

He indian's way of life essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In historic times the Indians lived the broad expanse of Americas heartland between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, and from the Saskatchewan River Basin in Canada to Central Texas. Both their culture and history lent themselves to the works of writers and dramatists who romantised the hard riding buffalo hunters and warriors that is the image many of us have of the American Indians today. There were two main sub cultures existing in different parts of the area. The first was the agricultural tribes that lived along the Eastern Plains.

The were known as farmers due to the area being covered in grass making it ideal land to grow their own food. The second sub culture being the Western Plains Indians. They were nomadic and they relied entirely on the products of the buffalo. There were many different tribes of Indians, each having their own language, customs and their own individual grounds. Some of the best known tribes being Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahos, Nez Perces, Comanche's and Apaches. When invaded by the whites fighting broke out, as they wanted to claim the land the Indians were living on.

Obviously they resisted, The Sioux and Cheyenne were the first who fought the fiercest to keep the land. The Sioux Indians were the most powerful with great leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. The nomadic groups moved frequently from one campsite to another, following the herds of buffalo. Buffalo was essential to their way of life. It provided the main necessities needed by the Indians. Buffalo meat was the basic diet, along with a few wild berries. The skin was used for clothes such as moccasins and buffalo hide was used for the shelter of the teepee and the dung was used to fuel the fires.

The most important item made from buffalo was the shield which was very important when it came to war. A buffalo hunt was very exciting. It was male only and as the women had a different role within the tribe. A young male Indian wanting to gain a good reputation and a name for himself would go on his first hunt to impress his fellow tribe members and his future wife. This was considered to be a very important event for a Brave. The hunt was dangerous. The buffalo and the horses trampled many men. The Spaniards were responsible for the introduction of the horse.

As they moved northwards through Mexico during the 16th Century, they brought herds of livestock with them. They tried to keep the horses out of the hands of the natives they met, but some Indians learned to ride them and frequently stole the horses to take back to their tribe. They were very good at taming and handling the animals and taught one another exactly what to do. Indian children would be strapped to a horse before they could even walk as they played a major part in the Indian way of life. They were now able to hunt the buffalo more efficiently and fight in war due to this new transportation they had found.

Each Brave had two horses, one for hunting and another for fighting. The hunting horse was smaller and more agile, like a pony. This made it easier to weave in and out when trying to kill the buffalo. Indians lived in what is called a Teepee. This was the most suitable accommodation as they were always on the move and never in one place for a period of time due to the moving buffalo and changes in climate. They needed to be able to pack up their things and leave in a matter of minutes and with the Teepee they could do

this. It was made by constructing poles into a cone shape and draping the buffalo hide over the top for a shelter.

At the top was an adjustable flap to allow smoke to escape and fresh air into their homes. It could be closed during the winter and when it was raining. A fire was lit inside for warmth, cooking and light. This was the only downfall of the Teepee. As the fire burnt inside it could easily set the structure on fire, making them very vulnerable during war as the white men would burn the Indian homes. Due to the lifestyle they lead they tribes often had to follow the buffalo across the Plains. As they moved from place to place in pursuit of food, they often carried their possessions on a travois.

This was a frame consisting of two trailing poles, cross frames were then tied to the poles to make a platform. Items such as Teepee covers, bedding, general camping equipment, young children, the elderly and sick were carried on board. Young babies were carried by their mother in a Cradleboard on their back. Other small items were carried in a Saddlebag attached to the horse. The Plains baby was born within the Teepee. The women's relatives would be present but not the father or any other male. An aunt fed the baby for the first 4 days, after that the baby spent long hours in a moss packed buckskin bag laced to the cradleboard.

Childhood was carefree. They were hardly ever-punished Small boys with miniature bow and arrows made life hell for the birds. Gangs of boys pelting one another with mud worked off high spirits. Indian children were raised to be prepared for adult life from an early age. By the age of 14 they were ready for marriage. Indian girls played with dolls and teepees to ensure they

would be ready for motherhood and raising a family. They looked for a strong man, who was a good hunter and brave warrior. Indian men were very shy. To put across their interest for a girl they would play love songs on a flute, which included messages for them to meet.

They would look for a squaw to be a good wife, mother and worker. Looks were also important as both the young males and females spent a lot of time on their appearance. There was very little opportunity to get privacy in an Indian campsite. Obviously it would be dangerous for them to venture away from the rest of the tribe and therefore they had a very unique courting procedure. The girl would stand in front of the teepee with a blanket and the man would put the blanket over both their heads to show that they were to be alone. Friends and relatives would pretend not to see them standing there.

There was no actual marriage ceremony. The 'best' for of marriage involved the giving of horses or ponies to the bride's parents. The gift of the horses simply signified a sign of respect to show how much the male regarded his wife-to-be. Once they had children they would build their own teepee next to the women's parents. Polygamy was general practice. The more successful a hunter, the more wives he gained. Instances of one man having 30 wives have been recorded. Ideally a man would marry his wives first sister as she matured. Indian women accepted this and did not mind sharing their husbands.

Divorce was a simple matter of one party throwing the other one out. A dance would be performed and the brave who wanted to get rid of his wife

would throw a stick into the air say, " How ever gets the stick may have her!" However a high percentage of marriages remained stable. War was the chance for a young brave to show his bravery and courage and training for this started from an early age. The prime motives for war were personal glory, to steal horses and even revenge. There were two main weapons used by the Indians for fighting.

First was the Bow and Arrow, which was around 3'6" long, small enough to use on horseback. Second was the Lance. It was 8-12 foot long and generally used in buffalo hunts. Other arms included the Plains War club, with its egg shaped stone head fixed to a flexible stem by shrunk raw hide, and a Tomahawk, which was a wooden handle with an iron axe attached. This was mainly used to fight the white men in war. The shield was the most valuable form of defense, but the Indians also believed it offered spiritual protection when fighting. There were special rules of warfare.

The main aim was not to kill an opponent as that could be done from a distance using a bow and arrow. This wasn't very courageous, neither was the scalping of an enemy. To touch an enemy with the bare hand or the butt of a weapon - to ' strike a coup' - was more honorable than to kill him. It was considered especially brave to go to war without any weapon and armed only with the ' Coup Stick' to count your coups. A war party was disgraced if any of the tribe died. They all painted their faces black and the female relatives of the dead would cut their hair and slash their arms.

After around four days all was forgotten and everyone joined in a victory dance. The Indians were allowed to record their deeds in many ways. They

could wear feathers in their hair, which were cut in various ways to signify what brave task they completed. They could also display paint signs on their bodies, horses, teepees or clothes. Each tribe had its own chief. This position wasn't gained by family i. e. father to son, it was secured by a braves ability and daring. The chiefs took great pride in their wardress. The main part of which was the war bonnet.

Each feather on the hat signified a different brave deed or victory won by the chief. Red Cloud has so many feathers he had to have a double tail. The women out of buffalo, deer and antelope skin made their clothes. The skin was scrapped, rubbed and cleaned. Elaborate patterns using coloured thread and beads, which were attached to the clothes/outfits which consisted of shirt, leggings and moccasins. When the berries were ripe the preparations for the Sundance began. This was a great ceremony for the renewal and prayers of blessings given by the Indian god 'Wakant Tanka' or 'Great Spirit'.

This festival shown a form of self-sacrifice, which was not a punishment of any kind, it was actually a great honour. The festival lasted around four days during which the worshippers gazed towards the sun. The focal point was a sacred tree trunk to which the chosen one would be tied by ropes ending in wooden skewers thrust through the flesh of the chest. The danced and gazed at the sun until the flesh gave way. They wore the scars with pride. The pieces of flesh left behind would be an offering to the 'Great Spirit', asking him to take care of the tribe for the coming year.