

*Div II
Prairie Indians
Cultures filmstrip*

*What
2 weeks out*

Introduction

Slide 1 - Prairie Indian Cultures

Before the coming of the Europeans there was considerable diversity among the various people living in the area now known as Saskatchewan. The filmstrip presentation you will be seeing show a variety of Indian cultures from about 1600 to 1700.

Quite a few differences existed between the Bushland (Northern), Woodland (Central) and Plains (Southern) people who lived in this area. The lifestyles and cultures of these groups of people now known as Indians were largely based on the natural resources of the area of which they lived. Food, shelter, clothing, means of transportation, arts and religion were often a direct expression of their surroundings.

Slide 2

On the left is a Cree woman plainly dressed in a buffalo robe. The early Southern Cree people used very little or no decoration on clothing or homes. The Cree lived in the southern central and northern areas where wood was plentiful. They were late-comers to the West as they originally lived in Woodland Ontario and Quebec. Women were the major labourers.

The Assiniboine woman on the right is wearing more decorative clothes than the Cree woman. This could be because the Assiniboine woman had more leisure time to practice her art.

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The two men pictured here are Chipewyan and Cree. These people lived in what is now Northern Saskatchewan. Their work clothing was simply made with very little decoration. The fur hood on the one man's jacket indicates a cold climate where fur bearing animals lived.

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Shown here are tepees covered with buffalo robes. These belonged to the Plains Indian people. The fire smoke outlet at the top, has two flaps to control air flow in and out of the tepee.

Notice that the tepee on the right is decorated with paintings. This is representative of Indian cultures such as the Blackfoot or Assiniboine who used decorative designs on tepees, clothing and tools. It appears that other Plains Indian cultures did not place as strong an emphasis on decorating their homes.

Notice the difference in the shape of the door flaps. The oval flaps were used in winter to prevent snow from entering the tepee.

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The tepee like the one shown on the left was used by Dogrib Indian people who lived on the edge of the Northern bush. It is covered with deer or caribou, the main source of food, clothing and shelter for the Dogrib people. Sixty or seventy skins were used for a large lodge.

The dome shaped home on the right was made by Saulteaux Indians. They lived in an area where it was treed and large pieces of bark were plentiful.

The smallness of the pieces of hide or bark creates the patch-like appearance.

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Some of the tools shown here were used by the women for preparing animal skins and others for serving food. Tools and utensils were made from the bones and antlers of animals.

The undecorated moose scraper is larger because of the size of the animal. On the other hand the buffalo scraper shown is smaller and decorated with thongs. Note the practical uses made of the parts of the food animals such as the bone needle in the upper left corner and the horn spoon in the top right.

Slide 7

The left frame shows a woman tanning a moose hide. Because moose were large animals, frames to hold them had to be placed on a horizontal angle to enable the person dressing the skin to reach the top by walking on the hide. These frames were most likely used by northern Indian people.

A buffalo hide stretched on a vertical rectangular frame is shown on the right. This made it possible to stand and work at the hide. This type was used by the Plains Indians.

After the hide had been scraped or fleshed and the hair taken off it, if so desired, it was treated by a skin-dressing agent to soften the skin. The most common agent used to soften hides were animal brains. These were rubbed into the scraped hide and left there for a number of days to react with the hide by softening it so that it was flexible and pliable for making clothes.

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Blackfoot and Saulteaux camp settlements are shown here. Notice the buffalo hide stretched upright and the decoration on the tents. This indicates the prairie environment of the Saulteaux.

Slide 9

One method of hunting buffalo was to drive them over a cliff. It is important to understand that other methods were also effective. Driving them into ravines with a wooden corral at the end was one. In some areas of the prairies buffalo were stalked by groups of hunters who were covered with buffalo robes.

Caribou hunters, on the right, hid behind rock shelters and hunted using weapons such as spears, bows and arrows and a noose.

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The goose decoys on the right were visual lures meant to entice flying geese to land once they saw other geese in the water. Pictured on the left are hunting lures designed to call animals within range of the hunter. These lures are an antler rattle and a moose call. The method of making and using these lures was passed on from one generation to another. These traditions are the basis of lures used commercially by modern day hunters.

Slide 11

Here we have a good example of how Native people adapted to their environment. Round snowshoes were used by Plains Indian people to travel over deep snow. There were few obstructions on the prairies so they used a snowshoe shape which held them up most effectively.

The long, pointed snowshoe on the right was used by bush country Indian peoples. Where round snowshoes would be a nuisance the long ones did not catch on bush and were able to go through narrower trails.

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Snowshoes allowed the hunter to pursue the animal into deep snow where the animal was unable to run. The animals which floundered in the snow were killed by the hunter.

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Gathering wild edible plants and berries was an agricultural practice of Indians on the plains.

Baskets, made by the women from local materials, were used to carry food. The Cree birchbark container on the left carried edible berries and roots. Digging sticks such as the one shown at the bottom of the picture were used to dig roots. Note the animal decoration on the baskets. These represent animals found in that particular area and were symbolic of their culture and spirituality.

The Chipewyan basket on the right was used for gathering blueberries and wild rice.

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Pickereel or jackfish were common food of the north. Beaver was available wherever bush and water was plentiful. The rabbit and prairie chicken were also eaten. These foods were a main source of small game meat on the Prairies.

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Shown here are drying racks used to dry meat and fish. On the right are the tools and ingredients used to make pemmican: stone mall, crucible, bladder bag, dried buffalo meat, and berries. Pemmican was a staple nutritious food which stored over long periods of time.

Slide 16

Women were harvesters and gardeners. Wild rice harvesting was done by women paddling a canoe through ripe stalks of wild rice. The seeds were beaten from the heads of the grain. Seeds were gathered in baskets made for this purpose or fell into the bottom of the canoe. Chipewyan and Wood Cree people harvested wild rice. Rice grew and stills grows in Northern Saskatchewan where the land is marshy.

Plains people, who were known to spend a number of years in one place because the horse was not yet a source of quick, long distance transportation, were gardeners. Women planted, cultivated and harvested maise, squash and beans. Fish, when available, were used as fertilizer. Maise, squash and beans were staple food crops when and where they could be grown. These were called "The Three Sisters" because they protected each other. Maise protected the beans against the bright rays of the sun. The beans spread their leaves over the squash to give it shade.

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Just as Christians wear a cross to protect themselves from Satan by showing their faith in Christ, Indian people used various objects to attract supernatural assistance.

The charms on the top left were made to resemble lizards and turtles which to the Sioux signified long life. They were placed on the belly buttons of newborn babies to help them live a long life and to protect them from dust and dirt.

The Crows on the other hand, felt that the power shield on the bottom left gave them protection.

Finally, the fetal caribou legs shown on the right were used by the Bush Cree. They were put on the bed of the male babies so that they would grow into great hunters.

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These pictures show two religious symbols. The decorated buffalo skull on the left was used in a group ceremony asking for a successful hunt. The buffalo skull was also used as part of the sundance ceremony.

The picture on the right is a bear skull with symbolic decoration. The skull represented the bear which was to be hunted and was used as a symbol of the live bear. Before going on the hunt, the hunter apologized to the bear for having to kill him and thanked him for his gifts.

Slide 19

Dances were also an important part of religious ceremonies. The Blackfoot sundance shown on the left is a pledge or promise made by the members taking part.

The Cree hoop dance on the right shows the movements of the partridge; a bird on which they depended for food. This dance also signified the powers of a hunter for the young boy entering into manhood.

Slide 20

Assiniboine people of the Plains needed to move more easily and quickly to follow the buffalo herds. Prior to the horse, they used dog travois to carry goods when they travelled. Poles for housing were very scarce on the plains so the Indian people had to take their tepee poles with them. These

were bound in a V shape and fastened to a dog's harness. The rest of the tepee materials were bound in a bundle and placed on the poles which were then dragged by the dog. Each family owned from six to twelve dogs who were able to pull loads of up to 50 pounds each.

The canoes pictured on the right were used by two different groups of people. The canoe on the top with turned up ends, was used by the Cree Indians. The canoes were designed to travel over shallow swift streams and rivers.

The flatter, wider canoe was used by the Ojibway or Saulteaux. This canoe was designed for wider river and lake travel.

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Babies were carried in cradle boards such as those shown here. Some were plain while others were elaborately decorated. The laced cradle board on the left was for a Cree baby while that on the right belonged to the Souix-Blackfoot people.

Indian babies were wrapped in a soft covering such as the inner bark of trees, a smooth animal skin or fur. They were then strapped or laced into the boards. Moss or some other absorbant material was placed beneath the babies and acted like a diaper.

Babies stayed in cradle boards until they learned to walk and thus avoided dangerous situations. The baby was safe and snug as he or she travelled on the mother's back while she moved about. When mother was working, the cradle board with the baby in it was suspended from a tree or propped against a wall.

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Canoes and horses had great effects on transportation. The birchbark canoe in this picture, because of its width, was suitable in wider bodies of water and could carry bulky or heavier loads.

As significant as the canoe was as a means of transportation, it paled before the horse as a source of quick mobility.

Horses were not native to the Americas. They were introduced by the Spanish to South America. Through trade and the capture of wild horses or an enemy's horse, they gradually became common in North America. It was not until the late seventeenth or eighteenth century that the Plains Indians used the horse-drawn travois. By 1800, all the Plains Indian peoples had horses which were not only used for transportation but were a source of wealth used for bartering and purchasing.

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The Cree woman on the left is biting into a piece of folded birchbark. When completed the birchbark was opened to reveal a design.

Buffalo skin was decorated by a Plains Indian, probably a Sioux. The colors used were derived from clays, except black, which came from charcoal.

As well as a means of aesthetic expression, these traditional patterns of art work, told stories and band or family histories.

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Painting on hide, birchbark or stone were used to record tribal or family histories.

The picture on the left depicts a stretched buffalo hide. The person, bird, tepee, and canoe indicate the livelihood of the people where the artist lived. The type of frame used for the hide and the rectangular entrance shown for the tent indicates that this belonged to a plains Indian group of people who used a rectangular flap covering for the door of the tepee. The canoe shows that water travel was important to their way of life.

The stone painting on the right shows that this belonged to a more northern group of people who depended upon the moose and possibly lake travel.

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Toys were made from materials at hand. The deerskin dolls on the left belonged to a Sioux child.

Slide 26

All Indian cultures made very accurate maps which charted stars as well as giving directions.

The birchbark map on the left was drawn by the woodland people and the skin on the right was used by people from the prairie. Historians always give European people the credit for discovering and mapping the lands and regions of North America. This was not a true reflection of what really happened. It was the Indian guides who directed and led these trips of discovery and they often used Indian maps to guide them on their journeys.