

## FACT SHEET

# THE NAVAJO

### INTRODUCTION

The Navajo (NAV uh hoh) tribe is one of the largest in the western United States. The Navajo lived in the canyons and mountains of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. About 200,000 Navajo currently live on the 28,000-square-mile (72,520 square kilometers) Navajo reservation located in the Southwest. The Navajo people call themselves the "Dineh," which means "People."

### CLOTHING

Long before they had contact with European explorers, the Navajo wore clothes made from deerskin. Men often wore breechcloths and leggings, while women wore deerskin dresses. Both men and women wore moccasins.

Later on, Navajo clothing was often brightly colored. Men wore shirts and pants that ended halfway between the knee and ankle. They also wore a blanket that they wrapped across one shoulder. The Navajo highlighted their clothing with belts, bracelets, and necklaces made from silver and leather.

As time went on, women wore dresses made from wool. These dresses were often made from two blankets sewn together at the shoulders. Women also wore cradleboards so they could carry their babies on their backs.

### FOOD

In spite of the hot, dry climate of the Southwest, the Navajo grew and harvested corn, potatoes, wheat, and fruits. However, sheep were the main source of food for the Navajo. The meat was added to soup or stew along with vegetables. Fry bread, made from wheat they had grown, usually accompanied the meal.

### SHELTER

The Navajo built circular-shaped earth lodge houses that they called hogans, a Navajo word meaning "house." A hogan had a frame of sticks and logs that were covered with mud. A hogan consisted of one giant room that measured about 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 meters) across. There was a smoke hole in the center of the roof. The entrance to each hogan

always faced east so the Navajo could pay respect to the rising sun.

Separate from the house was a veranda called a ramada. The Navajo built each ramada from four poles and a frame. The frame was then covered with brush to provide shade.

In the summer, the Navajo often wandered with their sheep herds. When winter approached, they returned to their hogans to live. If a family member died, the hogan was abandoned and the family built a new one.

### FAMILY LIFE

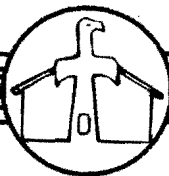
In the Navajo tribe, horses belonged to the men, while sheep and most other possessions belonged to the women. Navajo women spun, dyed, and wove the sheep's wool into beautiful blankets, clothing, and rugs. They incorporated many intricate designs and patterns. Navajo women used cacti and other plants, shrubs, and trees to make dye for their wool. Weaving was done outdoors on large vertical looms. Navajo women passed along their skills, traditions, and tools to their daughters. In fact, all Navajo property was passed from mother to daughter.

Navajo men were responsible for hunting, silverwork, and many ceremonial activities. Navajo silversmiths often made bridle ornaments for their horses, as well as belts, bracelets, rings, water bottles, and boxes.

Navajo men and women participated in dry painting. Dry painting was a type of sand painting used during a ceremony to help cure someone's illness. The dry painting was performed inside the hogan and often took hours to make. When the ceremony was over, the painting was destroyed because it had served its purpose.

Navajo children were raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older brothers and sisters. At an early age, Navajo children learned to respect and act like their elders.

Boys learned to hunt and track animals, while girls learned to cook and weave. Both boys and girls cared for sheep, which they were told would someday belong to them.



NW

## FACT SHEET

# THE TLINGIT

### INTRODUCTION

One of many Native American groups that lived along the Northwest Coast was the Tlingit (KLIHN kiht). The Tlingit made their home along the southeastern coast of Alaska, northern British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory. The Northwest Coast was rich in natural resources. Food was plentiful, and the Tlingit often had more food than they needed. They often traded their excess food with neighboring tribes in return for other goods.

### CLOTHING

The Tlingit wore animal skin pants with feet in them, leather aprons, and skin blankets made from rabbits or marmots. Men and women wore nose rings and earrings. Some people pierced their lower lips and wore tattoos.

The Tlingit had ceremonial clothing for special feasts called potlatches. They wore carved masks, potlatch hats, dancing dresses, and Chilkat robes. Chilkat robes could be fur-trimmed, multicolored, or fringed. Chilkat robes and dancing dresses had extreme value. The animal designs on the masks, hats, and clothing identified the person's clan.

### FOOD

The most important source of food for the Tlingit was salmon. In early spring, millions of salmon would swim from the salty Pacific Ocean to freshwater rivers to lay their eggs. The Tlingit called this event the salmon run. The salmon run lasted from spring until late summer. It was not unusual for a family to catch more than 1,000 pounds (454 kilograms) of salmon during a salmon run. A large portion of the salmon was dried or smoked so it could be preserved for future meals.

Each summer and fall, the Tlingit people lived in fishing camps near the sea. They built large canoes and caught halibut and other types of fish, sea lions, and otters. On the shore, they gathered clams and mussels. Near the forests, the Tlingit hunted animals such as goat, deer, elk, and bear.

In the winter, the Tlingit held ceremonial potlatches. Potlatches were often held to honor the dead or celebrate good fortune. People often ate

seal meat, fish, berries, and vegetables at a potlatch. Guests ate and ate until they became sick, which was considered a great compliment to the family who hosted the potlatch. Potlatches could often last up to 12 days. Many potlatches took years to plan.

### SHELTER

The Tlingit built large plank houses. They used red and yellow cedar, yew, alder, maple, and Sitka spruce from the vast Northwest coastal forests. Many times, planks were cut from large trees without chopping down the trees.

As winter approached, the Tlingit left their fishing camps. During winter several families lived together in one house. The Tlingit painted their houses with bright pictures and colorful designs. The designs usually depicted animals and birds. Common raven family crests included raven, whale, salmon, and frog. Eagle crests included eagle, bear, shark, and thunderbird. The Tlingit often carved these animal crests on the beams, doorways, and entrances of their homes. Many wealthy families had elaborately carved panels in the interior of the house.

Huge wooden totem poles stood in front of each home. Tlingit families recorded their family histories by carving special animals and birds on the totem poles. Most totem poles were 40 to 60 feet (12 to 18 meters) tall, but some measured more than 100 feet (30 meters). Raising a totem pole was a special event. Totem poles were often raised at potlatches.

### FAMILY LIFE

Each plank house was home to several families who belonged to the same clan. The relationships were established through the mother's side of the family. When a boy reached eight years old, he went to live with his mother's brother. There he eventually learned to hunt game animals, as well as other responsibilities. Girls learned house traditions from their mothers and grandmothers. Both boys and girls learned from their elders the clan's history and customs.