



YEAR 8
HISTORY

NATIVE
PEOPLES OF
NORTH
AMERICA



Peoples and places

AIMS

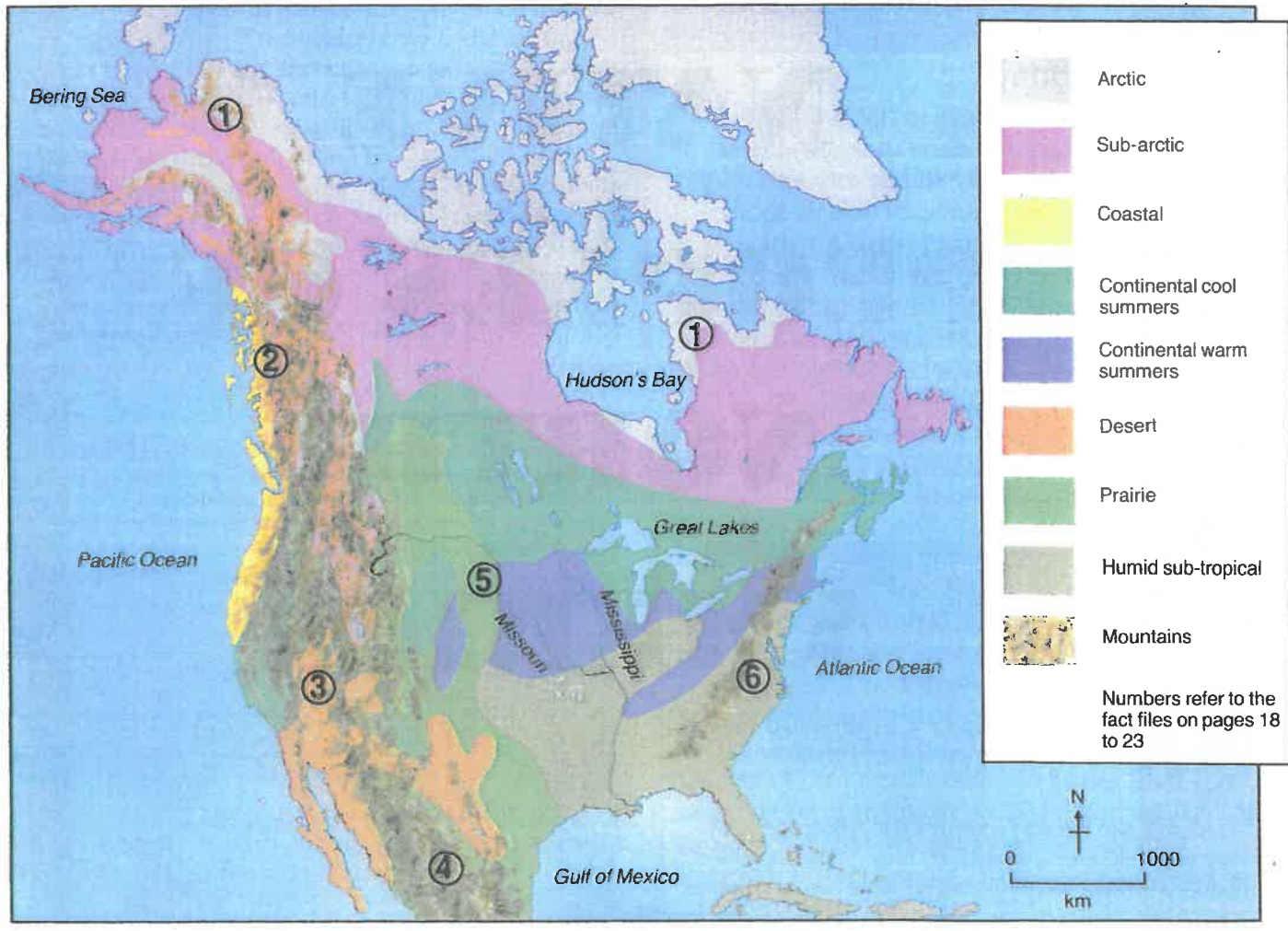
In this unit we will look at some of the many different local ENVIRONMENTS of North America. We will look at the different groups of Native American peoples who lived in each environment. Over the centuries, these groups developed ways of living to make the best use of the natural resources all around them.

Adapting to the environment

The North American landscape ranges from high, rugged mountains to deep CANYONS, tropical swamps and wide, open PRAIRIES. Its climate varies, too, from bitter snows in the north to baking heat in the south. How did Native American people manage to survive without the benefit of modern building techniques, farming methods or big machines? On the following six pages, you can see some examples of different American environments, and look at how Native Americans worked out ways of living there. Source 1 provides a key to these case studies, showing you where the different peoples and places can be found.

SOURCE 1

This map shows the natural environments of North America.



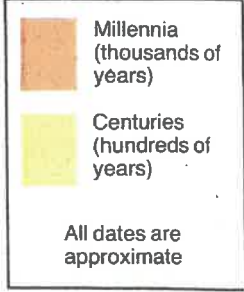
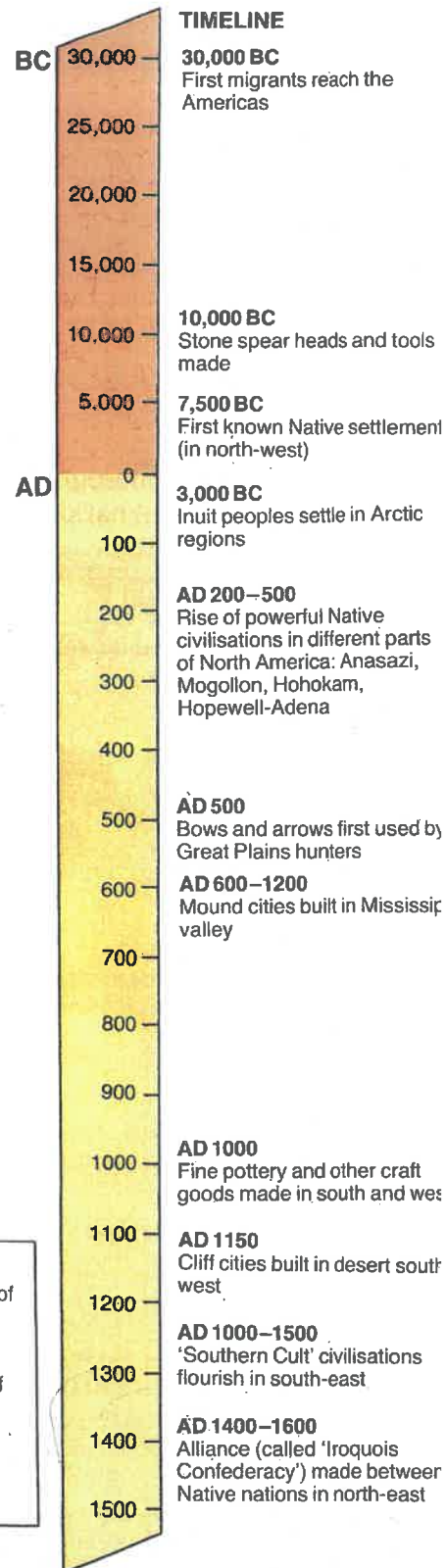


SOURCE 7

Around 30,000 BC, the first Americans began to settle in North America, after crossing the Siberian 'land bridge'.

The Americans arrive

For hundreds of thousands of years, North and South America were cut off from the rest of the world by deep, stormy oceans. No one lived there. Around 80,000 BC, during the last Ice Age, much of the Earth's water was frozen. Sea levels fell, and large stretches of the seabed were uncovered. A 'land bridge' – a strip of dry land – was formed between the CONTINENTS of Asia and America. It was about 1,600 kilometres long.



ARCHAEOLOGISTS think that the first people to set foot in America travelled across this land bridge, probably about 30,000 years ago (Source 7). These first settlers were NOMADIC hunters. They moved to the empty American continent, following deer, tigers and BUFFALO.

**SOURCE 4**

Thousand Mile Lake and the Klondike Hills in Yukon Alaska.

**SOURCE 5**

Hunters from the Makah people, Washington State, with a whale they have caught, photographed around 1920.

'A successful whale hunt marks the beginning of a happy year.'

SOURCE 6

This comment about Inuit peoples in the Arctic was written by an American anthropologist in 1977.

SOURCE 7

Members of the Inuit nation building a snow house, around 1913.

**FACT FILE 1**

NAME OF REGION	Arctic and sub-Arctic.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Inuit, Aleut, Athabaskan.
LANDSCAPE	Low, rolling hills.
CLIMATE	Dry, windy and very cold. Ground frozen all year round, sea frozen in winter. No daylight in winter, midnight sun in summer.
WILDLIFE	CARIBOU, wolves, foxes, weasels, LEMMINGS, whales, seals, walrus, fish, ducks, geese, gulls.
VEGETATION	Shrubs, lichens, mosses.
CROPS	None.
WAY OF LIFE	Hunting; struggling to survive in a very harsh environment.
MAIN FOODS	Whale and seal meat and fish. Berries.
HOUSING	Shelters made from blocks of ice or sealskin tents.



SOURCE 8
Reflection Lake and Mount Rainier (4394 metres high), in Washington State.



SOURCE 9
A hook for catching halibut (a kind of fish) made of wood and bone.

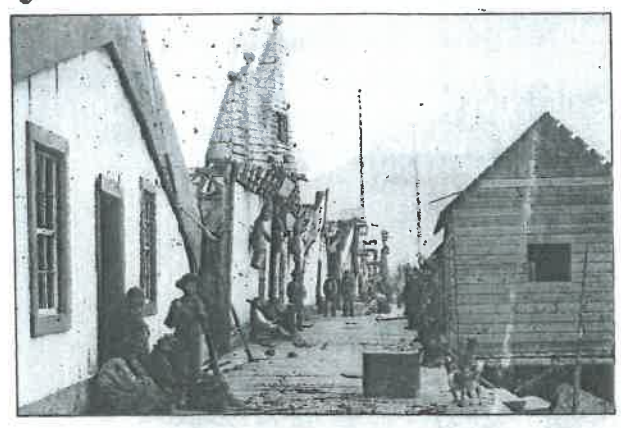
FACT FILE 2

NAME OF REGION	North-west coast.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Tlingit, Haida, Nootka, Salish and many others.
LANDSCAPE	Steep, rugged mountains. Rugged coastline, narrow beaches. Fast, deep rivers. Travel difficult on land.
CLIMATE	Mild, wet and foggy.
WILDLIFE	Deer, bears, wolves, otters, beavers, MINK, salmon, herring and other fish, seals and whales.
VEGETATION	Thick CONIFEROUS forests.
CROPS	Edible clover, tobacco.
WAY OF LIFE	Fishing and trapping. As food was plentiful, people lived comfortably.
MAIN FOODS	Salmon: fresh, dried or salted.
HOUSING	Large, sturdy wooden 'halls' shared by many close relatives.

SOURCE 10
This was written by an American historian in 1977.

'The culture was marked by abundance. Caches of food, racked . . . boxed, stored, were present in quantity in every village. The odour of decaying fish and rancid oil lay heavily over each one.'

SOURCE 11
Wooden houses in Bella Coola, on the north-west coast of Canada, photographed around 1900.



- 1 Native American lifestyles evolved gradually, over thousands of years. The pace of change was slow. From the evidence on these pages, can you suggest reasons for this?
- 2 Suggest reasons why many Native Americans were cautious about new inventions.

- 3 Do you follow the same way of life that your parents or grandparents followed? Do you like new inventions?
- 4 Why do you think the way we live today is so different from the ways of life which Native American peoples followed?

**SOURCE 12**

Rocky desert landscape, Utah.

**SOURCE 13**

A woman from the Paiute nation of the Great Basin area, gathering seeds in a basket in 1872.

'The Great Basin . . . is one of the . . . driest and least habitable regions. In some parts of it are low, barren and rocky deserts and large salt flats where human habitation is virtually impossible. Elsewhere, limited water supplies and meagre food resources provided a poor existence for native peoples.'

SOURCE 15

A shelter made of twigs, built in 1873 by members of the Ute nation from Utah.

**SOURCE 14**

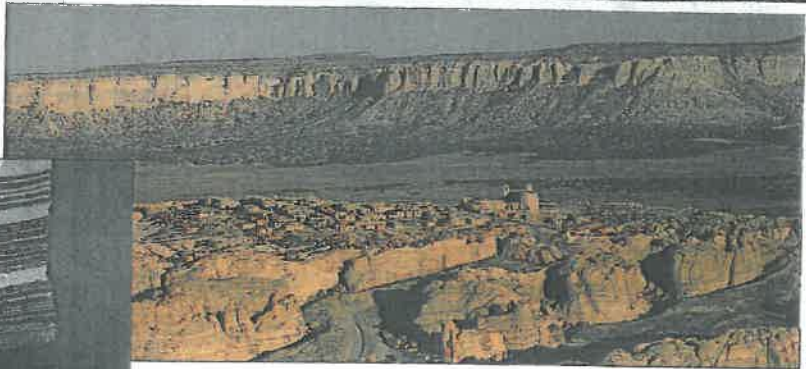
This comment was made by an American historian in 1968.

FACT FILE 3

NAME OF REGION	Great Basin.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Ute, Shoshone, Paiute.
LANDSCAPE	Semi-desert, surrounded by mountains. Canyons and salt lakes.
CLIMATE	Hot very dry summers, bitterly cold winters.
WILDLIFE	Rabbits, rats, locusts, ants, flies, snakes, lizards.
VEGETATION	Bushes and shrubs; pine, juniper and oak trees.
CROPS	None.
WAY OF LIFE	Gathering and some hunting. Population density very low (one person per 80 square kilometres). Ancient, nomadic way of life about 10,000 years old.
MAIN FOODS	Pine-nuts and other seeds, green plant shoots, insects, grubs, rabbits, lizards.
HOUSING	Fragile temporary shelters of grass and branches.

SOURCE 17

Women from New Mexico grinding maize on a stone slab and baking bread in a clay oven in 1892.



SOURCE 16

Acoma Pueblo (village), New Mexico.

'A princely realm ...'

SOURCE 18

An opinion given by General James Carleton of the United States Army in 1862.

FACT FILE 4

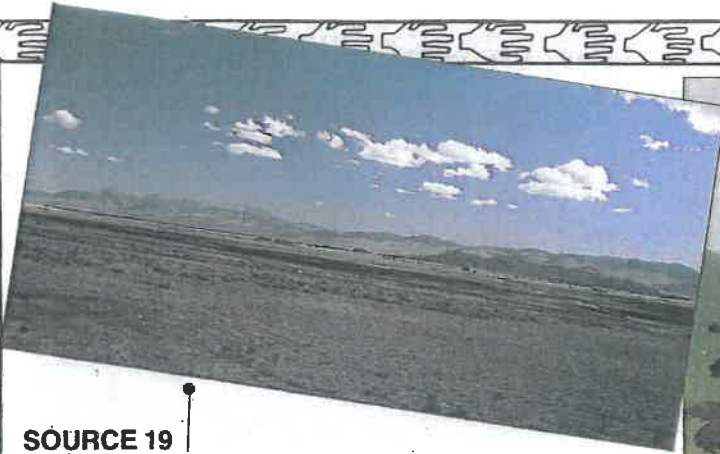
NAME OF REGION	South-west.	VEGETATION	Rough grassland. Pine trees on mountains.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Pueblo, Zuni, Hopi, Apache, Navajo and others.	CROPS	Maize, beans, pumpkins.
LANDSCAPE	High plateaus, mountains, narrow valleys, rich soils.	WAY OF LIFE	Farming using irrigation and some hunting. Sheep-rearing (after Europeans arrived). People lived in close-knit communities.
CLIMATE	Very sunny, with hot, dry summers and cool winters. Occasional heavy storms, but water in short supply.	MAIN FOODS	Maize, beans.
WILDLIFE	Deer, antelopes, mountain sheep, rabbits, turkeys.	HOUSING	Homes built close together made of sun-dried bricks.

ACTIVITY

1 Work in groups of four, in two pairs. Choose two regions from the fact files on pages 18 to 23. Each pair comes from a Native American nation in one of these regions.

Give a short presentation to the other pair in your group explaining:

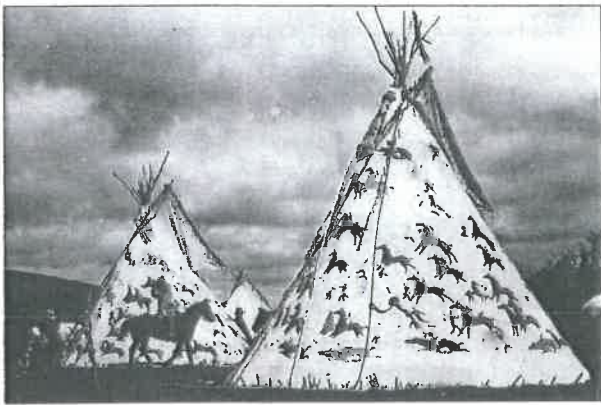
- why your homeland is a good place to live in.
 - why your homeland is a difficult place to live in.
- 2** Compare the advantages and disadvantages of living in each homeland.
- 3** You are a Native American man or woman acting as a guide to travellers. Write a 'survival guide' for them, explaining how to find food and water, and how to make a shelter.



SOURCE 19
Typical Great Plains landscape, Idaho State.



SOURCE 20
Members of the Hidatsa nation chasing buffalo, 1832 to 1833.



SOURCE 21
A tipi belonging to Chief Old Bull of the Sioux nation.

“The Great American Desert” . . . is almost entirely unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence [basic needs].’

SOURCE 22
A comment made by Major Stephen Long of the United States Army in 1820.

FACT FILE 5

NAME OF REGION	Great Plains.	VEGETATION	Thick, tall grassland and forests in the east. Short grasses, shrubs and cactus in the west. Wild fruit, berries, roots, wild rice.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Cree, Blackfeet, Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, Mandan, Comanche, Hidatsa, Kansa, Pawnee.	CROPS	Maize, beans, squashes, sunflowers, tobacco.
LANDSCAPE	High, rolling plains surrounded by mountains. Wide, fertile river valleys. ‘Badland’ rocky areas too.	WAY OF LIFE	Two different lifestyles: hunters followed buffalo; farmers lived in settled villages but also hunted.
CLIMATE	Bitter winters with heavy snows. Very hot summers (over 40°C in July) with thunderstorms.	MAIN FOODS	Buffalo, maize, wild fruits.
WILDLIFE	Buffalo herds, antelopes, wolves, deer, COYOTE, GROUSE, hawks, eagles.	HOUSING	Sturdy earth LODGES (large halls housing about 30 people); buffalo skin TIPIS used on hunting trips.



FACT FILE 6

NAME OF REGION	Eastern woodlands.
NATIVE PEOPLES	Natchez, Iroquois, Cherokee and many others.
LANDSCAPE	Marshy coastal plains, low hills rising to mountains.
CLIMATE	High rainfall, warm in south, cool in north.
WILDLIFE	Bears, deer, buffalo, turkeys, fish, turtles.
VEGETATION	Fruit trees, nut trees, berries, root plants.
CROPS	Maize, beans, melons, tobacco.
WAY OF LIFE	Farming plus hunting and gathering. In the colder north of the region hunting was important as fewer crops grew there.
MAIN FOODS	Maize, nuts.
HOUSING	Tipis or 'longhouses' of wooden poles covered with thatch and matting. They had room for several families. Some villages enclosed by a wooden wall.

SOURCE 23

Eastern woodland landscapes range from cold, northern birch forests to this semi-tropical swamp, in Florida.

SOURCE 24

Hunters, disguised in deerskins, drawn by a 16th-century European traveller to America.



SOURCE 25

Tipis made of birchbark by the Ojibwa people of eastern Canada around 1857.



attainment target 3

- 1 This unit shows the environments where Native Americans lived. How can photographs of the landscape today help us find out about the past?
- 2 Compare Source 22 with this description of the same territory, written by a 19th-century Native American:
'Crow country is good country. The Great Spirit

put it in exactly the right place. Wherever you are in it you fare [do] well. . . . When your horses are fat and strong from the mountain pastures, you can go down on the plains and hunt buffalo.'

- a Compare the usefulness and reliability of these two descriptions.
- b How can historians use this conflicting evidence?

Horses and guns

For thousands of years, many parts of the vast Great Plains area of North America were uninhabited. People lived only in the river valleys where the land was good for farming. In summer, they set off (on foot) across the wide plains grasslands, chasing herds of deer and buffalo. In winter, they returned to the safety of their village homes.

After the Europeans arrived, this traditional way of life changed. More and more Native peoples moved to make their home out on the open plains. Why did this happen? It was partly because Native peoples needed new territory after European settlers drove them out of their traditional homelands. They moved westwards into the 'empty' plains to escape the Europeans, or other Native nations facing similar pressure from settlers.

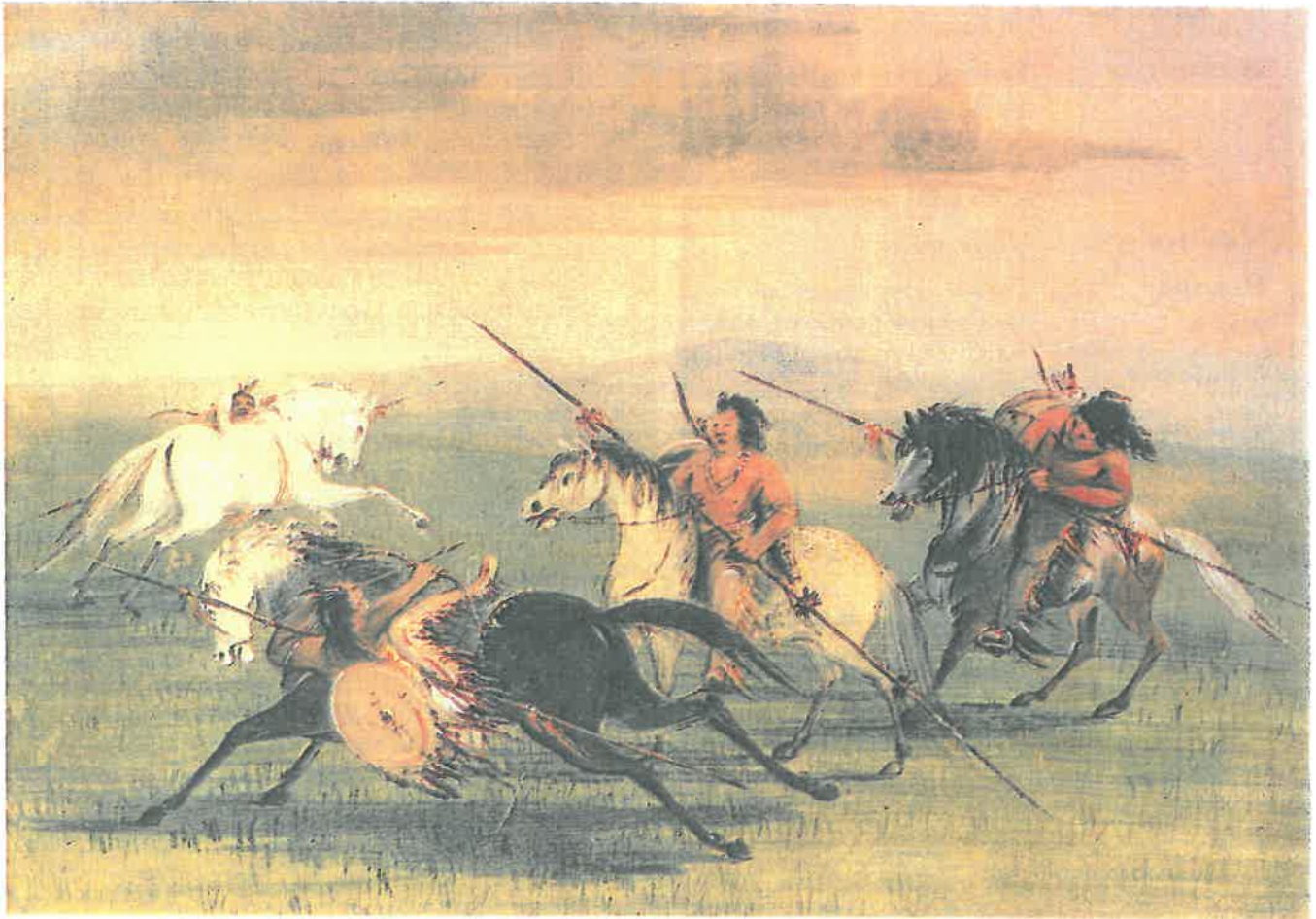
SOURCE 5

Comanche horsemen practising battle skills, painted by eye-witness George Catlin in the 1830s.

- 1 Many Native American religious ceremonies among people living on the Great Plains were connected with buffalo hunting. Can you explain why?
- 2 Horses changed some Native American people's lives completely. Can you think of one or two modern inventions that have revolutionised people's lives today? Give reasons for your answer.

Horses

This changed lifestyle was made possible because, for the first time ever, Native American people had horses. In the 16th century, Spanish settlers in Mexico brought horses and donkeys with them. By around 1700, many Native Americans had stolen or bought these 'new' animals for their own use. Occasionally, horses escaped and roamed freely on the plains. Over the years, large herds of wild horses grew up; young foals could be captured and trained, and were highly prized, see Source 5.



On the move

Horses, donkeys and MULES caused a transport revolution. Native American peoples could now travel much further, and much faster. On horseback, hunters could chase and keep up with the herds of deer and buffalo on the Great Plains. They no longer had to stay within a few days' walking distance of their homes.

Before they had horses, it was difficult for Native American people to transport heavy loads. Ferrying goods by boat was best if there was a suitable river close by. Otherwise, loads had to be carried by people (often women) or by dogs. Source 6 shows a traditional dog travois. This was a kind of sledge, made of wooden poles. Horses could carry much heavier burdens than women or dogs, and this made it possible for people on the plains to develop a nomadic lifestyle. They spent all year travelling, and relied on buffalo for food, shelter, clothing and many other needs, as you can see from Source 7.



SOURCE 6

Bull's Head of the Nez Percé nation, with his wife and a dog-pulled travois.

SOURCE 7

Great Plains peoples used every part of the buffalo they killed. Some historians estimate that there were over 70 different items made from buffalo meat, bones, sinews and skin.

Buffalo skins or hides were used to make many different items of clothing as well as shoes, belts, tipi covers, bedding, bags, covers and pouches for weapons, toys for children, medicine bundles, rattles and drums for rituals and riding equipment.

Bones were carved to make many kinds of utensils, weapons and tools. They were also used for making jewellery.

Sinews made strong thread for sewing clothes or fixing arrowheads.

Buffalo meat from all parts of the body was eaten by Native Americans.

Tails made good fly whisks and whips.

Dung was dried to make buffalo chips which were used as fuel.

Hooves were boiled to produce glue and could also be used as rattles.

Stomachs and bladders could be used as cooking pots or for carrying food, water and medicines.

The beard was used for decorating weapons and clothes.

Tongue was a delicacy and its rough surface also made a good hairbrush.

The skull was used in many religious ceremonies and rituals.

Brains were rubbed over the hides to soften them so that they could be used for clothing.

Horns were made into a variety of cooking utensils. They could also be used to flatten quills. Successful warriors sometimes wore head-dresses made from buffalo horns.

Hair was used to fill saddle pads and pillows. It was also used to make rope and for decorating clothes, homes and weapons.



SOURCE 8

A tipi encampment on the Great Plains, painted by George Catlin in 1834.

Cut thin slices of fresh buffalo meat and hang them to dry in a warm breeze. Protect them from rain. When they are completely dry and hard, pound them (using stones) until you get a fine meat powder, like sawdust. Mix carefully with melted buffalo fat and flavour with dried berries. Pack into buffalo skin bags or buffalo bladders, and store in a cool, dry place.

ACTIVITY

You are a Native American woman living on the Great Plains. A herd of buffalo has been sighted. Hunters are getting ready to chase them. Your job is to help the other women pack up a tipi village (like the one in Source 8), to get it ready to move in just one morning. You have to fit in your usual tasks of childcare and cooking as well. What are the tasks you need to do? How would you organise them?

SOURCE 9

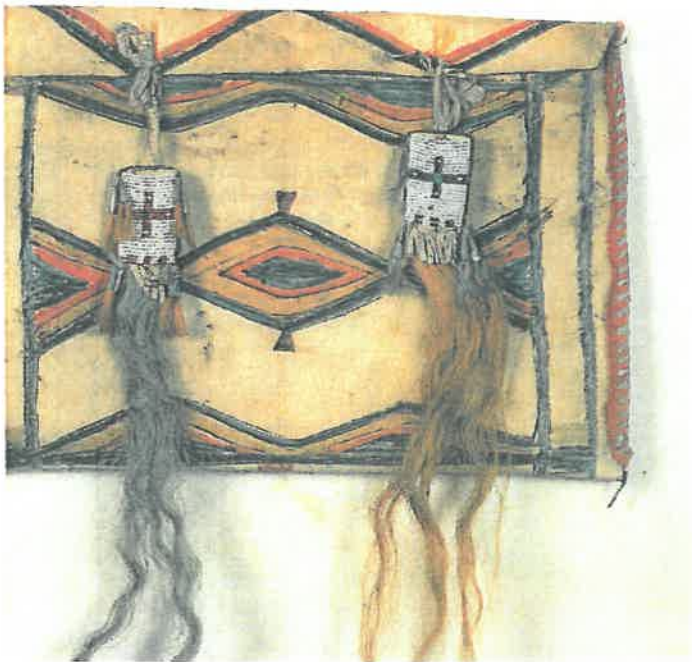
How to make pemmican. Do you think you would like to eat it?

Travelling villages

Nomadic families had no settled homes. They lived in buffalo-skin tipis (like tents). These could be taken down and moved from place to place as hunters followed the buffalo herds. Early travellers to the Great Plains reported that an entire tipi 'village' (as in Source 8) could be packed up, ready to move in one morning. Rich, long-lasting foods like pemmican were made for journeys (Source 9). Lightweight containers, like the parfleche (bag) in Source 10, were used for travelling: they were often beautifully decorated.

Warriors on horseback

Horses were also a great advantage in warfare. Warriors, like those in Source 11, could stage 'hit and run' attacks on enemy settlements, and ride away before their enemies had a chance to fight back. As Source 12 tells us, horses soon became used as proud symbols, identifying Native American nations.



SOURCE 10

A parfleche made by Sioux craft workers from South Dakota.



See them prancing,
They come neighing,
They come a Horse Nation.
See them prancing,
They come neighing,
They come.

SOURCE 12
A war-song used by Great Plains warriors. It was first written down in the 19th century.

Knives and guns

Traditionally, Native American peoples fought with spears, clubs, bows and arrows. European traders introduced new technology into Native warfare (see Source 13). Imported iron knife-blades, fixed to wooden clubs, could cause horrific injuries. Guns, gunpowder and bullets were all bought at a high price from European traders. These new weapons gave the Native nations who owned them tremendous power over the peoples who did not.

Source 14 tells us how Native peoples who lived close to European settlements along the east coast of North America soon became involved in the settlers' wars. Their fighting skills, using both new and traditional weapons, were admired. But however skilfully they fought, Native peoples always ended up the losers. By helping one European army to defeat another, they were also helping to strengthen a fighting force that might, one day, be turned against them.

SOURCE 11
Great Plains warriors drawn by Howling Wolf of the Cheyenne people in 1876.



SOURCE 13
Warriors from the Ute nation holding guns. They were photographed in 1874.

attainment target 1

- 1 In what ways did horses change Native American lifestyles? In what ways did guns change them?
- 2 Which aspects of Native American lifestyles were not changed by horses or guns?
- 3 Explain the difference between the ways guns changed the lives of Native Americans at first, and in the long term.
- 4 Do you think the movement of Native Americans on to the Great Plains was a change for the better or for the worse? Explain your answer.

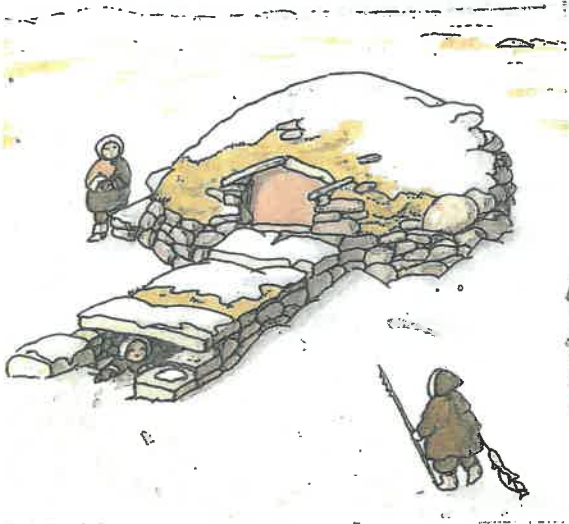
During the many conflicts, they were often willing players, choosing sides based on what they considered to be their best interests in protecting their territories, maintaining trade, or settling old inter-tribal scores. Moreover, they often fought on one side or another for what the whites offered them – bounties for scalps, regular pay and rations, firearms and blankets. And, as allies at war, the Indians were worth any price.

SOURCE 14
This comment was made by a modern European-American historian.

Indian homes

Different landscapes and climates required different types of home. As early Europeans moved from one area to another, they would have seen homes of varying shapes made from different building materials.

- Which home do you think would be the easiest to build?

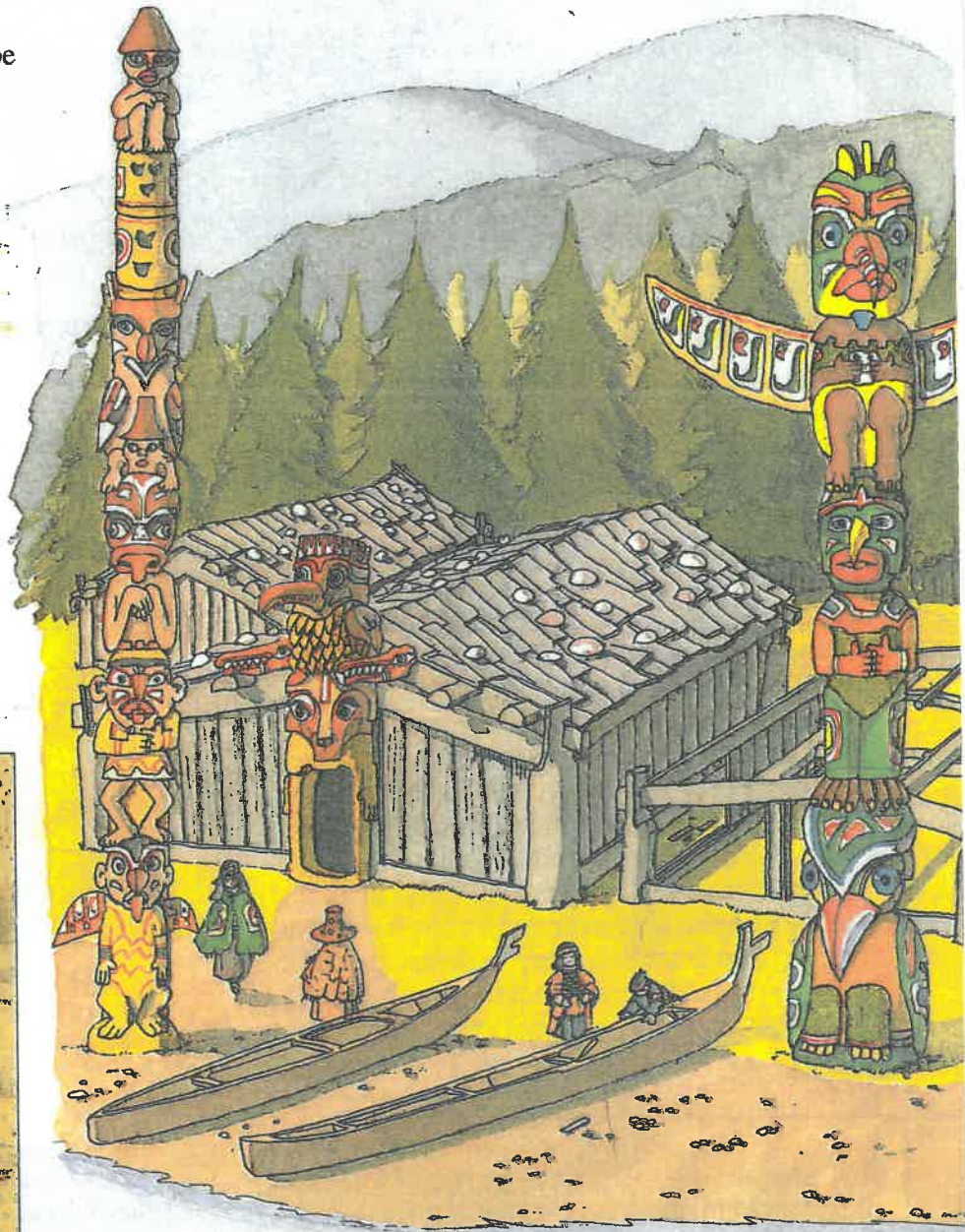


Arctic

Eskimo — or Inuit — Indians lived in igloos during the coldest winter months when the ground was covered by deep snow.

North West

Homes were made from wood. Outside, they erected tall, colourfully painted, totem poles. These poles told a magical story of the family's history.



Source A

Painting of Secota, an East Woodland village, painted by John White in the sixteenth century. These tall, wooden-framed houses were called 'wigwams'. They were also common in the South East. The walls and roofs were covered with tightly woven reed mats or bark.

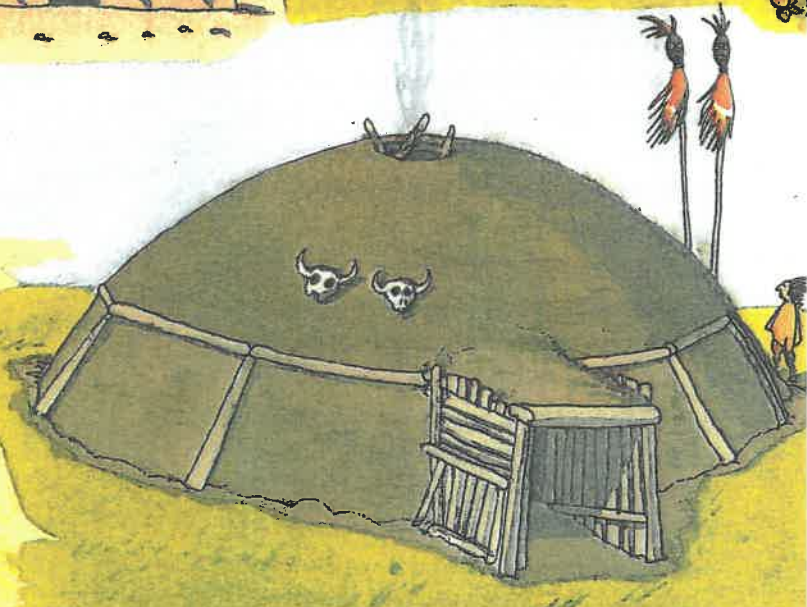
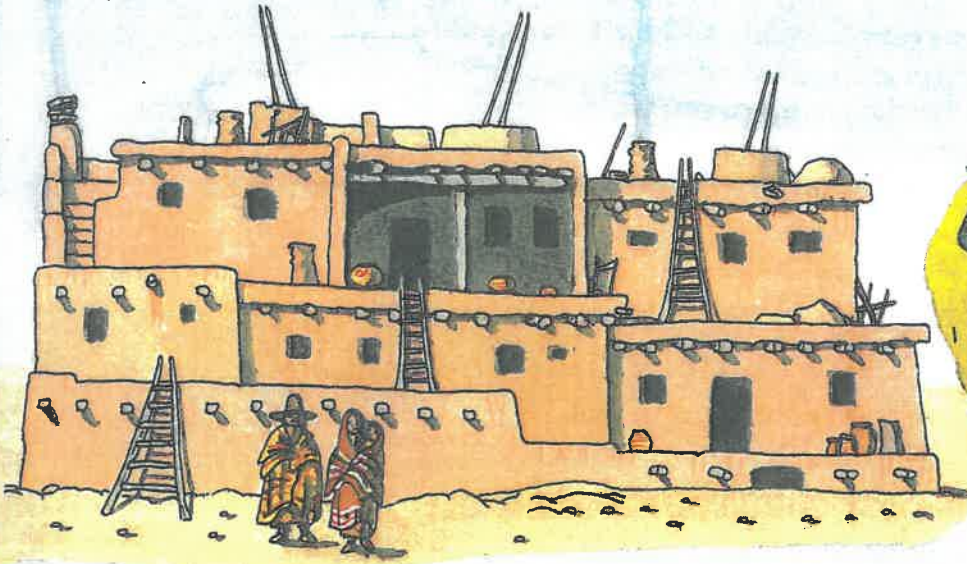
- What evidence of farming is there? What do you think the people are doing in the centre and bottom of the picture?

Great Basin and South West.

These homes, built in the driest areas, were made from bundles of dried grass and brushwood. They were called 'wickieups'. Further east the Pueblo Indians used rich baked clay to build strong square houses.

The Plains and Subarctic

In some areas, lodges were made from earth, branches and grass. Tepees made from animal skins were constructed by the Plains Indians while those living in the Subarctic used tree bark.



- 1 On an outline map of North America:
 - a mark on the culture areas.
 - b make up symbols for the different types of vegetation and the different methods used for getting food (hunting, fishing, gathering wild plants and farming). Mark these on the map.
 - c draw in the types of housing for as many areas as possible. Don't forget to give your map a key.
- 2 In your own words, explain how Indians of the Arctic, the North West and the South West adapted to their environment.
- 3 Write down any reasons you can think of to explain why the tribes of North America were so different from each other.

North America-

1500 - 1860 Indian tribes

In AD 1500, there were approximately 1 million Indians living in North America. They lived in over 600 tribes which contained from 300 to 30,000 people, with the larger tribes divided up into smaller bands. Each tribe had its own way of life and the differences between

them can be seen in the way they hunted and farmed, how they brought up their children and built their homes, and in the languages they spoke. The Sioux were one of the largest groups of Indians and were subdivided into seven tribes.

Indian tribes of North America

Many tribes did not stay in just one place. The Sioux, for example, did not originally live on the Plains but in the East Woodland area, where they lived in wooden villages, fishing and growing crops. Very rarely did they venture on to the Plains to hunt buffalo. But in the eighteenth century their way of life was threatened by white traders who gave guns to the Ojibwa tribe, the deadly enemies of the Sioux. To avoid a war and to find better hunting lands to support their growing population, the Sioux abandoned their villages in Minnesota and by 1750, their tepee camps were spread out from the Mississippi River to the Black Hills of South Dakota.

You can find many tribal names on maps of the USA— Kansas, Ohio and Michigan are examples. The name Sioux was given to them by the Ojibwa: it meant rattlesnake or adder. The Sioux called themselves Dakota, which means friends or allies; the present-day Plains states of North and South Dakota, where they came to live, are named after them.



This map does not show the names of all the Indian tribes but gives an impression of the great number of different groups of native people living in North America.

- Look at the map on page 16 to identify the culture areas of these Indian tribes.

Land of the Indian tribes



Tribal Culture of the Sioux Government

The Sioux people were split up into smaller tribes, governed by chiefs who made decisions about such things as moving camp and making war. The chiefs relied on the advice of other senior men in their group.

Homes

The Sioux moved their camps to follow the buffalo herds. They lived in tipis made of buffalo skin which the women transported when the group moved camp.

Food

The Sioux relied on the buffalo for their food. Hunting was dangerous but the buffalo provided the raw materials for many everyday needs. The women collected wild plants and berries but the Sioux did not farm on the Plains.

Religion

According to the Sioux, all things and all creatures possessed a spirit. They worshipped these spirits and the Great Spirit which controlled all things and performed many dances and rituals to please them.

War

Bravery in battle was very highly respected among the Sioux. They did not generally fight long wars, making short raids on enemy tribes for horses or revenge but they rarely fought over land. The most frequently used weapons were bows and arrows, spears and war clubs.

Evidence

Increased contact with white Europeans during this period means that there is a wide range of written and picture evidence about the Plains Indians. Nineteenth-century explorers wrote down, and sometimes painted, what they saw. White settlers, soldiers and newspaper journalists also had their stories of the Plains and the Sioux, in particular. *Many Indian artefacts such as this Sioux hair ornament made with quills and eagle feathers became collectors items for nineteenth-century white travellers.*



'Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. We know that the white man does not understand our ways. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on.'

Chief Seattle made this speech in 1854. Previously the Sioux language had not been recorded but after this time the words of many chiefs were written down and these translations provide valuable evidence of the lives of Indians as seen through their own eyes.

'These men were thorough savages. Their religion, their superstitions and their prejudices were the same that had been handed down to them from the immemorial time. They fought with the same weapons that their fathers fought with, and wore the same rude garments of skin.'

Frances Parkman Jr., The Oregon Trail, 1849. This popular nineteenth-century book reveals a common attitude to Indians and helped to create an image of their way of life which persisted for hundreds of years.

Sioux Camp Scene by Alfred J. Miller. This painting presents another view of the Indian way of life as seen by a white traveller. How does it differ from the impression created by Frances Parkman Jr.?



The spirit of life

The beliefs and ceremonies of the Sioux have been well recorded, both by the Sioux themselves and by their visitors.

What can we learn about Sioux religion from these sources?

The Great Spirit

To the Indians the world was full of mysteries. They did not use scientific ideas to explain the weather or the seasons or any other physical forces of nature. They noticed these changes and events and saw them as part of the mystery world of spirits and they paid particular attention to dreams, which they believed gave them knowledge and power.

Wakan tanka

The Sioux believed that the sun, the earth, the sky, the mountains, the animals and all the things around them possessed a spirit which they should worship. All of these spirits were controlled by the Great Spirit, known as 'Wakan tanka'. This literally meant 'great mystery'.

Source A

An old Teton Sioux explains the works of Wakan tanka:

'Plants are sent by Wakan tanka and come from the ground at his command. Wakan tanka teaches the birds to make nests. The stones and minerals are placed in the ground by Wakan tanka.'

Okute, speaking in 1911

Source B

The Indian world was carefully organised in sacred patterns, of which the circle was the most important.

'You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that this is because the Power of the World works in circles. The sun comes up and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle and always come back to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood.'

Black Elk, of the Oglala Sioux, who was born in 1863

Religion

All Indians believed in spirits which could bring evil or good to the tribe. The Sioux spent much of their lives trying to please the spirits to get their help. Religious worship was a part of everyday life.

Source C – Prayer

'In the life of the Indian there is only one duty — the duty of prayer. His daily devotions are more necessary to him than daily food. He wakes at day break and steps down to the water's edge. After the bath, he stands before the advancing dawn, facing the sun. Each soul must meet the morning sun, the new sweet earth and the Great Silence alone.

Ohiyesa, of the Santee Sioux, 1911

Ceremonies

The Sioux performed many dances and rituals for the spirits. According to George Catlin, they seemed to have a dance for everything. The most sacred of their ceremonies was called 'Looking at the Sun'. This involved a great deal of pain for those taking part and was the highest form of worship for a Sioux. The ceremony was carried out to make sure that the power of the sun would come back each day. Anyone doing it was given great power and respect within the tribe, if he was able to bear the pain for a full day.



Source D

A painting of the Looking at the Sun ceremony.

Medicine men and women

The Sioux, and other Indians, believed that some people in the tribe were especially good at dealing with the spirits. Each tribe had a special medicine man, second only in importance to the chief. He was in charge of all the ceremonies and was believed to have strong magical powers. An older married woman could, more rarely, become a medicine woman if she showed magical abilities. Their jobs included such things as telling the future, advising the tribe, casting love spells and healing the sick.

Plant medicines

Although much of the medicine man or woman's healing involved magical power, they also had a good knowledge of plants which could cure sicknesses. For example, the powdered roots of the skurik cabbage were successfully used to relieve asthma. The curing properties of 170 Indian drugs have been officially recognised in the USA.

- 1 What did the Sioux worship?
- 2 The white settlers brought Christianity to America from the fifteenth century onwards. Do you think that the Indians would have found any similarities between the Christian God and their own Wakan tanka?
- 3 What was the importance of the circle to Sioux life?
- 4 'The healing of the medicine man was based only on superstition.' Do you agree with this statement?
- 5 Choose one source which you think gives the best idea of what Sioux religion was like. Explain your choice.

Plants with curing properties.

Power from the spirits

An individual hoped to gain special power from the spirits. A teenage Sioux boy would try to gain the power of a spirit through going on what the Sioux called a 'vision quest'. He went up into a hill and did not eat for up to six days. His body became weak and his imagination became strong. In this state, he would dream, and if he saw an animal or bird in his dream, it was believed that creature would become his special guardian spirit for the rest of his life. His dreams sometimes told him of plants that he must collect together and put in a bag as a charm. This was known as his medicine bundle and only he was allowed to touch it.

Why do you think that the Indians thought that dreams were so important?

Warriors and weapons

The Plains were vast open spaces where tribes only rarely saw their neighbours. Yet warfare between them was common. Some tribes, including the Sioux, would actually look for opportunities to fight.

Why was war so important on the Plains?

Warrior societies

Bravery in war was the best way for a man to win honour. He therefore welcomed the opportunities that war brought. Most boys longed for the day when they could become members of a warrior society. Each society had its own costumes, songs and dances, and organised war raids against their enemies. Each society expected loyalty and great bravery from its members.

Source A

Song of the Sioux's Fox Warrior Society:

'I am a Fox
I am supposed to die.
If there is anything difficult,
If there is anything dangerous,
That is mine to do.'

Counting coups

The greatest sign of bravery during battle was to touch an enemy with either bare hands or a special long stick called a coup stick. The warrior societies ran a sort of point-scoring system for these blows or 'coups', as they came to be called. Acts of bravery were often more important than killing the enemy. A warrior would gain few points for killing a man from a distance with his bow and arrow but would gain maximum points for getting close enough to tap him with his coup stick.

Having counted his coups, the Indian would proudly display them for all to see. The usual way of recording coups was by the addition of feathers to their war bonnets or by notches on their coup sticks.



Source B

Plains warrior dressed for war and carrying a feathered coup stick. It is easy to see how this colourful costume could become the stereotype for all Indians.

The causes of war

Indians of the Plains were often keen to find a reason to fight so that they might win glory. Sometimes a war started as a result of an individual seeking revenge. Arnold Iron Shell describes one such case below.

Source C

'Shot-in-the-Heel's son, Holy Circle, had been killed in war against the Shoshoni tribe. Iron Shell, his brother, decided to take revenge for his death. He invited Holy Circle's warrior society to join him and a war party was organised.'

Arnold Iron Shell

Fighting for horses

The most common cause of war was Indians wanting horses or goods belonging to another tribe. Capturing horses from an enemy camp was a highly valued act of bravery. Occasionally tribes fought each other over the control of hunting grounds but this was unusual because the Indians did not see the land as their property. They never fought with the idea of conquering another tribe.

Other causes of war might include a real or imagined insult from another tribe or it might simply occur as a result of a dream.

Preparation for war

Having decided on war, the warriors spent time preparing themselves and their horses. It was a time of religious ritual and spiritual advice from the medicine man.

Source D

Arnold Iron Shell described the equipment needed for war:

'In saddle bags they put their leggings, their bone breast plates and their bladder food bags containing pemmican. Feathered war bonnets were also packed. They also brought new make-up kits packed with elk grease and paint, a porcupine tail brush, their pipes and pipe bags and a buffalo horn drinking cup.'

Arnold Iron Shell

Method of war

Sudden surprise raids were the Indians' favourite form of battle. These gave them plenty of opportunity for bravery and cunning but lessened their chances of being killed. An average of 10–30 Indians went on these raids and few were killed. Women very rarely took part in a raid although a few instances have been recorded. They were, however, quick to take up arms if their own camp was under attack.

Scalping

Death on the battlefield sometimes led to scalping. Without a scalp (skin and hair from the top of his head), the Sioux believed that a person could not enter the eternal after-life, known as 'the land of the many tepees'. Indians removed the scalp of their dead enemies so that they would have fewer enemies in the after-life. Europeans were horrified by the practice of scalping. Many felt that this showed the Indian to be truly savage. For the Sioux, a scalp was a prized trophy and a cause for great celebration.

Source E

Part of a war record of a Sioux warrior, Monka-ush-ka, painted on buffalo skin in about 1830. The picture shows the Sioux fighting Crow Indians, who can be identified by their long hairstyles.

- What does the picture tell us about warfare on the Plains? ▼

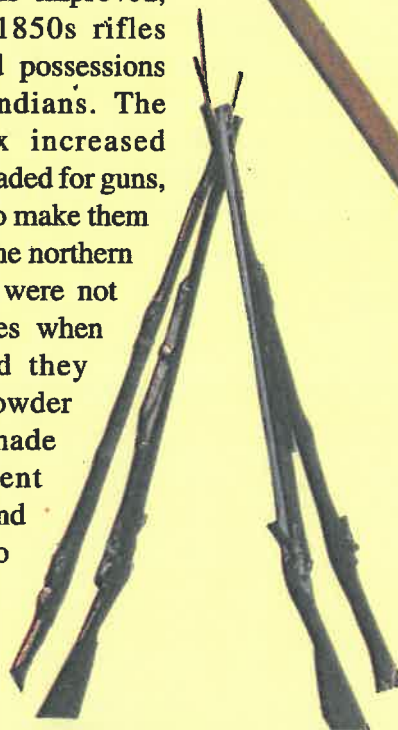
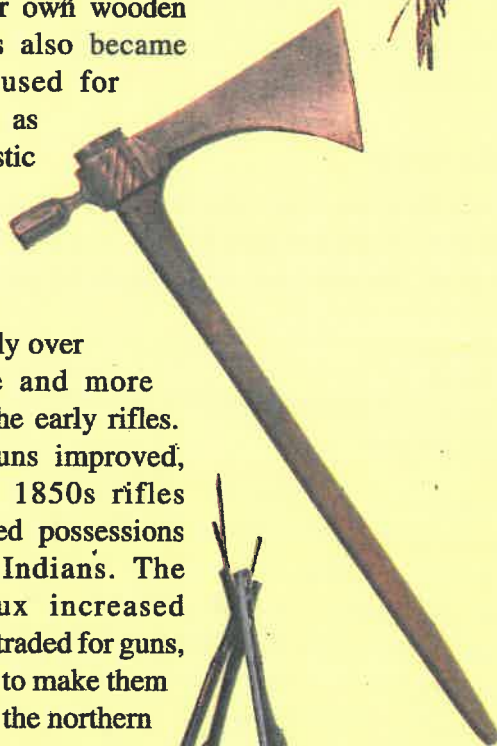


Weapons old and new

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Plains Indians made their weapons from stone, bone and wood but as white traders came onto the Plains, metal replaced the old stone heads. Indians bought the blades from traders and made their own wooden handles. Steel knives also became available and were used for scalping and stabbing, as well as for more domestic purposes.

The bow and arrow was a very efficient weapon. It could be fired accurately over a long distance and more rapidly than the early rifles.

However, guns improved, and by the 1850s rifles became prized possessions amongst the Indians. The power of the Sioux increased enormously when they traded for guns, their firepower helping to make them the dominant people of the northern Plains. But the Indians were not able to mend their rifles when they broke, nor could they make their own gunpowder or bullets. The gun made Indians more dependent on the white people and their technology so the traditional weapons continued to be used alongside the new.



1 Why do you think that boys were so keen to join a warrior society?

2 For what reasons did the Plains Indians go to war?

3 Battles were quite frequent on the Plains. What effect do you think that they would have had on the population of the Indian tribes?

4 In what ways did Indian weapons change and in what ways did they stay the same?

5 Do you think that the Indians were better off with their new weapons?

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Battle at Little Bighorn

In 1868, Red Cloud agreed to end his war and settle within a large reservation area but the peace did not last long. By 1876 the Sioux Indians and the US cavalry were fighting again.

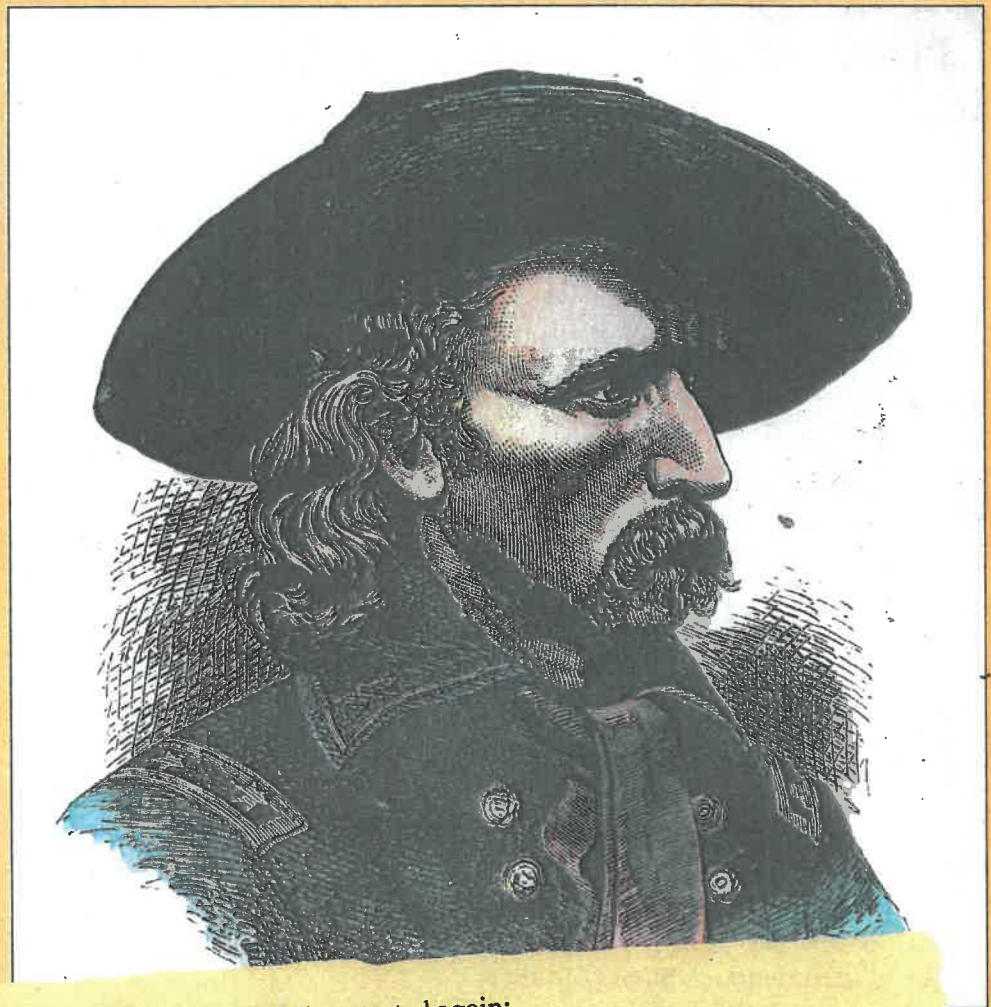
Why did the Sioux Indians return to the war path?

Gold!

By 1872 more gold had been discovered in Sioux territory. This time the gold was in the Black Hills, a very sacred place to the Sioux and other Indians. Miners moved into the area and once again the peace of the Sioux was disturbed.

Source A

General Custer of the 7th Cavalry.



Source B

Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux explained how the fighting started again:

'It was when I was 11, in 1874, that the first sign of new trouble came to us. Scouts told us that many soldiers had come to the Black Hills. Afterwards I learnt that it was Long Hair [Custer]. He had no right to go there. The white men had made a treaty with Red Cloud that said it would be ours as long as the grass grows and water flows. Later I learned too that Long Hair had found much of the yellow metal that makes the white men crazy, and that is what made the bad trouble just as it did before.'

Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*

- Why do the Indians feel that the white men had no right to be in their territory?

Bloodshed at Little Bighorn

The US government asked the Sioux for permission to mine the gold, but they refused. The government was unable to stop miners going into the Black Hills and so the Indians dealt with them in their own way and many miners were killed. Soldiers were brought in to try to control the situation but the problems continued and, by 1876, the Sioux and the US army were prepared to fight.



Source C

Chief Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa Sioux.

The Sioux were led by Chief Sitting Bull and Chief Crazy Horse, who were ready to fight the treaty breakers and refused to make any deals with the white people. In their camp in June 1876 there were not only Sioux Indians but also Cheyennes and Arapahos. Approximately 12,000 Indians had gathered at the Little Bighorn River. They were well armed and prepared for battle. When, on 25 June, the ambitious General Custer led his detachment of about 250 men of the 7th Cavalry towards the camp, he could not have realised the strength of the Indian force. The Indians struck down Custer and all his men that day.

Was it really a victory?

Victory at the Little Bighorn made Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse the most famous Indian chiefs. It was this victory, however, that finally broke the Sioux people. The US government was so shocked that they put huge amounts of money into a final effort to defeat the Indians. The fighting tribes were hunted down; some were killed, some surrendered and others escaped north to Canada.

Dancing for freedom

By the 1880s the Sioux were forced to live on reservations. Lacking the power to fight, they turned to their religion. They, and other Indians across America, started to perform a dance called the Ghost Dance. They believed that its magical powers would remove the white people and bring back the buffalo.

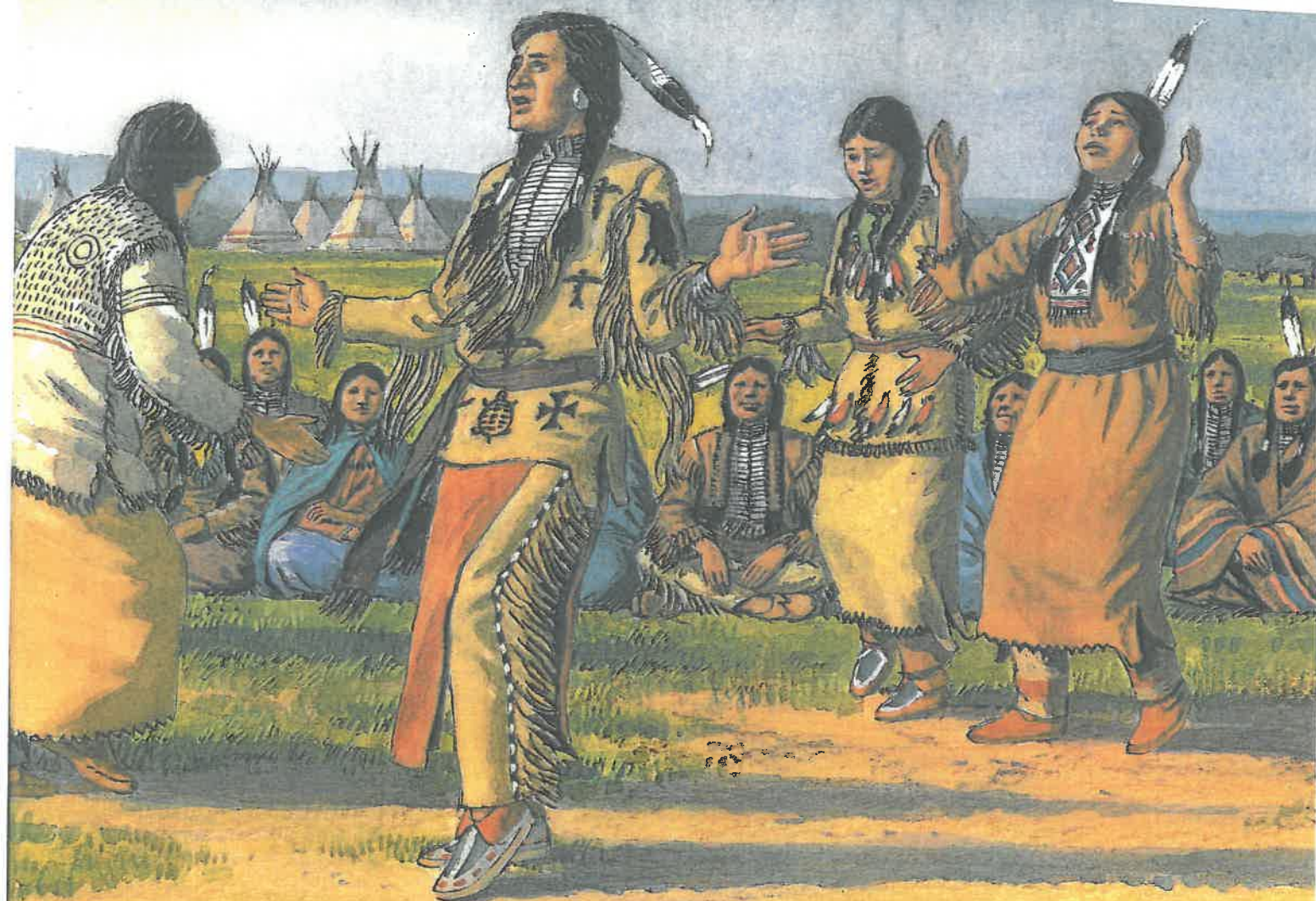
Source D

'Hear us and help us.
Take away the white men
Send back the buffalo
We are poor and weak
We can do nothing alone
Help us to be what we once
were —
Happy hunters of buffalo.'

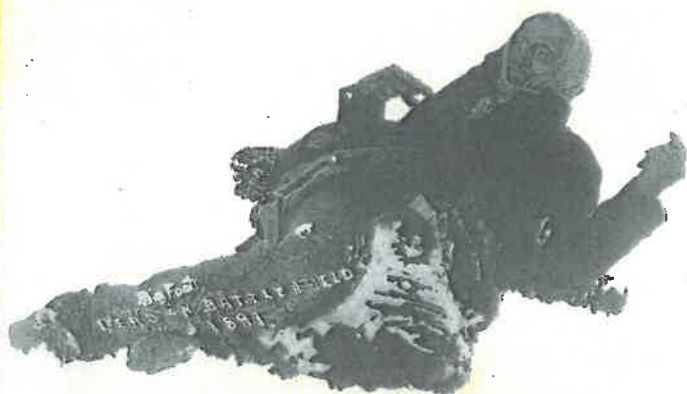
Ghost Dance song, 1880s

The end for the Indians?

Although it was a peaceful dance, some Indians performed it holding rifles. This worried the government and the army. They were afraid that it would start up trouble again. In 1890 a group of largely unarmed Sioux ghost dancers were fired on by the 7th Cavalry. About 200 Indian men, women and children were killed. This became known as the Battle of Wounded Knee. It signalled the end of the Indians' hope for a return to the old life.



A modern artist's impression of the Ghost Dance.



Source E

This photograph, taken in 1890, shows Big Foot lying dead in the snow on the Wounded Knee battlefield. His frozen body represents the end of the Indian resistance.

- 1 What were the causes of the Battle of the Little Bighorn?
- 2 What were the short- and long-term consequences of the Battle of the Little Bighorn for the Sioux?
- 3 Why did the Indians perform the Ghost Dance in the 1880s?
- 4 What words would you use to describe the Indians' feelings as shown in Source D?
- 5 Why do you think that many Indians would have given up hope of returning to their old life after the Battle of Wounded Knee?
- 6 The US newspapers described the Little Bighorn as a massacre and Wounded Knee as a battle. Do you think that the Indians would have agreed with these words?

