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## TRIBAL REGIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

### Unit Overview

In this unit, we will learn that American Indians developed unique cultures with many different ways of life. We will also learn that American Indian tribes and nations can be classified into cultural groups based on geographic and cultural similarities and how to identify those cultural groups.

### Indian Migration

The Indians of North and South America formed hundreds of tribes and nations with many different ways of life. Anthropologists classify tribes and nations into groups with strong geographic and cultural similarities. These classifications are referred to as cultural areas or cultural groups. The best way to show Native American life is through pictures. Where these people came from is answered in the First North Americans map below. The **first route** (denoted in **blue**) was approximately 14,000 to 15,000 years ago. The **second route** (denoted in **red**) was approximately 12,000 to 13,000 years ago.



Over time these people created villages and settlements. This is best shown on the map Native American Tribal Map below.



Many different cultures arose in North America. Farming societies developed in the desert in what was to become the southwestern United States. The **Hohokams** used irrigation to farm in the desert. They may have learned this from the earlier civilizations of Central America. The **Anasazi** built houses high in the cliffs. Some buildings had over 500 rooms. These cliff houses protected the Anasazi from invaders.

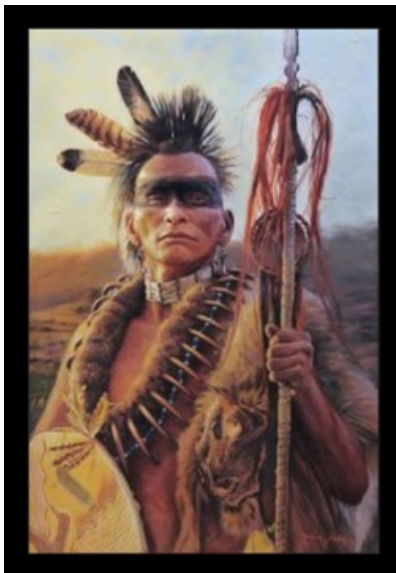
Other farming societies emerged in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys around 700 B.C.E. A group called the **Mound Builders** built huge mounds made of earth. Mounds were cone-shaped or shaped like animals. Scientists see the mounds as evidence of an organized society with fundamental religious beliefs and strong leadership.

Many other groups of Native Americans lived in different regions of North America before 1500. In each region, geography influenced their ways of life. Along the Northwest Coast, people fished for salmon and built large villages with wooden homes. The **Iroquois** of the Eastern Woodlands cleared land and built villages in the forests.

In this lesson we are going to focus on five of the major Native American cultural areas:

**Northeastern Woodland, Plains, Southwestern, Northwestern, and Southeastern Woodland.**

## **Northeastern Woodland**

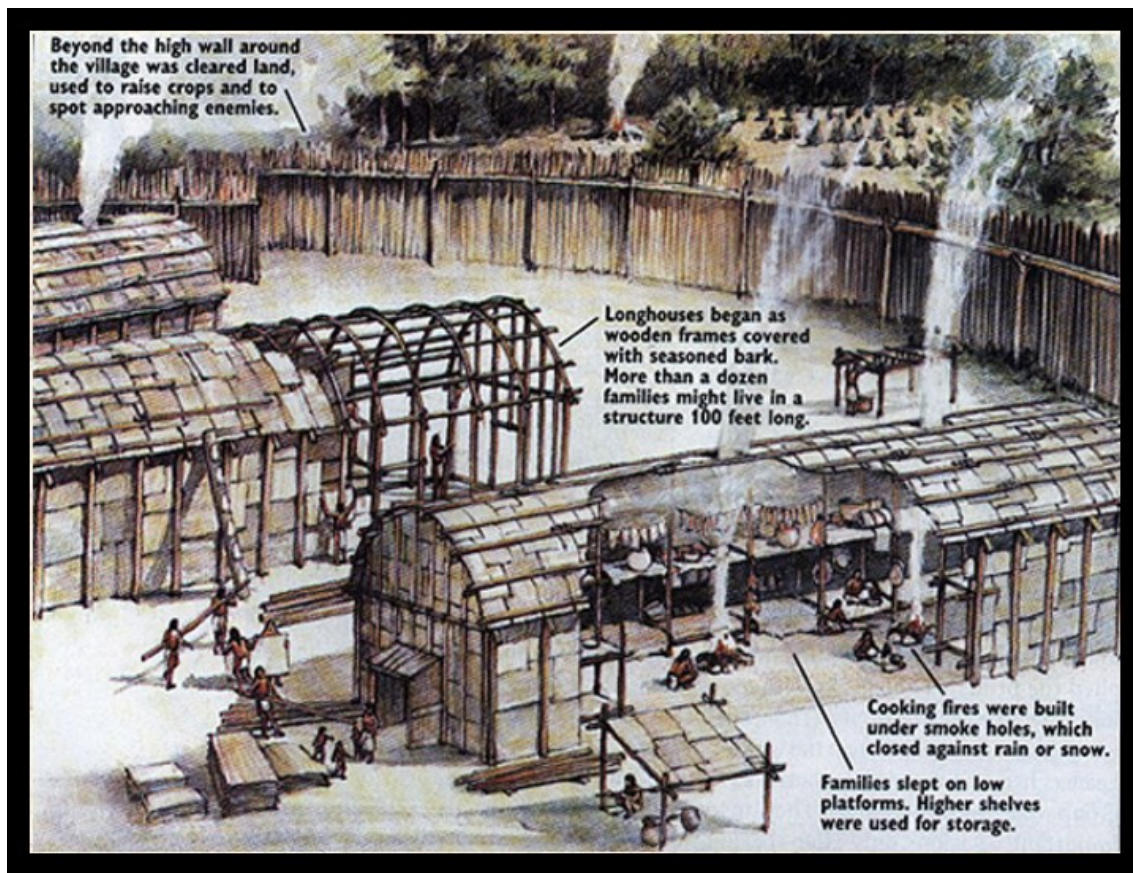


The **Northeastern Woodland Indians** were not nomadic people and built their own home for shelter from the elements. The type of dwellings that they built were known as **longhouses**. They used animal skins, wood, and hay to construct their homes.

The name **Iroquois** means “People of the Longhouse.” The Iroquois were actually six nations combined together. The five original nations were the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Cayuga. Later, the Tuscarora joined. Iroquois wore clothing made from deerskin. The Iroquois made, wore, and traded wampum. **Wampum** are beads made from shells that are woven into strings or belts. Most Iroquois men wore their hair in a mohawk. Iroquois women grew their hair long and usually wore it braided.

Iroquois were mainly farmers. “The Three Sisters” were their most important crops. **The Three Sisters** is the name the Iroquois gave to beans, corn, and squash. They also hunted and fished. In the spring, the Iroquois collected sap from maple trees and made maple syrup. The Iroquois built their villages near rivers. Villages were surrounded by palisades. **Palisades** are tall fences used as a barrier for protection. Iroquois warriors guarded the villages. The Iroquois lived in longhouses. **Longhouses** are long, narrow buildings that housed many families that belonged to the same clan. An average longhouse was about 100 feet long and 20 feet wide. Longhouses were divided in half by a long hallway. Each family lived in a small area that had an upper and lower level. Belongings were stored on the upper level and the family slept on the lower level.





Native Americans groups also had governing bodies. The Iroquois formed the **League of Nations** to discuss their needs and make important decisions together. The League of Nations is also known as the Iroquois Confederacy. The **Iroquois Confederacy** was a Native American governing body that joined all 6 Iroquois nations. Each nation had a specific number of seats in the League of Nations. The women of each tribe selected the men that would serve as members of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Click on the presentation below!



## Southeastern Woodland



The **Cherokee** tribe was one of the main cultural groups of the **Southeastern Woodlands**. About 4,000 years ago, the **Cherokee** people left the southwest region of what would become the United States in search of a home. They settled for a while around the Great Lakes region, but they were not welcomed. The Iroquois were not happy to see them. The Iroquois forcibly pushed the Cherokee from their land. The Cherokee moved on.

They wandered finally into North Carolina, where they discovered a land full of forests, mountains, rivers, streams, and fertile valleys. Wildlife was plentiful. They settled down happily. Life continued for thousands of years. As their own village populations grew, and as they conquered other tribes in the area, the Cherokee Nation grew. At one time, it covered 8 states including all or portions of the present day states of Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Alabama, Virginia and West Virginia.

The Cherokee were farmers, hunters and gatherers. They grew corn, squash and beans, along with pumpkin, melons, sunflowers, tobacco, and other crops. Corn was the most important food. The women made sure they planted enough crops to provide food for two years. The Cherokee were wonderful hunters. They did not hunt for sport. The men only hunted what they needed to feed their families. Every part of the animal was used. The most important animal for their needs was the deer. They hunted turtles for food, and used turtle shells for rattles. The tools they made were blowguns, bows and arrows, animal traps, nets to catch fish, and spears.



Women wore deerskin tops, skirts, and moccasins. Men wore deerskin loin clothes in the summer, and added leggings, shirts, and robes in the winter, all made of deerskin. Men commonly decorated their bodies and faces with tattoos or paint. They made jewelry of shells and silver. Women made painted clay beads.

In the Cherokee culture, men and women were considered equals. Men cut down trees to clear land for planting. They used the wood to build canoes, homes, and the pole fences around the villages. They hunted and fished. They made traps, nets, and other tools. They fixed moccasins. Sometimes a man would move in with his wife's family, and sometimes he might build a home for his wife. The role of Cherokee women in the past was very different than the role of other American women. In the Cherokee Nation, women were warriors. Women also ruled the home. Although the men built the homes, the women owned them. Women had power over their families, participated in government, and fought as warriors. Very few women had these rights in Colonial America. They also did the same jobs as did other Indian women. They were very proud of their colorfully designed baskets. Baskets were used to gather nuts in the fall, and store goods. The women were the farmers. They planted seed and harvested crops. They stored food. Young girls pounded corn into flour. Women used the skins of animals to make clothing and other goods. They also raised the children.

## Trail of Tears



The US government passed a law in 1830 called the **Indian Removal Act**. This allowed the US government the right to force Indian tribes to vacate their land and move to reservation lands, geographical areas the government had put aside for their use. Most Indian tribes did not want to

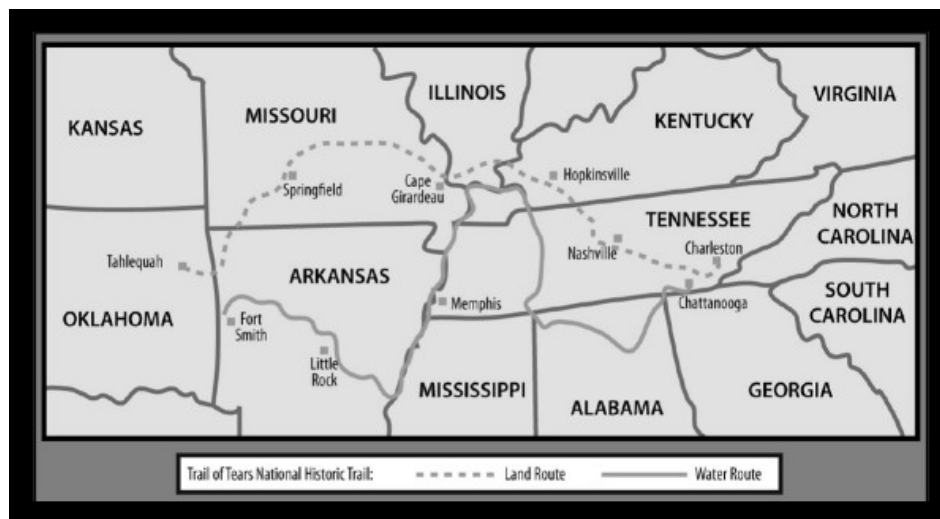


leave their land. It was their spiritual and physical home. But the government sent in the army to force tribes to move.

The Cherokee, like other tribes and nations, were told to leave. The US government gave them land in Oklahoma. The Cherokee refused to leave. They had no desire to live in Oklahoma. They wanted to live in the land of their ancestors, where they had always lived. The Cherokee took their case to the US Supreme Court. And they won! The Supreme Court said the Cherokee were right - the US government could not force them to move. The Cherokee people were so happy. They thought they had won the battle to live on their own land. But they were mistaken.

President Andrew Jackson ignored the Supreme Court ruling. He directed the US Army to capture all the Cherokee they could find and force them to move. The US Army followed the President's direction. The Supreme Court did nothing.

This was an incredibly sad time in American history. Most Cherokee had to walk the whole way. They walked through rain and cold and incredible heat. More than 4,000 Cherokees died on the journey. That is why this forced eviction was called "**The Trail of Tears.**" The painting above was completed by Robert Lindeux in 1942.





## Plains



The **Sioux** tribe was one of the main cultural groups of the **Plains**. The Plains Indians were located between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. The Sioux was a huge nation made up of seven strong tribes. The tribes were close. They traded with each other. They supported each other. They worked together. They obeyed the decisions of the **Seven Council Fires**. And they were peaceful.

Not all Sioux men were warriors. One man might be a great hunter. Another might be a great storyteller, who told tales of Iktomi, the trickster who got what he wanted by using mischief. Yet another might be a recorder whose job was to paint pictures on buffalo hides that told a story, usually a story about a great battle or a great victory. The Sioux believed that people should do the job they did best.

The women were in charge of the camp and the kids. They cooked and gathered food and firewood. They made clothes. They made baskets. They worked with porcupine quills and beads to decorate the deerskin clothes the tribe wore. They made beautiful star quilts. One of their major jobs was to make buffalo jerky. **Jerky** was a form of dried food made from meat. It was not easy to make. It took a great deal of pounding and drying and mixing. But it was an important food because it could be stored for two years without spoiling.

The Sioux were hunters and gatherers. They hunted buffalo, deer, and other animals. They gathered fruits and vegetables. Some of the Sioux people also grew crops. **The Three Sisters** were the most important crops - maize, squash, and beans. They also grew pumpkins. Food was often traded between the various tribes.

Like all Plains People, the Sioux used all the parts of the animals they killed. Nothing was wasted. Hunters brought back deer, elk, moose, sheep, beavers, mountain lions, coyotes, and rabbits to name a few. Animals provided food, clothing, and bags to hold arrows, medicines, and other goods. Even the tiniest scraps were kept and used over and over. If they could not find a useful purpose for something, they used it decoratively. The women wore dresses made from soft deerskin. They used the soft fur from rabbits to decorate their clothing. The men wore leggings and gloves. They rarely wore shirts. Leftover scraps of deer and elk skin were used to make moccasins. Scraps from other animal skins were used to add decorative fringes to clothes and to moccasins. The men wrapped buffalo furs over their shoulders. They could not be buttoned or fastened. These fur garments were called buffalo robes. Both women and men wore a lot of jewelry made of sea shells, metal, and beads. The men wore necklaces and sometimes arm bands. The women wore earrings and bracelets. Men had to earn the right to wear a grizzly bear claw necklace through an act of bravery.

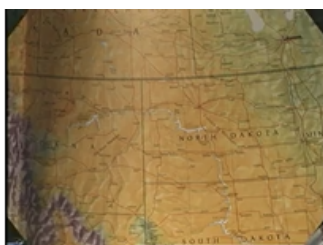


A **tepee** (tipi, teepee) is a Plains Indian home. Shown in the watercolor painted by Karl Bodmer about 1833, above. It is made of buffalo hide fastened around very long wooden poles designed

in a cone shape. Tepees were warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Some were quite large. They could hold 30 or 40 people comfortably.

A tepee used a hide flap as a doorway. Weather permitting, the entrance faced east, towards the rising sun. If the weather was miserable or a storm was brewing, the people positioned the flap opening in whatever way would best serve the comfort of the occupants. Sometimes, the people arranged their tepees in a circle, with all the opening flaps facing the center open space created by the circle of tepees. The younger kids could play in this open space, under the watchful eyes of their mothers. It was up to the women where to place a tepee. The tepee was their castle, and they were in charge of anything to do with it, including building it, creating it, breaking it down for transports. The mother was in charge of behavior inside the tepee, as well. If she said, "Go to sleep," everyone had to go to sleep or leave the tepee. She was in charge inside the tepee. It was her tepee. Men were in charge of the outside of the tepee. It was up to them to bring back the skins necessary to cover the poles. It was up to them to either bring back horses or hides to trade for poles, or to make the poles themselves.

The men often painted the outside of the tepee they called home. The painting was often symbolic of their achievements. Each tribe had their own style. There was a small fire in the center for cooking and for warmth when needed. Tepees had an open space at the top, a little off center, to let the smoke out. When it rained or snowed, the men were sent outside to wrap an extra piece of hide around the top of the tepee. The men always left a little room for the smoke to get out. The Plains people used little furniture. They slept on buffalo skins on the floor of their homes.



## Northwestern



All of the west coast tribes were considered rich by the other Indian nations. Of all the coastal Indians, the Tulalip, Swinomish, Lummi and Skagit tribes were considered the most rich. It was not the discovery of oil, although these early people did love to dunk their food in whale oil to give it flavor. It was not the discovery of gold or silver, although these early people were talented artists. They would have made gorgeous jewelry from gold and silver (if they had discovered gold or silver!) But, they did not use metal of any kind. They did not have gold statues or iron pots or brass weapons.

What made them so rich and famous? Food! An abundance of food and safe, sturdy shelter made them famous. These early people never developed a system of agriculture. They did not need to. They built their villages along the ocean shores, rivers, and streams, where food was plentiful. Added to the abundance of food was the abundance of cedar trees. They used cedar trees to build plank homes and sturdy canoes. Softened cedar bark was used to make shoes, clothing, blankets, and toweling. Their art was incredible. Using cedar, they carved everything from masks to totem poles to cooking utensils. These early people were very clever. They created a way to dry food so that it could be stored safely.

Once they could store food, they could relax a bit during the winter months. That gave them time to develop a gracious lifestyle. They lived in longhouses built of thick cedar planks. These homes were also called **plank houses**. These early people chopped down and split massive cedar trees using beaver teeth and stone axes. The longhouses were huge. Some were about 100 feet long and 25 feet wide, with low roofs for easy heating. The only openings in the whole building were the entrance door and a hole in the roof to allow smoke to escape.

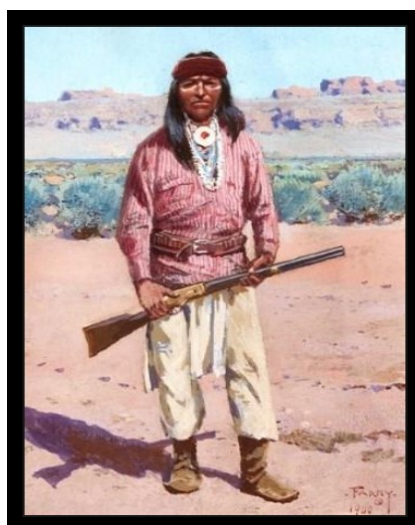
Unlike other tribes across the country, the Pacific Northwest Coastal Indians never developed democracy. That made them different. Instead, they ruled by wealth. The clan with the most



wealth had the most power. They set great store by wealth, family connections, and slave ownership. They took social climbing to a new level.



## Southwestern



A long time ago, people lived in what would become the Southwest Region of the United States. Some scientists say people came to this region about 40,000 years ago from Asia. Some say 25,000 years ago. These early people were hunters and gatherers. They hunted for buffalo. They gathered wild fruit and vegetables. They left traces of themselves on cave walls. **Pictographs** are rock drawings. **Petroglyphs** are rock carvings. These early people left both pictographs and petroglyphs that date back more than 11,000 years. To paint pictographs (rock drawings), the Ancient Ones used twig brushes dipped in naturally colored vegetable fats. These early people painted hands, animals, dancers, hunters, gods, and medicine men. Even though these paintings are thousands of years old, some still exist in caves all over the southwest. Some are still brightly colored.

As time went on, around 300 CE, people began to settle down and grow crops. The three major crops were "**The Three Sisters**" - maize, squash, and beans. Farmers used irrigation to water crops in dry areas. They commonly grew their crops above ground. They raised sheep for food and wool. They used the wool to make colorfully woven blankets and clothing. The women made clay baskets. They also wove baskets from long grasses. Over time, the women became the potters, and the men became the weavers. One of their favorite designs was a zigzag pattern that represented lightning and rain. Without rain, the Anasazi could not have grown corn.

The anasazi made their houses out of cliff rock. They were called **pueblos**. They lived "in" a cliff. The Anasazi were clever to build their homes in cliffs so that rain, snow, bad weather, and dangerous animals could not harm them.



They governed themselves using a simple tribal system of clan representation. Every clan, or family group, had a representative who spoke for their clan at village meetings. These people worked out their problems in a peaceful manner. They believed in many supernatural beings. Everything they needed they got from nature, so it is not surprising that their gods were the gods of nature. They developed a rich religious life. Like most early people in the Americas, they used impersonation to honor their gods. The men dressed up in colorful costumes at religious ceremonies, to look like their gods and to attract the attention of their gods. Rain played an important part in their religion. One of their most exciting dances was the **rain dance**.



Print and complete the following activities!

[\*\*Native American Regions of North America\*\*](#)

[\*\*Tribal America: A Picture Story\*\*](#)

[\*\*Tribal America: Cherokee Code\*\*](#)



### NATIVE AMERICANS

- 1830** The Indian Removal Act forces all Native Americans to move to reservations.
- 1837** Plains tribes are devastated by diseases brought by settlers from Europe.
- 1838** Cherokees march on the "Trail of Tears" to the west. Thousands die on the way and soon afterwards.
- 1860** At this date there are around 15 million buffalo living on the Great Plains.
- 1861-1890** Frequent wars break out between settlers and Native Americans.
- 1862** The Homestead Act allows settlers to buy land on the Great Plains very cheaply.
- 1864** The Navajos are forced to go on what is known as "The Long Walk" to Bosque Redondo. Many Cheyenne are massacred at Sand Creek, Colorado.
- 1865** Many more settlers start heading west after the end of the Civil War.
- 1868** General George Custer and the US cavalry brutally attack unarmed women and children in a Sioux village.
- 1876** The American government forces the Chiricahua Apaches to move from their homelands to a reservation in eastern Arizona. In June General Custer's forces are trapped and killed by Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at the battle of the Little Bighorn.
- 1885** By this date only about 2,000 bison are left.
- 1890** The US cavalry massacres over 200 Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek.
- 1952** The reservations are abolished and Native Americans are free to live where they want to.

