty continent, one without civilization. Therefore, the “uncivilized” peoples who met the settlers when they came ashore must not have any sort of culture or traditions of their own—or so the thinking went.

The settlers saw the New World through Old World eyes. They arrived not only with their possessions but also their narrow viewpoints and ideas about civilization—politics, religion, ethics, economics, art, and culture. They saw what they wanted to see: tribes of Stone Age “savages,” whom they viewed as inferior to themselves.

American Indian or Native American?

You have probably heard that the native people of North America should not be called “Indians.” The citizens of the country of India, in southern Asia, are the Indians. Those 15th-century European sailors who mistook the Bahamas for the Indies mistakenly named the people they met “Indians.”

Is it more correct to refer to American Indians as “Native Americans”? Strictly speaking, anyone born in America is a native American. And even if we’re careful to use a capital *N* for a Native American who is an Indian, and a small *n* for a native-born American who is not an Indian, we still can get confused. The term “Native American” also applies to native or *indigenous* peoples of the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

Here is some advice from Dr. David Hurst Thomas of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Dr. Thomas learned “Indian lore” when he was a Scout, and he credits his Scouting work for starting him on his career in anthropology and archaeology. In his book *Exploring Native North America* (2000), Dr. Thomas writes:

“Indigenous people throughout Native North America recognize the garbled logic behind all such labels. Most simply accept the imprecision and use terms such as American Indian, Canadian Native, Native American, Indian, and Native more-or-less interchangeably. . . .

“Of much greater concern to most Indian people is the tribal name. Today, those native Arizonans formerly known as ‘Pima’ and ‘Papago’ prefer to be called the O’odham people. Some Navajo people would like to be known as Diné, a traditional name meaning ‘The People.’ Some, but not all, Native people prefer the terms ‘Lakota’ and ‘Dakota’ over the more-common ‘Sioux’ (which is a French variant of an Ojibwe or Chippewa word meaning ‘enemy’). Whenever discussing a tribe . . . try to use the term preferred by the particular tribe in question.”

If the Europeans could have looked beyond their prejudices, they would have seen that the Indians had sophisticated civilizations and complex systems of government and laws. But the Europeans didn’t understand the Indians, and the Indians, who had lived here for thousands of years, found the new arrivals equally strange and puzzling.

Appreciating Tribal Differences

Supernatural

relates to a
belief in God,
or gods, ghosts,
and spirits.

You will discover many differences in the various tribes of North America. These differences generally reflect the environments in which the groups originally lived.

Some groups were farmers; others were nomads who hunted game and foraged for food. (*Nomads* keep moving, following food sources such as wild game.) Some Indians depended on fishing; others ate only red meat.

Most believed that nature belonged to everyone and to no one. The land, the rivers and seas, and the air were gifts that could not be owned or sold. Some tribes believed that Mother Earth was sacred, and that it was wrong to cut into her body by tilling the soil.

Most Indians believed (and continue to believe) that all living things are linked together and depend upon each other. They believed in the supernatural. Different tribes had different beliefs about the spirit world and practiced their beliefs with many kinds of rituals and ceremonies.

Indian Culture and American Democracy

The basic principles of the Haudenosaunee of New York and Ontario (also known as the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations) are explained in their Great Law of Peace. It is a *constitution*, with principles and laws that determine the powers and duties of the government.

Many Americans think the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee influenced the development of American democracy. Interesting similarities exist between the Great Law and the U.S. Constitution.

Some historians, however, say there is little evidence that America's founding fathers ever read the Haudenosaunee constitution. Some believe it is more likely that the writings of European scholars influenced the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Most people agree that colonial American leaders often met, negotiated, and traded with the Six Nations and with other American Indians. In fact, Benjamin Franklin knew about the Confederacy of the Six Nations—he wrote about it in a letter in 1751.

Indians and American Culture

Few of us realize how much of American culture has been influenced by American Indians. Many of our ideas about freedom, as expressed in the Constitution of the United States, came from the Indian way of life. Indians deeply respected individual rights and equality. Many groups governed themselves by a system of values learned from infancy and voluntarily followed by every member of the group.

Individuals enjoyed great personal liberty. Leaders did not rule, but advised and helped to resolve disputes. Everyone had the right to speak out on issues, and the group had to agree before taking any action. Many Europeans left their homelands hoping to find such a place to live, where they could be free from oppressive rulers and practice their beliefs without interference.

Indians introduced the first settlers to many new food crops. Corn, potatoes, and tomatoes—staple foods in cultures around the world—came from the Americas and were first cultivated by American Indians. In fact, 60 percent of the food eaten worldwide today comes from plants that were originally farmed by American Indians—mainly Indian women. They were the first to grow and harvest foods such as pumpkins, squash, beans, sunflower seeds, and avocados.

The Indians were inventors. Kayaks, canoes, moccasins, hammocks, ponchos, dogsleds, toboggans, and parkas are all from American Indian cultures.

Language in the United States would be very different without the Indian influence. Many names of cities, states, lakes, rivers, plants, and animals, and common expressions have Indian origins. See how many different items or words you can find that were first used by Indians and then adopted by nonnatives. Can you list the 26 states whose names are of Indian origin?

Medicinal plants that Indians discovered and used are still being used for medicines today. From the bark of the willow tree came salicylic acid (used in aspirin). Digitalis, a heart medicine, came from the common foxglove.

America's First Immigrants

Paleo-Indians

Scientists have different theories about when Paleo-Indians—America's true pioneers—first set foot on the North American continent. (*Paleo-Indian* is the name given to the Asian migrants of the late Pleistocene age, a prehistoric time known as the great age of glaciers. The Pleistocene is a division on the geologic time scale, similar to the Jurassic period of movie fame but much more recent.) Some scientists believe Stone Age people came to North America as early as 40,000 years ago; others believe it was as late as 12,000 to 15,000 years ago.

To trace the movements of Paleo-Indians, scientists look for clues in the physical evidence the people left behind. Most now think that these migrants probably traveled from Asia across a land bridge that once connected Siberia and Alaska. Today, the Bering Strait separates Siberia from Alaska by about 50 miles of seawater. But during the last Ice Age, massive sheets of ice covered huge expanses of land and “locked up” so much water that the world's oceans dropped. The receding waters opened the Bering Land Bridge. People could have simply walked across into North America.



Dwellings of the ancestral Pueblo

It took them many centuries to get here. Small bands of people moved gradually from place to place. They were not intentionally migrating. They were following herds of game, or seeking better places to forage for roots and berries—or just looking to see what lay beyond the next hill.

Along the way, they found plentiful game to hunt. They stalked some now-extinct animals, such as 20-foot-long ground sloths, massive woolly mammoths standing 14 feet tall at the shoulder, and beavers as large as today's black bear. They foraged for food with the huge bison and moose. While the hunters were stalking game, saber-toothed cats with 8-inch canines, dire wolves, and giant bears were surely stalking the hunters.

Scientists believe they know when and how these ancient wanderers lived, based on intriguing clues they left behind. Near Clovis, New Mexico, archaeologists found evidence of the first identifiable American Indians—the Clovis people—at mammoth kill sites that date back about 12,000 years. (*Archaeologists* study human life and cultures of the past by examining the things those people left behind.) The Clovis people who apparently camped and hunted there left distinctively shaped spear points, stone scraping and cutting tools, and deftly fashioned tools of bone and ivory.

The Clovis people probably lived in small bands of no more than four to 10 families—about the number their nomadic lifestyle could support. A small band of hunters could track and kill a 6-ton mammoth. A few families could live off the kill.

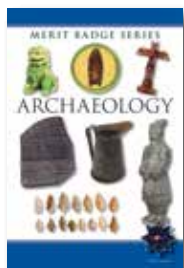
The Clovis people were followed by other groups who left their own marks on prehistory. The Folsom people, named for a discovery at Folsom, New Mexico, left behind stone weapon points (distinct from the Clovis) that are about 8,000 to 10,000 years old.

In Colorado, scientists found the remains of almost 200 bison in one site where a group of Plano people camped. Their tools and weapons were different from the Clovis and Folsom peoples, so archaeologists identify them as a separate group.

Because of the size of the kill, scientists can also imagine how the hunt was conducted. As many as 150 people may have taken part, helping to stampede a herd of bison over a cliff and slaughtering the animals killed or injured in the fall. Such a well-organized hunt could mean that this group had a social order that required discipline and leadership among its members.



Clovis point



For more about archaeologists and how they uncover the stories of the past, see the *Archaeology* merit badge pamphlet.

Evidence of a desert culture was found in Danger Cave in Utah. People lived in this cave off and on for many centuries from about 11,000 years ago. They may have been among the first people in the world to practice the craft of basket weaving.

Another desert group, the Cochise, may have been the first farmers in North America. In Bat Cave, New Mexico, archaeologists uncovered a cache of Cochise-style weapon points and several corncobs from a primitive type that was deliberately grown, or cultivated.

We cannot be sure how farming got started. Perhaps some observant food-gatherer noticed that certain plants grew in certain places, and realized that where seeds fell to the ground, new plants later grew. Maybe seeds were buried in the ground as a sacrifice, and someone noticed that plants appeared on that spot soon after. However it happened, the idea of cultivating crops was a stunning advance in the way of life for prehistoric people.

Changing Patterns

Huge animals like the mammoth began to disappear at the end of the Ice Age. Then people began to hunt smaller animals like rabbits, deer, and antelope, or fish and fowl. They found other sources of food, too, as they foraged for edible roots, grains,

A New Weapon

By 8000 B.C. (perhaps much earlier), a new invention greatly enhanced the hunter's skill. The *atlatl* was a 2- or 3-foot-long stick with a small base carved in its butt end. A spear rested on the atlatl. The hunter threw the spear using a whiplike motion that hurled it from the atlatl toward its target with great force and long-distance accuracy. This allowed the hunter to be farther away (and safer) when striking at prey. The atlatl was a major weapon until the invention of the bow and arrow, and the arrival of guns with the Europeans.



wild vegetables, nuts, and berries. They made new tools for a changing way of life artfully shaped scrapers and choppers, and notched points for hunting and killing small game.

Between 5000 B.C. and 1000 B.C., some groups settled into semipermanent villages. Although they continued to hunt and forage, they began to cultivate plants deliberately to provide enough food for everyone. Social customs—the ways in which people behave toward each other—changed as people settled together in villages to live and raise their families.

Of course, not every Indian group changed to this way of life. Some tribes remained hunters and foragers until modern times.

The role of men (the hunters) and women (the foragers and farmers) changed to adapt to a more settled existence. New ways of doing things evolved. Artisans crafted utensils that were not only useful, but beautiful. Religion and ritual became more important. Family and tribal relationships were affected.

The Formative Period

Great civilizations were built during the period from about 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1500. Many of these were in Mexico and in Central and South America. Extraordinary societies also developed in what is now the United States.

The ancestral Pueblo people built huge apartment-like dwellings four or five stories high in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, and in Mesa Verde, Colorado. This great civilization of the Southwest left behind the remains of a complex and sophisticated culture. Preserved for modern-day archaeologists to study are textiles (fabrics), fragile baskets still vibrant with centuries-old color, black-on-white pottery, furs, and even feathers.

Other remarkable cultures, the Adena and the Hopewell, appeared in the eastern half of the present United States. The Adena culture formed in the Ohio Valley about 500 B.C. To honor their dead, these people built low earthen mounds over graves. As centuries passed, the Adena built their funeral mounds ever larger and more fanciful. Some of the mounds had many layers. Some were shaped like birds, tortoises, or humans. The largest was the Great Serpent Mound near Cincinnati, Ohio. Shaped like a snake wriggling across the woodland, the mound is 20 feet wide, 5 feet high, and a quarter-mile long.

The Hopewell people also arose in the Ohio area, about 100 B.C. They soon dominated the Midwest and influenced a region from the Atlantic to present-day Wisconsin and Iowa, and south to the Gulf of Mexico. The Hopewells built great earthworks. One of their most impressive sites was an enclosure at what is now Newark, Ohio, that covered 4 square miles. Apparently built to house the dead, the site contained burial mounds, a great figure of an eagle, and many avenues, circles, and plazas.

After the decline of the Hopewells, another mound-building society appeared in what is today the southeastern United States. In the centuries after A.D. 800, this Mississippian culture spread from the Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast and from present-day Georgia to as far west as Oklahoma. Mississippian society reached a high point at a city called Cahokia, in what is now Illinois. There, these Temple Mound Builders, as they are called, constructed mounds higher and broader than any others north of the Rio Grande. One massive earthwork rose to a height of 100 feet. At its base it was 1,000 feet long and more than 700 feet wide. The flat top of this huge structure once supported a building—probably a temple—that spread over an area large enough for three modern tennis courts.

Hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans, Cahokia was a center of art and religion, trade and industry. Long after the first European explorers entered the North American heartland, the great mounds and earthworks of Cahokia and other now-vanished centers of Mississippian life would continue to amaze and mystify the new American settlers.

American Indians Today

As you read in the following pages about the history of Native Americans, keep in mind that as many Indians live in the United States today as when Columbus reached the Caribbean—about 2 million, according to the 2000 census. The direct descendants of America's first people are still very much here. Indians are not people of the past. They are not "vanishing Americans." Indians are a proud and vital part of 21st-century America, and theirs is a proud, vital, and rich heritage. As you learn about Indian history, always be aware that the culture you are investigating is a living, dynamic culture.

Indian Culture After 1492

After Europeans arrived, the lives of American Indians were forever changed.

Newly introduced diseases—smallpox, measles, flu, yellow fever, and others—wiped out whole societies. Wars killed many natives. European ways of doing things were imprinted, sometimes forcibly, on Indian ways. Indians lost traditional hunting and farming lands. Whole tribes and nations were sent to live in faraway places.

Scholars believe that at the time the first Europeans came here, there may have been about 2 million Indians in North America—or possibly as many as 18 million. They had many different traditions and ways of doing things. They lived in all kinds of dwellings: adobe pueblos, longhouses, hogans, plank houses, tepees. Some were farmers; others were hunters and trappers. Some lived in cities. Others lived in small, close-knit communities. They had rich social lives and established systems of government.

The map shown here depicts the approximate regions where different groups lived, and the general names given to cultural (related or neighboring) groups. In each chapter that follows, you will find a list of most of the major groups and tribes included in that cultural area. Not every tribe will be mentioned; nor do all who study American Indians agree on where to place each tribe culturally.

Use the general descriptions of how tribes in each area have lived, worked, and worshiped as a starting point for your journey of discovery. Then do your own research to learn more about the fascinating heritage of the American Indians.

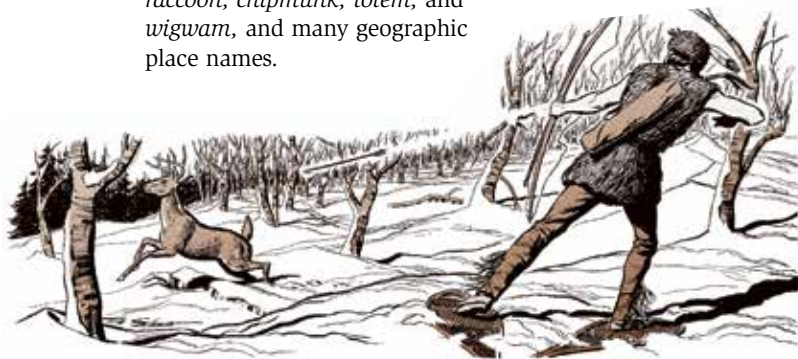


Northeast Woodlands

Tribes on the eastern seaboard were among the first to meet European explorers and settlers. The Pilgrims thought the Indians were heathens and tried to teach them European ways. In fact, the first Europeans to land on the North American continent probably would not have survived their first winter had not the Indian people taught the Pilgrims to hunt, fish, and forage for native foods. Later, these Woodlands Indians taught them to plant foods native to the continent.

Located in the northeast quarter of what is now the United States, the home of the Woodlanders was a huge area. It stretched between the Atlantic Coast and the Mississippi River, and from the upper shore of Lake Superior to about the northern border of present-day Tennessee. Because the environment varied greatly from region to region, these tribes had different ways of living depending on where they lived.

Most spoke some variety of Algonquian, which was the most widespread language in the New World. Siouian and Iroquoian languages also were spoken. English words of Algonquian origin include *hickory*, *hominy*, *moccasin*, *papoose*, *pecan*, *powwow*, *squash*, *terrapin*, *tomahawk*, *raccoon*, *chipmunk*, *totem*, and *wigwam*, and many geographic place names.



Hunters often bagged animals bogged down in the snow. Note the snowshoes.

The People

The tribes, subtribes, and nations of the Northeast Woodlands are generally divided into the following groups. Other tribes besides those listed also lived in this region.

Eastern Algonquian: Abenaki, Mahican, Massachuset, Penobscot, Narragansett, Wappinger, Pequot, Montauk, Delaware (Lenape)

Iroquois (League of Five Nations): Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Tuscarora (joined League about 1713)

Western Algonquian (Forest Tribes): Ojibwa or Chippewa, Ottawa, Menominee, Forest Potawatomi

Western Algonquian (Prairie Tribes): Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Illinois, Miami, Prairie Potawatomi, Shawnee

The Indians of the coastal plains lived on flat, fertile land between the Atlantic Ocean and hardwood forests teeming with game. Tribes such as the Delaware and Montauk reaped the bounty of sea and forest and also benefited from the lush growing areas where they cultivated crops such as corn.

Farther to the north, where cold winds blew and life was not so easy, lived the Penobscot, Abenaki, and other seminomads.

Corn would not grow in the subarctic northern regions. So these tribes lived a wandering but well-ordered life pursuing deer, bear, moose, wild ducks, and fish. They trapped animals such as beaver for their meat and pelts. After the Europeans arrived, beaver pelts became very valuable, and a brisk trade started between the Indians and the Europeans.

Tribes of the western Great Lakes region included the Menominee, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwa, and Winnebago. These tribes were both farmers and hunters. Using canoes, they harvested a delicious wild rice that still grows thickly in the thousands of lakes and ponds of that region.



Menominee gathering wild rice. Notice the wigwam. (Courtesy Milwaukee Public Museum)

Some Algonquian groups, such as the Powhatans of Virginia and the Abenakis of Maine, formed powerful confederations that dominated large regions. The mightiest confederation in the Northeast, however, was of the Iroquoians who lived in the forests east of Lake Ontario.

The Algonquian Birchbark Canoe

The birchbark canoes of the Algonquians plied the rivers and lakes of the Northeast Woodlands.

The Algonquians used the light, swift, and graceful watercraft to hunt, fish, trade, and make war.

These lightweight canoes could easily be *portaged*, or carried from one waterway to another. On the trail, they served as shelter from the elements. They were constructed in all sizes, from small, two-person craft to large canoes for eight to 10 people.

Cedar was normally used for the framework. The bark of birch, peeled from the trees in large sheets, did not shrink or stretch and was ideal for the covering. Bark pieces were sewn together with spruce roots and shaped around the frame. Spruce tree resin waterproofed the seams. The braces and paddles were made of maple.



In the fall, the Iroquois harvested and preserved crops and game for their winter food source.

The tribes of the Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, and Onondaga made up the Iroquois League of Five Nations. (The Tuscarora later joined the confederacy.) They were farmers whose lives revolved around the seasons. In spring and summer, the women planted and raised corn, beans, and squash—crops they called the Three Sisters. The men hunted and fished.

When Europeans arrived in the New World, these Iroquois Confederacy tribes dominated much of the Northeast. Not every Iroquois-speaking tribe joined the confederacy, however. The Huron, which was a nation of four tribes, and the Tobacco tribes, for example, scorned and often warred with the confederacy.

Dwellings

Among the Woodlands tribes were many types of houses, but a few types are most associated with these groups.

Because the northern tribes were wanderers, moving with the seasons to follow game, they needed portable houses. The

wigwam was perfect for their way of life. Its frame consisted of four saplings bent toward the center. They covered this with long strips of bark sewn together and lined the inside with grass for insulation. Animal skins hung at the entrance. Fir branches covered with moose skins lined the floor. The Abenaki, unlike most other New England tribes, built cone-shaped wigwams that resembled the tipis of the Great Plains Indians.

The village-dwelling Delaware lived on river meadows and built small, irregularly spaced groups of bark buildings. Some were round, domed wigwams; others were oblong and arched; and still others were rectangular longhouses with pitched roofs.

The Iroquois built permanent structures. Known as the People of the Longhouse, they imagined a gigantic, symbolic "longhouse" stretching across their nation, the "doors" guarded by different tribes to the east and west. This imaginary longhouse took actual form in the many pole-and-bark structures that made up each village.

An individual longhouse was about 50 to 150 feet long, depending on the number of families living inside. A typical house could shelter about 50 people. It was built like an arbor, with long poles driven into the ground, then more poles arched across to form a high roof. Long poles running the length of the structure intertwined with the arched poles. Sheets of bark covered the whole structure from top to bottom.

Inside, a long central corridor ran the length of the longhouse, and to each side were boothlike quarters where families slept and stored their possessions. A tall fence, or palisade, surrounded each village. Warriors stood guard there while the villagers carried on their pursuits.

Village and Family Life

The seasons dominated life. In the spring, nomadic tribes would move their entire villages to their favorite coastal fishing grounds to gather lobsters, clams, and shellfish. More settled tribes like the Iroquoians tended to stay in their well-established and protected villages.

During the warm summer months, Indians all along the seaboard turned to fishing and hunting, and in the south, to

Usually, two
or three
families shared
one wigwam.



A wigwam made of grass mats tied to saplings and covered with slabs of bark



Northeastern multifamily longhouse

planting corn. Traders traveled up and down the coast and from inland, bringing the goods of different regions for barter or trade.

In the fall, the northern tribes returned to their nomadic lifestyles and spent the autumn and winter months following moose and smaller game. Their southern neighbors also hunted for winter provisions, but families stayed in their villages. The women tanned hides, sewed, took care of the children, and prepared for the winter.

Many tribes, including the Huron, the Iroquoians, and the Delaware, were *matrilineal*, meaning they traced their ancestry or kin relations through the mother's side. Other tribes were *patrilineal* and traced their ancestors through the male line.

How the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy Was Formed

According to tribal history, the Iroquois Confederacy was first suggested in about 1570 (possibly earlier), when intertribal warfare threatened to destroy the Iroquois. A holy man named Dekanawideh had a vision in which the five warring nations were united under a symbolic Tree of Great Peace. He saw tribes who lived in harmony under a government of law and put the future welfare of their people ahead of any other desire. A Mohawk named Hiawatha heard of the holy man's vision and was greatly moved.

Hiawatha traveled from one tribe to another over the Iroquois territory, spreading the message of a confederation united in peace and under one government. One by one, the tribes accepted this astounding idea. First to join were the Mohawk, who became keepers of the Eastern Door. Then the Oneida, the Cayuga, and the Onondaga, who were the Firekeepers, joined the league. Finally, the most warlike tribe, the Seneca, entered the confederacy and became keepers of its Western Door. This was the League of Five Nations; later, when the Tuscarora joined, it was called the League of Six Nations.

The six agreed to stop fighting among themselves and to cooperate for a common defense. Each tribe kept control of its own affairs, but united in matters concerning other tribes and foreign countries.

Modern Six Nations people prefer to be called Haudenosaunee instead of by their French name, Iroquois. Haudenosaunee (pronounced Ho-deh-no-shaw-nee) means "People Building a Long House."



Among some tribes, the *calumet*, a sacred pipe used for rituals of peace and war, was the most cherished possession. The pipe was both an altar and a kind of passport. French missionary-explorer Jacques Marquette carried a calumet to pass unharmed through the territories of various tribes in the Mississippi Valley.

The oldest woman in the longhouse was supreme. She was “mother” to the entire household in the sense that it belonged exclusively to her and her female relatives. Women in matrilineal societies such as the Seneca were very powerful. The clan mother, with the advice of other women of her tribe, appointed each of the eight Seneca councillor-chiefs. If a councillor-chief failed in his duties, the women could remove him from office.

The chief of a village or several villages would have a council and other city officials, just as cities do today. Town meetings were *powwows*, with singing, dancing, prayers, games, and serious talk all part of the ceremonies.

Some tribes had more than one chief. The peace chief was usually a hereditary position. The war chief was chosen for his military prowess. Some tribes had a third leader, the *shaman*, or medicine man, who was responsible for religious rituals.

Family life was important. Being a family member meant being a member of a *clan*. Clans traced their origins to a common ancestor. They usually were identified by an animal symbol, such as the Bear Clan or the Wolf Clan.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

During the warm summer months, men of the Woodlands tribes generally dressed in soft deerskin breechcloths, or breechclouts, that covered the loin area. Children did not wear clothes. Women wore kneelength skirts and, after the arrival of Europeans, wampum headbands. *Wampum* were purple and white disk-shaped or cylindrical beads made of clamshell. They were strung together and exchanged as gifts. After Europeans arrived, wampum became an exchange currency like money.



The Wolf belt, strung with wampum (clamshell beads), celebrated the friendship between Northeast Woodlands Indians and white settlers.

The Myth of the Indian “Squaw”

The role of women in Indian life is largely misunderstood. An Indian woman was not a “squaw” or slave, as the Europeans mistakenly saw her. In fact, many modern-day Indian people regard the word “squaw” as insulting and demeaning.

In most Indian groups, life in the village centered on the family. Chores were divided fairly. As lifeways gradually changed from hunting to foraging to farming, the skills of women, who were the foragers and the first farmers, grew in importance. Women’s economic role became central to the group, and their status and power increased.

Many tribes became *matrilineal*, with family lines traced through the mother. In these groups, a child always belonged to the clan of his or her mother. The father was acknowledged but was the head of the families of his sisters, not of his wife and children. In *matrilocal* tribes, the husband lived with the wife’s family.

Women acquired property and wealth. For the Navajo of the American Southwest, for example, sheep became the basis of wealth, and all sheep belonged to women. Indian women owned herds of horses. Plains Indian women, like the women of many other tribes, owned the lodges and almost everything in them. Pueblo women owned the houses, all the furnishings, and all the crops.

Women had great influence with their husbands. Sometimes they went to battle, with or without their husbands. Women were often the true rulers of a village; they might choose the chief, and fire him if he did a poor job. They certainly were not the drudges or slaves the Europeans considered them to be.



The men of some tribes, the Delaware in particular, liked to wear a *vermillion*, or red, makeup of fat mixed with berry juice and minerals. Women also wore makeup. Some Indian men used sharpened mussel-shell tweezers to pluck their heads bare except for a central crest; others shaved their heads.

In the cooler months, everyone dressed for warmth. Both sexes wore fur shawls and robes woven of downy, waterproof turkey feathers. Deerskin leggings, or trousers, moccasins, and often fur hats provided extra protection from the cold.

The Woodlands Indians used materials at hand to shape tools, weapons, and ceremonial objects. Wood, bark, and other plant materials, and stone, clay, hide, bone, antler, shells, quills, and feathers were used. Later, the Europeans introduced new materials such as metals, glass, and cloth.

The Algonquians used watertight birchbark or the hardwood burls from birch, elm, and maple to make bowls, dishes, and trays. Wooden bowls were made by charring, then scraping the burls. The shredded bark of trees such as basswood was twisted to make twine for sewing. They plaited baskets from sweetgrass and wood splints and used clay for unpainted pottery dishes.

The Iroquois made pottery from clay shaped in coils, then decorated them with geometric designs and sun-dried and fired them in hot, smoldering coals. The Huron embellished clothing and other items with intricate designs using the hairs of moose dyed with bright vegetable colors.

While the women of many tribes excelled at making elaborately decorated clothing, those items were saved for special occasions.

Religion and Ritual

Beliefs and rituals among the Indian tribes were quite varied. The Algonquians believed in forces called Manitou, which had many different forms. Spirits were in all things—animals, plants, water, rocks, the sun, the moon, weather, and even sickness. Shamans were supposed to be able to control these spirits. Each person was thought to have a personal, protective spirit.

Some tribes had sacred societies with special rites, signs, and symbols. Examples include the Midewiwin (the Grand Medicine Society) of the Ojibwa and the False Face Society of the Iroquois, also an organization of healers.



Potawatomi beaded garters, worn during ceremonial dances

Warfare

The means and methods of Indian warfare confused Europeans when they first came to America. Rather than fight in the open, Indians scattered their men and fought from behind fences, trees, and bushes. Surprise and ambush were weapons, as valuable in warfare as axes, bows, arrows, and war clubs.

Most fights were small and were rooted in intense rivalries and blood feuds between tribes. One tribe might avenge the death of a warrior by taking the lives of the offending tribe's warriors. The offending tribe would want revenge, often at the urging of the wife or mother of a slain man. In these raids, people were killed, and captives and goods taken. Prisoners were sometimes tortured and killed; more often they were adopted by the captors' tribe to replace the men lost to war.

The western Algonquians fought mainly to keep others out of their territory, and sometimes helped the French to fight the English. They also carried out raids, took women and children for slaves, sometimes tortured male warriors, and often took the scalps of enemies. But touching a live enemy in battle meant more.

The Iroquois Confederacy began to fall apart with the American Revolution, when four of the Six Nations tribes joined with the British. The defeat of the British by American forces brought them more grief. George Washington sent Gen. John



Woodlands war clubs like this one were carved from a single piece of ironwood. This ball-like head seems clutched in the jaws of a fierce animal.

When the Iroquois united to eliminate intertribal warfare, they turned their full energy to waging war against other tribes and nations, and against the newcomers from Europe. They were great warriors who began developing military skills when they were young, practicing with knives, war clubs, and bows and arrows. Through military exploits, a man could gain great respect and be named a war chief.

The Algonquians called these ferocious warriors the “real adders” or “poisonous snakes,” and the name stuck: “Iroquois” is the French adaptation of the Algonquian phrase. One Iroquois chief in particular, Aharihon of the Onondaga, was feared by Indians and Europeans alike for his cruelty to anyone not of his tribe. But to his own people, he was a moral and virtuous leader, and a loving husband and father. Aharihon came to be a symbol of the conflict between American Indian and European values of the time.

Why the Owl Has Big Eyes

Raweno, the Everything-Maker, was busy making the animals. He was working on Rabbit, and Owl (still unformed) was sitting in a tree nearby, awaiting his turn.

"Whoo, whoo," Owl said. "I want a long neck like Swan's, and red feathers like Cardinal's, and a long beak like Egret's, and a crown of plumes like Heron's. I want you to make me into the most beautiful, the fastest, the most wonderful of all the birds."

"Be quiet," Raweno ordered. "Close your eyes. Don't you know no one is allowed to watch me work?"

Owl refused to obey. "Whoo, whoo," he said. "Nobody can forbid me to watch. Nobody can order me to close my eyes."

Raweno got angry. He grabbed Owl, pulled him down from his branch, stuffed his head deep into his body, shook him until his eyes grew big with fright, and pulled at his ears until they stuck up at both sides of his head.

"That will teach you," said Raweno. "Now you can't crane your neck to watch things you shouldn't watch. Now you have big ears to listen when someone tells you what not to do. Now you have big eyes—but not so big that you can watch me, because you'll be awake only at night, and I work by day. And your feathers won't be red like Cardinal's, but gray like this"—and Raweno rubbed Owl all over with mud—"as punishment for your disobedience."

Owl remains as Raweno shaped him in anger—with big eyes, a short neck, and ears sticking up on the sides of his head. And he must sleep during the day and come out only at night.

—Condensed from a traditional Iroquois story



Sullivan on a campaign of pillage and arson that destroyed 40 Iroquois villages and most of their crops.

Today, the Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Mohawk, and Tuscarora maintain headquarters in New York. Other Northeast Woodlanders are present throughout the region: the Narragansett in Rhode Island; the Pequot in Connecticut; the Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot in Maine; and the Sac and Fox in Iowa. There are Chippewa in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Montana, and Canada. Also in Wisconsin are Menominee, Potawatomi, and Oneida.

Southeast Woodlands

Tattoos, powerful kings, a sun god, and “Stinkards” met Europeans when they first encountered the tribes of the Southeast Woodlands.

The Southeastern tribes lived in a region bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Gulf of Mexico on the south, the Trinity River in the west (approximately), and the Tennessee and Potomac Rivers to the north (approximately). It is an area of great diversity. The territory of these Indians included the salt-water marshes of the coastal plains, the subtropical Everglades, rich river valleys, and the forests and mountains of the southern Appalachian chain.

Some of the most advanced tribes north of Mexico lived in the Southeast Woodlands. They were skilled farmers, hunters, and builders who lived mostly in permanent villages. They used herbs and medicines that have equals in modern health care. They were conservationists who valued and took care of their natural resources. Their practices and beliefs are reflected in present-day environmental and ecological ideas.

About 150 or 200 separate groups or tribes lived in this region at the time the first European invaders found them. They spoke many different languages, some similar and some as different as Russian is from German.

Florida Indians prepare to kill an alligator.



The People

While many languages were spoken among the Indian tribes of this region, we can divide the groups roughly according to the following language families.

Muskogean: Creek (Muskogee), Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Natchez

Siouian: Catawba, Tutelo

Iroquoian: Cherokee, Tuscarora (before 1712)

Others: Yuchi, Shawnee

Lifeways

Young people growing up among the Indians in the Southeast Woodlands probably thought they were living in paradise. They were surrounded by beautiful country. Nature was bountiful. There were game animals to hunt—deer, alligators, turtles, rabbits, and squirrels. There were fish to catch, nuts and berries to eat, and rivers to swim and play in.

They lived in a town of several hundred people, with a king or chief, the members of the noble class, and the members of the working class. All followed the same laws and traditions. They dreamed of becoming warriors, or perhaps healers. In some tribes, war was the most important way for someone to gain honor and prestige. In others, one's place might also be determined by achievements in healing or religion.

Their ancestors, the Temple Mound Builders, had lived in this region long before Europeans arrived. From the Temple Mound culture had come the tradition of building houses for rulers high atop large earthen mounds. Smaller homes for priests and nobles were on terraces below the tops of the mounds. The higher up the side of the mound one lived, the higher one's rank. The king often lived atop his own mound. Villages or cities that surrounded the mounds housed merchants, artisans, soldiers, hunters, farmers, and laborers.



The commoners
were called
Stinkards. They
did all the labor,
such as farming
and building
mounds. The
nobility—even
the king himself—
had to marry from
the Stinkard class.
When the noble
died, the noble's
spouse and
servants were
sacrificed to go
with him or her
to the next world.

Much of that way of life remained at the time the first Europeans came to the Southeast Woodlands. The Natchez, who lived in territory that now makes up parts of Mississippi and Louisiana, were probably the last of the Temple Mound culture. They were still living that life as late as 1682, when the French explorer La Salle made contact with them.

Their king, the Great Sun, had absolute power over his subjects. He was a true monarch, crowned with red-tasseled swan feathers and seated on a throne of feathers and furs atop his village's highest mound. Below him were priests with shaved heads, and warriors, tattooed from head to foot, strolling through the precisely laid out village watching the commoners work.

East of the Natchez lived the Creeks. The Creeks spoke a type of the Muskogean language. They were among the most widespread and powerful of Muskogean tribes. In many ways the typical Southeastern way of life is better represented by the Creeks than by the exotic Natchez.

The Creeks lived along rivers and streams coursing through the piney woods of their territory in most of present-day Georgia and Alabama. They were a confederacy of about 20,000 people who lived in at least 50 towns. They were mainly farmers, but also hunter-gatherers. Each family grew its own crops of corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, melons, and sweet potatoes. Everyone also helped with the communal fields, which fed the warriors, the poor, and guests.

Other tribes who spoke varieties of Muskogean are the Alabama, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole.

The Cherokee are related to the Iroquois. They lived in the mountains and valleys of the southern Appalachian chain, occupying a large area of land. They had villages in parts of North Carolina and western Virginia, eastern Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Alabama. Their name for themselves in the Iroquoian language means "real people." The name "Cherokee" probably came from their neighbors, the Creeks. *Tsiloki* in its original form means "people of the different speech."

Besides being good farmers, the Cherokee were excellent hunters who used disguises to get close to their prey. Wearing an entire deerskin, antlers and all, and sounding an authentic deer call, they would entice the shiest deer. They brought down big game with bow and arrow. Smaller animals such as raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, and turkeys fell prey to blowguns. With these hollowed-out cane reeds, hunters could blow small wood-and-feather darts with deadly accuracy as far as 60 feet.

Dwellings

The homes of many Southeast Woodlands tribes were similar in construction. Most families had two houses—a large summer home and a smaller winter home.

The summer house was rectangular in shape. It had a peaked roof of bark or thatch, a pole framework, and cane and clay walls. The house was open to the breezes during the hot summer months. The winter home doubled as a sweat-house and was built over a pit with a cone-shaped roof of poles and earth.

The Seminole lived in a warm, wet climate of rivers and swamplands in Florida in raised houses called *chickees*. The homes were up on stilts to keep them above water.

The Natchez house was made like a giant overturned basket with no windows. Posts were sunk into the ground, then canes and reeds were woven within them. Arched saplings formed the roof, thatched with reed, canes, or grass. Then the whole house was plastered with mud and sometimes whitewashed.



**One type of dwelling used
by the Seminole in Florida**

Some tribes
formed loose
confederations
for protection
and united in
war. Towns and
villages kept
their own control
over other
matters, however.

Village and Family Life

War was a fact of life, and villages typically were surrounded by log fortifications. There was an open square or plaza in the center, with open-sided shelters where spectators could sit during ceremonies. The town's meeting house or council house was at one end of the square.

The most influential person in the village was the civil chief, who headed the council and was responsible for handling village matters. A war chief led the warriors in battle, supervised dances and games, and policed the town.

Family life centered on the clan. Clans took the names of animals—the Bear clan, the Deer clan, the Eagle clan, etc. Because the family line passed through the mother, children were members of their mother's clan, and their mother's brother acted as their "father." Their real father had responsibilities to his sisters' families, and was little more than a visitor in his wife's home.

Religion and Ritual

The Upper World, the Lower World, and This World made up the universe of the Southeastern Indians. The Upper World had order and stability and was clean and pure. In the Lower World were pollution and madness, but also fertility and invention. This World, where people, most animals, and all plants lived, was thought to be somewhere between the other worlds.

In the religion of these people, humankind's purpose in life was to find balance between the perfect order of the Upper World and the chaos of the Lower World. To keep balance, the Indians offered to the spirits gifts of tobacco, copper, beads, and other objects in many different ceremonies. The greatest deity, the sun, was represented on Earth by a sacred fire that burned throughout the year.

Southeastern Indians believed that good countered evil. They used herbs and plants to treat disease. The shaman sought the causes of disease and worked to dispel them. Priests cured illness, predicted success in war, and were in charge of the sacred village temple.

Priests also took charge of ceremonies. The important Green Corn Ceremony was held toward the end of the summer's corn harvest; it marked the start of a new year almost like a New Year's Eve celebration. Feuds were mended, communal buildings repaired, hearth fires extinguished, and houses cleaned; old cooking pottery was broken and thrown away. Villagers fasted. Prisoners were set free. The high priest lit the ceremonial new sacred fire. Then everyone danced, sang, and drank for days until a purifying bath in a nearby stream brought the celebration to an end.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

Southeastern Indians—men and women—favored tattoos. Their daily dress was much like that of other tribes. In the warm summer weather, men dressed in buckskin, fiber, or cloth breechclouts, and women wore skirts of buckskin or fiber. In winter, the men put on buckskin shirts and leggings, while the women donned buckskin capes. Moccasins kept their feet warm. Bear, beaver, or other skin robes kept the chill off during very cold weather.

For special occasions, men wore feathered crowns. Often they shaved their heads or plucked their hair in patterns, although they always left a scalp lock as a challenge to the enemy to try to take. Women wore their hair long. Everyone wore jewelry and ornaments of feathers, bones, shells, and beads.

Women sometimes wove a highly prized cloth from nettle, silk grass, and mulberry bark. They made *cradleboards* (baby carriers) from swamp cane. They wove mats and fashioned colorful split-cane and wicker baskets. Pottery was common, but not ornate.



Men wore feathered crowns on special occasions.



A belt of feathers worn as a skirt



Tattoos show that this Florida man was an accomplished warrior. (Courtesy American Museum of Natural History)



Cherokee pottery

The Cherokee were known for their Booger masks (from the word *bogeyman*), which were carved from wood and gourds to ward off evil spirits. Cypress logs, hollowed out, made canoes for navigating the many streams and rivers of the region.

The Cherokee used Booger masks to chase away evil and diseases.



Cherokee pipes like this one could take months to make.



Warfare

Prestige, personal glory, obtaining slaves, getting revenge, righting wrongs—and sometimes, just the thrill of the battle—were reasons for war for Southeastern Indians. Once war was decided on, preparations were turned over to the Great Warrior, the chief of war. With the veterans of earlier conflicts to help him, he would rally the young volunteers for combat (no one was ordered to fight). Speeches, war songs sung by the women, fasting, and purifying drinks all helped prepare the warriors.

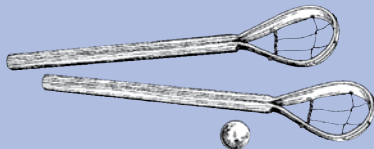
Those in the war party would paint their bodies red and black, then arm themselves with weapons such as pikes, lances, darts, slings, clubs, and bows and arrows. Stealthily creeping up on the enemy, they would surround the foe, cutting off all possibility of retreat. Then, howling and screeching, the warriors would launch a terrifying rain of arrows, clubs, and lances.

No mercy was given. Entire villages might be wiped out; scalps were taken, and sometimes a head or two was carried off as a war trophy.

The fate of captives was uncertain. They might be adopted and treated as kinsfolk or kept as slaves. A great and feared enemy warrior, however, could expect to be put to death.

Lacrosse: War's "Little Brother"

No Indian game aroused more enthusiasm than *istaboli*, which we know today as lacrosse and play in a very modified way. In its bloody original version, the game, sometimes called *Indian stick-ball*, was nicknamed "the little brother of war."



Major lacrosse games drew players and spectators from neighboring villages for miles around. Sometimes as many as a thousand spectators would show up for the action. Formal invitations went out to the opposition.

The playing field was carefully laid out. Spectators brought furs, skins, and trinkets to bet on the game's outcome. Pregame ceremonies reached a climax the night before the match, when the 75 or so members of each team painted their bodies, drank sacred medicine, danced, and sang.

The purpose of the game was to toss a leather ball between goalposts, using 3-foot-long rackets or sticks that had curved and webbed ends. Each player used two rackets to catch and throw the ball. Players could not touch the ball with their hands or use the sticks to fight, but almost any other activity was fair. Tripping, hitting, tackling, stomping, and piling on one another were part of the game. Broken bones, severe injuries, and even deaths resulting from the frenzy were not uncommon.

Medicine men would act as coaches for the game. But they used incantations, rather than game strategy, to get their team to score the 100 points needed to win.

The Five Civilized Tribes and the Trail of Tears

Nonnatives named the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole Indians the “Five Civilized Tribes.” These tribes adopted many European customs—which, to non-Indians, seemed “civilized.”

The tribes went through difficult times after they first encountered European explorers in the 1500s. By the early 1700s, their populations had dropped about 75 percent. But despite many setbacks, including wars, starvation, and disease, they rebuilt their lives so that by the early 1800s they lived much like the Southern whites. They owned plantations and slaves and had learned new farming methods and the white people’s ways of doing business. They established a republican form of government. Sequoyah, a Cherokee, produced a written version of the Cherokee language—the first written Indian language—so that his people could have a written constitution.

However, they were still not well-treated by whites. A forced removal—the Trail of Tears—took place in 1838. Fifteen thousand Cherokees were forced from their lands so that whites could get the gold discovered on Cherokee property. President Andrew Jackson ordered the Indians moved nearly 1,000 miles to Indian Territory, in what is now the state of Oklahoma.



They were not allowed to take clothing, food stores, or personal belongings. As many as 4,000 Cherokees died during the terrible forced marches over a route they came to call *nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi*: “the trail on which they cried.” More died of epidemics and starvation when they reached the Indian Territory. Others of the “Five Civilized Tribes” also lost their homelands during this shameful period in American history.

Indian Territory was supposed to be a permanent home for the different tribes. But over the next few decades, settlers poured onto Indian land in Oklahoma and it became theirs. By the turn of the 20th century, the Indians had lost most of the territory that was first promised to them.

In recent years, the federal government has tried to make up for some of the losses these tribes suffered. Many Indians themselves have sought cultural renewal and tribal unity as the best path to a better life.

The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole nations have headquarters and tribal heritage centers in Oklahoma today. Some groups avoided forced removal during the 1830s, and their descendants still live in the Southeast. These include the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina, the Mississippi Band of Choctaws, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in Alabama, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.



The Trail of Tears

Great Plains

When most Americans imagine how Indians look, dress, and act, they think of the Great Plains Indians. Why is this group the most famous of all?

The Great Plains stretch westward from the Mississippi Valley to the Rocky Mountains, and south from present-day Canada to central Texas. The Plains Indians had not lived in the area long before their first contacts with the Spanish in the 1500s. Ancient Indians had once lived there but had moved away before the 13th century. When tribes started moving back, the first were probably farmers. Later groups became nomadic, with a lifestyle centered on buffalo hunting.

When settlers started moving westward in the 19th century, the Plains Indians fought them. Those final, desperate Indian wars are portrayed over and over in books, movies, and television shows.

Perhaps this explains why the Plains Indian image is everywhere. The Indian-head nickel, the buffalo hunter, Sitting Bull in his feather headdress, Conestoga wagons, mustang ponies—all evoke the era of America's westward expansion.



Arapaho dog dancer (*Courtesy American Museum of Natural History*)



On the Great Plains, various Indian tribes developed a hunting lifestyle based on the horse and the buffalo.

Some of the Plains tribes encountered by European explorers included the following.

Village tribes: Mandan, Hidatsa, Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Omaha, Ponca, Osage, Kansa, Wichita, Caddo, Arikara, Pawnee

Hunting tribes: Dakota (Santee and Yankton Sioux), Lakota, (Teton Sioux), Assiniboiné, Crow, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sarsi, Plains Apache, Plains Cree, Comanche, Kiowa

The People

The Great Plains is a huge area. Much of it is treeless grassland that stretches like a vast ocean for thousands of miles. In some the prairies are interrupted by highlands, such as the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas, the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming, and the badlands of South Dakota.

Into this enormous area came the different Plains tribes. Some were looking for fertile farmland in the river valleys. Others had been pushed from their homelands by the newcomers from Europe and were seeking places to live. Teeming herds of buffalo and other wild game lured those who lived by hunting.



Buffalo-hide shield with snapping turtle design, probably Mandan

The Horse People

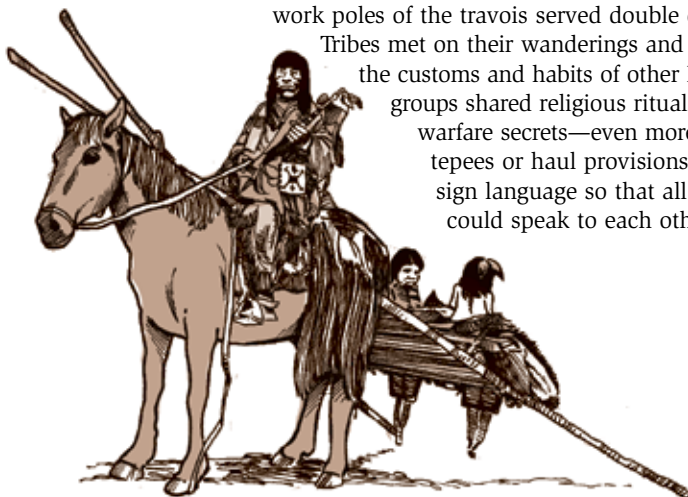
Plains Indians developed ingenious ways to hunt and catch buffalo. One way was to drive whole herds over cliffs. Or they would trap the beasts by setting fire to the grass around a herd, leaving only one escape route where hunters waited with bows and arrows and lances. They were highly successful buffalo hunters—and at first they did it all on foot.

Spaniards brought horses to the New World in the 1500s. (Prehistoric horses, native to North America, had died out thousands of years earlier.) By the early 1700s, when the Plains tribes got the horse, a new way of life opened to them: a nomadic life of hunting buffalo. On horseback, they could travel great distances searching for game, carrying their possessions with them. Although it was no longer necessary, not all Indians gave up farming. But even the farmers of the village tribes took to the range, returning home at planting and harvest time and during the winter.

Before they had horses, Plains Indians carried their possessions on their backs, or on the backs of their dogs. They used a sledlike device called a *travois*. Two poles were tied together at one end, which rested on the dog's shoulders. Hide stretched between the trailing poles provided a pallet for carrying things. Sometimes women pulled travois.

Horses could pull giant travois big enough to carry many possessions, and people, if necessary. The long wooden framework poles of the travois served double duty as tepee poles.

Tribes met on their wanderings and gradually, they adopted the customs and habits of other Indian bands. The groups shared religious rituals, hunting methods, warfare secrets—even more efficient ways to build tepees or haul provisions. They devised a hand sign language so that all the different groups could speak to each other.



A Blackfoot woman, with her children riding a travois

Lifeways

Through most of the year, the nomadic tribes foraged and hunted in small bands. In cold weather they lived off the fruits of the summer hunt, occasionally tracking elk, deer, or other game through the snow.

Winter could bring hunger, but it also could be a fun time. Buffalo ribs lashed together made excellent sleds. Games and contests involved both children and adults. Dancing and especially singing accompanied most activities. The women sang high, trilling songs that inspired courage and excitement.

Seminomadic bands would return from the summer hunt to their stockaded villages in time for the fall harvest. Then they settled into their lodges to begin preparations for spring, when crops would be planted again.

Summer was a time for games, trading, courtship, tribal reunions, and ceremonies. The most important ceremony was the Sun Dance, as the Sioux called it. The Cheyenne called it the New Life Lodge, and the Ponca the Mystery Dance.

The Sioux Sun Dance took 12 days. During the first four days, while the various bands assembled, people renewed family ties, swapped stories, and began courtships; almost everyone was in a mood of high excitement. During the next four days, assistants to the shamans, or medicine men, ritually prepared themselves for the following four days of sacred ceremonies. On the final day of the Sun Dance, some of the men volunteered to have bits of flesh cut from their bodies. Or they agreed to be skewered and hung from a pole until their skin ripped and freed them. Their pain was a sacrifice to honor and thank the Great Spirit.

The great “surround,” an annual tribal hunt, was another important ritual. This solemn affair involved several hundred men and their families. Prayers and many rituals preceded the hunt. Discipline was strictly enforced; every hunter had assigned tasks, and members of a military society made sure no one tried to hunt by himself. The discipline imposed during the group hunt was rare; Plains Indians prized their independence and resisted strict authority.

When a herd of buffalo was located, the hunters stripped themselves and their horses of any clothing or gear that might restrict movement or make noise. The hunters rode their ponies into the midst of the huge herd. Dodging the buffaloes’ powerful horns, they forced the beasts into a circle where they killed them with bows and arrows or lances.

Different tribes had different rituals, but the purpose of the Sun Dance was the same: to give thanks for blessings bestowed and to ask that the coming year also be blessed. Through ceremony, the people sought to renew nature, keep the buffalo plentiful, bring victory in battle, make marriages successful, heal the sick, and settle quarrels.

The Gift of the Buffalo

The buffalo was like a general store on hooves. Plains Indians made use of nearly every inch of these giant prairie beasts.

Buffalo meat was the staple food of the Plains tribes. They ate the liver and kidneys raw. Sweet marrow and roasted intestines were favorites, but the greatest delicacies were the tongue and flesh from the hump. Following a successful



hunt, after everyone had eaten their fill of roasted and raw flesh, the rest of the meat was dried for jerky. Or it might be mixed with berries and fat to make *pemmican*, a trail food.

Skins had many uses. The soft skin of a calf swaddled a newborn baby. Hides were sewn together to make tepee covers and hung inside for curtains. A single hide could make a round, lightweight bullboat. Parts of hides became drums and rattles and battle shields. Specially prepared hides were used to fashion clothing, and long-haired winter skins made excellent cold-weather blankets and robes. Tails were flywhisks. Rawhide made strings and lassos from which the warriors fashioned tools and weapons.

Buffalo hair was woven into strong rope or stuffed loose into cradleboards, gloves, moccasins, saddle pads, and pillows. Rolled tightly, it made an excellent ball for games.

Bones became saddletrees and tools of various kinds. Ribs tied together with rawhide made sleds. The skull was used in certain religious ceremonies, as were rattles made from the animal's hooves. The buffalo paunch (stomach) became a cooking pot. It was suspended from four sticks and filled with water, wild turnips and onions, and meat; then hot rocks were dropped in to cook the stew.

Indians suitably honored the buffalo with special ceremonies. Tribal leaders often took names associated with the buffalo to give them added status.

The conclusion of a successful hunt was a joyous occasion. Everyone—even the dogs—ate their fill. Then the exhausted revelers would rest for a few hours before beginning a night of celebration and dance.

In general, the Plains Indians lived without need of a strong central government. Men and women were free to go their own way. There were no hereditary or elected governors, and rarely did a chief have the power to give orders to others. The title “chief” was usually awarded to an individual honored for bravery, wisdom, and powers of persuasion.

Some tribes traced family lineages through the paternal (male) line. The Omaha, for example, were divided into 10 paternal clans. Others traced descent from a common mother. Some tribes had no clans. But almost every tribe had military societies that played important roles in tribal life. Society members might be responsible for guarding camps during wartime, keeping discipline during hunts, or organizing traditional feasts, dances, and games.

Romance and courtship were much the same as in any other society. Boys and girls flirted, but a girl’s virtue was closely guarded. The parents arranged most marriages, although sometimes couples eloped.

Many warriors died each year during buffalo hunts and wars. Because women outnumbered men, many tribes allowed *polygamy* (the practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time). A man could have several wives to bear children and to help with the workload of the camp.

Babies were eagerly awaited, and great joy and celebration greeted newborns. Children enjoyed a free and secure life. A Sioux child had a second “mother” who took over much of his or her care so that the birth mother would not spoil the child.

Men did not “buy” their wives, as is widely believed. A suitor gave the girl’s family a gift of horses. The gift was not to buy her—women were not property that could be bought—but to show his love for her and to prove that he could be a good provider.

Among the most unusual societies were the Hidatsa Dogs, known as the “Contraries.” They did everything the opposite of what they were asked or expected to do. They rolled in the dust to “wash” and jumped in water to “dry off.” They said yes when they meant no, and attacked when they were told to flee in battle. Does the tribe you are studying have an unusual society like the Contraries?

Dwellings

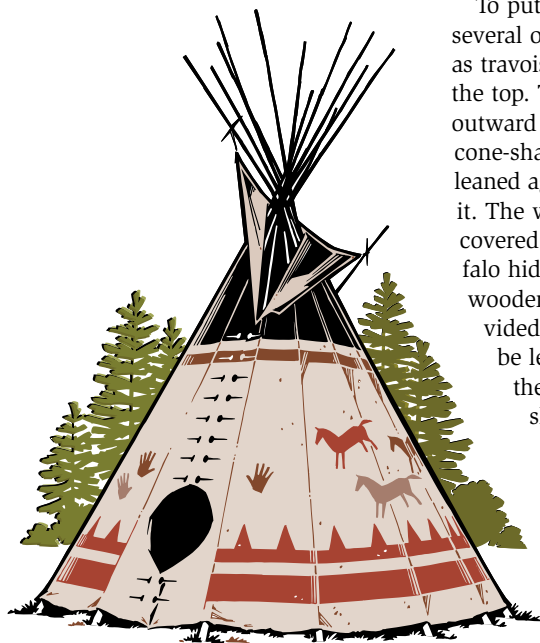
While the Plains tribes had different types of dwellings, the tepee is the one most associated with this group. To nomadic tribes such as the Blackfoot or Cheyenne, it was the only home they knew.

The tepee made an ideal dwelling for nomads. A simple structure, it could be put up and taken down quickly and was lightweight and easily transported for a life of following the great herds of buffalo.

The tepee was more than a shelter or home: It was a sacred place. The floor symbolized the earth, and the walls the sky. The tepee's base was a circle, a sacred shape that symbolized how all of life is interconnected. Sacred objects lined the walls, along with family possessions and the necessities of daily life. The inner walls were painted with brightly colored figures and shapes that referred to family histories, spirit beings, ancestors, and battle honors. A small altar was also a part of every tepee.

To put up a tepee at a new campsite, several of the long poles that also served as travois shafts were lashed together at the top. The poles, stood on end, slanted outward from the top lashing to form a cone-shaped structure. Other poles were leaned against the framework to strengthen it. The woman who owned the tepee covered the pole framework with buffalo hides sewn together and secured by wooden pins. An opening at the top provided a smoke hole, and the flaps could be left open or closed, depending on the weather. During the winter, more skins were hung on the inside walls to insulate from the cold.

Nearly every Plains tribe used tepees when it was on the move. Some tribes, like the Mandan and the Hidatsa, continued to farm and had permanent homes as well.



Plains buffalo-hide tepee



A Mandan earthlodge could hold 40 to 60 people.

Their huge lodges were made of earth and grass, and housed from 40 to 60 people. Above the firepit in the center was a smoke hole in the roof. The sacred place was in the rear of the lodge. Food platforms, storage pits, sleeping areas, and a stall or two for horses lined the walls of the structure.

Religion and Ritual

Everything in life had supernatural aspects and religious meaning for the Plains Indians. Sky, sun, and wind were all part of the Great Spirit and were objects of reverence. The Indians drew power from nature, from animals or other living things.

Each individual practiced religion in a unique way. Visions were an important part of the religious experience. A vision was considered a direct encounter with the Great Mystery Power. Both men and women went on vision quests when they felt the need for help from the spirit powers. A vision quest was a boy's initiation into manhood. A man went on vision quests to seek help before a hunt or raid, or at other important times in his life.

The sacred pipe was an important element in Plains Indian rituals. Most tribesmen owned their own pipes. Some pipes were owned by a tribe as a whole and were used in many ceremonies. Although often called peace pipes, they were more than a symbol of peace and hospitality. Pipes were ceremoniously smoked when preparing for battle, when trading goods and hostages, before rituals and dances, and as part of some medical treatments.

Beautifully crafted, the pipestem was of ash or sumac wood and the bowl fashioned from red pipestone found in a quarry in present-day Minnesota. For many generations, all Indians could mine pipestone without fear of harm from their enemies, for the quarry was neutral territory.

Some especially talented pipemakers carved pipes in the form of birds or animals. Feathers, quills or beads, fur, and horsehair decorated sacred pipes. Tobacco and other plants were smoked.

Many of the Plains Indians' possessions had sacred meaning. So did some dances and songs. If you are studying a Plains tribe, learn which of their possessions, songs, dances, and games are sacred. Take care not to misuse anything of religious significance.

The Sacred Pipe

"All the meanings of moral duty, ethics, religious, and spiritual conceptions were symbolized in the pipe," wrote Chief Standing Bear in the book *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933). The pipe "signified brotherhood, peace, and the perfection of Wakan Tanka (the Great Spirit), and to the Lakota the pipe stood for that which the Bible, church, state, and flag, all combined, represented to the mind of the white man."

Plains Indian culture has changed drastically since the era of the free-ranging buffalo herds, but pipe carving is by no means a lost art. Carvers of Indian ancestry continue to quarry the pipestone, and pipes today are appreciated as artworks as well as for their ritual value and ceremonial use. Modern carvers carry on an age-old tradition, ever-changing but firmly rooted in the past.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts



**Arapaho
moccasins**

Plains Indian clothing was often artfully and elaborately decorated. Buffalo, elk, deer, and occasionally other animal skins were used to make clothes.

A loincloth or breechcloth and moccasins were summer dress for men. Tanned-hide leggings might be worn, and in the colder regions, shirts were also a part of everyday dress.



Feathered headdress, worn for special occasions only

Women wore moccasins and one-piece dresses of softened buffalo hide. Sometimes they wore kneelength leggings. Deerskin skirts and capes were common in Osage and Pawnee villages and Cheyenne encampments. Elk teeth, natural paints, porcupine quills, beads, and shells decorated clothes. During the winter, fur robes, caps, and headbands added warmth.

Ceremonial clothing differed from tribe to tribe, but such items were luxuriously decorated with ermine fur, feathers, and other embellishments. (If you have chosen a requirement that involves decorating an object or item of

clothing with feathers, be sure not to use feathers from an endangered species.)

Only a few men—those who had earned the privilege in warfare—wore an eagle-feather headdress, or warbonnet. The longest warbonnets were worn by war chiefs, and the number and kind of feathers in the bonnet represented the warrior's exploits. Feather bonnets and decorative caps were used for ceremonies and social affairs.

The life of the Plains Indians was often harsh. Yet they softened it with finely crafted tools and highly decorated clothing and other articles.

Among the tribes of the grasslands, painting, beadwork, and porcupine-quill embroidery were prized skills. Women took pride in the tepees they sewed and the handwork they made. A woman was honored for her artistry.

The Plains Indians decorated with natural paints—yellow from bullberries, black from burnt wood, green from plants, white from certain clays. They painted containers, buffalo robes, tepee skins, their horses, and themselves.

The insides of lodges or tepees—especially the dwelling of a tribal chief—were painted with colorful murals. Their designs came from the visions of the owner. The Crow Indians outfitted their horses with saddles, bridles, collars, and blankets that were richly decorated and embellished with beadwork and embroidery.



Sioux child's coat, made of leather with beaded floral motifs

Women spent their “leisure” time helping to sew together buffalo skins for tepees; braiding bags, scarves, and belts; quilling or beading items; and making many of the tools needed for everyday life on the Plains. Women sewed with sinew. Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Dakota women decorated pouches, clothes, moccasins, and other objects with porcupine quills dyed yellow, black, red, green, and blue.



A Crow horse-bridle ornament, made from circles of yarn sewn on buckskin, was worn fastened to the front of a decorated bridle.

Warfare

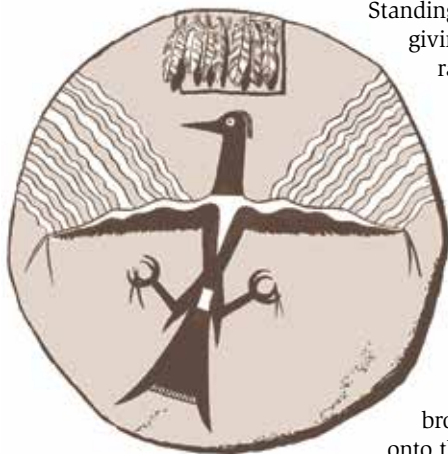
Small bands of warriors made hit-and-run raids on other tribes. Revenge, capturing horses, and most of all, counting *coups*, or personal honors, and earning glory in battle were reasons for warfare.

In the face of hopeless odds, a war party was expected to pull out quickly to avoid fatalities; but once in the battle, warriors were expected to fight to victory or death.

Standing in the midst of a raging battle and not giving an inch to the enemy, rescuing a comrade, or counting coups were ways to earn battle honors. (Touching an armed enemy with a coup stick was considered much braver than killing him.)

Relations between the Plains tribes and the early settlers were not unfriendly, at first. But as the number of wagon trains grew, and thousands of settlers began pouring across Indian land, warfare between the two groups became unavoidable.

The gold rushes of the 1850s and '60s brought thousands more settlers and soldiers onto the Plains. Forts and towns sprang up. The newcomers wanted more and more of what the



A Sioux shield of painted rawhide

Indians controlled: land for farms, unending miles of grasslands for grazing cattle and sheep, and other natural resources. The angry Indians retaliated by raiding settlements, and taking livestock for food, horses for mounts, captives for slaves, and scalps for revenge.

Indian warfare became increasingly sophisticated. War parties grew larger, and battles were bigger and more frequent. While the Indians fought bravely, in the end they could not match the superior firepower and strength of the United States Army.

The near-extinction of the buffalo was a heavy blow to the Plains tribes. In 1800, there were some 60 million buffalo on the Plains. During the 1860s, whites slaughtered huge herds for sport while riding across the prairies on the newly completed rail lines. The 1870s brought professional buffalo hunters seeking the \$3 bounty on each hide. An efficient group of hunters could shoot and skin 50 buffalo a day. By the turn of the 20th century, fewer than 1,000 buffalo survived.

Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee

Of all the confrontations between U.S. troops and Indians, the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the massacre at Wounded Knee are the most famous. Sitting Bull, a great warrior of the Plains Indians, will forever be connected to both events.

In June 1876 on the banks of the Little Bighorn River, the U.S. Army's cavalry suffered its most crushing defeat of the Indian wars. The battle is also known as Custer's Last Stand. History has not treated Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer kindly. Some historians say his ambition and vanity caused the death of some 250 troopers.

Custer's orders were to scout out a large encampment of Indians but not to engage them in battle until reinforcements came. Scouts estimated that as many as 3,000 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors were at the camp.

Custer did not wait for reinforcements. Dividing his regiment of 600 men into several smaller groups, he ordered an attack. In the battles that followed, Custer and at least 250 soldiers were killed. It was the Indians' greatest and last victory.



Lt. Col. George A. Custer

**Sitting Bull**

Sitting Bull was a medicine man, or spiritual leader, of the Hunkpapa band of the Teton Sioux. Historians believe Sitting Bull was not at the battle, but he had a vision that white soldiers would fall “like grasshoppers” into the Indian camp. His vision was interpreted as a sign of victory; the warriors went into battle confident that they would win.

After Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull led his people into Canada but surrendered to U.S. troops in 1881. He and his followers were confined to a reservation in the Dakotas. It was a time of despair and near starvation.

The Ghost Dance religion gave them hope. It promised that the world would soon end and then come back as the old world the Indians had once known. All Indians, including the dead, would inherit the new Earth. Buffalo would again cover the plain, and whites would disappear. The religion quickly became popular. Indians performed the Ghost Dance, a simple ceremony of dancing and chanting, to prepare for the coming age.

Reservation officials banned the dance, believing it encouraged rebellion. The Indians held the forbidden ceremonies in secret and invited Sitting Bull to join them. In 1890, Sitting Bull was arrested on a charge of rebellion. When he resisted the soldiers, a fight broke out, and 14 people, including Sitting Bull, lay dead or dying.

His followers fled the reservation but were quickly caught by soldiers. The Indians surrendered at a place called Wounded Knee, in South Dakota. When someone’s gun accidentally went off, the soldiers opened fire on the Indian camp. As many as 300 unarmed men, women, and children were massacred.

Wounded Knee symbolized the way American Indians historically were treated by whites. The site lies on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Today, about half of all Sioux live on reservations in the northern plains. Other Sioux live in urban areas throughout the United States.

Why the Lakota Wear the Eagle Plume

A long time ago when the world was freshly made, Unktehi the water monster caused a great flood. The waters rose over the new earth until everything was flooded except for one hill. The people climbed the hill, trying to save themselves, but then the water swept over that hill, too.

The waves smashed rocks down upon the people. They were killed, and all their blood jelled into one big pool. The blood turned to pipestone and created the sacred red pipestone quarry, the grave of those ancient ones. That is why the pipe, made of the red rock, is sacred. Its red bowl is the blood of the ancestors, its stem is the backbone of those people long dead, the smoke rising from the pipe is their breath. The pipe comes alive when it is used in a ceremony; power flows from it.

When all the people were killed many generations ago, only one young woman survived. As the water swept over the hill where the people sought refuge, a big spotted eagle, Wanblee Galeshka, flew down and let the young woman grab hold of his feet. With her hanging on, he flew to the top of the highest stone pinnacle in the Black Hills. That smooth, steep, needlelike rock was the eagle's home, and it was the only spot not flooded. Maybe that rock was not in the Black Hills; maybe it was Devil's Tower, as white men call it, in Wyoming. Both places are sacred.

Wanblee made the young woman his wife. She bore him twins, a boy and a girl. The children were born on the high stone pinnacle.

When the floodwaters finally subsided, Wanblee helped the children and their mother down from his rock and put them on the earth. He told them: "Be a nation; become a great Nation, the Lakota Oyate"—the eagle nation.

So the Lakota are descended from the eagle. The eagle is the wisest of birds. He is the Great Spirit's messenger; he is a great warrior. That is why the Lakota wear the eagle plume.

—A Brule Sioux story, adapted from *"How the Sioux Came to Be,"* as told by Lame Deer, a Sioux medicine man, to Richard Erdoes (American Indian Myths and Legends, Pantheon, 1984)

Southwest

Soaring mountains and deep canyons, the Painted Desert, the Grand Canyon, pine and piñon forests, mesas, majestic rivers, sagebrush, cactus, droughts followed by floods, scorching days, freezing nights: This is the Southwest. It is a land of contrasts, a land of enchantment, a homeland of both the village-dwelling Hopi farmers and the mobile Apache nomads.

The Pueblo Peoples

The Pueblo peoples are southwestern American Indians who live in a style of stone or adobe house called a pueblo. *Pueblo* means “village” in Spanish. The term is used not only to describe the house but also as a general name for the people who live in such houses and for their villages. The pueblos of New Mexico are the oldest continuously lived-in communities in the United States.

The Southwest takes in the present-day states of New Mexico and Arizona and parts of western Texas and southern Colorado. Some major tribes of the Southwest are:

Pueblo peoples: Hopi, Zuñi, Taos, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, Acoma, Laguna

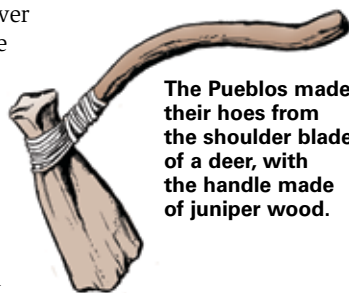
Nomadic tribes: Navajo (Diné, also spelled Dineh or Dene), Southern Plains Apache (Llanero, Mescalero, Jicarilla, Lipan), Western Plains Apache (Tonto, White Mountain, San Carlos, Cibecue)

Farmers of the desert: O’odham (“Pima”), Tohono O’odham (“Papago”), Yavapai, Havasupai, Yaqui

Some tribes, like the Hopi and the Zuñi, live on the Colorado Plateau, an area of high hills, deep valleys, and flat mesas. The homeland of other Pueblo tribes, like the Santo Domingo and San Felipe, is along the Rio Grande, a great river that flows through much of the Southwest into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Pueblo tribes have long been farmers, cultivating corn of various colors (have you ever eaten blue corn?), squash, beans, sunflowers, and cotton. Hundreds of years ago they domesticated the wild turkey and dog, and occasionally hunted deer, antelope, and rabbits. They traded their goods and extra food and sometimes traveled many miles to trade with other pueblos.

In the spring, the men were responsible for hoeing and tilling the soil and planting the crops, although everyone helped in the fields. In some areas, they built miles of irrigation ditches leading from the banks of rivers to their fields to water their crops. During a sacred rain dance ceremony, they prayed for good rains to bring a bountiful harvest. At harvest time, the corn was picked, husked, and sorted. Most of it was ground into meal; the rest was eaten fresh or stored for future use.



The Pueblos made their hoes from the shoulder blade of a deer, with the handle made of juniper wood.

Dwellings

Pueblos clustered at the bottoms of wide canyons, or atop towering buttes and mesas covered with piñon pine and juniper trees. Others rose from the flat desert terrain and forbidding cliffs.

The pueblo-style home is unique among Indian dwellings. A pueblo was as high as five stories, and many families lived in a building, much like modern-day apartments. The flat roof of one level was the floor and front courtyard of another level. Ladders connected the different levels. Early pueblos had no doors or windows, making them easier to defend from attack. Families entered their apartments through holes in the roofs.



Southwestern adobe pueblo

Pueblos were made of different types of materials. The Hopi and the Zuñi used stones that were mortared together and surfaced with plaster. Rio Grande Indians constructed their homes from adobe bricks of sun-dried earth mixed with straw. They stretched log beams across the roofs and covered them with poles, brush, and plaster. Sometimes the beams projected beyond the walls and were used as pegs to hang food for drying. The women owned the apartments and all of the furnishings.

Pueblos faced the village streets and plazas. In the central plaza of the village, the people dug *kivas*, underground chambers where men conducted sacred rituals. Men also used the kivas as clubhouses, and women usually were not allowed to enter.

Religion and Family Life

The stone-walled kivas were the spiritual and physical center of the village. Sunk deep in the ground, kivas symbolize the World Below, from which come the spirits said to inhabit all things. All of the Pueblo kiva groups had similar religions, but the kiva usually is associated with Hopi religion and ritual.

Religious ceremonies were conducted year-round, with offerings of cornmeal and prayer sticks placed on altars in secret rites to bring rain and good crops. *Kachinas*, or guardian spirits, were recreated in wooden masks and dolls. Masked kachina dancers performed at many festivals and rituals. In the summer, the Hopi held a 16-day festival called the Niman Kachina, featuring many rain dances and celebrating the return of the spirits to the World Below.



Hopi kachina doll

A kachina doll is not a child's toy but a likeness of a supernatural being meant to help Hopi and Zuñi children learn the different kachinas.

The most spectacular of rites, the Snake Ceremonial of late August, was performed with live snakes wrapped around the dancers' arms and legs, and held in their mouths. Snakes, with their zigzag movements, symbolized lightning and thunderstorms.

The senior chief of the village presided over the council of chiefs, which led the affairs of the community. The men of the kivas and the many religious and healing societies dominated the ceremonial life of the village. Women were the property holders, owning not only the houses but also the crops and the seeds that would be planted to grow new crops. The clan was the basic unit of Pueblo society, and children belonged to their mother's clan. The clans also helped direct religious events and make village decisions.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

By 1540, Pueblo Indians had already perfected the skill of spinning yarn from cotton to weave into cloth. When Spanish explorers introduced the sheep to their culture, they also mastered the art of spinning and weaving wool.

Among the Hopi, it was the responsibility of each man to supply his family's clothing. Men wore short kilts of cotton. Often they used rabbit fur for headbands to hold down their bangs and to tie their long hair in a knot at the back of the neck. Women wore a blanket dress—a calf-length wrap of cotton cloth draped under one arm and fastened to the other shoulder. Both sexes wore leggings of deerskin.



Pueblo pottery jar

The Pueblo Indians are excellent artisans. Today, their skillfully crafted pottery, jewelry, weavings, baskets, and other art forms are eagerly sought by collectors and art lovers. Traditionally, basketmaking and pottery were women's tasks; weaving was men's work among the Hopi.



Hopi gourd rattle with painted design, wooden handle, and feather decorations

Warfare

The Pueblo peoples seldom waged war. When they did, it was to preserve peace, or to protect their villages from Navajo and Apache raiding parties, or later, from Spanish soldiers. In fact, the Hopi name comes from their word *hópi*, which means “peaceful.”

When war was unavoidable, Hopi men held three nights of rituals before setting out on surprise raids. Their biggest war was against the Spaniards. When the invading Spanish tried to eliminate all kachina worship, the Hopi rebelled. They joined the Rio Grande pueblos in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and destroyed the Christian missions built by the Spaniards. The Rio Grande pueblos were later recaptured, but not the Hopi. They remained free and kept their culture despite Spanish and U.S. domination. Today, about 7,000 Hopi live on tribal lands in Arizona.

The Nomads

The Apache and the Navajo were once a single people who spoke the singsong Athapaskan language. The name “Apache” comes from the Zuñi word *apachu*, which means “enemy.” The name “Navajo” comes from a Pueblo Indian word that refers to an area of land in the Southwest. In their own language, the Navajo are the *Diné*, meaning “the people,” and their homeland is the *Dinétkah*.

The Apache

The Apache lived a nomadic life, roaming widely over the Southwest. They hunted deer and rabbits and foraged for plant foods such as cactus and mesquite seeds. When food became scarce in their rugged, desert land, they raided neighboring tribes. The Chiricahua Apache raided into northern Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico from their strongholds in Arizona’s Dragoon Mountains.

Apache lifestyles were flexible, adopting from other Indian tribes they contacted. The Western Apaches took up farming from the Hopi. The Jicarilla Apaches of northern New Mexico became buffalo hunters like their Plains Indians neighbors.

The Apache fiddle, or “the wood that sings,” was crafted from a yucca stalk and played with a bow made of wood and sinew.

The Apache lived in small encampments. Home was the wickiup, a domed structure made of a pole frame-work covered with brush, grass, or reed mats. It could be erected quickly.

There was no central tribal government. Bands had headmen or informal leaders. A leader's authority came mainly from the strength of his personality and his success in warfare. Each band or local group was made up of several extended families.

Women, their female relatives, and children were at the center of the family structure. Apache women were excellent basketmakers who wove intricately designed baskets in many shapes and sizes. They made pottery and buckskin clothing.



Twenty to 30 poles, about a foot apart, and bundles of grass were used to build a wickiup.



This 2-foot-high Apache basket was used for storing food.

The Apache worshiped Ussen, the Giver of Life, and often sought the help of mountain spirits known as Gans, which were especially important in Apache ceremonies. The men painted their bodies and dressed in elaborate costumes of kilts, black masks, and tall wooden-slat headdresses for these ceremonies, which were presided over by shamans.

More than 25,000 Apache live in the Southwest today. The San Carlos, Tonto, and White Mountain Apache tribes are in eastern Arizona. The Chiricahua, the Mescalero, and the Lipan are in southern New Mexico; the Jicarilla, in north central New Mexico.

The Apache went to war against the U.S. Army in the 1860s, led by Cochise, a chief of the Chiricahua tribe. After the death of Cochise in 1874, another Apache leader, Geronimo, took up the fight. Geronimo (his original name was Goyathlay, meaning "One who yawns") led warriors on raids against the army and against settlers coming into the area. He was arrested, but escaped and went on fighting until he finally surrendered in 1887. Geronimo was still a prisoner of war when he died in 1909 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.



The Navajo are famous for their skill as weavers of fine woolen rugs like this one.

Navajo weaving is among the finest examples of native craft. Navajo artisans also excel in jewelry making.

The Navajo

The Navajo—like their kinsfolk, the Apache—lived a largely nomadic lifestyle. Eventually, the Navajo adopted a settled way of life. They became planters of corn, beans, and squash. With sheep and horses they got from the Spaniards, the Navajo became excellent sheep ranchers and herders. They spun and dyed the wool from their sheep and wove it into fine blankets and cloth with complex designs.

The Navajo developed an art form known as sand painting, used in ceremonies to banish evil and heal the sick. Art and religion are linked in the Navajo way. Art could draw one closer to ancestors, affect the weather, or cure the sick. In the Navajo religion, Changing Woman (the Earth Mother), the Hero Twins, and Coyote the trickster are important spirit-beings, or Holy People. There are evil ghosts, too, that cause sickness and accidents.

Hundreds of songs or chants tell stories from Navajo tradition. The Evil Way chant, for example, is a defense against witchcraft. The Blessing Way is sung for health and harmony in family life.

The Navajo Code Talkers

During World War II, the United States military urgently needed a secret code that the enemy could not crack. Americans were fighting the Japanese, who were skilled code-breakers and had a group of well-trained, English-speaking soldiers who could decipher the messages the American military sent.

The solution: Use a Native American language for sending secret messages. Choctaw Indians had been “code talkers” in World War I. That tradition continued in the 1940s, when the hundreds of Navajo code talkers who served with the U.S. Marines used their complex native language to create an unbreakable code. They used Navajo words to represent terms that did not exist in the Navajo language. A submarine, for example, was an “iron fish” (*besh-lo*). A fighter plane became a “hummingbird” (*dah-he-tih-hi*). And America was “our mother” (*Ne-he-mah*).

At Iwo Jima, six Navajo code talkers worked around the clock for the first two days of the battle. Those six sent and received more than 800 messages, all without an error. The Japanese were baffled; they never broke the Navajo code.

The code talkers’ skill and courage saved American lives and helped the United States win the war. Only recently, however, have the code talkers been publicly recognized and honored, because the Navajo language remained potentially valuable as a secret code long after World War II ended.

Other Native Americans have served as code talkers during World Wars I and II. It is estimated that at least 17 tribes have contributed code talkers, including the Cherokee, Cheyenne, Choctaw, Comanche, Osage, and Yankton Sioux in World War I; and the Chippewa, Choctaw, Comanche, Creek, Hopi, Kiowa, Menominee, Muscogee-Seminole, Navajo, Oneida, Pawnee, Sac and Fox, and Sioux (Lakota and Dakota dialects) in World War II.



A Navajo hogan made of logs, small branches, brush, cedar bark, and earth

Traditional Navajo society had no villages, only solitary family encampments. As the Navajo began raising sheep, families moved farther and farther apart to find enough grazing land. Home was a *hogan*, a cone-shaped house built of timbers and poles and covered with bark and earth. The hogan entrance faced east to the sunrise.

Navajo extended families were grouped into about 60 clans. Daughters inherited the hogans, sheep, and other property of their mothers. Ancestry was determined through the female line. Husbands fathered the children but were responsible to their sisters and their sisters' offspring. Many Navajo families today live in hogans and live by centuries-old traditions.

In 1863, U.S. Army forces under Col. Christopher "Kit" Carson campaigned against the Navajo, destroying their fields and crops and killing their livestock. The Army forced 8,500 Navajo men, women, and children to walk to a barren reservation in eastern New Mexico. Many died during the journey known in Navajo history as the Long Walk. The survivors were allowed to return to their homeland in 1868. There they began the process of rebuilding.

Today the Navajo are the largest American Indian tribe in the United States. The reservation lands in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah total more than 15 million acres.

Desert Farmers

The O'odham and Tohono O'odham of southern Arizona, though closely related, developed different ways of coping with the demands of desert life. The O'odham lived along rivers and built large, permanent villages where they tended plentiful crops of squash, corn, beans, and cotton. Water for the crops flowed from the Salt and Gila Rivers through a series of irrigation ditches.

The Tohono O'odham, living deep in the desert, depended on rain to water their crops. They spent the summers in their "field villages" in the desert, where heavy rains usually supplied enough water to grow beans and corn. In winter, the Tohono O'odham moved to their "well villages," near springs in the mountains, and hunted deer and peccary for food. In times of famine, Tohono O'odham families sometimes moved to O'odham villages and worked in the fields.

O'odham men were farmers, hunters, fishermen, and builders. They built the houses—small, round, flat-topped, pole-framed dwellings—and the *ramadas*, which were open-air structures that served as the community's clubhouses. Men wove cotton fibers into sheets of fabric on their horizontal looms. Women sewed the cotton sheeting and other materials into clothes.

O'odham women foraged for mesquite seeds and the fruit of the saguaro cactus to add variety to their diet. Wild foods were even more important to their kinsfolk, the Tohono O'odham, who depended on foraging for wild plants to round out their crops. They cooked and ate the fleshy heart of the mescal plant. The beanlike mesquite seed was a regular part of their diet, and the fruit of the saguaro cactus was a delicacy. This sweet, fleshy fruit was eaten fresh or dried; boiled into jam or syrup; or dried and ground into a powder that made a sweet drink when added to water.

Both tribes were known for the fine baskets they created. The Tohono O'odham are also renowned for the calendar stick they developed. With it, they could recount their history over many years and record important events in tribal life.



**An O'odham
carrying-basket**

In the 1980s the Papago officially changed their name from Papago, which means “Bean Eaters,” to Tohono O’odham, which means “Desert People” in their native language. The name change reflects the tribe’s desire to keep its identity and traditions. Similarly, the group formerly known as the Pima now prefer the name O’odham (People) or Akimel O’odham (River People).

Piman Villages

An O’odham tribal chief was elected to preside over the chiefs of the villages. Village chiefs reported to the tribal chief in council. They were responsible for communal farm projects and for defending against marauding Apache raiders. The Tohono O’odham also had village chiefs, but there was no chief for the tribe as a whole. In every Piman village, one man, the Keeper of the Smoke, was a ceremonial chief.

Villages of both tribes were organized into two clans. The clans opposed each other in games and gambling, the major entertainment in the villages.

Unlike many other tribes, the Pimans (as the O’odham and Tohono O’odham together are known) allowed two members of the same clan to marry. Children took clan membership from their fathers.

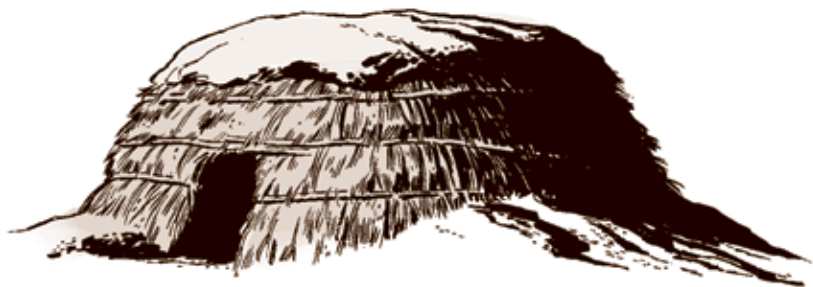
The Pimans believed that songs and singing had magical powers. They had corn-planting ceremonies, ceremonies for “singing up the corn,” and ceremonies at harvest time. Medicine men and singers conducted curing rituals. Rain-bringing ceremonies and baby-naming ceremonies were important religious rituals.

Pimans believed they gained power through visions. Animal spirits, they thought, gave men power for curing, warring, even gambling and running. On the rare occasions when they made war (usually in defense against the Apache), villagers danced for 16 nights to help the warriors’ purification rituals.

The Tohono O’odham made annual pilgrimages across the desert to a place near the Gulf of California where they believed the rain spirits lived. There, on the salt flats, they drank saguaro wine and prayed to the rain spirits for valuable water.

The O'odham still live along the Gila and Salt Rivers. The Tohono O'odham reservation stretches for more than 100 miles along the Mexico/Arizona border and extends far into southern Arizona. The reservation lies in the Sonoran Desert, where the Tohono O'odham have lived for thousands of years. It is a land of wide valleys, plains, and jutting mountain ranges that rise to nearly 8,000 feet. One of the peaks, Baboquivari Peak, 7,730 feet high, is the sacred mountain home of the Tohono O'odham creator god, I'itoi.

The reservation consists of four separate lands: Tohono O'odham, Gila Bend, San Xavier, and Florence Village. The combined reservation covers nearly three million acres, about the size of the state of Connecticut. Most contemporary Tohono O'odham live on their lands in permanent villages or they live in the cities surrounding the reservation.



Piman Indians built earth-and-pole houses over shallow pits.

Great Basin and Plateau

Great Basin Tribes

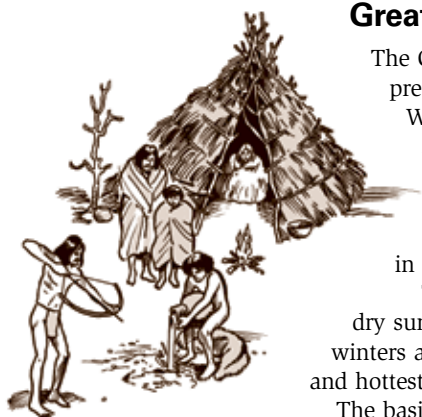
The Great Basin cultural area takes in nearly all of present-day Utah and Nevada; parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, and California; and small sections of Arizona, New Mexico, and Montana. Much of the Great Basin is desert.

The area is covered with grasses and sagebrush. At higher elevations, forests of pine grow in the mountains and near lakes and streams.

The climate in the Great Basin varies from hot dry summers at lower elevations to extremely cold winters at higher elevations. Death Valley, the lowest and hottest point in the Americas, is in the Great Basin.

The basin is surrounded on all sides by mountain ranges. The Rocky Mountains stand on the eastern border; the Sierra Nevadas on the west. The Colorado Plateau forms the southern border; the Columbia Plateau the northern.

Because the mountains block rain and snow blowing in from the ocean, rainfall in the Great Basin is low and the evaporation rate is high. A few streams flow through the valleys, fed by runoff from the mountains. In ancient times the basin had many large lakes, but most of them have evaporated. The Great Salt Lake, together with Utah Lake and Sevier Lake, are all that remain of an enormous, ancient body of water called Lake Bonneville.



A Paiute youth floods a burrow with water as a hunter stands ready to shoot the animal when it comes out.

For 10,000 years, tribes of resourceful desert dwellers have met the challenges of life in the Great Basin.

Great Basin tribes: Paiute (Northern and Southern), Bannock, Mono, Western Shoshone, Lehmi, Ute, Chemehuevi, Washo

Lifeways

Because of the limited vegetation in the Great Basin, Indians in this area were traditionally hunter-gatherers. The main food source for early native peoples was pine nuts. The people also varied their diet with acorns, wild beans, the bulb of the camas plant, mesquite, ricegrass, wheatgrass, and berries from various shrubs. A few farming groups raised corn, beans, and squash. The people fished for trout, salmon, and whitefish, and hunted game such as pronghorn, rabbits, rodents, snakes, lizards, and birds.



A Paiute encampment on a desert plateau in northern Arizona. The shelters were made of brush placed over a frame of willow poles.

Indians of the Great Basin traveled in small family groups seeking food. At special times during the year, the family groups would work together for antelope, rabbit, and grasshopper drives.

In spring, the people gathered cattails from the marshes and ate the crisp inside flesh. They trapped ground squirrels and, with bow and arrow, shot Canada geese and other waterfowl. They used finely crafted decoys to lure and trap ducks in nets, and they gathered duck eggs. They fished the streams that filled each spring from mountain runoff.

In summer, they might eat the abundant insect life: locusts, caterpillars, and crickets raw or roasted. Ants were roasted and ground with seeds to make a flour. Grasshoppers were scorched and ground up to make a porridge. Robins and flickers went into the cookpot, but not magpies, which were prized especially for their feathers.

Water was precious and scarce, and the people of the Great Basin spent much time searching for it. Wood from the relatively few trees was also highly prized, for fires as well as tool making.

In autumn, it was important to gather and dry enough food to help tide them over during the winter months. The small bands went into the hills in the fall to meet with other small groups and gather piñon nuts. Then they returned to the desert floor to repeat the yearly cycle.

The type of shelter they used depended upon the season. In winter, they lived in wicki-ups—small, cone-shaped structures with a pole framework covered in sod, bark, grass, animal skins, brush, or reeds. During the summer months, a lean-to or windbreak made of brush provided living quarters.



A Paiute twined basketwork cap with a painted design

Family Life and Customs

A Basin Indian encampment did not need a chief, although they might sometimes consult a wise elder. Nor did they need many rules or laws, for the small group consisted only of an extended family.

Indians of the Great Basin were spiritual people. They believed they shared their world with good spirits. Shamans were greatly respected; they were thought to have the power to heal the sick and injured. The people often performed round dances in which the participants would join arms and dance around a central pole or tree. These dances were done to ask the spirits for rain, for a successful hunt, and for other reasons.

Prayers were offered at the beginning of the fall piñon nut harvest. The ritual piñon prayer dance lasted through the night after the first day's harvest. Nuts were scattered on the ground to show gratitude for Earth's bounty.

When potential mates were scarce, both men and women might take more than one mate. Desert women were valued for the foraging and gathering that made them the major food providers. Women as well as men could become shamans.

Clothing and Crafts

The Basin tribes, particularly the Paiute, were noted for their craftwork. They produced cedar-bark ornaments, tule rush mats, nets, baskets for storage, basketwork caps, and watertight baskets that could be used as cooking pots. The women used chokeberry wood, pliable twigs, and antelope hide to make cradleboards for babies.

Jackrabbits were prized both for food and for their pelts, which were sewn together to make a blanket or cloak for winter wear. As many as a hundred skins might be needed to make one man's wrap. Deer provided not only food but also skins for clothing. Most of the Basin Indians wore clothes and occasionally sandals woven from shredded sagebrush and cedar bark.



When the Paiute could get deer, they made the skins into clothing like this dress. Many Basin Indians made clothes and sandals from shredded bark.

The Paiute entrusted their myths and legends to a Teller of Tales. The Teller entertained around the evening campfire with stories of talking animals and the adventures of Coyote, an animal the Basin tribes held in high regard.

Basin History

Basin people made war only in self-defense. When nonnatives came, the newcomers were defeated at first by the elements, not the Indians. Death Valley claimed many. Forty-five people in the Donner party died of starvation while crossing the Sierra Nevada to reach the West Coast.

When prospectors began pouring into the area in their search for silver and gold, they ruined the land for food gathering. They cut down stands of piñon trees for firewood. Livestock trampled wild seed plots. To survive, many Indians had no choice but to work in the white men's mining camps and on their ranches.

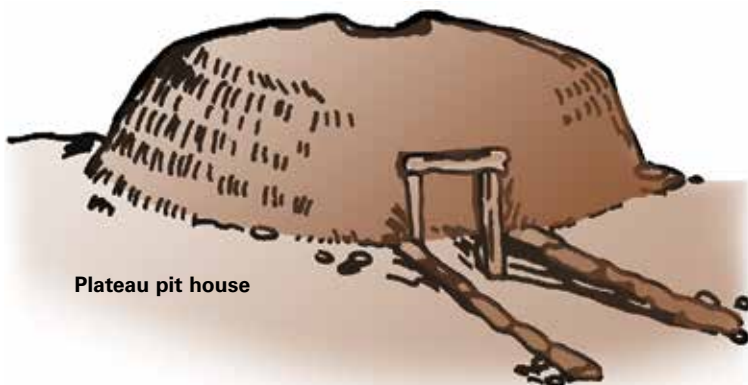
Some Indians adopted the white man's ways. Others fought. The Northern Shoshone took to horses and rode the plains with other tribes.

Many Indians of the Great Basin today make their living as farmers and ranchers. For additional income, some tribes in the region lease mining rights to their lands.

Indians of the Plateau

Plateau Indians settled in the northwestern United States, where the basin lowlands rise and become the highlands of present-day Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, and part of Wyoming. The Rocky Mountains border the region on the east. To the west is the Cascade Range. The Columbia, Snake, and Fraser Rivers and their tributaries provided the Plateau Indians with waterways to travel for trade and abundant salmon for food.

Here are the major **Plateau tribes**: Klamath, Cayuse, Flathead, Nez Perce, Yakima, Klikitat, Walla Walla, Umatilla



Plateau pit house

Before the coming of the horse, the Plateau Indians were gatherers, hunters, and fishers. Sometime toward the end of the Ice Age, they were drawn to the majestic Columbia River by promising fishing sites. Cascade points—leaf-shaped projectiles—are artifacts that mark the passage of these Paleo-Indians.

With nets and spears, they took salmon from the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Women gathered berries and wild vegetables; the starchy edible bulb of the camas, a kind of lily, was second only to salmon as a main staple in their diet.

Lifeways

Plateau Indians traveled the rugged high country in search of food and moved with the changing seasons. They traveled in larger bands than the Basin Indians, mainly because food was more abundant and more people could be fed from available game and fish.

Most Plateau peoples had summer lodges made of bullrush mats over cottonwood frames. In winter they lived in partly underground earth houses.

Whole villages camped beside the rivers when and where the salmon ran. After the women had finished smoking and preserving the catch, they took apart their wooden drying racks and moved on. Although they relied on fish as their main source of food, the Plateau peoples also hunted deer, elk, mountain sheep, and rabbits.

The villages were independent. Their headmen were not all-powerful. They guided councils in deciding such matters as when to break camp and return to the winter home.



Plateau tribes were renowned for their basketmaking.

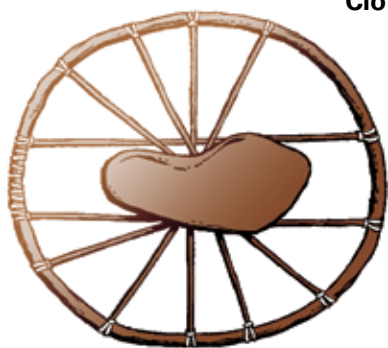
Using dugout canoes, Plateau tribes traveled and traded widely along the Columbia and Fraser river systems. From the west came sea otter pelts and ornamental shells. Deerskins, hemp for basketmaking, and bitterroot were brought from the interior. All sorts of goods changed hands: dried salmon, candlefish oil, baskets, carvings, even the canoes in which the traders carried their wares. When horses came to the Plateau in the early 18th century, tribes like the Yakima, Nez Perce, and Cayuse became expert horse raisers and traders.

The Plateau Indians had a complex system of beliefs and ceremonies. Everyone sought visits from guardian spirits, and when someone felt they were about to be healed by their guardian spirit, there was a ceremony of singing and dancing. Shamans had visions and appeared to the people in the guise of grizzly bears.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

Exquisite baskets with bright geometric designs, which could be used for food gathering and even cooking, were a trademark of these tribes. The women wore basket-work hats woven from plant fibers. They sewed deerskins into leggings and shirts and made dresses decorated with beads and fringe.

The Wishram and neighboring tribes were noted for their horn carvings. Using the horns of bighorn and mountain sheep, they carved delicate and complex designs into bowls, spoons, and other utensils.



When traveling over snow, men wore circular snowshoes like this.

The Wasco and Wishram tribes of Oregon developed an unusual “X-ray” style for wood carvings and basketry designs. The skeletons of the artists’ subjects could be seen in designs portraying animals and humans, as though the artists had looked through the flesh.

Plateau History

When the horse reached the Plateau Indians in the 1700s, it changed the lifeways of tribes such as the Flatheads. They adopted the buffalo-hunting and tepee culture of the Plains Indians and fought with the Blackfoot for hunting lands.

In 1805, the explorers Lewis and Clark arrived, guided by their interpreter, the Shoshone woman Sacajawea. The explorers were followed by fur trappers and traders. Traditional Plateau lifeways were again altered as hunting for food gave way to hunting for the fur business.

In the wake of the fur trappers came the settlers. The flood of settlers disordered the Plateau Indians' way of life. Some tribes, including the Yakima and Nez Perce, tried to resist, but the odds against them were overwhelming. Today, the reservations of Plateau tribes dot the maps of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Montana.



Jason, a Nez Perce chief, in buckskin clothing. The Nez Perce are Plateau Indians. (Courtesy Smithsonian Institution)

California

Many California Indians made their homes in a land of plenty, between the mountains of the Cascade Range and Sierra Nevada to the east and the Pacific Ocean on their western shore. The climate was mild, the rain generous, and food and plant life abundant. A wide assortment of raw materials was available to fashion shelter, weapons, tools, clothing, and other necessities.

Such abundance supported many people. Perhaps 133,000 Indians speaking more than a hundred different languages and regional dialects lived in the area at the time nonnatives came.

California Indians differed from one another not only in language but also in physical appearance. An interesting fact about this group is that the Mohaves of southeastern California, among the tallest people on the continent, shared the same cultural area as the Yukis of the northern coast, who were among the shortest people.



Californians such as the Chumash had coastal territory and were skilled seamen.

The presence of so many different languages and varied physical traits is evidence that many different groups migrated to the area in prehistoric times. Overall, however, they were more alike than different. They ate the same kinds of foods, which they gathered and prepared in much the same ways. Their social organizations and lifestyles were similar, as were their religious beliefs.

The following are some of the better-known tribes of California.

Northern Californians: Karok or Karuk, Yurok, Wiyot, Shasta, Hupa, Yuki

Central Californians: Maidu, Pomo, Costanoan, Miwok, Yokut

Southern Californians: Chumash, Serrano, Luiseño, Cahuilla, Gabrielino

Yuman tribes: Yuma, Mohave, Cocopa

Food

Many tribes depended on the fruit of the oak tree—the acorn—as a staple food. During the important fall harvest, women gathered the nuts as the men and boys shook them out of the trees. Then the acorns were hulled and ground into a meal that was leached with hot water to remove the bitter taste. Boiled, the mush was a main dish at each of the day's two meals. Acorn meal could also be baked into bread.

A few tribes, like the Yuma and Mohave, were farmers. Although they lived in a sun-baked desert, they could grow corn, beans, pumpkins, and melons, and later wheat, along the fertile banks of the lower Colorado River. They also hunted small desert game, fished, and gathered mesquite beans and piñon nuts.

Most California Indians did not farm. They were hunter-gatherers. The land teemed with wildlife; most groups hunted deer, rabbits, and gamebirds. More than 60 wild plants were gathered for food. Fish and shellfish were abundant in the rivers and along the coast. The Chumash fished the ocean in plank canoes to add to their staple diet of acorns and small game.



A Pomo woman pours hot water on raw acorn meal to remove the bitter taste. Pouring through a bundle of bullrush twigs would make the water flow evenly over the meal.

Dwellings

California tribes lived in many different types of houses. A typical house was cone-shaped like a tepee and built of poles covered with brush, grass, or reeds.

Some groups had lean-tos made of redwood bark slabs. In summer, the desert-dwelling Yumans lived in open-sided, flat-roofed shelters that gave protection from the sun.

Some tribes in central California built big, solid homes—dome-shaped structures that housed as many as 40 to 50 people. The Maidu built partly underground houses 20 to 40 feet in diameter. A single hole in the roof through which people entered the house also allowed smoke to escape.

In the northern part of the area, tribes built wood plank houses.

The Mohave, though farmers, loved to travel. They traveled to trade, but sometimes they would journey hundreds of miles simply out of curiosity about other groups.



The tepee-shaped dwellings of the Miwoks had a framework of poles tied with vines, then were covered with brush, grass, or reeds.



Pomo Indians haul in a net full of fish. Nets were made of hemp, milkweed, or nettles. (Courtesy Milwaukee Public Museum)

Village and Family Life

Villages typically were made up of several families, related through the male line, who lived in small, independent groups. Sometimes, when two or three of these villages were close to one another, the people formed a loose, unstructured association.

A headman might guide village affairs or preside at meetings. The shaman was the dominant person in the village, and in some areas was more likely to be a woman than a man.

The single family was the basic social and economic unit of many of these tribes. Life was relatively easy, but everyone had chores to do. The women gathered and cooked the food, made baskets, raised the babies, and kept the household in order. Babies were welcomed, and parents were seldom strict with their children. Men were responsible for hunting, fishing, fighting, building their houses, making tools, and ceremonial dancing. Generally, young men married young women from outside bands, who were chosen by the parents.

Some groups were villagers in winter, travelers in summer.

Most put down permanent roots. Chumash villages could be quite large, with more than a thousand inhabitants.

In the Pomo groups, a marriage might be arranged by maternal aunts, but according to the couple's wishes. The young man suggested his choice of bride; she had the right to accept or refuse. Gifts were exchanged as a matter of goodwill between families.

Ishi of the Yahi

In August 1911, in Oroville, California, the townsfolk found a nearly naked and starving Indian. He was exhausted and terrified and could not speak a word of English. The sheriff put him in jail for safekeeping.

Ishi (the name meant “man” in his native language) had lived with his tribe, the Yahi, in the foothills of Mount Lassen in northern California. By the time he wandered into the small town, he was alone.

The story of Ishi made the newspapers. Two anthropologists (scientists who study human cultures) from the University of California quickly arranged to take charge of Ishi. He was taken to San Francisco and given a comfortable place to live in a museum.

Imagine this middle-aged man (Ishi was about 54 when he was found) who had never been around whites or large groups. The sights and sounds of 20th-century civilization must have assaulted every sense. He was shy and bashful and lonely.

The anthropologists spent many hours with Ishi, learning his language and his beliefs. They took him camping in his former wilderness home so they could see how he had once lived. He made a salmon harpoon, snared deer, and shaped juniper wood for a bow.

Ishi was a gentle man. He learned some English, adopted non-Indian ways, and overcame his fear of crowds and noise. For the last five years of his life, he lived in San Francisco at the museum. He demonstrated native crafts to museum visitors and traveled around the city when he was not working.

Religion and Ritual

California Indians had a variety of religious beliefs and practices. Some tribes had shamans, including women healers. Some tribes had secret societies. Prayers were offered to supernatural spirits who were thought to live in mountains, trees, caves, and other abodes in the local environment.

Initiation rites—the passage from childhood to adulthood—were important in most of the tribes, as were death rites. Death ceremonies were meant to free the spirit of the dead and keep it from coming back as a ghost.

Major ceremonies for the Yurok of northwestern California included the White Deerskin Dance and the Jumping Dance. Each ritual lasted for days. The purpose was to renew the world for the coming year and ward off illness and misfortune.

Ceremonies also were held for curing the sick and influencing the weather. The Patwin Indians of California's Sacramento Valley held sacred ceremonies from October to May to bring health and prosperity, rainfall, and a plentiful harvest of wild crops. A secret society, the Kuksu, was in charge of the rituals. Kuksu members used disguises of feather and grass headdresses to hide their identities and make them resemble the spirits they portrayed. Some headdresses covered not only the face but the body as well.

Music and dancing played important roles in ceremonies. Some groups used a potion made from parts of a poisonous weed to induce visions.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

Because of the warm climate, little clothing was needed. Males rarely wore clothes except in the winter. Women dressed in two-piece garments of a skirt and apron made of animal skin or shredded willow bark. They sometimes wore basketwork hats, iris fiber hairnets, feather headbands, or feather crowns. Some went barefoot, while others wore high leather moccasins or sandals made of fiber. In cold weather, they wore robes of sea-otter fur, rabbit skin, or feathers.

For decoration they wore handsome necklaces of shell and stone, earrings, and armbands. Tattooing was popular among tribes from the Hupa of the north to the Mohave of the south. Men and women also painted themselves for greater beauty.

California Indians—famous for their basketry—fashioned reeds, grasses, roots, and barks into all kinds of articles: trays, containers, cook pots, hats, fish traps, baby carriers, ceremonial objects, and even boats. The Pomo decorated their finely crafted baskets with shells and feathers. Basketry was the work of women in most tribes, but Pomo men often wove articles such as mats and fish traps.

Various groups made ceremonial objects like stone and clay pipes; rattles of gourds, turtle shells, and deer hooves; and drums, flutes, and whistles. In central California, coastal tribes hollowed bowls out of soapstone. Other tribes made bowls and jars from clay, using coiled ropes of the material. Northern tribes carved spoons and purses from elk antlers.



A young man of a Yuman tribe in typical clothing (Courtesy Smithsonian Institution)



Southern Californians might wear yucca-fiber sandals, with soles almost 1 inch thick.

Men made weapons and tools for the hunt: nets of hemp or milkweed, harpoons, stone knives, and willow and ash bows armed with feather-tipped arrows. The seagoing Chumash built canoes of pine planks sewn with fiber cords and caulked with tar. Their fishing nets were woven of sea grass and weighted with stone balls. The Hupa of northwestern California made dugout canoes from redwood logs split in half.

Warfare

Warfare was not commonplace among native Californians. Disputes arising from feuds or vengeful acts were usually settled by negotiation or bargaining.

The Mohave (also spelled Mojave) who lived and farmed along the lower Colorado River had a warrior class known as the *kwanamis* ("brave men"). The *kwanamis* dreamed of battle and often went out in raiding parties of 10 or 12 fighters. Warfare on a larger scale was less frequent. With their River Yuman allies, the Mohave made forays against the Maricopa to the east. The Yuma called upon the Mohave to join them in expeditions against the Cocopa who lived southward.

Native Californians fiercely resisted the onslaught of Europeans, but the non-Indian newcomers were relentless. In southern California beginning in 1769, the Spanish gathered Indians into missions, where they hoped to use their labor and to teach them Christianity and European-style trades. By the time Mexico lost California to the United States, whole bands of Mission Indians had been stripped of their traditional ways.

Entire tribes lost their cultures and ways of life. Some disappeared, but others endured. Today, California has dozens of Indian communities throughout the state, from bands of Mission Indians in the south to the northern Yurok reservation.

When nonnatives began pouring into California during the great Gold Rush of 1848, the Indians were overrun. Many wandered, homeless, for years. Some blended with the settlers; others, like the Yuma and Mohave, took up farming on a large reservation.



Diegueño eagle feather dance skirt



Pomo twined burden basket



Woman's carrying-basket and net that fitted across her forehead

How the Sky Spirit Made Mount Shasta

Before there were people on Earth, the Chief of the Sky Spirits grew tired of his home in the Above World, because the air was always icy cold. So he carved a hole in the sky and pushed all the snow and ice down below until he made a great mound that reached from Earth almost to the sky. Today that great mound is known as Mount Shasta.

The Sky Spirit took his walking stick and walked down the mountain. When he was about halfway to the valley below, he began to put his finger to the ground here and there, here and there. Wherever his finger touched, a tree grew. The snow melted in his footsteps, and the water ran down in rivers.

The Sky Spirit broke the small end of his walking stick into pieces and threw the pieces into the rivers. Some of the pieces turned into beaver and otter; some became fish. When the leaves fell from the trees, he picked them up, blew upon them, and made the birds. Then he took the big end of his stick and made all the animals that walk on Earth.

Pleased with all that he had done, the Chief of the Sky Spirits brought his family down to live on Earth with him. The mountain became their lodge. He made a big fire in the center of Mount Shasta, and he made a hole in the top so the smoke and sparks could fly out. When he put a big log on the fire, sparks would fly up and Earth would tremble.

The Sky Spirit's giant strides, when he came down the mountainside, tore up the land under his feet. Even today his tracks can be seen in the rocky path on the south side of Mount Shasta.

Some say the Sky Spirit decided to go back up into the sky to live. When he left Earth, he banked the fire in the center of his lodge, the mountain. That is why Mount Shasta is a dormant volcano today.

—Condensed from a traditional Modoc story

Before battle,
Yuman warriors
marched in
formation to the
battleground and
issued ceremonial
challenges to the
foe. Leaders of
each war party
fought duels,
often ending the
battle with no
one else fighting.

Pacific Northwest



The bounty of the sea was the harvest of the Northwest Coast tribes. They were seagoing people. They built the most seaworthy craft found anywhere in early America and canoed the Pacific Ocean, its inlets and bays, and the region's rivers and mountain streams.

These tribes fished and lived along the Pacific Coast from southeastern Alaska to northern California. They lived on islands, on beaches, and in sheltered coves along the coast.

In the south, rising abruptly from the beaches, were thick forest-covered mountains that gave the Indians the raw materials for their canoes, houses, and totem poles. In the north were more rugged, rocky mountains, sheer cliffs, and huge canyons.



Northwest Coast tribes caught salmon and candlefish in weirs (fences) set in rivers. The salmon were smoked, and the candlefish cooked for their oil.
(Courtesy Milwaukee Public Museum)

The People

On the coastal islands of present-day British Columbia and Alaska lived the wealthy Maritime peoples: the whalers, the seafarers, the totem-pole builders. Their relatives, the River and Bay peoples, lived slightly inland along the rivers and ocean inlets from the Canadian border to northern California.

Maritime peoples: (Alaska and British Columbia)

Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw), Bella Coola, Nuuchahnulth

River and Bay tribes: (Washington Coast) Quinault,

Quileute, Chehalis, Makah; (Washington Puget Sound)

Coast Salish, Chimakum, Lummi, Klallam; (Oregon)

Chinook, Tillamook, Alsea

Food

Northwest Coast Indians fished for salmon, smelt, halibut, trout, cod, and herring. Women cleaned and dried the fish and collected mussels, clams, and small abalones.

Men fished with carved hardwood hooks. They trapped fish in large basket-like traps set in the rivers where the salmon ran. With dip nets, the Chinook and others scooped up salmon as the teeming masses of fish fought their way upstream to spawn. Pulling big nets behind their canoes, southern tribes caught barrels of fish, while northern tribes harpooned salmon.

The Nuuchahnulth and Makah were whale hunters. They went to sea in canoes, led by chief harpooners skilled in finding and spearing the huge marine mammals.

Indians here gathered food, too—berries, roots, and wild celery. Inland, the Tlingit hunted caribou; others caught elk, deer, and black bear in pitfall traps. The Kwakiutl and Nuuchahnulth snared diving ducks in underwater traps. The coastal Salish knocked ducks out of midair by stretching huge nets across flyways between ponds and lakes. In the north, hunters climbed the sheer cliffs after mountain goats, driving them down to snares and waiting spears. Most of the tribes hunted sea lions, seals, sea otters, and porpoises. None of the tribes were farmers.

The Haida were also great hunters of whales and sea otters. Canoes were to them what horses were to the Plains Indians.



To build a plank house, the parts were grooved and fitted together to support one another.

Dwellings

Without nails or saws, Northwest Coast Indians built imposing wooden houses. The walls and roofs were made of wood planks that were precisely fitted and tied to a framework of thick beams, poles, posts, and plates. All the homes of this region were built for multifamily use. An average lodge was about 30 by 45 feet.

In the north, the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian built rectangular gable-roofed houses, often larger than houses today. There is evidence that some homes were as long as a thousand feet, built to house an entire village. The Kwakiutl, Bella Coola, and Nuuchahnulth lived in low, sloping, almost flat-roofed houses. Some tribes built houses on pilings, often over the water. The coastal Salish, the Makah, and others lived in plank houses with roofs that sloped from front to back.

Village and Family Life

Social standing meant much in the family and village life of this region. Improving one's rank in society was a major goal. To do this, one needed to accumulate riches like blankets, dried fish, shells, baskets, furs, hides, and canoes.

Canoe making, wood carving, carpentry, and whale-hunting skills, passed down in families, were handled by specialists. Everyday chores were handled by slaves. A youth became a specialist by having a vision about a skill, then training in that skill for several years. The youth without a vision usually became a routine fisherman.

Not all of the groups had clans. Clan loyalty, however, was the basis of the Tlingit social order. Tlingit children belonged to their mother's clan. They were expected to learn their clan history by heart, as mothers and grandmothers repeated the stories time and again.

Each village was headed by its wealthiest family. The highest-ranking individual (usually, but not always, a man) was leader of the village. The leader's high-ranking relatives were one rung down on the social scale. Less affluent relations were further down the ladder. The middle classes were free people with some property. Below them were the slaves, who were people captured from the poorer and weaker tribes inland and south along the California coast.

Marriages usually were arranged by the young people's families. The families exchanged gifts—as many and as valuable as they could afford—to show off their wealth.

About three times during his lifetime, a wealthy chief of a village would throw a huge party, called a *potlatch*. This was a tremendous feast, sometimes lasting for days, with much singing, dancing, and games, and displays of wealth. The host called his guests up in the order of their social rank and gave them gifts. For the highest-ranking guests, gifts were especially lavish—a canoe, perhaps, or a robe of ermine. Such fine gifts might have taken the chief years of hunting, fishing, trading, and wealth-building to get. The guests performed the traditional songs and dances of their clan as well as new ones prepared for the occasion.

The Tlingit and Tsimshian held potlatches to honor a dead chief and to appoint a new one. The Haida, Kwakiutl, Bella Coola, and Nuuchahnulth gave potlatches to honor the younger person who would someday inherit an important position in the family. Chiefs in the Salish groups, and in some Chinook villages, gave potlatches to maintain their social positions. In the far north, if a chief or his heir did something embarrassing or undignified in public, he threw a small face-saving potlatch.

Religion and Ritual

Many groups, especially those from the southern part of the coast, celebrated the beginning of the salmon run in late spring with a ritual of thanksgiving. The people believed that salmon were a race of immortals who lived in houses beneath the sea. The immortals swam up the rivers in springtime to offer themselves to humans for food. The ritual gave thanks for the gift of the salmon, to encourage the immortals to return the next year.

Supernatural beings of the Tlingit world included the Thunderbird, which was thought to flap its wings and create thunder, lightning, and rain. Land Otter Man was believed to kidnap people and rob them of their senses. Raven was respected for cleverness; many Tlingit stories tell of Raven's skill at outwitting others.

Among the Kwakiutl, only wealthy men and women could generally afford to pay the fees to belong to the religious societies. One society was dedicated to the spirit of the wolf, another to the spirits of the sky, such as stars and birds. The Shaman's Society was for shamans only.

The Tlingit
believed that,
after death, their
ancestors were
reborn as babies.
When a clan
member died, the
mourners dressed
the deceased for
travel, provided
food for the trip
to the spirit world,
and cremated
the body.



**A wooden
Nuuchahnulth
headdress-mask
representing a
supernatural wolf**



**Klallam Indians
wore raincoats
like this, made of
woven bark.**



**A Kwakiutl
hat with
painted design**

All Tlingit men sought guardian spirits. Some had visions in which their guardians seemed to reveal themselves. Shamans were believed to associate with the spirits and to cure illness by supernatural means. Both men and women could be shamans; most inherited their roles.

Groups such as the Kwakiutl and Bella Coola had a rich ceremonial life centered on secret societies. Society members wore fantastic, elaborately carved and painted masks that represented spirits or creatures from the tribes' mythologies. During ceremonies, the wearers told stories that gave the meanings behind their masks. Some masks were quite complicated, with moving or interchangeable parts.

Ceremonies were held in the fall and winter, after the people had moved from their summer fishing camps back to their permanent villages. The rituals had two purposes: to initiate new members, and to impress audiences with the power of the spirits. Society members appeared in spectacular costumes, masks, and headdresses representing spirits. They staged dramatic productions, like plays performed in theaters. Tricks were used to give the illusion of magical powers. Dancers "disappeared" through trapdoors and tunnels and in puffs of smoke. Carved birds "flew" overhead on strings. From unseen performers, strange voices called out. The effect was truly magical, and reinforced the people's awe of the supernatural world.

Clothing, Arts, and Crafts

In the summer, the men of most tribes wore nothing. If they covered themselves, as the Tlingit usually did, it was with a breechcloth. They went barefoot, or wore moccasins for mountain travel. During the frequent downpours on the rainy coast, most wore raincoats and capes made of shredded cedar bark, and wide-brimmed basketwork rain hats.

Women's clothing typically was of shredded, woven cedar bark. If you travel the mountainous Northwest today, you may hear of the multicolored Chilkat blankets and shirts made by Tlingit women from mountain goat wool. Chilkat garments were among the most treasured items a Tlingit owned. Salish groups also used goat's wool in their clothing, as well as hair from a special breed of small white dog.



Tlingit dance cape, made of leather

The northernmost tribes had brightly painted dance aprons and half-leggings. They made headdresses with a forehead mask of wood and with ermine skins sewn to buckskin hanging down the back.

Using chisels made of stone, elk horn, and shell, people of the Northwest Coast became master wood-carvers. How these artisans turned wood and horn into extraordinary masks and elegant dishes, spoons, fishhooks, storage boxes, and other items amazed the first explorers to visit this land.

Steaming and bending wood, sewing pieces together with spruce root, and pegging (driving pegs into predrilled holes) were techniques perfected by the coastal peoples. The polished products of these carvers were sanded smooth, first with sandstone, then with sharkskin. Men sanded their wooden whaling canoes so smooth that they could slip noiselessly through the water and surprise resting whales.

The canoes they made were the grandest in pre-Columbian America. Some were more than 50 feet long and 8 feet wide. Most were dug-outs, carved from a single log of cedar or redwood.



Haida chief's ceremonial hat with killer whale and bear faces

Most Northwest Indians wore tattoos. They painted their faces, too, for practical as well as decorative purposes. The paint helped protect against sun, wind, and cold.



The beaver was a popular symbol on Haida totem poles.

Northwest Coast tribes are known for their totem poles. Some were 60 feet tall. Wealthy families hired master craftsmen to carve the poles. Fashioned from cedar tree trunks, some totems were memorial poles put up by the heir of a dead chief to show that he was assuming the chief's title and jobs. Some were mortuary poles and held the ashes of the dead. Another type was the house-portal pole. A post carved with symbols representing the family's history and social

rank, it was built onto the front of the house. Still other poles symbolized special privileges.

The carvings on totem poles usually represented important events or times in the owner's life, illustrated stories and myths, or showed family (clan) connections. Totem poles had nothing to do with religion and were never worshipped, as many 19th-century missionaries mistakenly believed.

None of the Northwest Coast peoples made pottery. For storage and cooking they used wooden boxes and woven baskets. They wove reeds and the inner bark of the red cedar into mats, pillows, baskets, tablecloths, and even sails. Many articles, including arrowheads, were made from the horns of elk and mountain goat.



A Nuuchahnulth whaling harpoon head

Warfare

The Tlingit, Bella Coola, Chinook, and some Tsimshian groups made sinew-backed hardwood bows. North of Vancouver Island, tribes used slings and double-bladed daggers; southward they had heavy whale-rib war clubs. Some tribes used “slave killers”—short-handled picks made of antlers, bone, stone, and hard wood. The Kwakiutl fought with bone swords.

Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian war leaders and chiefs wore wooden helmets, elk-hide armor, and breastplates of wooden slats. The warriors themselves wore no special garments for protection, relying instead on speed and agility. To make sure enemies could not catch hold of their long hair, normally worn loose, they knotted it on top of their heads.

Despite all their weapons and armor, these tribes did more feuding than actual warring. South of Puget Sound, so-called wars were little more than quarrels between villages. Only the more northern groups fought real wars, usually to take property.

The Haida and Tlingit raided to get slaves or wealth. Others staged raids after a chief died, killing only the first persons they met so that others could mourn, too, or could “depart” with and be company for the dead chief. The Maritime peoples brought back heads to put on poles outside their villages. Only the Tlingit took scalps.

A (Nearly) Lost Culture

The highly developed Northwest Coast culture declined quickly once nonnatives arrived. In 1792, George Vancouver, a British explorer, and Robert Gray, an American sea captain, started fur trading in the region. In return for furs, the Indians got new tools and materials. Harpoons, bows, and clubs gave way to guns and iron traps. Boiling water by dropping fire-heated stones into a cookpot became obsolete when brass kettles appeared.

By about 1840, the Hudson’s Bay Company was buying all the furs it could, and many Indians began wearing woolen “trade blankets” they received in exchange. Since Hudson’s Bay Company bought only furs, many fishermen turned to hunting, and in a short time fur-bearing animals became scarce.



**Tlingit wooden
boat paddles**

Encouraged by the villagers' newfound wealth through trading, potlatches became ruinously extravagant and frequent. The rank system began to fall apart. Imported diseases including measles and scarlet fever killed thousands.

In 1842, covered wagons reached the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Indians soon lost their lands and were put on reservations. Some tribes fought hopeless wars resisting the move, but eventually they were relocated. Other Indians blended into the non-Indian culture. By the early 1900s, traditional ways were disappearing.

But the Northwest Coast culture did not vanish. By the 1930s, the Coast Indian population had begun to grow. In 1951, laws banning major native ceremonies were dropped.

Elders again began to teach the young about the traditions of the Northwest Coast. A few craftsmen started to carve and paint totem poles again.

Today there are many more carvers. Old totem poles have been restored. New ones are being carved and raised in traditional ceremonies. The ancient stories and legends of the Coast people are being told once more.

Why the Sky Is So High

The Creator first made the world in the East. Then the Creator slowly came westward, creating along the way. To each group of people the Creator made, a different language was given. Many languages were scattered around Puget Sound and to the north. That is why so many different Indian languages are spoken there.

Though the people could not talk together, all of them were dissatisfied with the way the Creator had made the sky. The sky was so low that tall people bumped their heads on it. Sometimes people would do a forbidden thing by climbing high in the trees and entering the Sky World.

The wise leaders of all the different tribes met to see what could be done about lifting the sky. They agreed that the people could do it if everyone—including the animals and the birds, as well as the people—all pushed at the same time.

“How will we know when to push?” asked one of them. “We don’t all talk the same language. How can we get everyone to push together?”

Another member of the council had the idea of using a signal. “When the time comes for us to push,” this one said, “let someone shout ‘Ya-hoh.’ That means ‘Lift together!’ in all our languages.”

So the members of the council sent that message to all the people and animals and birds and told them on what day they were to lift the sky. Everyone made poles from the giant fir trees to use in pushing up the sky.

When the day came, the people raised their poles and touched the sky with them. Then the wise leaders shouted, “Ya-hoh!” All the people and animals and birds pushed, and the sky moved up a little.

“Ya-hoh!” the wise leaders shouted again, and everybody pushed again. The sky moved a few more inches. “Ya-hoh!” they kept shouting, and everyone pushed with all their strength until the sky rose to the place where it is now. Since then, no one’s head has bumped against it, and no one has been able to climb into the Sky World.

See what people can do when we all work together?

—*Condensed from a traditional Snohomish story*

American Indians Today

From the brief descriptions in this pamphlet, you have learned some of the difficulties American Indian tribes faced after the arrival of Europeans. Native peoples lost so much that by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it seemed to some observers that they must be doomed.

Many tribes were wiped out. Others lost huge numbers of their people and all of their lands and possessions. Some, like the Mission Indians of California, lost cultural memories—their Indian ways of living and surviving—after being under missionary rule for many years.

Some people predicted that eventually all Indian cultures and their traditional ways would be lost and that finally the Indians themselves would vanish. The prediction was wrong. Native peoples endured, and today there are about 2 million American Indians living in the United States.

Today, more than half of American Indians live outside the reservations that were set aside for them by the federal government. Many live in big cities; others live in smaller communities and rural areas. While they are fighting to win back some of the things that were taken from them, including their cultural identities, gains have come slowly.

Still, American Indians are taking renewed pride in their heritages and tribal traditions. Traditional religions have survived, despite years of outside influences and official disapproval.

“Indian people in recent years are overturning their image as the ‘invisible Americans,’ ” notes Dr. David HurstThomas. “Many tribes have constructed tourist facilities to encourage your visits: hotels, resorts, historical attractions, camping areas, golf courses, recreational facilities. . . . Many tribes want to show off their heritage and educate you about their past.”

Indians are relearning lost traditions and languages and reviving their arts and crafts, their songs, dances, and stories. Many have chosen not to disappear into America's "melting pot."

Indians are reclaiming control over what happens to them. They want to decide for themselves how they will live in the modern world. This will not be an easy decision.

The question is, how can they keep cultural roots alive and protect and preserve tribal identities, yet still be a part of modern society? There is no easy answer, and no one knows what the future holds.

Famous Names Past and Present

The history of American Indians is filled with the names of men and women who are remembered for deeds that set them apart from others. They may have been renowned leaders, peacemakers, or lawmakers. Some, like Pocahontas, Sacajawea, Hahyohwatha (known as "Hiawatha"), and Tecumseh, lived centuries ago. Others, like Geronimo, Ira Hayes, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Ada Deer, and Wilma Mankiller, are people of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Find out who are outstanding people in the Indian culture you investigate. Learn as many details as you can about them, so you can tell your story well.

As you research the tribe you chose to study for requirement 2, be sure to learn about its circumstances or situation today.

Visiting Indian Country

Be aware that you enter another sovereign nation when you enter the Indian "reservations" of the United States and the "reserves" of Canada. Always ask tribal managers about any special regulations or permits that may be required for hunting, fishing, hiking, or picnicking.

Stay in public areas. Be especially careful to not trespass on sacred sites.

You may need permission to attend some cultural and religious ceremonies. Be sure to ask. While visitors may be encouraged to attend powwows and take part in certain feast days, there may be other occasions when non-Indian visitors are simply not welcome.

Be prepared to leave your camera, video equipment, and tape recorder behind. You might also be asked not to make sketches or take notes.

Behave as you would when visiting any other religious service. Dress conservatively. Be quiet and respectful.

American Indian Culture Resources

Scouting Literature

American Cultures, American Heritage, Archaeology, Archery, Architecture, Basketry, Canoeing, Citizenship in the Nation, Environmental Science, Leatherwork, Metalwork, Pottery, Sculpture, Textile, Wilderness Survival, and Wood Carving merit badge pamphlets

“The First Americans,” an eight-part series. *Boys’ Life* magazine. May–December 1993.

With your parent or guardian’s permission, visit Scouting America’s official retail site, **scoutshop.org**, for a complete list of merit badge pamphlets and other helpful Scouting materials and supplies.

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Organizations and Websites

American Indian Heritage Foundation

P.O. Box 6301
Falls Church, VA 22040
indians.org

This organization provides relief services to Native Americans throughout the nation and fosters an understanding relationship between Native and non-native peoples. The AIHF also coordinates scholarship programs for American Indian youth.

American Museum of Natural History

Central Park West at 79th Street
New York, NY 10024-5192
Telephone: 212-769-5100
amnh.org

One of the most famous museums in the world, the American Museum of Natural History has a series of exhibition halls exploring traditional cultures. Since its founding in 1869, the museum's mission has been to discover, interpret, and make available information about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe.

Crazy Crow Trading Post

Toll-free telephone: 800-786-6210
crazycrow.com

Heard Museum

2301 N. Central Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85004-1323
Telephone: 602-252-8848
heard.org

This world-renowned museum educates the public "about the heritage and the living cultures and arts of Native peoples, with an emphasis on the peoples of the Southwest."

National Congress of American Indians

1301 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: 202-466-7767
ncai.org

This organization, founded in 1944, seeks “to preserve rights under Indian treaties or agreements with the United States, and to promote the common welfare of the American Indians and Alaska Natives.” The NCAI includes 250 member tribes from throughout the United States; they are listed on the organization’s website under “Tribal Directory.”

National Museum of the American Indian

americanindian.si.edu

The NMAI is a museum of the Smithsonian Institution and the “first national museum dedicated to the preservation, study, and exhibition” of American Indian culture. Its extensive collections (housed in three different facilities) explore the life, languages, literature, history, and arts of indigenous Americans, including tribes of the United States, Canada, Middle and South America, and the Caribbean.

NativeCulture.com

nativeculture.com

This website offers a variety of links to American Indian resources—current events and news, tribal sites, education, games, and more. It also is home to “Native American Sites” by Lisa Mitten, a page recommended by the Discovery Channel for its thorough coverage of American Indian culture and resources.

NativeTech

nativetech.org

NativeTech features American Indian technology and craft resources, with a special focus on Eastern Woodlands beadwork, weaving, stonework, pottery, and other crafts. The site also offers Native poetry, recipes, and educational games.

NativeWeb

nativeweb.org

This nonprofit, international website provides resources to people of indigenous cultures around the world, including Native Americans. It includes links to everything from art to businesses and products and also hosts *Wotatin Wowapi*, North America’s oldest American Indian weekly newspaper.

Paul’s Supplies

Telephone: 303-948-2767
paulssupplies.com

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