

American Indians

Reading and Discussion

The term “American Indians” refers to the native people who live in North America. Generally, these people flourished in the time before Europeans colonized the continent in the 1500s. The American Indians were a diverse population of people that formed groups that related to their environment. There were several major areas of North America that became localities for groups of Indians. There were groups for the **East**, the **Plains**, the **Southwest**, and the **Northwest**. Each of these cultural groups shared many characteristics, including similar languages, but they could also be differentiated from the other groups. Among these groups, there were many subgroups, which were called tribes.

In the East, the two major groups were the **Iroquois** and the **Algonquin**. The first group, the Iroquois, was actually a confederation made up of six other tribes under a government of leaders from each of the tribes. The six tribes were: **Mohawk**, **Seneca**, **Cayuga**, **Oneida**, **Tuscarora**, and **Onondaga**. These tribes considered themselves people of the longhouse, which refers to the long, single room building made from logs that the people used as living quarters. The most famous of these tribes was the Mohawk. This tribe was known among the confederation as the Keepers of the Eastern Door because their task was to guard the area from attacks coming from the East. The tribes of the East shared the same environment – woodlands with heavy winters and many rivers and watersheds. They were located in what is now known as New York State and the Ontario and Quebec Provinces in Canada. These American Indians were farmers, but they were good at hunting deer and elk as well.

The Plains Indians were named the **Sioux** by the French. The Sioux lived in the central plains area of North America. Today, this area would be the area from Iowa to Minnesota and up to the Dakotas. They were the largest group of American Indians and were governed under a group called the Seven Council Fires. This refers to the seven tribes that made up the Sioux. The seven tribes can be divided into three main branches: the **Lakota**, the **Santee**, and the **Yankton**. The Sioux generally lived in teepees (or tipis) which were a type of tent made from animal hides.

The Lakota were the most famous Sioux tribe. The Lakota were gatherers and hunters, but not farmers. They followed the migrations of the wild game, like the buffalo herds. The Lakota were a tribe of warriors and soldiers and they were often called upon to protect the other tribes. Being able to tame horses, the Lakota became excellent hunters that rode on horseback.

The two most famous tribes in the Southwest were the **Navajo** and the **Apache**. Navajo people called themselves Diné, which means “the people” in the Navajo language. The Navajo have been known to live in six-sided houses that were made of wood and covered in clay. These houses are called **hogans**.

Name _____

Date _____

The Apache were the major nomadic tribe in the Southwest. They were also the last major tribe to surrender to the American government in the 1880s. This tribe had little political unity and primarily lived in northwestern Mexico, New Mexico, parts of Texas, and the Great Plains. They spoke seven different languages.

Of the Northwest tribes, the **Blackfoot** are the most well-known tribe. The buffalo provided a majority of their needs, including food, clothing, and leather for teepees. Because buffalo was so important, the Blackfoot were a nomadic people that often followed buffalo herds. The Blackfoot were fiercely independent and were good warriors. The Blackfoot were enemies of the Sioux.

The Blackfoot had an interesting social structure. They lived in groups of about 80-240 people. Their society was structured in bands. Each band had a respected leader. People in a band were not necessarily related and were free to leave one band and join another at any time. This often solved disputes because people who disagreed with their leader could leave their band and join another band that was more agreeable.

As you can see, there have been many different tribes of American Indians. Each tribe is unique.

Name _____

Date _____

Activities

Activity A: True or False: Write T or F in the space provided.

- ____ 1. The Sioux lived in the central plains area of North America.
- ____ 2. The Lakota were the most famous Sioux tribe.
- ____ 3. The Lakota were gatherers and hunters, but not farmers.
- ____ 4. The two most famous tribes in the Southwest were the Blackfoot and Apache.
- ____ 5. The Apache were governed by a group called the Seven Council Fires.
- ____ 6. The tribes in the East were located in what is now known as New York State and the Ontario and Quebec Provinces in Canada.

Activity B: Fill in the blanks.

1. In the East, the two major groups of American Indians were the _____ and the Algonquin.
2. This tribe was known among the confederation as the Keepers of the Eastern Door: _____.
3. A _____ is a type of tent made from animal hides and used by some tribes of American Indians.
4. The Navajo called themselves _____, which means “the people.”
5. This tribe was an enemy of the Sioux: _____.
6. This tribe was the last major tribe to surrender to the government in the 1880s: _____.
7. Six-sided houses that were made of wood and covered in clay are called _____.
8. This tribe had a society that was structured in bands: _____.

Answer Key

Activity A

- T** 1. The Sioux lived in the central plains area of North America.
- T** 2. The Lakota were the most famous Sioux tribe.
- T** 3. The Lakota were gatherers and hunters, but not farmers.
- F** 4. The two most famous tribes in the Southwest were the Blackfoot and the Apache.
- F** 5. The Apache were governed by a group called the Seven Council Fires.
- T** 6. The tribes in the East were located in what is now known as New York State and the Ontario and Quebec Provinces in Canada.

Activity B:

- 1. In the East, the two major groups of American Indians were the Iroquois and the Algonquin.
- 2. This tribe was known among the confederation as the Keepers of the Eastern Door: Mohawk.
- 3. A teepee (or tipi) is a type of tent made from animal hides and used by some tribes of American Indians.
- 4. The Navajo called themselves Diné, which means “the people.”
- 5. This tribe was an enemy of the Sioux: Blackfoot.
- 6. This tribe was the last major tribe to surrender control to the government in the 1880s: Apache.
- 7. Six-sided houses that were made of wood and covered in clay are called hogans.
- 8. This tribe had a society that was structured in bands: Blackfoot.