

First People

The following chart divides the First People into seven groups and lists some of the groupings found in each.

You will notice that some of the names are words from Native languages, and others are from English or French. We have tried to use the word that each group uses in referring to itself. Because some names are still changing, you may find that this book has not always caught up with current use.

Boundaries did not exist for the First People and groups ranged widely in order to obtain enough food. For centuries the various First People had been trading with each other to obtain the goods they desired. These trading patterns were very complex and often involved travelling long distances over well-known waterways.

The boundaries on the map at the bottom of this page indicate the general territorial areas of these groups. Different cultures developed depending on the resources available.

Plains

- Siksika (Blackfoot)
- Assiniboine
- Sioux
- Atsina (Gros Ventre)
- Pikani (Peigan)
- Secwepemc (Shuswap)
- Tsúu Tina (Sarcee)
- Kainai (Blood)
- Nehiyawak (Plains Cree)

Iroquoian Nations

- Mohawk
- Oneida
- Onondaga
- Cayuga
- Seneca
- Tuscarora
- Huron
- Tobacco/Petun
- Neutral

Northern Hunters

- Chipewyan
- Dunne-za (Beaver)
- Dene-thah (Slavey)
- Yellowknife
- Dogrib
- Hare
- Sekani
- Tutchone
- Kutchin
- Kaska, Dena

Northwest Coast

- Nuu-chah-nulth, Dididaht, Pacheedaht (Nootka)
- Nuxalk (Bella Coola)
- Lingit (Tlinkit)
- Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)
- Haisla, Oweekeno, Heiltsuk (Northern Kwakiutl)
- Gitksan, Nisga'a (Gitksan-Nass)
- Haida
- Tsimishian
- Klahoose
- Qualicum
- Sne-Nay-Muxw
- Quwutsun'
- Somlahmoo
- T'sou-ke
- Songhees
- Tagish
- Tsawwassen
- Xaadas
- Homalco
- Silammon
- Se'shalt
- Squamish
- Sto:lo
- Musqueam
- Esquimalt
- Saanich
- Burrard

Algonkian Nations

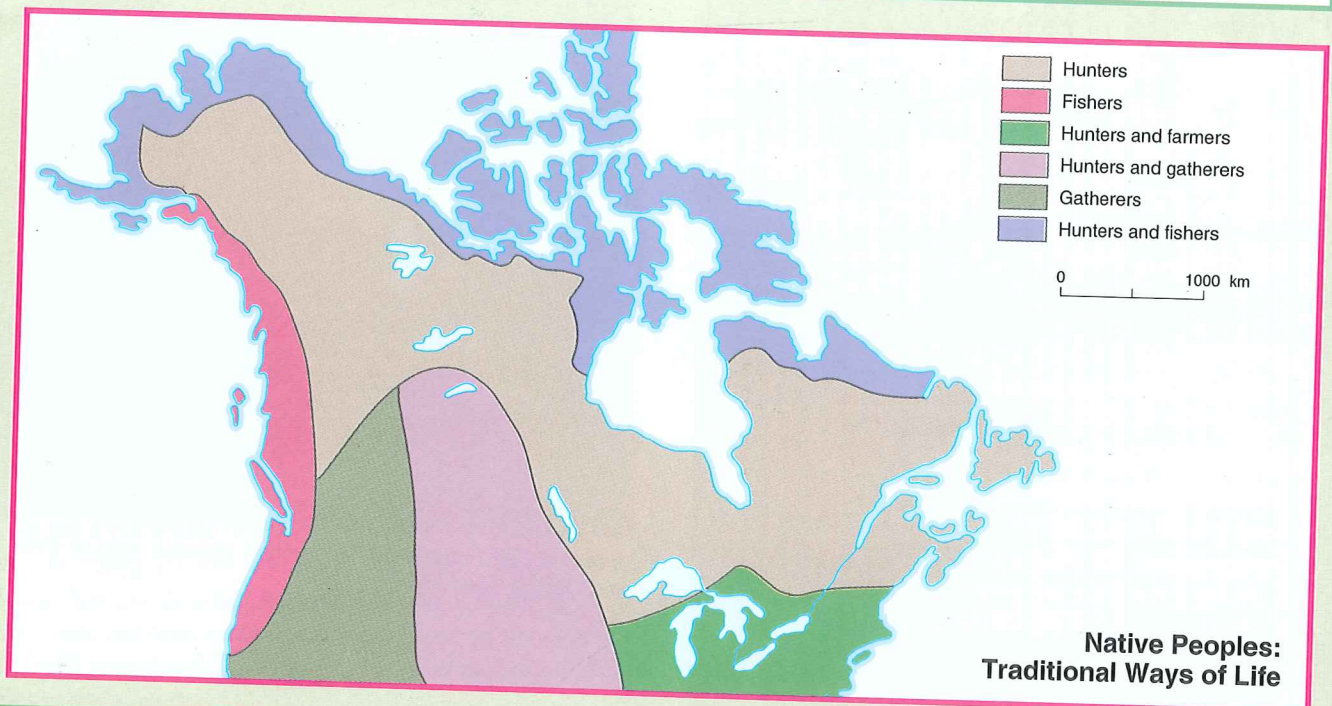
- Ojibwa/Chippewa
- Algonquin
- Cree
- Montagnais
- Naskapi
- Erie
- Malecite
- Micmac
- Beothuk

Plateau

- Ktunaxa (Kootenay)
- Tsilhqot'in (Chilcotin)
- Nat'ooten, Wet'suwet'en (Western Carrier)
- Dakelhne (Central and Southern Carrier)
- Tahltan
- Nlaka'pamux (Thompson, Nicola-Similkameen)
- Okanagan
- Stl'atl'imx (Lillooet)

Arctic

- Inuit



The Plains People

Focus On: Buffalo Hunters



Environment and Resources

The Plains people were hunters and gatherers. Food was plentiful on the plains. Buffalo (bison), deer, elk, and antelope roamed in abundance. Wild berries and plants completed the diet.

Winters on the plains were long and very cold. During the winter the people lived in small family groups in sheltered river valleys or in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. When spring came, they moved out

onto the plains, where they were joined by other groups. The summers were hot but short. Late in the summer a large buffalo hunt was held. Often as many as 1000 people gathered together for such a special event.

Technology

Wood, stone, bone, and animal hides were used to supply the needs of the people of the Plains.

Economic Needs

Food

The Plains people were hunters. The buffalo provided them with most of the raw materials they

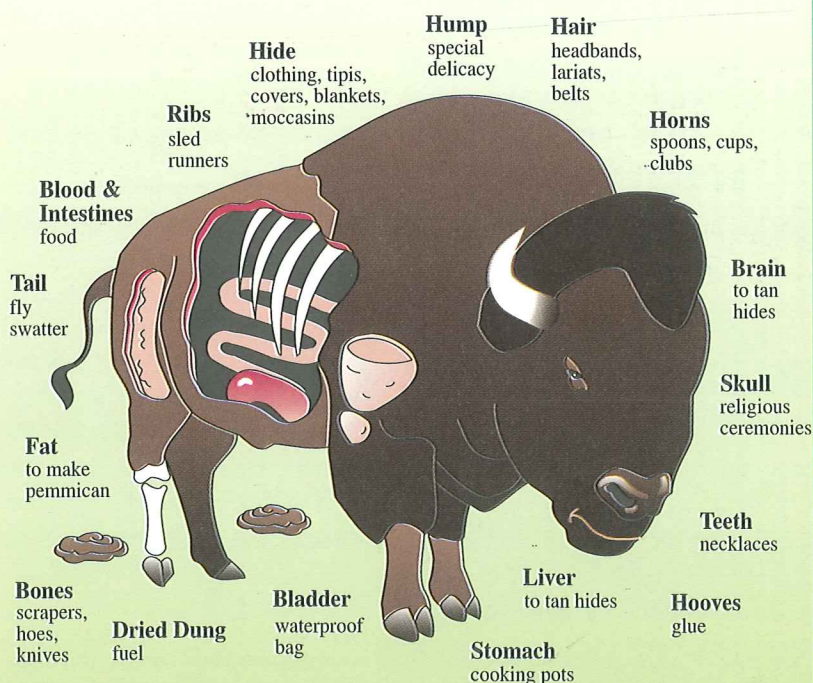
needed. Study the diagram and note how well they made use of the animal. Hunting buffalo was the men's most important role as the well-being of the group depended on their skill. The largest hunt took place in the late summer or early fall. Strict ceremonies and a carefully chosen police force enforced the regulations. Hunting alone was forbidden for fear that the herd might stampede and leave the tribes without food for the winter. People who broke this rule were severely punished.

In Plains societies, the women's main role was to prepare food, make clothing, build and care for the home, and look after the children. Most of the food preparation revolved around the buffalo hunt. As soon as the men had killed the animals, the women started to skin and butcher the carcasses. The meat was shared among the entire band. Most of the meat was made into jerky or pemmican. Pemmican was a combination of powdered dried buffalo meat and saskatoon berries or chokecherries, all mixed together with melted buffalo fat. Pemmican was very nutritious. One kilogram was thought to be the equivalent of four kilograms of meat.

Shelter

The tipi was the main form of shelter for the Plains tribes. Tipis could be moved to different places as the seasons changed. Each family normally had its own tipi. The tipis were the property of the women.

Every Part of the Buffalo Was Used



Focus On: The Plains People (Buffalo Hunters) continued

Political Needs

During the winter, the Plains people lived in small political groups called bands. These groups were either gens or clans. In a gens, membership in the band is patrilineal, or inherited through the father. Clans are found in matrilineal societies. In either case, each band contained about ten **extended families**. The majority of the Plains bands were patrilineal.

Each Plains tribe was governed by a tribal council consisting of both men and women. Group decisions were reached by consensus after the opinions of the adults had been heard. This often took much discussion, debate, and persuasion.

When it was necessary, a Plains tribe would choose a chief. This man was usually brave, generous, a good speaker, a wise decision-maker, and a good hunter. His role was to advise, not to order. He could maintain his power only if the people trusted him and were willing to follow him. The position of chief ended when the special situation requiring a chief had passed.

Bands met in the late spring or early summer for the Sun Dance and again in the late summer for the annual buffalo hunt. Up to 1000 people would attend these events.

Social Needs

The Plains people viewed life as a cycle of events from birth to death. Children were very important because they were the ones who continued the culture. They spent a large part of their time with their grandparents and the band elders. The elders were

highly respected for their knowledge of the band's history, customs, and traditions. Long winter evenings were devoted to the telling and retelling of stories from the past. Most of the stories used spirit hero characters (animal, human, and superhuman) to teach a lesson. They showed the children how problems were solved and which values were important.

Spiritual Needs

The Plains tribes believed strongly in the importance of sharing and generosity. Their survival depended on group co-operation. As a result, they did not believe in private ownership of land. The land had been made by the Creator or Great Spirit for all to use. It could not be bought or sold, for it was not theirs individually.

The Plains tribes honoured the Great Spirit. They believed that everything on earth was sacred and was to be respected. They believed that rocks, trees, lakes, rivers, animals, and people had all been given spirits and special roles by the Great Spirit. The hunters and trappers thanked the animals for giving up their lives to provide the people with food, clothing, and shelter. Women thanked the plants they used in the same way.

Sweetgrass

The Plains people believed that one of the Great Spirit's most important gifts was sweetgrass. Sweetgrass grows wild on the plains. It was picked and tobacco was buried in its place as a thanks offering to Mother Earth. Once picked, the sweetgrass was braided into three strands like

hair. One strand symbolized the mind, another the body, and the third, the spirit. Each was considered necessary to make a good human being. When all three were woven together, it was possible to see how mind, body, and spirit became one.

Sweetgrass appeared as a symbol of kindness in the stories told by the elders. They taught children to follow the sweetgrass road of kindness and goodness.

Sweetgrass also played an important part in all spiritual ceremonies. The Plains tribes burnt sweetgrass as an incense for purification when they prayed to the Great Spirit. They believed that the smoke from the sweetgrass rose above the earth and alerted the Great Spirit to the fact that the people needed a blessing.

The Circle

The Circle was sacred to the Plains people. They believed that the Circle was the perfect shape. It was perfectly balanced, all parts had the same strength, and it had no beginning and no end. It appears over and over again in their artwork and tools. Objects such as the tipi, the shield, the sacred drum, and many beadwork designs reflect the importance of the Circle. The Plains people perceived that many things in their lives were based on the Circle: the cycle of the day, the four great winds, the phases of the moon, the seasons, and the cycle of life and death.

Extended Family—includes cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-grandparents, not just parents and brothers and sisters

The Iroquois

Focus On: Planters of Corn



Environment and Resources

The Iroquois lived near the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River on forest-covered rolling hills that were dotted with lakes. The land was very fertile and grew good crops. The forests housed many animals. Summers were long and hot. Winters were often cold. This area was able to provide enough food for a large population.

Technology

The Iroquois used the materials available in their environment—wood, stone, bone, and animal skins—to make the tools and weapons that they needed.

Economic Needs

The Iroquois were farmers who lived in villages of 20 to 350 families. The villages had to be moved to new locations approximately every 12 years, for the crops robbed the soil of **nutrients** and would no longer grow. New villages were located on high ground close to a good water supply. The land would be cleared by the men with stone-bladed axes. Shrubs and stumps were burnt. When the land was cleared, the women used their digging

Nutrient—food for plants or animals; minerals in the soil that provide food and nourishment for plants

sticks to loosen the soil, and then made holes with their stone-tipped hoes. They put fish into the holes for fertilizer, said a prayer, and then added the seeds.

Almost all of the agricultural work was done by women. The Iroquois men recognized the women's contributions to the group by acknowledging their status to be equal with men.

Food

Agriculture provided the Iroquois with 70 percent of their food. Their main crops were maize (corn), beans, and squash. These were so important to the Iroquois diet that they were called "the three sisters." Late in the summer the women also picked berries, wild plants, onions, nuts, pumpkins, cabbages, and sunflowers to add to their winter food supply. Tobacco was grown and harvested in the fall. Maple syrup and sugar were made in late winter. Iroquois men contributed to the food stores by hunting and fishing.

Women did the cooking. Clay cooking pots were hung over the fire or food was wrapped in leaves and placed in the ashes to cook. Since

there was normally plenty of food, large groups of people were able to live together and find plenty of food nearby.

Shelter

Iroquois villages were made up of 30 to 75 lodges each. The lodges were called longhouses, as they were long enough for several related families.

Trade

Since the Iroquois women were good farmers, they often had extra food to use in trade. The men often became traders. Corn was the main trade product. The Algonkian were their chief trading partners. They traded furs and game for corn. These trading patterns were firmly established long before the Europeans arrived in North America.

Transportation

Before the arrival of horses, the Iroquois developed other means of transportation such as canoes and snowshoes.



Focus On: The Iroquois (Planters of Corn)

continued

Social Needs

The Iroquois social system reflected the importance of women. The society was matrilineal. Kin relationships were traced through the mother, not the father. Thus, at birth, children became part of their mother's clan. A clan was made up of the female leader, her sisters, their children, and their daughters' children, as well as their husbands. The women chose the leader of the clan from amongst themselves. The leader was highly respected by all of the members of the clan.

Families were very important to the Iroquois. When a man reached

the age of marriage, his mother selected his bride and obtained permission from the woman's mother. After marriage, the man became a member of his wife's clan and went to live with her parents.

Iroquois society designated specific roles for men and women. Men did not do women's work, and women did not do men's work.

Storytelling and Games

Stories were used to pass history, spiritual beliefs, values, traditions, and customs from one generation to the next. The elders were the chief

storytellers and were highly respected for their wisdom and knowledge. This oral tradition allowed children to learn what was important. Children also learned by watching and helping others.

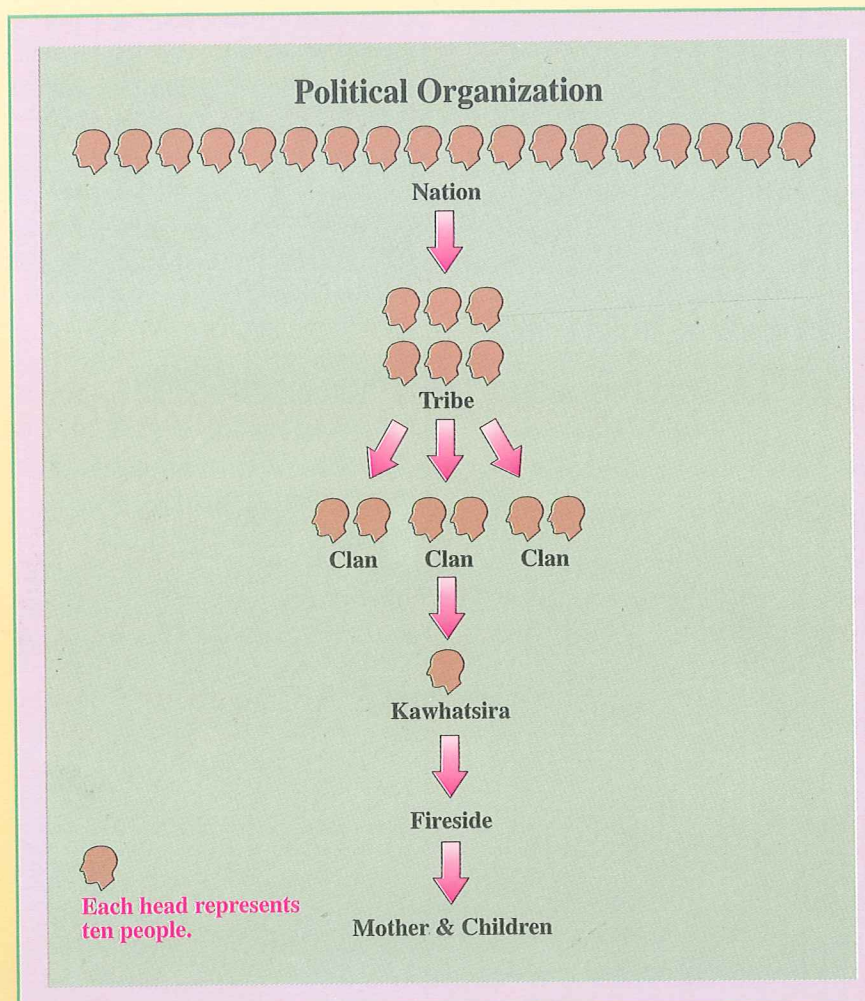
The Iroquois enjoyed games, especially guessing and gambling games. Racing, archery, double-ball, and snowsnake were also popular. The game of lacrosse—ancestor of modern hockey—was invented by the Iroquois.

Political Needs

The Nation

Iroquois society was based around the fireside, which was made up of a mother and her children. The firesides were part of a larger group of matrilineally related families known as a *kawhatsira*. The *kawhatsira* was part of a clan, and the clan formed part of a tribe. The tribe formed part of a nation.

Each village in the tribe held council meetings to settle its own problems. Men and women took part in this decision-making process. Decisions that affected the entire tribe, however, had to be decided on by a council of the clans' *sachems* or representatives. The female clan leader or matron chose a man to act as *sachem*. He was chosen for his wisdom and ability as a hunter and fighter. It was his job to speak for the clan and follow their instructions at the larger council meetings and in the Iroquois Peace League. If either the matron or the clan was not pleased with his work, he could be replaced at any time. This ensured that the *sachems* respected their clan's wishes.



Sachem—the appointed representative of an individual clan

The Iroquois Confederacy

(The League of Five Nations)

The Iroquois Confederacy dates from the 1400s. Dekanahwideh, whose name means "heavenly messenger," founded the Iroquois Confederacy at this time. He was said to have been destined to bring peace and power to his people. Dekanahwideh created an alliance, called the League of Five Nations, that brought peace to the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Tuscarora joined the League much later, in the 1700s, at which time the league was called the Confederacy of Six Nations.

The Five Nations' territories formed a symbolic longhouse to reinforce the kinship ties among the groups. Thus, the Confederacy was a spiritual as well as a political organization. The Confederacy Council was made up of 49 *sachems*. It met once a year in the fall around the real and symbolic central fire of the Onondaga Nation.

Each nation had only one vote. Council decisions had to be unanimous. Consensus had to be reached not only among the sachems of each nation, but also among the Five Nations. This method of decision-making was fair for each nation but very time-consuming.

Each tribe had its own local form of government, which made decisions affecting individual villages. The tribes were also part of the larger governing body of the Confederacy.

The Iroquois emphasized decision-making by consensus. Once the group reached consensus, the chief respected the group's decision and had to follow it. This type of democracy allowed everyone to participate in the decision-making process. It worked efficiently, though slowly.

The consensus method of decision-making places the power to make decisions squarely in the hands of the people. In order for a decision to be made, each member of the tribe had to be in agreement. Decisions could not be made unless there was unanimous

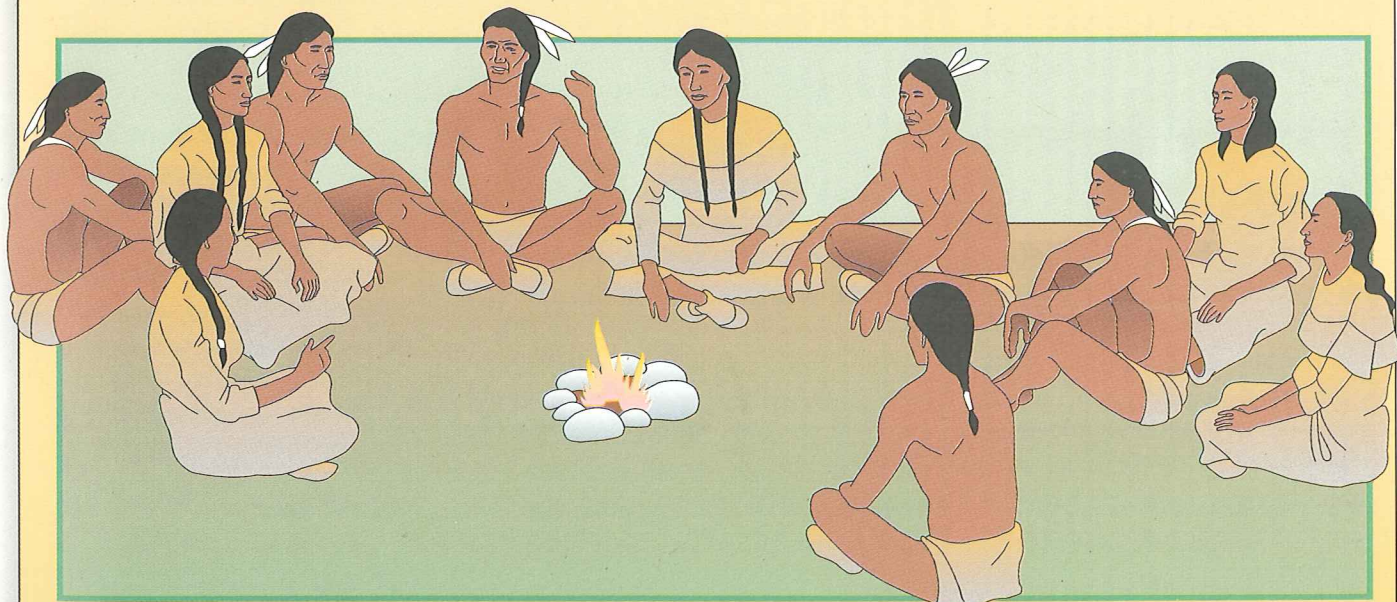
agreement. Achieving this unanimity required time, tact, and diplomacy, as decisions were reached only after long discussions and debates. All the adults had a say. The Iroquois men respected women's equal status and power in decision-making. Having so many people involved in the decision-making process made it very time-consuming.

Peace was the most important aspect of the Confederacy, which was based on democratic principles. In the Confederacy, decisions were made by consensus after long discussions and debates.

Dekanahwideh brought unity to his people and is still remembered and honoured today.

Spiritual Needs

Spirituality was part of everyday life for the Iroquois. Corn was believed to be the holy gift of the Creator, or Manitou. Manitou was consulted through prayers at all feasts and ceremonies.



When making decisions, the *sachems* of the League of Five Nations continued discussing until consensus was reached.

Northwest Coast People

Focus On: People Who Fished



Environment and Resources

Northwest Coast people lived along the western coast of the North American continent between what is now northern British Columbia and the American states of Washington and Oregon. This area is composed of many islands and deep, narrow coastal inlets. The climate is mild and rainy. Trees and other plants are plentiful.

Technology

The Northwest Coast people developed sophisticated tools using the materials available to them. For instance, they made **adzes** and chisels from stone, knives from bone or beaver teeth, and sandpaper from shark skin.

Economic Needs

Food

The Northwest Coast people had a much more abundant food supply than did other Native groups. They obtained most of their food from the sea, which was full of fish such as salmon, cod, and halibut; mammals such as whales, seals, porpoises, sea otters, and sea lions; and shellfish such as clams, mussels, and crabs. Edible seaweed was also available.

For meat, these people hunted

deer and other land animals. The land also provided fern roots, berries, and the inner bark of hemlock and other trees.

The men's main role was hunting, fishing, and gathering the food; the women's main role was preparing the food.

Clothing

The mild, rainy climate and the materials available determined the clothing worn. People usually went barefoot; in the summer, men wore very little clothing. Cedar bark was the material most often used to make clothes. Goat or dog hair was sometimes made into garments. Cone-shaped hats with wide brims were often worn to keep off the rain.

Shelter

A typical village might contain 30 houses strung along the beach. While most houses were large enough to shelter several families, a chief's house could be as much as 18 metres wide and 32 metres or more long. The houses were made of cedar planks. Inside, the space was divided into individual family areas by planks or woven mats of cedar bark. Each family usually had its own fire for cooking and warmth. A raised wooden platform for sleeping and for storage of family possessions extended around the walls of the house. The Northwest Coast people were able to accumulate far more furniture and possessions than other Native groups because they had permanent villages.

Trade

Trade flourished among Coastal tribes. Dugout canoes were an efficient mode of transportation and made it easy for food, raw materials, and other objects of various kinds to be traded up and down the coast.

Social Needs

The Northwest Coast people had an elaborate **caste system** ranging from aristocrats, who were chiefs, at the top, through nobles and commoners, to slaves. **Rank**, other than that of slave, was based on inheritance, marriage, and wealth acquired in one's lifetime. Slaves could not change their status. They could marry only other slaves and were not allowed personal possessions.

The most important way of sharing good fortune and establishing rank in society was to give a successful potlatch. This was a giant gathering, often lasting for days, where people from other villages were invited to feast, tell stories, dance, and receive gifts. Guests were seated according to rank. The number and quality of the gifts they received also depended on their rank. Gifts consisted of items such as food, utensils, tools, canoes, and slaves. The host sometimes chose to destroy valuable items as

Adze—tool similar to an axe, used for shaping wood

Caste System—social system with distinct classes based on differences of birth, rank, position, or wealth

Rank—position based on importance

Focus On: People Who Fished continued

well as give them away—an impressive gesture. The amount of wealth that the giver of the potlatch gave away and destroyed established his importance. These “gifts” were more like loans because each person who received gifts was expected to host his own potlatch in turn and give away gifts that were even more valuable than those received. If he did not do so, he would suffer a serious loss of prestige.

Spiritual Needs

The Native people of the west coast believed in the existence of one supreme being and lesser spirits. One group, the Haida, believed in a spirit whose name meant the “Power of the Shining Heavens,” but this being had no contact with humans. It was the force from which lesser spirits derived their powers. They were the ones who could affect peoples’ lives.

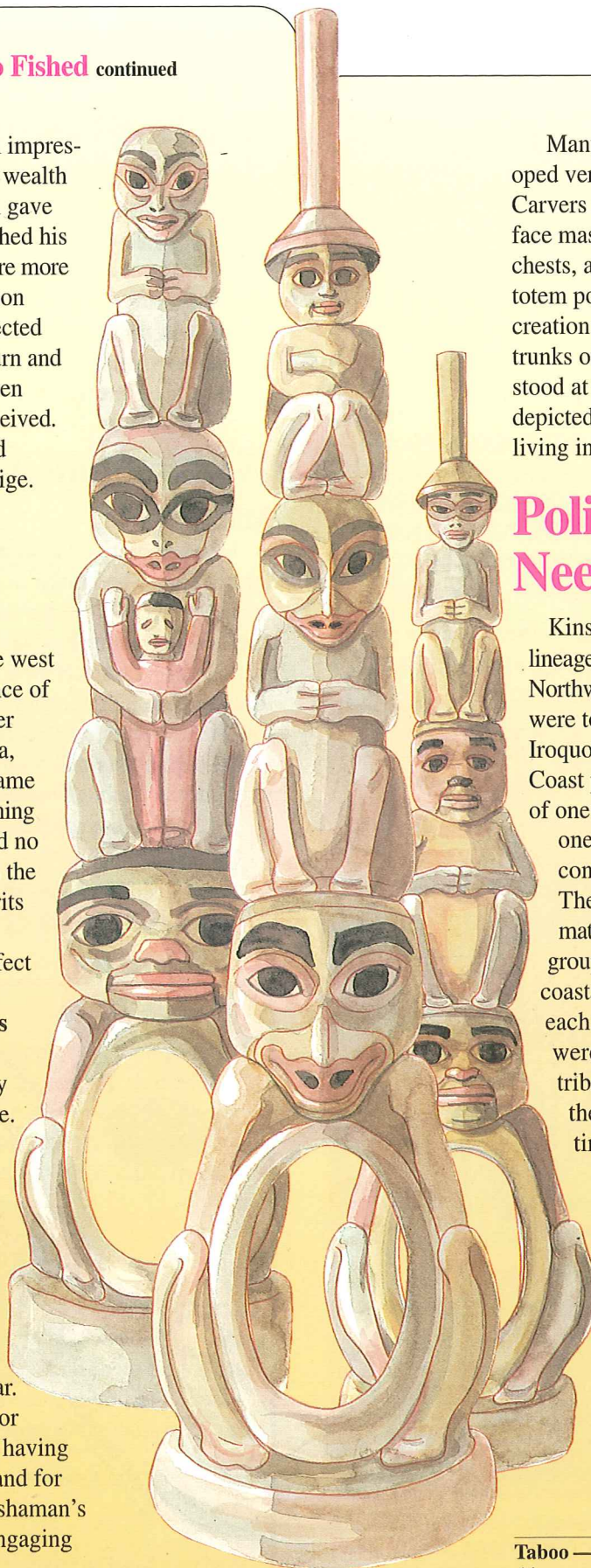
There were many **taboos** that had to be observed in order not to offend the many spirits who were everywhere. These included such rituals as placing the first salmon caught from the year’s run on an altar facing upstream, cooking it, and giving each person a taste. The bones were then returned to the stream to ensure that the salmon came again next year.

The shaman was a man or woman who was viewed as having special powers for healing and for interpreting of omens. The shaman’s advice was sought before engaging in any important activities.

Many of the Coastal tribes developed very sophisticated art forms. Carvers created elaborate ceremonial face masks, canoe prows, wooden chests, and bowls. However, the totem pole is their most famous creation. These were made from the trunks of cedar trees. The poles often stood at the front of a house and depicted the history of the families living in the house.

Political Needs

Kinship ties based on clan and lineage were very important to the Northwest Coast tribes, just as they were to the Plains tribes and the Iroquois. Among the Northwest Coast people, relatives, or people of one lineage, lived together in one house. A village could contain one or more lineages. The northern Coastal tribes were matrilineal; the southern Coastal groups patrilineal; the central coastal groups included some of each. Neighbouring villages were not linked together in a tribal organization, although they would join together in times of need, such as war.



Totem poles were carved by the Native people of the Northwest coast from the huge trees that grew near the Pacific Ocean.

Taboo — custom or tradition that sets things apart as sacred, unclean, or cursed

Review

Summarizing the Chapter

- There are many theories to explain the presence of the First People in North America. None of the theories have yet been proven. Many historians and **anthropologists** believe that the First People may have arrived in North America during the most recent ice age via a land bridge known as Beringia. Many traditional Native people believe the First People were created in North America by the Creator.
- The First People developed cultures appropriate for their environments and the natural resources available to them. The Iroquois used the rich soil to become farmers; the Plains people used the buffalo to supply their needs; the Northwest Coast people used products from the sea to satisfy their needs.
- Native cultures were not all the same. It is not a good idea to overgeneralize about the First People as they were often as different as nations are today. Some cultures were matrilineal while others were patrilineal. In matrilineal cultures, such as the Iroquois, women had higher status in society than men.
- Spirituality was part of everyday Native life. It was reflected in the burning of sweetgrass, the Circle shape of the tipi, the ceremony of the buffalo hunt, and the growth of corn, to name a few examples.
- Conservation and living in harmony with nature were essential elements of the Native way of life.
- Decisions were made by consensus after long discussions and debates. Chiefs and *sachems* were chosen by their bands and could act only as representatives. They had no power of their own.
- Until recently, historians have thought that the First People did not have horses until the 1700s. Recently, some historians have become convinced that the First People had horses earlier than this.

Note: the preceding summary has been written in the past tense as the generalizations refer to the historical period under study. Many Native people today, though, believe in and follow the beliefs and values described above.

Anthropologist—one who studies the origins, development, and culture or way of life of humankind

Checking Predictions

1. At the beginning of this chapter you made some predictions based on the Overview and what you already knew. Now use what you learned from reading the chapter to fill in the third column of the Prediction Chart that you began earlier.
2. Refer to the “Questions to Talk About” on page 3. Discuss the questions based on what you have learned about the First People. Record major ideas in your notes.

Working with Information

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is an alternative method of organizing information. Mind maps work very much like clusters, only they place each idea on a separate line. Each word or idea must be joined by a line to at least one other word or idea. Coloured sketches are used to represent words or ideas since colour helps us remember. Examine the sample mind map on homogeneous cultures found below. Work with a partner and make a mind map that shows the relationships among the following:

- (a) origins of First People
- (b) heterogeneous cultures
- (c) decision-making among First People
- (d) co-operation among First People
- (e) nation

