
THE CHEYENNE TEPEE

CULTURE CLUES

As nomadic hunters, the Cheyenne needed homes that were portable. They took their homes with them as they moved from place to place following the herds of buffalo. Their tepees were based on the tepees used by the Sioux (Lakota) people. When they reached a new location, the tepees were placed according to the group's village plan.

About 20 poles, some as long as 25 feet (8 m) were used as a frame to support the tepee. The poles were made from slender pine or cedar trees, smoothed to make them easier to handle.

It took 12 or more buffalo hides to make a tepee cover. The hides were tanned, trimmed, and sewn together with sinew. The average tepee was about 12 feet (4 m) high and 15 feet (5 m) in diameter.

Only two or three people were needed to erect a tepee. For a Cheyenne tepee, three poles were tied together a few feet from the top. (Some tribes used four poles.) These poles were raised as a tripod. All but one of the remaining poles were laid against this support and spread out to create an oval base.

The tepee cover was spread out on the ground, and the last pole was tied to its center. Then the pole, with the cover attached, was lifted into place on the west side of the tepee.



The women stretched the cover around the frame and used wooden pins to join the sides above and below the doorway. Wooden pegs, driven through the bottom of the cover into the ground at about two-foot (.6 m) intervals, secured the structure against high winds and inquisitive animals. Large flaps at the top of the tepee could be opened or closed to control the draft of the fire.

Although the Plains people spent most of their time outdoors and used tepees primarily for sleeping or as shelter from the weather, their homes were comfortable. There were skin rugs on which to walk and buffalo robes on which to sleep. Clothing and other important objects could be hung from lines tied between the tepee poles. In summer, the bottom of the tepee could be raised to allow the breeze to cool the structure. In winter, grass, sod, or snow was packed around the outside of the tepee, providing extra warmth and cutting down on drafts.

Each person had a designated place in the tepee. The oldest man usually slept on the western side of the tepee, while the oldest woman frequently had a place by the door to guard against dogs or other intruders. When the family gathered together or when they entertained, the men sat on the northern side of the tepee while the women sat on the southern side.

Until the Spaniards introduced horses, large dogs were used to transport belongings, including tepees. With horses, larger tepees and greater ranges of travel were possible. The tepee poles were tied to the horse and dragged along the route. A frame between the poles held tepee covers and other possessions.

Traveling and constantly setting up and taking down the tepee shortened the poles and wore holes in the cover. Every year both would need to be replaced.

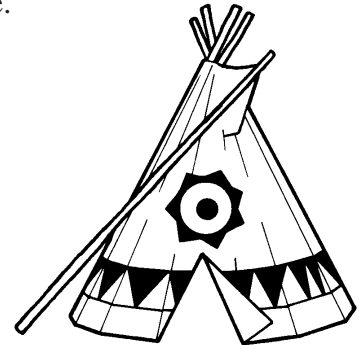
The Cheyenne painted only a few of their tepees. A painted tepee was a medicine lodge.

MAKING A TEPEE AND "BUCKSKIN" PAPER

After reading the information on page 30, construct a model of a tepee.

MATERIALS

- compass
- long, straight sticks
- string
- glue
- scissors
- tempera paint
- paper
- chamois, vinyl, or felt



DIRECTIONS

1. Display pictures of tepees. Read and discuss page 30.
2. If possible, measure and mark the diameter of a tepee with chalk on the blacktop or use a length of string to demonstrate the size on the classroom floor.
3. If desired, give paper a leather texture by following the steps below.
4. When the paper has dried, use the compass to draw a large circle. Use a diameter that is slightly shorter than the sticks. Cut out the circle, then cut it in half to form a tepee cover.
5. Use tempera paint to add Native American designs to the tepees.
6. Tie three sticks together and spread them into a tripod.
7. Glue the cover over the frame.

Native Americans made many of their necessities from the hides of the buffalo or other animals. In the late nineteenth century, expansion and white trappers nearly made the species almost extinct. Follow the directions below to make paper that looks like leather or buckskin. Use the paper for making Indian crafts.

MATERIALS

- sponge
- paper plate
- old toothbrush
- crayons
- tempera or acrylic paint
- paper (grocery bags, butcher paper, brown wrapping paper, or school craft paper)

DIRECTIONS

Method 1: Select crayons in brown, rust, and orange. Peel the paper wrapper from the crayon and use the side to cover the paper with scribbles. Make many layers of different colors. Rub the colors with a paper towel or rag to blend them together.

Method 2: Use a paper plate as a palette. Place a dab of paint of each color on the plate. Use colors like brown, ocher, and burnt sienna. Use the flat side of a damp sponge to pick up all the colors. Dab the sponge on the paper with quick movements. Blend the paint with the sponge as you continue. Use the sponge to create different textures and effects.