

The Dakota Tipi

Learner Goal: The students will gain an understanding and an appreciation for the tipi, a semi-permanent home of the Indians that lived on the Plains. The students will be able to recognize that there were many different types of dwellings and they had very specific purposes. The student will be able to identify the beauty and efficiency of this dwelling and understand why it is still used today.

Learner Outcomes: The students will be able to 1) Locate the area where the Plains Indians lived on a map of Native America 2) Identify and explain in their own words at least two different types of dwellings used by Indians in Native America. 3) Describe some thoughtful ideas about the decorations used on the tipis and their significance.

Materials: Map of Native America C. 1825 and C. 1900. Pictures and examples of various types tipis made and used by the Plains Indians both past and present. Pictures and examples of different types of dwellings for all Native Americans and how they differ from region to region. A tipi. Student Reading - Tipi Proprieties

Background Information:

Tribes Had Many Forms of Homes:

Indian tribes had many forms of homes or dwellings. One of the most important things I want you to remember today is this:

Only a Few Tribes Lived in Tipis

There are more than 300 different Indian tribes in North America. But only a few of them lived in tipis. Tipis were the favored homes in this territory, which is now Minnesota. The tipi was also favored by all the Plains tribes who followed the Buffalo. The word tipi means "for living in" and, although it is from the Dakota language, most tribes use the word tipi when they describe these homes.

Other Kinds of Homes or Dwellings

Enlist some discussion here: Can anyone tell me of other kinds of dwellings used by traditional Native People of North America?

- Eskimos or Aleuts How about Eskimos or Aleuts in Alaska? Igloos?
- Southwest U. S. Tribes - Pueblos? Pueblos were permanent dwellings made of clay and straw. They were actually the first condominiums on this continent
- Seminoles in Florida an anyone tell me what kind of dwellings the Seminole Indians in Florida had? Chickees? Chickees were homes built on platforms. Their poles were made of cypress wood and

the roofs were made of palm fronds. Both cypress and palm trees grow in abundance in Florida. Many Seminoles live in Chickees today.

- Dakota and Ojibwe Favored Tipis The Dakota Sioux and the Ojibwe tribes favored the tipi as did all other Plains Indian tribes, because tipis were simple and easy to move. Minnesota is the traditional homeland to both the Dakota Sioux and the Ojibwe tribes.

To be able to move the tipi quickly was very important because the Plains Indian tribes lived off of the Buffalo, and that means they had to be able to move their entire camp on a moment's notice. The plains Indians relied on the Buffalo for their food, their clothing, their tipis, their tools and many other necessities of life.

When the Buffalo herd decided to move to find better grazing lands, the tribe had to follow them and follow them quickly. Often their wanderings would take them for hundreds of miles across the vast Great Plains of America.

Tipi's Simplicity

Because of its simplicity, the tipi was the preferred home for Plains Indians. There has never been another tent design that can surpass the usefulness and beauty of the tipi.

The tipi is warm in the winter, cool in the summer, moveable, and easy to construct. And on top of all that, it is extremely beautiful to see. The tipi possesses a wealth of history, tradition and lore. Traditionally the women erected the tipi, while the men were on the Buffalo hunt.

Describe the Process:

Need 17 Poles

It takes a total of 17 poles for a typical tipi. The poles are about 25 feet in length and made from Tamarack Pine, which is indigenous to this area.

Tripod

The first three poles are called the tripod. They are tied together tightly at the top. The east pole is tied on top of the other two. These poles form the basic structure around which the other poles are placed.

Door Faces East

All tipis are erected with the door facing east, the direction of the rising sun, so that in the morning, when you awake, you step out to greet the dawn. The east pole becomes part of the door.

Four Poles to the Right:

When the first three poles are in place, 4 poles are placed to the right of the east pole, creating the door.

Four Poles to the Left

Then four more poles are placed to the left of the door pole.

Three Poles in the Back

Then three poles are placed in the back. This entire sequence is important. If you miss a step, you must go back and redo it because the tipi will not go up properly if each step is not correct.

The Spiral:

Each pole is placed on top of the previous pole forming a spiral that helps direct water out of the lodge.

Poles Wrapped (Kids like to help here)

At this point, the tripod rope is wrapped counter-clock wise, four times around all the poles.

Lift Pole

Now we are ready for the lift pole. The 15th pole is called the lift pole. The tipi cover is now tied to this pole and lifted into place. Then the cover is unrolled and laced up using the lacing pins, which are wooden dowels. Now the door is attached.

Last Two Poles are Flap Poles

If you are wondering about the last two poles, they are for the smoke flaps. These flaps can be adjusted, according to the direction of the wind to draw the smoke from inside to outside and can be closed for the occasional downpour or blizzard.

Stake Down the Tipi Cover

Once the flap poles are in, the cover must be staked down. The poles are then pushed out from the inside to give the cover a tight fit.

Circle of Life

Another thing to remember is that the circular shape of the tipi is not coincidental. Most Native Peoples recognize the circle as non-ending. It is often called the circle of life. It symbolizes the sun, moon, the calendar year and the cycle of life itself. You will see the circle in much of Native art and traditions and when camps were erected, all the tipis form a circle.

Activities:

- Students conduct research on various types of dwellings used by Indians of various climates and areas.
- Students witness a demonstration of a tipi being erected and taken down.

Student Reading:

Dakota Proprieties in the Tipi

by D. A. Weston (Mahpiya Wicasta)

The Dakota tipi was a sacred place as well as a home. The floor of the tipi represented the *Maka* (earth) on which we Dakota (human beings) live, the walls of the tipi the *Mah pi ya to* (blue sky), and the poles the trails from earth to the spirit world – the links between man and *Wakan' Tanka*, the Great Mystery. Directly behind the fireplace was a little space of bare earth which served as the family altar. Often this space was prepared in the shape of a square, the sod and all roots and stubs removed, and the earth within the square pulverized and brushed clean. The Sioux (Dakota) called this altar a "square of mellowed earth" It represented Mother Earth, and on this square sweet grass, cedar, or sage were burned as incense to the spirits. The type of incense used on a given occasion depended upon the ceremony as well as what was available, but the burning of incense was an important part of every ceremony. It carried prayers to the Ones Above, as did the smoke from a pipe. Indeed, the *c'an-du'-hu-pa* (pipe) itself was often purified in the smoke of incense. Before a meal, the host said a grace and made an offering of a choice piece of buffalo meat, either by placing it in the fire, or burying it in the earth on the altar. Dakota people had definite rules of behavior (etiquette) for life in the tipi. If the door was open, friends (*Ko da'*) usually walked right in. If the door was closed, they called out or rattled the door covering and awaited an invitation to enter. Some tipi even has a special door knocker which could be shaken to attract attention within. A shy person might just cough to let those inside know he was waiting. If two sticks were crossed over a tipi door, it meant that the owners either were away or desired no company. If they were away, they first closed the smoke flaps by lapping or crossing them over the smoke hole. The door cover was tied down securely and two sticks were crossed over it. The door was thus "locked," and as safe in Dakota society as the most strongly latched door would be in Euro-American settlers civilization today. Usually, *wi ca' sta'* (men) sat on the *wa-zi-ya-pa* (north side) of the tipi and *win'yan* (women) on the *l-to'kah-wa-pa* (south.) The owner's seat was against the rear south backrest. If he had a son, the son's seat was the other backrest, if he had no son, this was reserved for guests. And often both rear backrests were given to guests and the host moved farther over to the right so that the guests were on his left, or *c'an-te'* (heart side). On entering a tipi, a man moved to the right to his designated place, a woman to the left. Whenever possible, it was proper to walk behind a seated person, the seated one leaning forward, if necessary. If passing between him and the fire could not be avoided pardon was asked. In asking such pardon, a kinship term was used. This did not necessarily imply actual relationship, but was a courtesy. To an older person, one would say "Excuse me, *mihunkawazi* (my brother): or *mitanke* "(my sister)," or *Tahansi* (A man's male cousin)," depending upon how close the acquaintance might be. There were exceptions to the above placements and movements within the tipi, of course. There were occasions when women occupied the north side of the tipi especially in the case of a man having more than one wife. No one ever stepped across the altar, or the fire! *He'c'e-tu ya do!*

The Tepee: A Portable Home for the Plains Hunters

Long before the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other Plains tribes came to the grasslands, the tepee had been developed by the Indians of the northern forests. They used a pole frame to create the conical shape and then covered the skeleton with birch bark, caribou hides, or other materials.

The Plains Indians adapted this basic structure to their own environment and their own pattern of living. An adjustment in the framework was made to accommodate the strong winds of the region, and buffalo hides, sewn together, became the usual covering.

The tepee was an ideal dwelling for the Plains people. Like the buffalo they hunted, these Indians were constantly on the move. Their dwellings, therefore, had to be readily transportable. A tepee presented no problems. To move it, the ends of two of the tepee supporting poles were lashed to a horse. The other ends dragged along the ground, thus forming a roughly triangular frame, a travois, on which the buffalo covering and the family's other possessions were tied.

At the new campsite several long poles were bound together near their tops. The poles were then stood up and slanted outward from this center tie to

form the outline of a cone. Other poles were leaned against this framework to strengthen it, and a buffalo-hide covering, usually of 8 to 20 skins, was draped over the skeleton. The covering was joined near the top with wooden lodge pins, as shown below. An opening was left at the very top as a smoke hole; the entrance, with closable flaps, was at the lower part of this seam.

In hot weather, when cooling breezes were wanted, the flaps were left open and the lower part of the tepee covering was rolled up, permit-

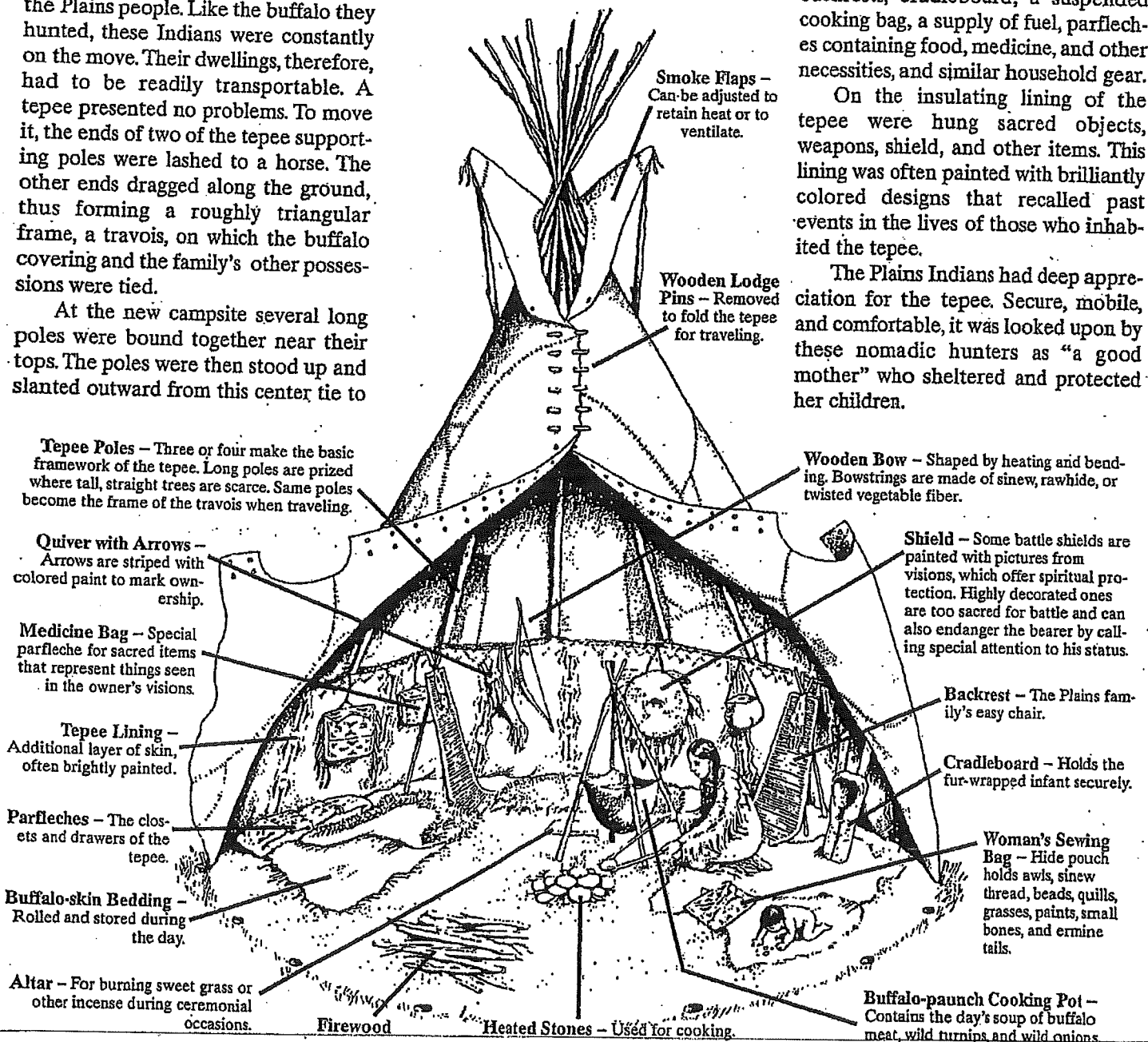
ting the air to circulate freely. In winter an additional skin lining was added to the tepee covering, thus providing insulation. The fire that burned in the center of the floor kept the tepee warm as well as furnishing heat for cooking.

Because of the strong, prevailing winds that swept across the Plains from the west, a tepee was always set up with the entrance facing east. And the entire shelter was always tilted slightly toward the east to streamline the rear, thus lessening the wind pressure on it.

As shown in the illustration below, a typical tepee was crowded with hide bedding, a rug for the baby, willow-rod backrests, cradleboard, a suspended cooking bag, a supply of fuel, parfleches containing food, medicine, and other necessities, and similar household gear.

On the insulating lining of the tepee were hung sacred objects, weapons, shield, and other items. This lining was often painted with brilliantly colored designs that recalled past events in the lives of those who inhabited the tepee.

The Plains Indians had deep appreciation for the tepee. Secure, mobile, and comfortable, it was looked upon by these nomadic hunters as "a good mother" who sheltered and protected her children.



Smoke Flaps - Can be adjusted to retain heat or to ventilate.

Wooden Lodge Pins - Removed to fold the tepee for traveling.

Wooden Bow - Shaped by heating and bending. Bowstrings are made of sinew, rawhide, or twisted vegetable fiber.

Shield - Some battle shields are painted with pictures from visions, which offer spiritual protection. Highly decorated ones are too sacred for battle and can also endanger the bearer by calling special attention to his status.

Backrest - The Plains family's easy chair.

Cradleboard - Holds the fur-wrapped infant securely.

Woman's Sewing Bag - Hide pouch holds awls, sinew thread, beads, quills, grasses, paints, small bones, and ermine tails.

Buffalo-paunch Cooking Pot - Contains the day's soup of buffalo meat, wild turnips, and wild onions.

Tepee Poles - Three or four make the basic framework of the tepee. Long poles are prized where tall, straight trees are scarce. Same poles become the frame of the travois when traveling.

Quiver with Arrows - Arrows are striped with colored paint to mark ownership.

Medicine Bag - Special parfleche for sacred items that represent things seen in the owner's visions.

Tepee Lining - Additional layer of skin, often brightly painted.

Parfleches - The closets and drawers of the tepee.

Buffalo-skin Bedding - Rolled and stored during the day.

Altar - For burning sweet grass or other incense during ceremonial occasions.

Firewood

Heated Stones - Used for cooking.