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## The Plains People

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From the Rocky Mountains to the woodlands of Southeastern Manitoba, the native people of the plains spanned the Southern provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

### Religion

- Plains Indians believed in a great god, the Sioux called that god the 'Wakan Tanka,' meaning the Great Spirit.
- The Plains believed all animals, plants, trees, stones and clouds possessed spirits and that the Earth was the mother of all these spirits, and that they each could be prayed to.
- People who were blessed or 'wakan' were called Shamans, and they were healers who had received a sign from the Great Spirit.
- Ceremonies were usually held during the warmer months, when nomadic groups united.



*Medicine Man or Shaman*

### Ceremonies

**Ceremonies were used by the Plains People for Spiritual purposes**



*Sweat Lodge*

#### Vision Quests

- When a boy became a man, he entered into a sweat lodge; the beginning of a journey to seek a spirit who would protect him in his manhood.
- Inside the lodge, stones were heated, water was poured on them, and the boy would become purified by all the steam.
- Afterwards he jumped into a pool of cold water, and then was led into the forest where he fasted for a few days, while seeking a vision.
- Then members of the tribe retrieved him, the boy visited a shaman with his vision, and the whole village feasted in ceremony.

#### The Sun Dance

- A sacred festivity of Plains People, the practice of the Sun Dance varied in the Tribes.
- It was usually the response to a vision, or a plea or prayer to the spirits.
- During the four days of preparation, the tribes would fast,



**Blackfoot Sundance Camp**

- while setting up their tipis in a circular fashion.
- In the middle of the camp, a tree was cut and secured with ropes fastened to the top of the pole.
- The festivities started at sunset on the final day of preparation and ended at sunset.
- While some cultures performed different dances around the pole, others- like the Sioux- pierced part of their breast area then tied the piercing to the rope.
- By leaning away from the post while dancing, the intention was to rip the skin free, with the pain being a tribute to the spirits.
- This self-induced torture could last hours.
- The Sun Dance festivities usually lasted days.

## Art

- Craft-work and Art-work was never exclusive from function.
- Art decorated tipis, a rawhide containers, and clothing.
- Paintings on tipis often depicted the earthly world and the spiritual world with paintings of animals, and celestial symbols.
- Pipes, spoons and bowls were carved with careful precision.
- The feather use on a war bonnet was intricate and exquisite.
- Tattooing among the tribes provided a visual focus.



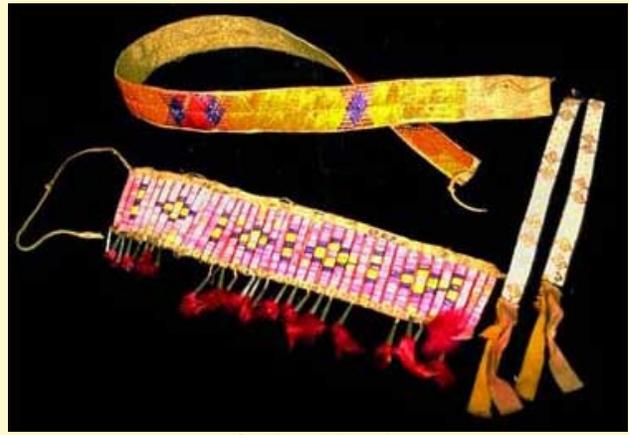
**Decorated Plains Tipi**

## Quillwork

- Quillwork was the oldest form of embroidery.
- Porcupine quills were usually dyed with berry juices.
- They were folded, twisted, wrapped, plaited and sewn into designs for clothing, moccasins, bags, baskets, handles and pipe stems.
- To collect the quills, women threw a blanket over a porcupine, and as a defense mechanism, the porcupine raised its quills into the blanket.
- Quills from the porcupine's tail were good for wrapping handles, or for fringes.
- Quills from the porcupine's back were good for loomwork.
- Quills from the neck were used for embroidery.
- The thinnest quills from the belly were good for delicate lines.
- Quills could be flattened by drawing them through the teeth.



*Quillwork Gloves*



*Quillwork Bands*

### Clothing

Clothing of the Plains People was based on tradition and personal preference

#### Everyday Dress

- Clothing articles were sometimes inspired by dream and visions.
- The women prepared the hides, and sewed the clothing or moccasins.
- The hides were sometimes only tanned on one side and the hair on the other side was left for warmth.
- Men wore shirts, breechcloths and full-length leggings.
- Ponchos were worn over shoulders for added warmth.
- Belts, headgear and necklaces added flair.
- Dress decorations and designs varied from tribe to tribe.



*A Buffalo Robe*

#### Moccasins

- Moose hide was used for soft-soled moccasins.
- Dried grass provided the moccasin with extra insulation.
- Sinew, or bone awl and a needle were used to sew up moccasins.



*Plains Moccasins*

#### Women's Dress

- Women wore dresses and short leggings.
- Plains women's snug-fitting leggings reached from the ankles to just below her knees, were made of two pieces of buckskin, and were wider at the top than at the bottom.
- They laced up with leather ties.
- The slip was the most common style of dress; it tied up around the neck and under the arms.
- Two sides were laced together with sinew.



*Woman's Dress*

#### Hunter/Warrior Dress

- Breastplates were made of bone or shells, and shields made of hide.
- Their coats were made out of deerskin, moose hide, or specifically buffalo hide.
- Tribes would use ceremonial rattles and armbands.
- In war, chiefs wore the eagle headdress with pride, usually with feathers that leaned downwards.
- Blackfoot wore upright feathers.



*Stoney Warrior*

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