



FACT SHEET

THE IROQUOIS

INTRODUCTION

The Iroquois (IHR uh kwoy) Confederacy was made up of five nations: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Cayuga. Eventually a sixth nation, the Tuscarora, also became part of the Iroquois Confederacy. The name *Iroquois* means "People of the Longhouse." The Iroquois inhabited the northeastern woodlands of present-day New York and Quebec.

CLOTHING

Most Iroquois clothing was made from deerskin. Men often wore a pair of loose-fitting leggings and a breechcloth, which was held in place by a long belt. When the weather was cold, Iroquois men wore fringed deerskin shirts. Sometimes men wore kilts and caps covered with feathers. Most Iroquois men cut off all of their hair, except for one section that ran down the center of their scalp. This section of hair, called a roach, is known today as a "mohawk."

Iroquois women wore long deerskin skirts and leggings. In cooler weather, they wore fringed capes as blouses. Women grew their hair long and usually wore it braided. Both men and women wore moccasins. Most Iroquois clothing was decorated with colorful beads and quills.

FOOD

The Iroquois were primarily farmers, although they hunted game, fished, and gathered fruits and nuts. The three most important crops were corn, beans, and squash, which the Iroquois called "The Three Sisters." The Iroquois were able to grow 15 types of corn, 8 types of squash, and more than 60 types of beans.

In the spring, the Iroquois collected sap from maple trees to make maple syrup. Spring was also planting time. During the summer, as the crops grew, Iroquois men often caught fish. When it was harvest time, women and children picked and preserved corn, while men prepared to hunt in the mountains for deer and moose. Fall was also the time when nuts such as acorns, hickory nuts, hazelnuts, and chestnuts were plentiful. Iroquois women and children wandered through the forest and gathered nuts from the forest floor.

SHELTER

The Iroquois lived in long, narrow buildings called longhouses. An average-size longhouse was about 100 feet (30 meters) long and 20 feet (6 meters) wide. A longhouse was home to many Iroquois families belonging to the same clan.

A long hallway ran down the center of the longhouse, dividing it into two halves. Along the sides of the longhouse, Iroquois families lived in small areas. The family area was divided into two levels. On the lower level, the entire family slept together under a bearskin blanket. On the upper level, the family stored their belongings.

The Iroquois built their longhouses near riverbanks and surrounded their villages with high fences or palisades. Each day and night an Iroquois warrior guarded the village. After about 10 years, the soil was no longer as rich as it once had been. When this occurred, the Iroquois would leave their villages to search for fertile farmland and build new homes.

FAMILY LIFE

The Iroquois formed a Great Council in which all of the members were male. However, the men chosen for the Great Council were picked by the women. The purpose of the Great Council was to discuss the needs of all nations and make important decisions together.

Leaders were notified of Council meetings when strings of wampum were sent to their villages. Wampum was a collection of small beads made from shells and woven into belts.

Special ceremonies were also an important part of Iroquois life. Each August the Iroquois held the Green Corn Ceremony in order to give thanks to "The Three Sisters" for a plentiful harvest.

Children were important to the Iroquois. Babies were kept safe in cradleboards until they were two years old. Iroquois men and women often made toys for their children, such as toy birch-bark canoes and cornhusk dolls dressed in deerskin clothing. Boys learned how to hunt, trap, and fish for food. Girls learned how to plant seeds, harvest crops, cook, and make clothing.



FACT SHEET

THE SIOUX

INTRODUCTION

The Sioux (SOO) roamed the plains of North America from as far north as present-day Wisconsin and Canada to as far south as present-day Texas. The Sioux Nation encompasses fourteen bands, which make up three main tribes: Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota.

CLOTHING

Most Sioux clothing was made from buffalo hide and other animal skins. The skins were tanned and dyed with natural pigments using berries, leaves, grasses, and flowers. Sioux women sewed the hides together using needles of sharpened bone. They also used buffalo sinew (tendons) to make tough, durable thread.

Women wore fringed dresses decorated with porcupine quills, horsehair, fox tails, and beads. Many of these same materials were used to make jewelry. Men wore fringed shirts and breechcloths. In the winter, they wore fur robes and leggings. Men also wore blankets or soft robes made from fox or wolf skins. Both men and women wore moccasins. The Sioux also made parfleches out of rawhide. A parfleche was a folded rawhide envelope that was used to hold food or something special.

FOOD

The buffalo provided the Sioux with their main source of food. They often cooked the meat in a bowl made from the buffalo's stomach. Because the stomach was pliable, it was easy to stretch the stomach muscle across a wooden frame. The Sioux also dried buffalo meat so they would have meat for the winter when buffalo were scarce.

Women and children gathered berries, wild turnips, roots, and herbs. Berries were often dried and stored in containers made from buffalo hide. The turnips were peeled, dried, and pounded into flour. The turnip flour was then used to thicken broth that was flavored with wild herbs.

The Sioux also ate wasna. Wasna was made from lean meat that the women dried and pounded into fine particles. The meat particles were then mixed with melted fat and crushed berries. Similar to beef

jerky, wasna was especially easy to eat while hunting or traveling. Wasna was often stored in parfleches.

SHELTER

The word *tipi* comes from two Sioux words meaning "an object used to live in." The Sioux were able to assemble and disassemble their tipis so they could follow the roaming buffalo across the plains.

A tipi was constructed with large lodgepoles that measured about 20 feet (6 meters) in length. Then the women scraped, tanned, and sewed a dozen buffalo hides together to make the tipi covering. The Sioux decorated their tipis with a variety of ceremonial symbols. When the weather was hot, the tipi covering was rolled up on the sides to allow for more air circulation.

An average-size tipi could sleep six people. Bedding was rolled up in the morning to make room for daily activities. Weapons were kept on the men's side of the tipi, while cooking pots and utensils were kept on the women's side. When it was time to move, the women disassembled the tipi and loaded it onto a travois, which acted as a sled and could easily be pulled by a horse.

FAMILY LIFE

Men made all the decisions for the tribe, and one man was chosen as chief. While women were not involved in decision-making, they had great influence over their husbands and often made suggestions about what should be done.

Women owned all family belongings. Young Sioux children played together near the women. Girls played with miniature tipis and dolls made from animal hide. Boys often pretended to hunt with small bows and arrows.

When children reached the age of five or six, they learned adult skills. Sioux women taught girls to cook, tan hides, make clothing, and assemble tipis. Boys were taught how to hunt and become great warriors. They also learned how to care for horses and often participated in hunting activities. Both boys and girls were responsible for taking care of the younger children.