

# 7 THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF CANADA

## CHAPTER OUTCOMES

Canada's geography is extremely varied, with many distinctive regions. In this chapter, you will learn about some of the Native peoples who have lived in these regions. By the end of the chapter, you will

- construct an ethnography of a group's culture using the terms of anthropology
- describe the history and lifestyle of five different Native culture groups
- identify the patterns of subsistence, shelter, and transportation of each group
- identify the important natural resources of each group
- describe the social organization of each group
- explain the difference between myth and legend and recognize the importance of each

# Why the Salmon Came to Squamish Waters

*Myths are stories that explain something about the universe—how it was made, for example, and why certain events occur. This myth about salmon has been handed down by the Squamish people. Salmon are still an extremely important food resource for the people living on the Northwest Coast of Canada, and form an essential part of their diet. In this story, the origins of the salmon are revealed.*

**A** long time ago, people, animals, and birds were really the same, only disguised in different forms. The Chief of the Squamish people was sad because there were no salmon in Squamish waters. As a result, the people often went hungry. One day, the Squamish village was visited by four **supernatural** brothers, and the Chief decided to ask them for help in persuading the Salmon people to swim to Squamish waters.

The four brothers were renowned for their good deeds, and they gladly agreed to offer their services to the Chief. The problem was that no one knew exactly where the Salmon people could be found. It was decided to ask Snookum, the Sun, as Snookum could see all over the world from his home high in the sky.

After much thought and discussion, the brothers decided to use their great powers to transform the youngest brother into a salmon by tying him to a rock with a length of fishing line. He leapt and sported in the manner of a salmon until he attracted the attention of Snookum. But the crafty Sun

caused the other three brothers to fall into a deep trance. Then, having transformed himself into a magnificent Eagle, Snookum swooped down from the sky and caught the Salmon brother in his claws. The Sun-Eagle rose rapidly up into the heavens, breaking the line as he flew.

On waking from their trance, the three brothers discovered their young brother was missing, and Snookum was back up in the sky. They decided to try again. They transformed the third brother into a great whale and tied him to shore with a very strong line. For a second time,



The youngest brother sported about, just like a salmon.



The Squamish people paddled their canoes towards the territory of the Salmon people.

Snookum cast the brothers into a trance. Again, transformed into an Eagle, he swooped down and dug his claws into the whale's back. The Sun-Eagle now tried to fly back up into the sky, but this time the line held. The Eagle realized he was stuck fast to the whale's back.

The frantic flapping of the Sun-Eagle's wings awoke the brothers from their trance, and they hauled in the line, bringing the whale and its unwilling passenger to shore. Outwitted and now captured, the Sun-Eagle agreed to tell the brothers the location of the Salmon people in exchange for his freedom.

Snookum told the brothers that the Salmon people lived a

long distance away to the west. He warned that if the Squamish people wished to visit the Salmon people, they must first prepare some medicine and take it with them on their journey. Then he was set free.

The Squamish people prepared the required medicine. Led by the brothers, they paddled their canoes westward until they arrived at the home of the Salmon people. Here they were **cordially** received, and they gave some of their medicine to Spring Salmon, the Chief of the Salmon village. As a result, Spring Salmon was very friendly to the whole party.

In a stream that flowed behind the village, Spring

Salmon kept a fish trap. He directed four of his young people, two boys and two girls, to enter the water and swim up the creek to the Salmon trap. Obeying his orders, the young people drew their blankets over their heads and walked into the sea. No sooner had the water lapped against their faces than they became salmon. Leaping and playing together, just as salmon do in the running season, they swam their way to the trap in the creek.

Later, when it came time to welcome the visitors with a feast, Spring Salmon ordered the fish to be brought from the trap to be cleaned and roasted. The four salmon were cleaned and



One of the youths emerged from the water with only half a face.

cut open and then spread above the flames on a wooden grill.

When the Chief invited his guests to eat, he insisted that they must not throw away any of the bones. They were to lay them aside carefully, making sure that not even the smallest bone was destroyed. When the meal was over and the satisfied guests had finished eating, all the bones were carefully gathered up and thrown into the sea. A few minutes later, the four young people reappeared in their original human form and waded out of the water to join the others.

The Squamish started to believe that they had found the home of the Salmon people. They became even more convinced when, on a subsequent occasion, one youth did not throw all the bones back into the sea. This resulted in near disaster—one of the youths emerged from the water with part of his face missing. He was made whole again only when the guilty Squamish youth produced the missing bones.

The eldest of the four brothers told how the Squamish people were often poor and hungry, and requested that the

Salmon be allowed to visit Squamish waters and swim in Squamish streams.

Chief Spring Salmon agreed, on one condition, which was that the Squamish be very careful with the bones and always be sure to throw them back into the water, just as they had seen the Salmon people do.

The four brothers and the Squamish people promised to observe this rule faithfully. As they were leaving, Chief Spring Salmon called to them: "I will send Spring Salmon to you first in the season. After that, I will send the Sockeye, then the Coho, then the Dog-Salmon (Chum), and last of all the Humpback."

The Chief of the Squamish kept his word and ever since that time, so very long ago, different varieties of Salmon, in that order, have come to the Squamish waters to help feed the people. And in the days of old, before the coming of the white people, the Squamish obeyed the words of Chief Spring Salmon and were very careful to throw the salmon bones back into the water.

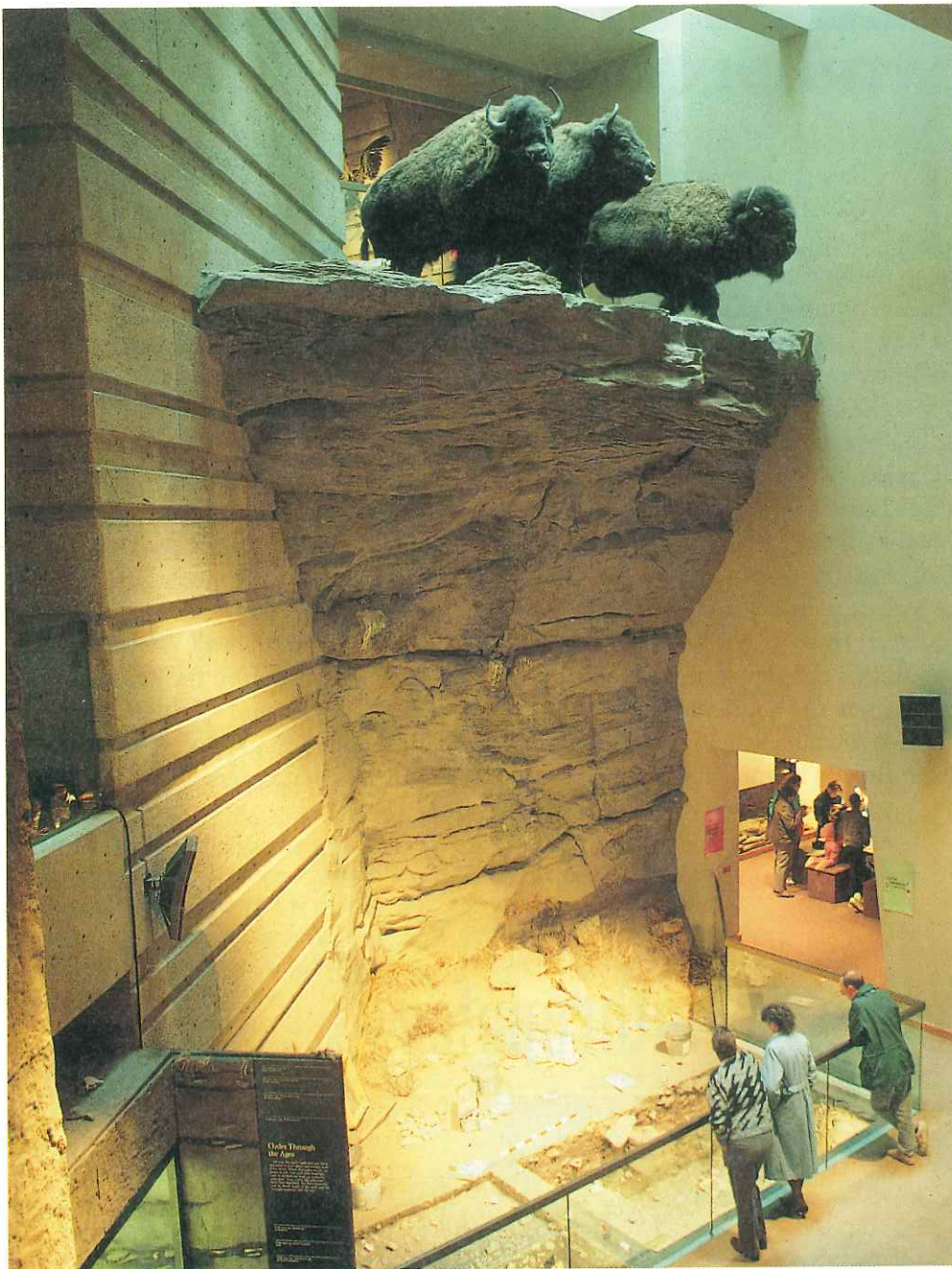
**supernatural:** living in the spirit world, not of the physical world

**cordially:** with politeness and friendliness

**trickster:** someone who lies or plays tricks to cause trouble

## ACTIVITIES

1. The **trickster** is a popular character in many myths and legends from around the world. Who is the trickster in this Northwest Coast myth? How is he outwitted? Why would the myth-maker include such a character?
2. Conservation of resources is important to the people who depend directly on them. How is the theme of conserving salmon made apparent in this myth?



## TIME LINE

- 1700 BCE ● PEOPLE MOVE INTO THE PLATEAU REGION FROM NORTHERN BC AND PRESENT-DAY CALIFORNIA
- 90 CE ● LARGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPS AT KEATLEY CREEK
- 1000 CE ●
- 600 BCE ● FIRST NATIVE CANADIAN CULTURE IN THE ARCTIC REGION
- 500 CE ● IROQUOIS ACQUIRE AGRICULTURE
- 1000 CE ● IROQUOIS CULTURE FLOURISHES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION
- 1400 ● BEGINNING OF THE LEAGUE OF FIVE NATIONS
- 1713 ● THE FIVE NATIONS ARE JOINED BY THE TUSCARORA, CREATING SIX NATIONS
- 1800 ● BISON STILL ROAM FREELY ON THE PLAIN

*For a long time I stood there waiting. Finally the tree spoke: "O poor boy. No living soul has ever seen me before. Here I stand, watching all the trees and all the people throughout this world, and no one knows me. One power, and one only, I shall grant you. When you are treating the sick, you shall see the whole world; when the mind of your patient is lost, you shall see and recapture it."*

These words, spoken to a Coast Salish boy while he fasted in the woods, communicate a belief in the power of every living creature. What is meant by the statement: "When you are treating the sick, you shall see the whole world?"

# INTRODUCTION

bison: buffalo

Long before any Viking or European explorer ever came to Canada, North America was home to millions of Native peoples, representing many different culture groups and speaking hundreds of languages. If no one from Europe had ever explored Canada—or the coastline of the Americas—the history of the continent might be completely different. There might not be a Canada, or a United States, or a Mexico, and English might be a second language, not the dominant language of media, politics, and business. Think about it: How would you fit in?

In this chapter, you will revisit the time when the aboriginal peoples of Canada were its sole inhabitants. You have already learned about the

geography of North America. Native societies, which in many cases go back thousands of years BCE, responded in different ways to their environment. On the plains, for example, the bison drive became the focal point of the Cree and Assiniboin cultures, while in the Arctic, eight months of snow and ice affected every aspect of Inuit society. You will learn about both groups in this chapter, as well as three other groups—the Iroquois of the Eastern Woodlands, the peoples of the Plateau, and the peoples of the Northwest Coast.

As you are reading, try to imagine life in Canada before the arrival of Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain, explorers you will read about in the next chapter.

## GUIDEBOOK

# An Introduction to Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of human groupings and the interactions of human beings—how they structure their lives, deal with each other, and deal with the world around them.

There are thousands of human societies around the world. This Guidebook will introduce you to some terms used by anthropologists to describe these societies. Many of these terms will be used in this chapter.

**Subsistence** All people have to eat to survive. Anthropologists use the technical term “subsistence” to refer to the diet of human groups and the ways in which people obtain food.

**Hunting and Gathering** All humans were hunters and gatherers until the development of agriculture in some parts of the world some 12 000 years ago. Some foods, such as plants and small animals, can be gathered from the environment. These foods form the basis of the diet in most hunter-gatherer groups. Larger animals are also hunted. Most hunter-gatherer societies are small and have a simple social structure. Hunter-gatherer societies still exist today in the Arctic, South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia.

**Agriculture** Through agriculture, humans plant and harvest plant foods, rather than simply gathering

them. In addition, animals can be used by agricultural societies to provide both meat and other food products.

Over time, certain plants and animals have been **domesticated**. This means that they are controlled and used by humans to provide resources, for example, as food or clothing. The domestication of plants in North and South America occurred more than 10 000 years ago. Domestication of corn, beans, members of the squash family, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco was begun by the aboriginal peoples of Mexico and Peru, and the knowledge of their use spread over much of both continents over thousands of years.

**Social Organization** Because human beings are social, they prefer to live in groups. These groups, known as “societies,” develop rules so that group activities can proceed smoothly.

**Leadership and Government** Small societies may have no permanent leaders. Instead, they trust the most experienced and skilled person for a specific task, such as leading a hunting expedition. Larger societies always develop some form of permanent leadership. Authority is usually vested in one person (for example, a chief), who has the power to direct the activities of the group.

**Religion** In order to explain how and why events occur, humans have developed religious beliefs. Religion explains the nature of the world and provides a moral structure so that people may live together in harmony. Mythology (see this chapter’s Window on the Past for an example) is actually an ancient form of religion.

Some Native spiritual traditions that you will read about in this chapter include myth-making, **shamanism**, the spirit quest, and

religious festivals. Festivals are an important part of religion because they mark special occasions when all members of the group join to celebrate some important aspect of their lives.

**Kinship** Kinship describes how a person identifies his or her blood relatives—through the mother’s family, the father’s family, or both. Other kinship rules govern whether a newly married couple live with the family of the wife or that of the husband. The following kinship terms are used by anthropologists. You will encounter a number of these terms in this chapter.

**Matrilocal** When a man and a woman marry, they go to live with the woman’s extended family.

**Patrilocal** When a woman and a man marry, they go to live with the man’s extended family.

**Patriarchal** Status and power is controlled by men.

**Patrilineal** Descent from generation to generation is reckoned through the male line only.

**Matrilineal** Descent from generation to generation is reckoned through the female line only.

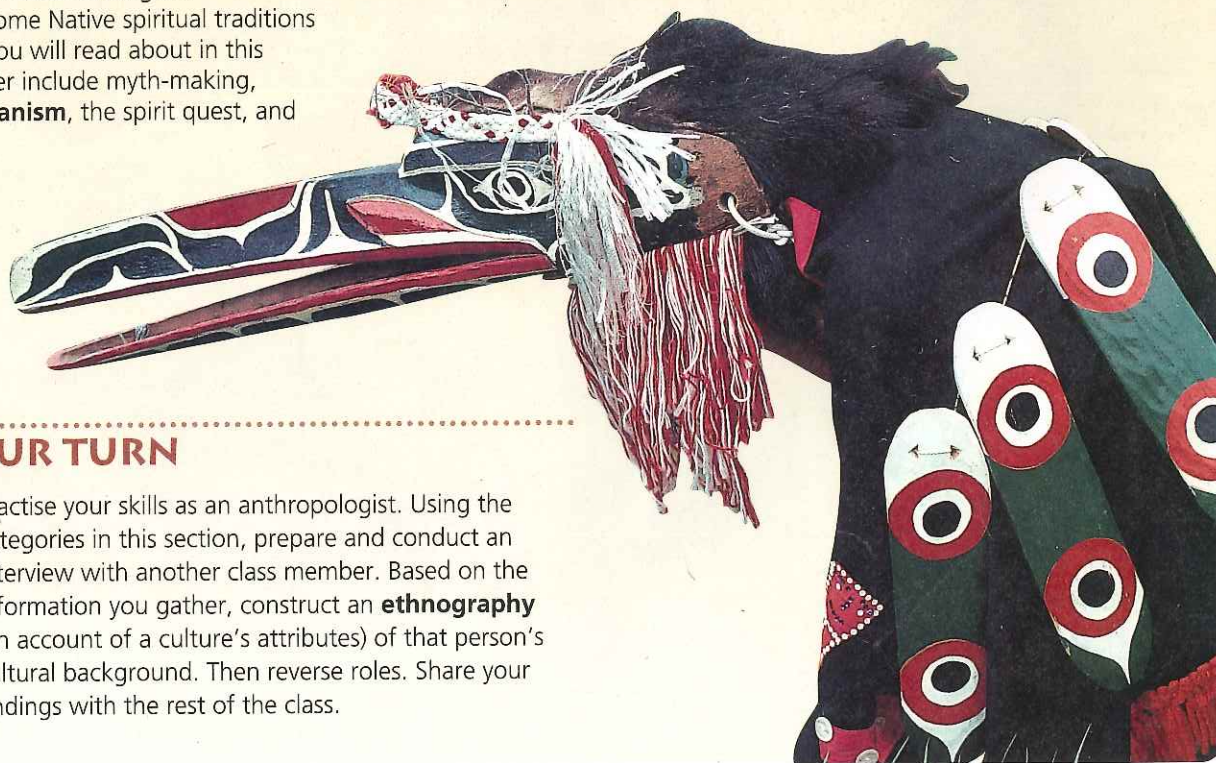
**Bilateral** Descent from generation to generation is reckoned through both the male and female lines.

**to domesticate:** to adapt a plant or animal for human use

**shamanism:** the belief that everything in the world has a spirit and that certain special people can communicate with the spirit world

**ethnography:** an organized way of describing the characteristics of a culture

**Figure 7-1** This Northwest Coast raven mask and button blanket could be worn during a spiritual ceremony. Masks and costumes depicting animals and other mythical beings intensify the presence of the being symbolized and open a door to another world.



**YOUR TURN**

1. Practise your skills as an anthropologist. Using the categories in this section, prepare and conduct an interview with another class member. Based on the information you gather, construct an **ethnography** (an account of a culture’s attributes) of that person’s cultural background. Then reverse roles. Share your findings with the rest of the class.

# THE INUIT OF THE ARCTIC

## DID YOU KNOW?

"Inuit" means "the people."

The Arctic Region includes northern Canada, most of Alaska, and Greenland.

While the Arctic is a challenging environment—snow-covered for most of the year—it is also a place of great beauty.

The Inuit are one Native group that resides in the Arctic. Considered to be the largest ethnic group living in Canada, the Inuit trace their ancestry back thousands of years BCE.

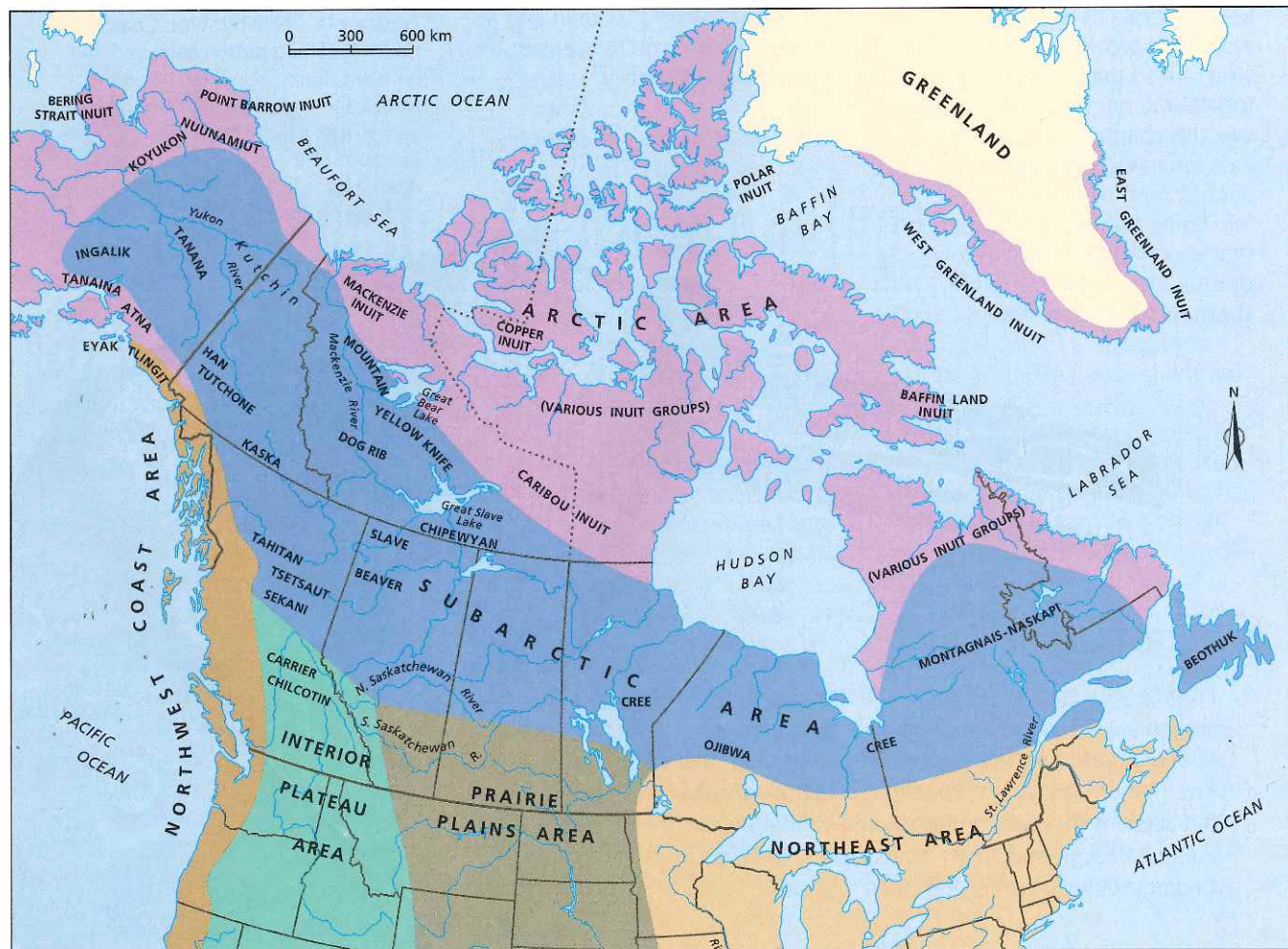
Traditionally, most Inuit have lived along the coast.

The Arctic is a difficult home, even for those who have adapted to it. Inuit groups over most of the Arctic were never large, and most people

lived on the edge of survival. As a result, a major concern was staying alive and as healthy as possible.

Because of the Arctic climate, shelter was important. In winter, temperatures drop to well below  $-30$  degrees C. The Inuit solved the problem of shelter in two ways. In the winter, they used snow as a building material to construct domed snow houses known as *iglus*. Two skilled persons, using only long knives as tools, could build an iglu in less than an hour. Snow also makes an excellent insulator. Warmed by the bodies of its occupants and a seal oil lamp, an iglu provides a secure and safe house.

**Figure 7-2** This map of the Arctic and Subarctic areas of Canada shows how many Native groups live in these regions. The Inuit also live on the east and west coasts of Greenland.







**Figure 7-3** Left: Two people working quickly can build an igloo in a matter of hours. In the western Arctic, the Inuit build pit houses (an example is on page 203). Right: Inside an igloo. The women are seated on a raised platform. The cooking area is to the left.



Ingenious clothing also provided warmth in winter. Inuit clothing was primarily made of caribou skin. Because caribou hair is hollow, it traps air and forms an **insulating** barrier. Winter pants and parkas were layered to provide maximum warmth. The inner layer was worn with the hair side facing outward, and the outer layer was worn with the hair side facing inward. The body warmed the suit, and the air-trapping hair provided a warm, insulating barrier. The hood of the parka was lined with fur, and when the hood was drawn over the head, the fur fringe nearly

obscured the wearer's face. In this way, breath was trapped near the face and warmed the skin. Double boots of sealskin and caribou hide and mittens of caribou hide completed the winter gear. The Inuit could survive well in this gear under most winter conditions. During the brief summer of the Arctic, the outer suit of clothes was discarded.

**insulating:** a warming barrier through which energy (heat) cannot escape



**Figure 7-4** Tents of animal hide were used in the summer months.

**soapstone:** a soft stone that has a soapy feel

**kayak:** an Inuit canoe consisting of a frame that is covered with skins except for a small opening in the centre

**umiak:** a larger boat covered with hides and propelled by broad paddles

## LOOKING FOR FOOD

While the Inuit who lived inland hunted caribou and musk-ox, especially in the fall, coastal groups depended primarily on sea mammals—seal, walrus, and whales. All Inuit ate fish.

The Inuit ate animals and used animal products because plant foods are extremely scarce in the Arctic. They used all parts of the animal, including the fat. The seal was an especially important animal because the seal blubber provided both energy and protein.

Animal fat also provided a fuel source. Fuel is scarce in the Arctic because very few trees grow in the region, and those that do are no taller than shrubs. Fat was collected and rendered into oil to be used in small **soapstone** lamps equipped with a moss wick. Such lamps were used primarily to provide heat and light. Cooking by lamplight was a long and difficult process, so most food was eaten raw. Over the long winter months, snow was used as a source of drinking water. However, eating snow in a cold climate can be dangerous, so collected snow would be slowly melted over soapstone lamps.

Arctic winters are dark. Depending on the latitude, winter nights can last up to twenty hours.

Therefore, little travel was possible during the winter, and people relied on stored supplies of meat, which were kept frozen outside the iglu until needed. As the days lengthened in the spring, hunters would move out onto the sea ice near the shore to hunt seals, which provided needed fresh food after the long winter months.



**Figure 7-5** Left: In winter, the Inuit travelled by sleds pulled by teams of dogs. In summer, people walked. Right: The **kayak** was used strictly for hunting. The larger **umiak** was used for transporting groups of people.



## The Caribou Hunt

Because the caribou helped the Inuit to survive their environment, great importance was attached to the annual hunt. Caribou herds follow specific **migration** routes every year. In order to capture enough animals, Inuit groups would establish lines of **inukshuk** (semblance of men) so that they could direct the herd to places where hunters waited concealed in shallow pits. In other locations, the caribou were directed into lakes or rivers, so that hunters in kayaks could kill them.

The caribou were a major source of meat, and a successful hunt would provide the group with enough food to last the winter. The caribou were also the major source of hides for winter clothing and **sinew** used to sew clothes together. Caribou antlers were used extensively to make tools. If the caribou suddenly changed their migration route, those Inuit who had no other major food source would face the prospect of a winter of starvation.

**migration:** movement from one place to another to ensure survival

**inukshuk:** human figures serving as landmarks

**sinew:** connective tissue attached to muscles, used for making tough cord or thread

### DID YOU KNOW?

*It was considered bad luck to perform any summer activities involving the caribou hide (such as sewing it together) during the period of actual hunting.*



**Figure 7-6** Caribou migration routes are thousands of years old. These animals are now extinct in large areas of British Columbia.

### DID YOU KNOW?

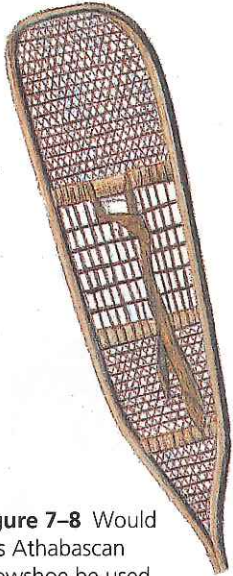
*The Inuit who settled in the territory west of Hudson Bay became known as the "Caribou Inuit" because they relied so much on this animal for survival.*

**Figure 7-7** These **inukshuk**, placed in long rows, drive caribou toward waiting hunters.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The people of the Subarctic used long snowshoes with upturned tips for walking on hard snow, and snowshoes with rounded tips (known as "bear paws") for walking on soft snow.



**Figure 7-8** Would this Athabascan snowshoe be used for walking on hard or soft snow?

**Figure 7-9** The Dene lived in the Subarctic area, south of the Arctic. This picture of a Dene winter camp was painted during the nineteenth century. Identify as many elements of the picture as you can.

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

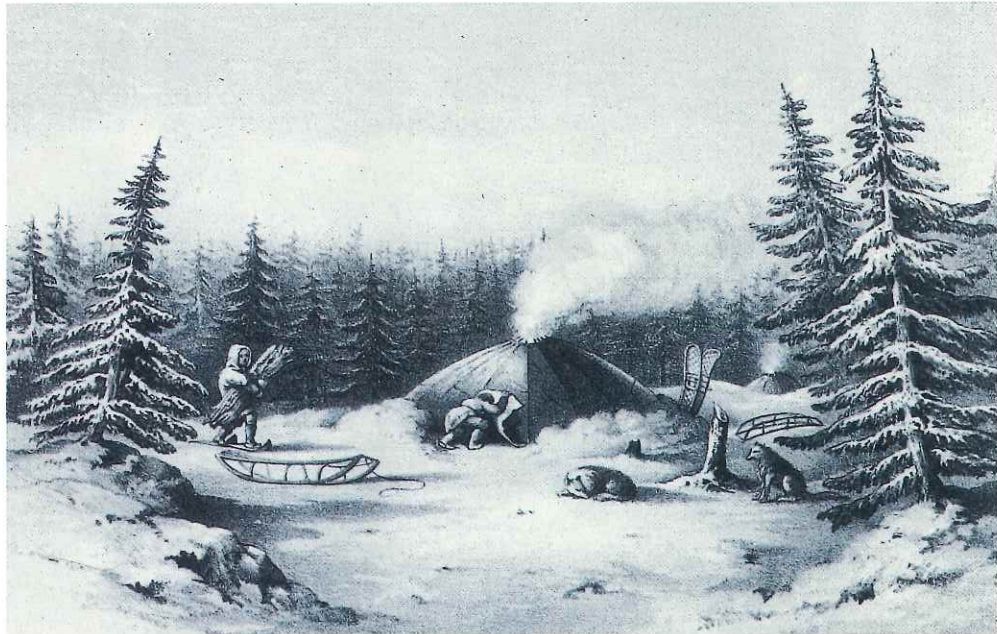
Because hunting was so important, Inuit society was organized according to groups of people who hunted together, and on trading partnerships between groups who had different goods to offer, for example, seal oil, walrus hide, or caribou hide. Trading partnerships were so important that they were expected to last a lifetime.

Some Inuit, such as those who lived along the Bering Sea, emphasized patrilineal bonds, which meant that a newly married couple would live with the husband's family,

and the children would receive names from the husband's family tree.

However, the couple would spend at least a year with the wife's relatives, so that the husband could work alongside the bride's father. The elders of the male line of the family always directed the other members of the community in proper behaviour and also formed a governing council of the local community.

All Inuit shared a belief in the spirit force of the universe and the need to behave in a certain way in order to ensure existence with nature. Illness or misfortune was a signal to the members of the community that they had not conducted themselves properly.



## ACTIVITIES

1. How did the Inuit cope with the harshness of their environment to exist successfully in the Arctic? Create a catalogue of home, fashion, and edible products, complete with pictures and text, that would be useful in the Arctic.
2. Why do you suppose most Inuit groups were so small in numbers?
3. Create a flow chart to express patrilineal or matrilineal bonds when a man and a woman marry and have children. Begin with these boxes and work downwards. You can show a relationship between the two sides of your flow chart by means of arrows.

Family A

Family B

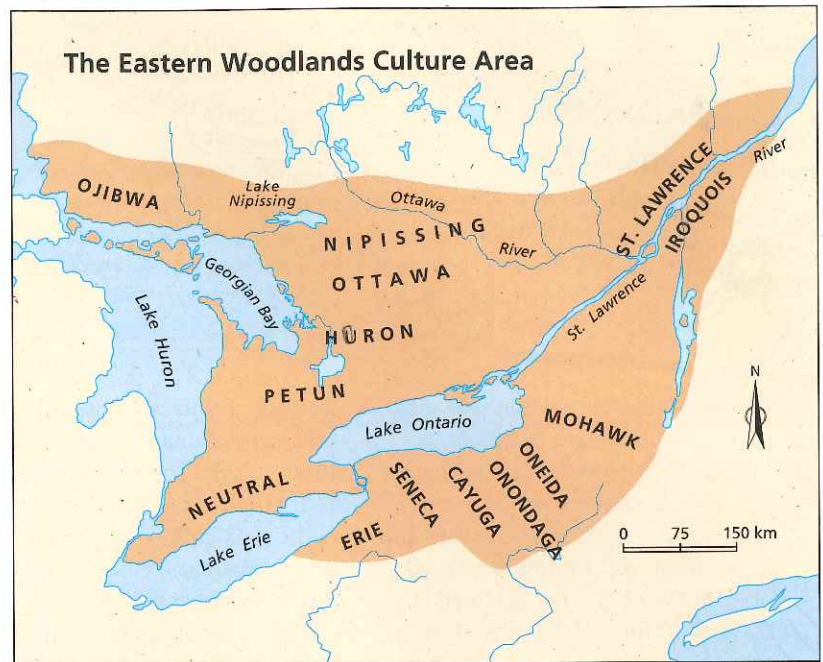
# THE IROQUOIS OF THE EASTERN WOODLANDS

In the next chapter, you will read more about the Iroquois and the Huron, two groups that lived in the fertile country of the Great Lakes.

The Iroquois have lived in their present territory since before 1200. They built large towns, heavily guarded by **palisades** of logs. Towns were surrounded by large fields of maize, beans, squash, and sunflowers.

Iroquois towns usually contained several rows of longhouses—sometimes as many as fifty in a row. Each extended family of the town lived in a longhouse, which was divided into several compartments, or hearths, one for each **nuclear family**. The town was run by a town council, which consisted of the chiefs from each family. When a decision about a town matter was needed, the council would meet and make a decision.

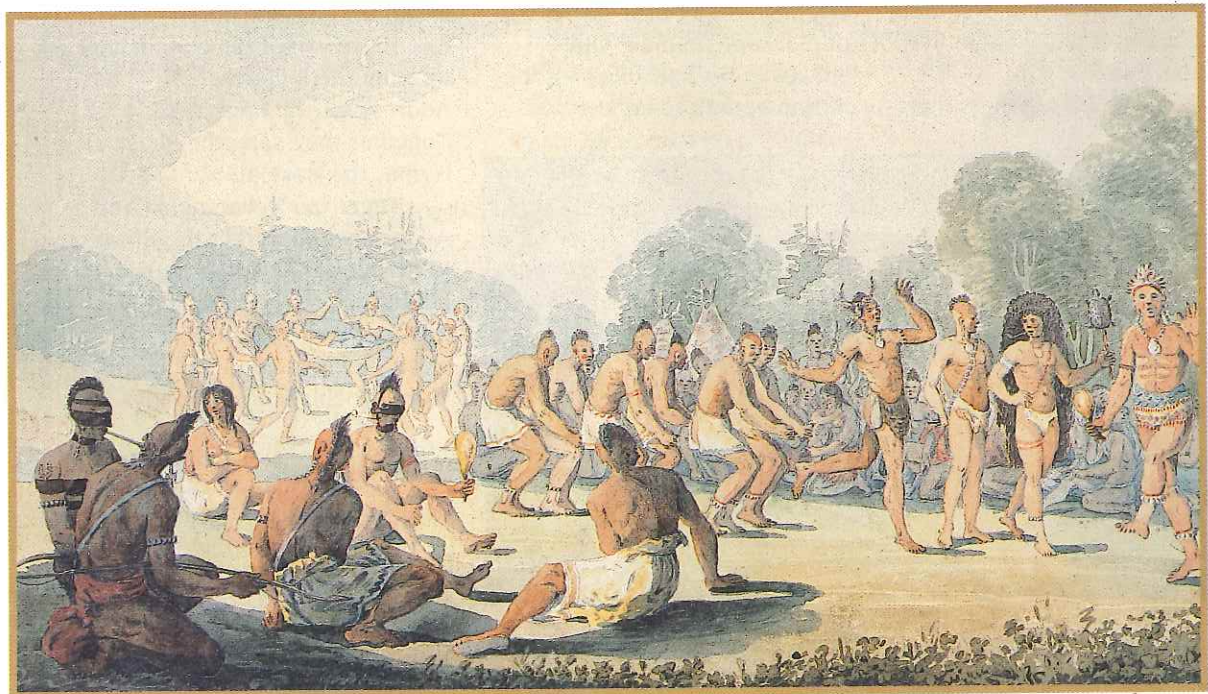
Figure 7-10 The peoples of the Eastern Woodlands



**palisade:** a defensive fence

**nuclear family:** a mother, a father, and their children

Figure 7-11 This painting depicts an Iroquois dance for the recovery of the sick. Can you find the ill member of the community?



# Using a Legend as a Primary Source

## CATALOGUE CARD

**What is it?** A legend that describes the beginnings of the Iroquois confederacy

**Who wrote it?** Unknown

**When?** Unknown

**Why?** To explain the importance of peace in the development of a nation

Many Iroquoian speakers lived south of Lake Ontario in what is now the United States. They comprised five nations: the Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and the Mohawk. As these nations competed for farm land and other resources, they found themselves in a state of

almost perpetual warfare.

In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the Iroquois nations stopped fighting with each other and made an alliance known as the "Confederacy of the Five Nations." What follows is an adaptation of a legend of how the confederacy came into being.

You might be interested to learn that a legend is not the same thing as a myth. A myth explains something about the world. A legend usually describes the challenges and adventures of a heroic person. Think about this difference when you are reading this adaptation.

In the time when war was the normal state of things, a young Huron woman who lived apart from her mother became pregnant, although she was still a virgin. Her mother dreamed that the child was destined to do great things. When the child, a boy, was born, he was named Dekanawida, and he was truly gifted. As he grew into a young man, he showed a natural gift as a persuasive speaker, but his own people treated him with doubt and jealousy. He therefore decided to depart and eventually came to the country of the five Iroquois nations.

He travelled amongst the

Iroquois hunters, giving them a message of peace, and urging them to take this message back to their chiefs. The Peacemaker, as he was called, stopped for a time among the Onondagas and gazed through the smoke hole of the house of Ayonhwathah. Ayonhwathah was a **cannibal**, but he was soon persuaded from this way of life by the Peacemaker, and he accepted his message of peace. Dekanawida charged him with the task of converting Thadodaho, a particularly unpleasant shaman with snakes in his hair. Leaving Ayonhwathah to convert

Thadodaho by combing the snakes from his hair, Dekanawida left to spread his message of peace among the Mohawk.

Unfortunately, Ayonhwathah failed in his mission. Thadodaho killed each of Ayonhwathah's three daughters in turn. In great grief, Ayonhwathah left his village and went eastward into Mohawk country. Wandering aimlessly, he happened upon Dekanawida, who cured Ayonhwathah of his grief by uttering the Requickening Address for the first time. Together they sang the Peace Hymn, the Hai Hai.

Together, Dekanawida and Ayonhwathah taught the ritual to the Mohawk, and accepted adoption into the Mohawk nation. They then turned westward, accompanied by the Mohawk chiefs, and quickly



**Figure 7-12** In this modern-day video, Dekanawida is shown preparing to bury the war clubs and hatchets of the different nations under the roots of a tree.

## Using a Legend as a Primary Source *continued*

convinced the Oneidas to join the League as younger brothers of the Mohawk. Bypassing the Onondaga for a time, they travelled to the Cayuga, who also accepted membership in the League as younger brothers. The three nations then returned to the Onondagas, all of whom, save Thadodaho, joined the League, as older brothers on the side of the Mohawk. The four nations

then went to the Seneca, and convinced this last nation to join, also as older brothers.

With the power of all five nations behind them, Dekanawida and Ayonhwathah returned to Thadodaho, and with the greatest difficulty, straightened his mind, and combed the snakes from his hair. Thadodaho, who was made first among equals in the role of the fifty League Chiefs,

placed antlers on the heads of all the chiefs as symbols of their authority, and taught them the words of the Great Law.

As a result of his efforts, Dekanawida had brought peace to the Five Nations, and they ceased to war amongst themselves. Henceforth, they lived as brothers of the same clan.



### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. The legend of the Peacemaker bears a resemblance to a story that is important to European culture. What is that story? How is it similar to this legend? How is it different?
2. Identify other regions of the world where war is "the normal state of things." Are these regions close to peace?

## SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

Iroquoian societies were both matrilineal and matrilocal, terms you learned on page 187. Women owned the fields in which crops were grown, and they were responsible for ensuring that the crops were well-tended and harvested.

When a couple married, they went to live with the bride's family. All Iroquoian groups had a fairly complex system of government. At the local level, each **extended family** or clan had two leaders. One, the "civil chief," directed the normal activities of the clan. The "military chief" was in charge of settling

conflicts with other groups. Both chiefs were chosen by the women elders of the clan, who also had the authority to remove a chief if he proved to be a poor leader.

Several towns usually cooperated in an area. On a regular basis, councils would be held to discuss matters concerning the entire group, and each town would send representatives to this council.

The nations of the Iroquois cooperated as much as possible. Matters concerning the entire nation would be discussed at a confederacy council, and each tribe would send representatives to this council. At all levels, decisions were made **democratically**, and the opinion of the majority was followed.

### DID YOU KNOW?

*The Iroquois had a three-level system of government—town, tribal, and confederacy. Canada today has a similar three-level system—municipal, provincial, and federal.*

**cannibal:** one who eats human flesh

**extended family:** the people related to the members of the nuclear family, e.g., the mother's mother or sister

**archaeological excavation:** a dig to uncover evidence of former civilizations

**hearth:** fireplace

### DID YOU KNOW?

*The longhouse was built of a wood frame and covered with bark*

## THE AGRICULTURE OF THE IROQUOIS

Agriculture came late to the Iroquoian people. Around 500 CE, they learned how to grow corn from their neighbours to the south. Until this time, the Iroquois had lived in small villages and had led a fairly nomadic existence, often travelling around the region seeking food. The discovery of agriculture eventually led to a rapid increase in both the size of villages and the number of people living in them because people could now stay in one place. This change is well documented by **archaeological excavations** of village sites in southern Ontario.

In the early-agricultural period, between 500 and 1300 CE, villages remained rather small, comprising about eight longhouses and about 250

people. The whole village covered about one hectare, and was surrounded by a defensive palisade. Fields were still rather small. Each **hearth** was shared by two families.

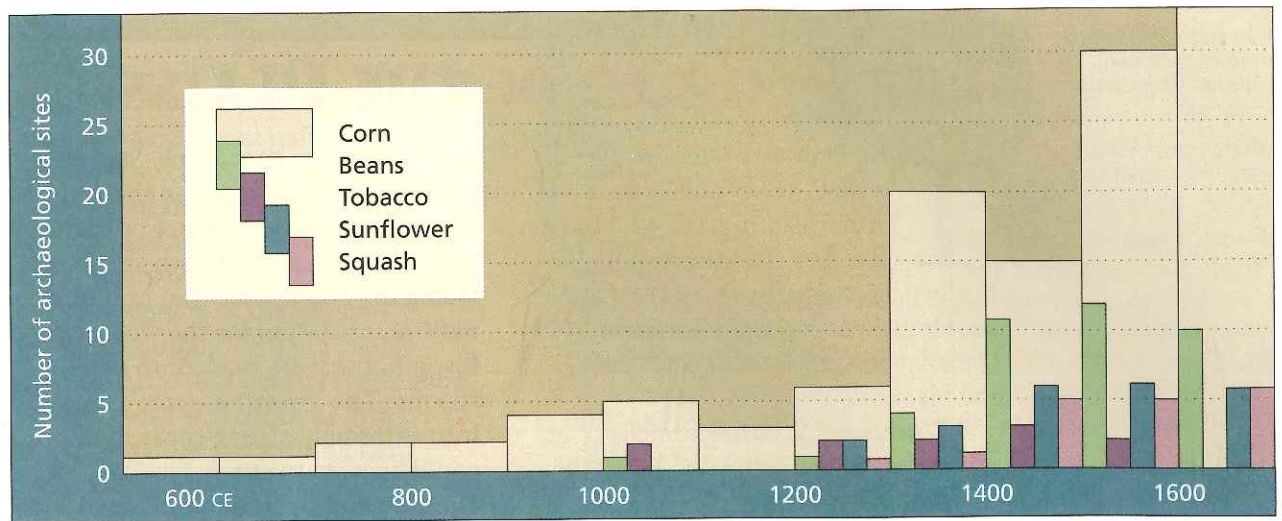
In the middle-agricultural period, between 1300 and 1400, villages grew much larger. New crops—beans, sunflower, and squash—were cultivated, along with the staple crop of corn. The villages had now become towns, each averaging about a dozen longhouses and 1000 people. By this time, the longhouses varied tremendously in size and housed between 30 to 80 people.

By the late-agricultural period (1400 to 1600), some towns covered up to four hectares or more, each with more than 2000 people. These palisaded villages were surrounded by large fields, which provided a stable source of food. Tobacco was a valuable trade item that could be exchanged for non-agricultural products with nations further north, such as the Huron.

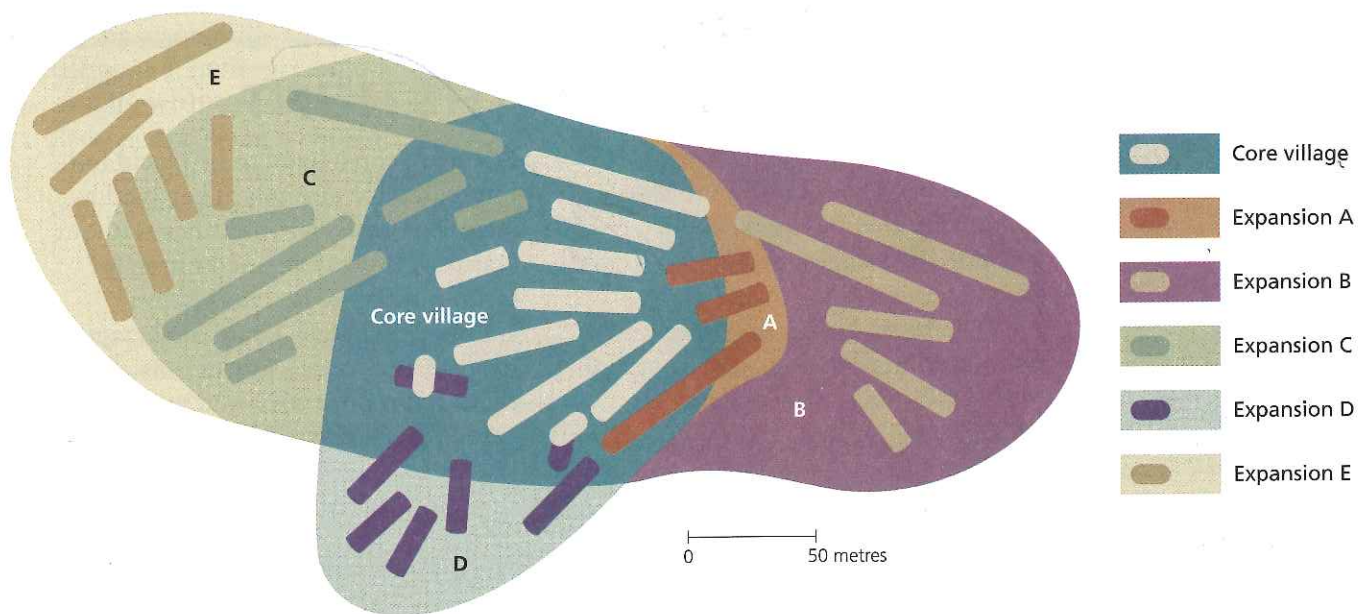
**Figure 7-13** This reconstruction of an early Iroquoian village (around 1000 CE) is located near London, Ontario.







**Figure 7-14** After 1000, Iroquois agriculture grew quickly. According to this chart, evidence for which crop has been found most frequently by archaeologists?



**Figure 7-15** This diagram shows how an early Iroquoian village could expand into a town. The core village is visible, as well as each addition.

## ACTIVITIES

1. What were the effects of the development of agriculture among the Iroquois? What do you suppose were the advantages of agriculture? What disadvantages do you think may have occurred?
2. How was Iroquois society democratic? Why were women so important to its development?
3. Look again at Figure 7-12. What is symbolized by the image of the hatchets being placed under the roots of a tree? What common expression used today captures this image?
4. Reread the information on the growth of Iroquois villages on page 196 and examine Figure 7-15. To which period does this town belong? How can you tell? Based on the number of longhouses shown here, how many people might occupy this town?

**blind:** an enclosure used to conceal oneself from wildlife for the purpose of hunting

**pound:** the pen in which animals were trapped and killed

**corral:** a pen to trap the bison

## THE PEOPLES OF THE PLAINS

The Plains peoples are part of a huge group of North American Indians who have lived in the Interior Plains.

In the past, the cultures of the Plains peoples (those living in northern Canada) depended on one animal—the bison.

The bison, or buffalo, once numbered in the millions. As late as the nineteenth century, it was estimated that 40 million bison lived on the Interior Plains. The Plains people subsisted on bison meat, and made many household and personal items from bison hides, hair, horns, and bones. The organization of Plains society was also affected by the bison. The number of people needed to operate an efficient bison drive—about fifty to a hundred people—became the basic unit of social organization.

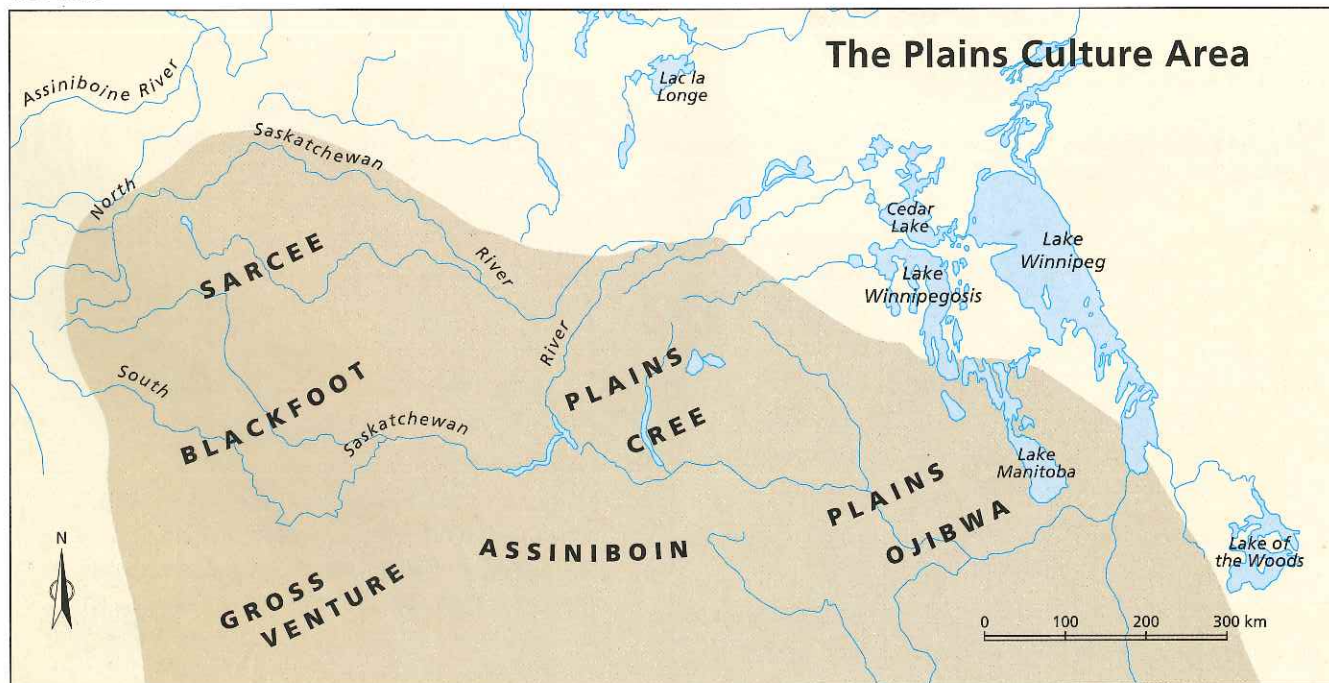
The bison hide was tanned and then used to make tipi coverings and robes. Clothing—tunics, leggings, skirts, breechcloths, and moccasins—

was made from deer skins. Some hides were not stripped of their fur. These were used as winter cloaks and robes that were worn with the fur facing inward, a style that provided natural insulation for the wearer. Bison horns were made into cups and spoons. The intestines were processed into extremely strong cords that could be used to stitch together clothing and tipi coverings, or to make bow strings and bindings for spears and arrows.

## THE HUNT

Bison are considered to be placid but unpredictable animals. They could stampede easily—sometimes without warning. It was not uncommon for bison hunters to be crushed by stampeding herds. These herds were magnificent, consisting of tens of thousands of animals, and would darken the plains as they passed.

Figure 7-16 The people of the Plains



Bison herds were often funnelled towards a location where they could be killed. **Blinds** were constructed, wide at one end and narrowing towards the collection point. The hunters began the process by locating and moving a herd towards the wide end of the buffalo run. Other members of the group—women, children, and old people—then rose up from behind the blinds, shouting and waving their arms, which kept the stampeding herd within the run.

The run would end in one of two manners. The first was the buffalo **pound**, large enough and strong enough to contain part of the herd. As the bison milled around within the pound, hunters would kill them, usually with bows and arrows. Because the bison were fairly placid, they did not seem to notice when other bison were being killed.

## The First Trail Mix?

The Plains peoples were nomads who travelled great distances to hunt bison, so they needed to take along food that would not spoil. Because they did not have access to vegetables and nuts, they developed an extremely useful and nutritious trail food, pemmican.

Pemmican has three main ingredients: ground-up bison meat that has been dried, lard, and dried berries. The meat

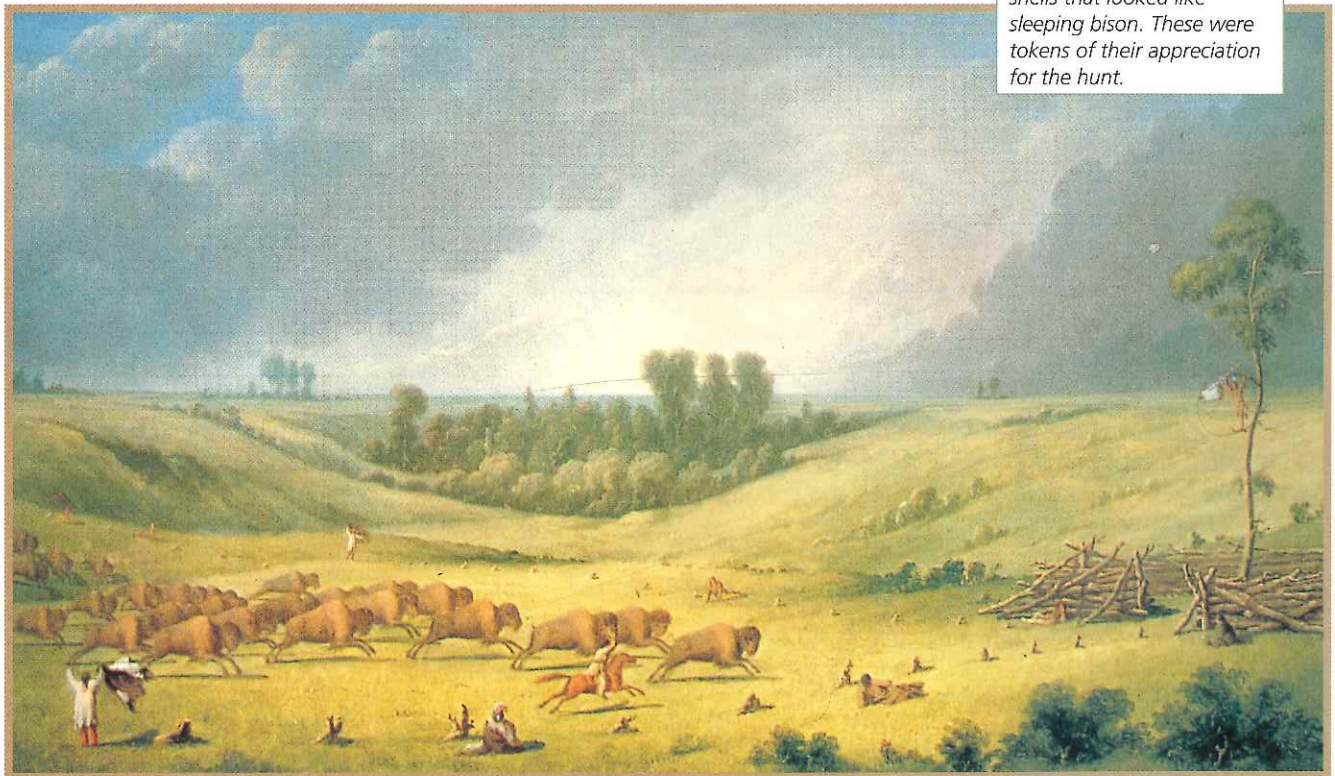
was mixed with the lard and dried berries to make a cake, and then wrapped in bison-hide packages.

Pemmican lasts for months at a time, and is both nutritious and tasty. A small amount can provide a great deal of food energy because of the high protein content.

**Figure 7-17** Pemmican cakes last a long time and provide excellent nutrition.



**Figure 7-18** This painting of a Cree bison pound shows the edge of the **corral** to the right. The corral did not have to be strong. As long as it was interwoven with brush and no light passed through, the bison would think it was a solid wall.



### DID YOU KNOW?

*The Blackfoot kept spiral shells that looked like sleeping bison. These were tokens of their appreciation for the hunt.*

**jump:** a cliff over which buffalo were enticed to jump

## A Londoner Reacts to the Bison

William Blackmore was a visitor to the United States from London, England during the mid-nineteenth century. He travelled more than 160 kilometres on the Kansas Pacific Railway. When the train encountered a herd of bison, Blackmore noted that it

... passed through an almost unbroken herd of buffalo. The plains were blackened with them, and more than once the train had to stop to allow an unusually large herd to pass.



### DID YOU KNOW?

While horses had lived in North America for millions of years, they became extinct at the end of the last Ice Age, along with other large mammals. When the Spanish arrived in Mexico, they brought horses with them. By about 1750, the horse had arrived in the northern plains. The horse lightened the work of the bison drive because enough horses could replace a corral.

Plains peoples also used buffalo jumps, or cliffs, to trap and kill buffalo. The run would end at the top of the cliff, and the stampeding herd would simply run over the edge. Many buffalo were killed by the fall, and the survivors were slaughtered by waiting hunters at the bottom. Once

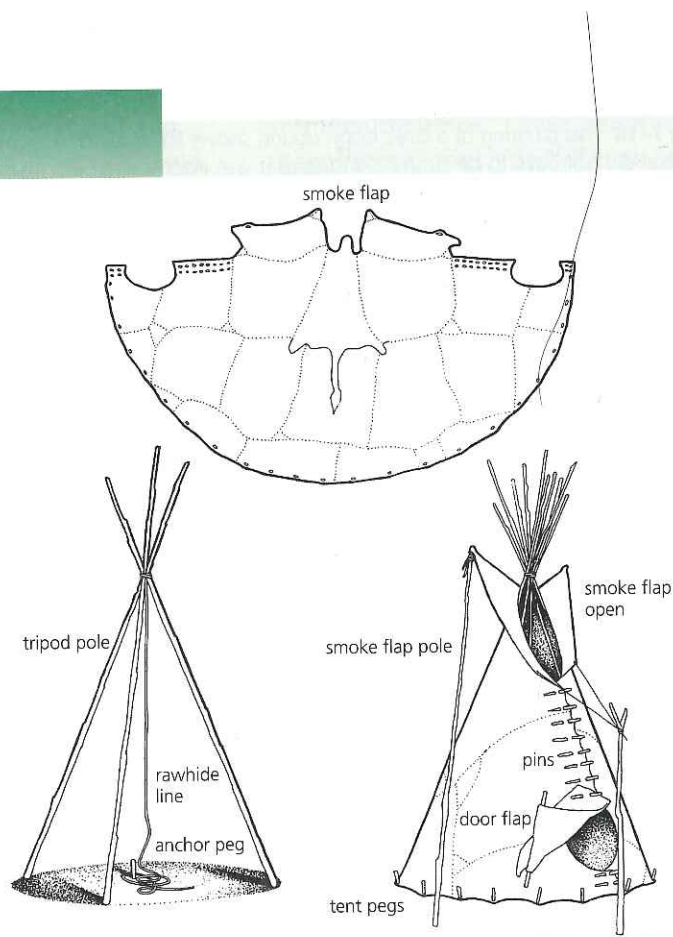
enough animals had been killed, they were butchered and processed. Both buffalo pounds and buffalo jumps seem to have been used for thousands of years. (A recreation of a buffalo jump at the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Interpretive Centre in Alberta is shown on page 185.)

## The Tipi

The tipi is an ideal house for nomadic peoples. It consists of three or four support poles made of wood, usually birch, because this tree grows straight and has relatively thin trunks. These poles are set up in a pyramid shape, large enough to shelter a single family. This framework is then covered with stitched bison hide. A flap is left open at the top of the tipi to allow for ventilation and the escape of smoke.

The tipi could be set up or taken down in a very short period of time. When a herd of bison was passing, it was often crucial that the band be able to move on very short notice.

**Figure 7-19** This diagram shows the construction of a tipi, beginning with the frame (left). The bison hide is shown top, before being placed on the pole frame.



## PLAINS SPIRITUALITY: THE SUN DANCE

The Sun Dance was the central religious festival of the Plains peoples. Actually, it has nothing to do with worshipping the sun. Among the Plains Cree, it was called the “Thirsting Dance.” This is a more accurate term, since the dancers sought visions by subjecting themselves to pain and suffering.

The Sun Dance was held during the summer, when most members of a nation assembled prior to the bison hunt. Sometimes a woman who was admired by everyone was the sponsor of the event. Often she would hold the event after prayers made at a time of crisis had been answered. On other occasions, a man would pledge to hold a Sun Dance, especially if he had returned safely from a war expedition.

While the sponsor **fasted**, a lodge for the ceremony would be built, using a tall centre pole made from a specially chosen cottonwood tree. This pole was decorated with a variety of offerings, such as bison skulls or other ritual objects. Rafters from the centre pole rested on a framework of smaller poles, which made up the walls of the lodge.

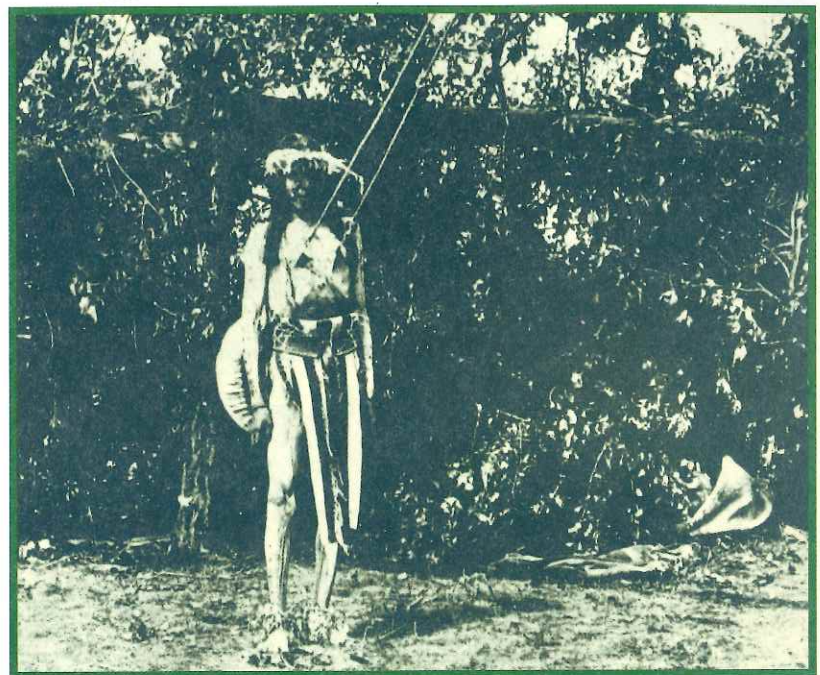
When the lodge was finished, the dances began. Dancers were people

who had made vows. They danced, often without rest, for the several days that the ceremony took. Dancers were not allowed food, drink, or rest until the Sun Dance was over. They danced in place, following the rhythm of chants, keeping their gaze fixed on the top of the centre pole. To prove themselves, young men would have their chests pierced with skewers of bone, which would be attached by ropes to the centre pole. As they danced, they would lean backward until the skewers were ripped out. The scars that resulted were held in high esteem as badges of the ability to withstand pain—essential for a warrior.

**to fast:** to abstain from food

**initiation:** a ceremony during which one gains new status, such as membership in a select group

**Figure 7–20** This young man is performing the Sun Dance as a rite of **initiation**.



### ACTIVITIES

1. How did the bison contribute to the development of Plains culture? Create a poster or write a paragraph that summarizes the information on pages 198–200.
2. In what ways were the Plains peoples adapted to a nomadic lifestyle? How did the horse enhance this lifestyle?
3. Why was the Sun Dance ceremony so important to Plains culture? Why was bravery an important aspect for young men?
4. What other passages from childhood to adulthood can you identify?

**dugout:** made by hollowing out a large log

**pit house:** a home built partly underground

**rafter:** a beam that supports the roof of a home

## THE PEOPLES OF THE PLATEAU

Some archaeologists think that the peoples of the Plateau came from other regions of western Canada and the United States around 1700 BCE. At this time, people who lived in the more northern forest of present-day British Columbia moved south, while some people who lived on the dry, southern edge of the plateau (in what is now California) moved north. Both groups were probably seeking a more comfortable climate.

Evidence from tools dating back to 500 BCE suggests that the Plateau peoples had **dugout** canoes and well-constructed winter homes. The remains of some of these homes indicate that some were more than 9 metres in diameter.

### HOME ON THE PLATEAU

Unlike the coast of British Columbia, the Plateau has cold winters and a dry climate. In the past, the Native peoples who lived there constructed **pit houses** for protection against the elements. A pit house was an ideal structure for this climate. A circular pit was dug into soft soil near a water supply (usually a creek), to a depth of about 3 metres. Strong **rafters** were then built up over the the pit. These were then covered with bark, followed by earth and sod. The finished house was well insulated against winter cold. A hole was left at the peak of the roof, which had two purposes. A notched log was placed at the top of the hole, which became a kind of door, used to enter and leave the house. A hearth was built directly under the hole, which was also used as a smoke hole and for ventilation. The hole could also be closed, and the log could be removed at night or when danger was near. Raised platforms around the outside wall were used as sitting and sleeping areas.

Pit houses were between 6 and 8 metres across, although archaeologists have discovered older houses that measure up to 20 metres

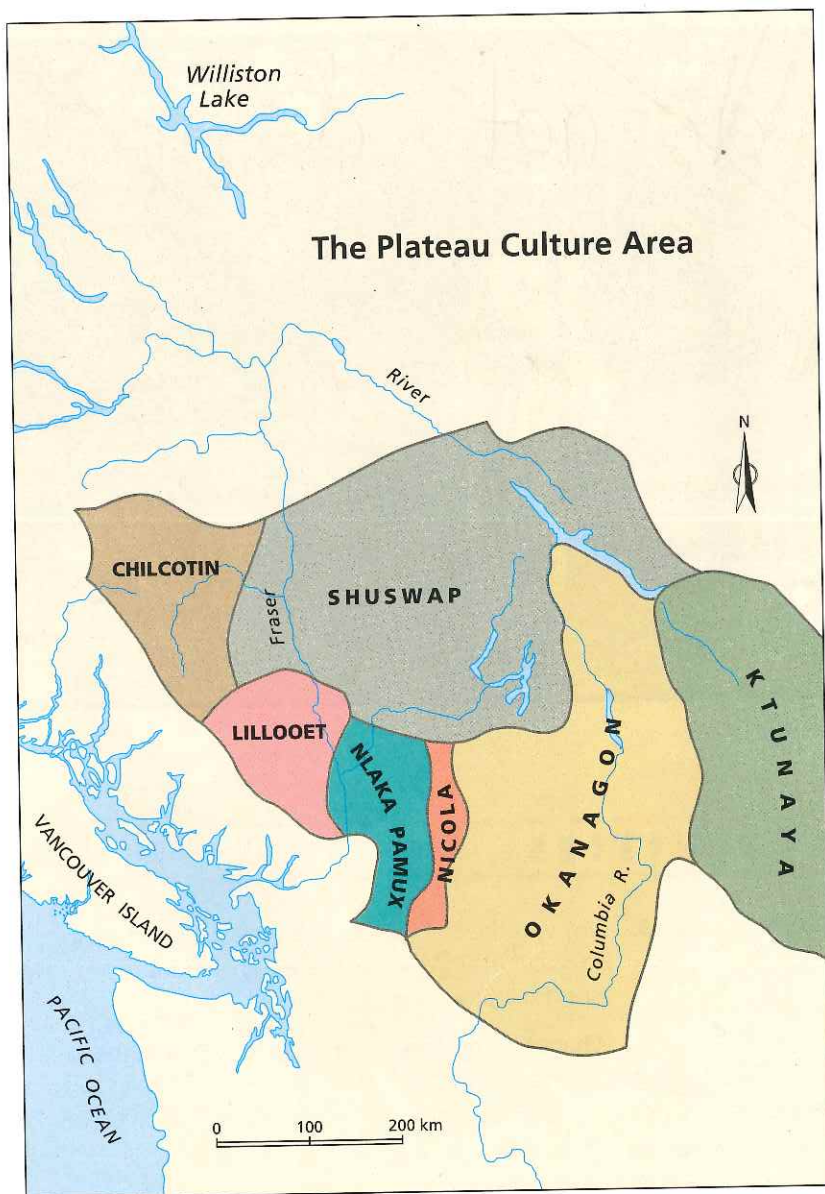


Figure 7-21 The peoples of the Plateau



**Figure 7-22** The remains of this large pit house were found at Keatley Creek, British Columbia. Here, an archaeological dig is in progress. These **semi-subterranean** pit houses were common among the Interior Salish.

in diameter. While the pit house was warm, it was also rather dark and smoky, and the people tended to leave them once spring arrived. Smaller covered pits for food storage were built near the pit house. In spring and summer, people lived in tents as they travelled around their region obtaining food resources.

Pit houses were reused over several winters, but most were abandoned after a few years. Rafters eventually rotted, making the house unsafe. Moreover, the earth that covered the house eventually became infested with insects, rodents, and—worst of all—rattlesnakes. Most pit houses were abandoned before the rafters actually rotted.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SALMON

Plateau peoples, such as the Interior Salish, relied heavily on salmon as a dietary staple. In the fall, people congregated along salmon-bearing rivers and streams to collect and smoke the fish.

Plants were another staple food item. Berries were collected as they ripened, then dried and made into cakes that were eaten during the winter months. **Edible** roots, including the wild onion, wild lily bulbs, and the root of a yellow flower called “balsam root,” were collected during the late summer. These were roasted in earth ovens. Roasting improved the

**semi-subterranean:**  
partially underground  
**edible:** able to be eaten

**landslide:** the rapid downward movement of land on a slope

**to excavate:** to dig an archaeological site

**to disperse:** to scatter across an area

## A “flock” of salmon

The Canadian artist Paul Kane spent much of the 1840s travelling through the West and painting the Native peoples he met. In 1847, he was at Kettle Falls in the interior of British Columbia. He wrote the following:

The salmon ... continue to arrive in almost incredible numbers for nearly two months; in fact, there is one continuous body of them, more resembling a flock of birds than anything else in their extraordinary leap up the falls....The chief told me that he had taken as many as 1700 salmon, weighing on an average of 30 pounds (14 kilograms) each, in the course of one day. Probably the daily average taken in the chief's basket is about 400. The chief distributes the fish thus taken during the season amongst his people, everyone, even to the smallest child, getting an equal share.



### DID YOU KNOW?

*The salmon entered the Interior Plateau via the Fraser River. The catastrophe that became known as “Hell’s Gateslide” was a **landslide** that made the Fraser River impassable for most salmon.*

flavour of the roots and preserved them for winter use.

Hunting also played an important role in the diet of the Interior Salish. While many types of animals were hunted, deer were the most popular prey. Long fences were constructed that led the deer into snares or into lakes, where they were killed with bows and arrows. Dogs were used to drive the deer into these fenced-off areas.

Like the bison of the Plains, deer were a resource that went beyond food. Deer hide was used to make all manner of clothing, as well as moccasins. The wearing of moccasins indicated a certain status among the Interior Salish. Ordinary people often had to make do with footwear made of salmon skin.

**Excavating** the site at Keatley Creek (see page 203), archaeologists discovered many huge pit houses, indicating a population concentration much larger than had been known historically. This period lasted from 90 CE to about 1000 CE. About 1000 years ago, the entire site was

abandoned. Some archaeologists speculate that a major landslide in the Fraser Canyon drastically reduced the salmon runs, and that the people were forced to **disperse** as a result.

## CULTURES IN CONTACT

The Plateau lies between the culture areas of the Northwest Coast and the Plains. Most of the peoples who lived in this region were Interior Salish with a Plains-style culture as they do today. The Ktunaya lived in the east, as they do today.

Interior Salish people shared many cultural attributes with the Coast Salish, and traded with them extensively. Shells and soapstone were two items that were commonly traded. The Ktunaya were closer to Plains people in their culture. They adopted the Sun Dance as a major ceremonial activity, and they also hunted bison.



Many Squamish people moved south and occupied camps along the northern shores of Burrard Inlet and in what is now Stanley Park. The Musqueam occupied sites along the shores of English Bay and Lulu Island. Groups of Cowichan and Nanaimo came across the Strait of Georgia and lived in fairly large villages on Lulu Island and on the Fraser River. The Cowichan village on Lulu Island was at least a kilometre long.

Late summer to early fall is the period when the major salmon run takes place on the Fraser River. The numbers of fish moving up the Strait of Georgia and then up the Fraser was so large that people were able to collect enough food to last them for most of the winter months. Early summer camps were largely abandoned as people from nearly all groups moved up the Fraser to catch fish near the mouth of the Fraser Canyon. Fish caught were dried on huge racks, and the dried fish was then carried back to winter camps. In 1828, the chief trader at Ft. Langley recorded 550 Cowichan canoes and 200 Squamish canoes passing downriver at the conclusion of this season. In the late autumn, people also collected the Indian potato from the marshes of the lower Fraser. By the late autumn, most people were back in their winter villages.



**Figure 7-29** Salmon drying on large racks late in the summer season

Despite the fact that the people belonged to several different villages or nations, they often cooperated with each other. Food collection sites belonged to people from specific villages or nations, and these groups had the right to use these sites as opposed to members of different families. Because Salish people had a **bilateral kinship** pattern, it was possible for people to marry outside their own group, and this meant that individuals could enjoy ownership rights to many different sites. Bilateral kinship also meant that individuals could choose to spend the winter in the villages of relatives, as opposed to the village they normally lived in. So while a village could be primarily, for example, of the Musqueam, Cowichan or Squamish families could also spend the winter there.

**bilateral kinship:** ancestry is reckoned through the mother's and father's families

## ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you are a member of an important family and you have been chosen to make a totem pole that shows major events in your family's history. What images would you select? How would you arrange them?
2. How did the Coast Salish differ from other Native peoples of the Northwest Coast?
3. How did the seasonal round of the Plateau peoples differ from that of peoples of the Northwest Coast? How were they similar?
4. In 1914, Edward Curtis made a film called *In the Land of the War Canoes*. If possible, have your teacher screen this film for the class. After watching the film, discuss whether it is an accurate depiction of Northwest Coast life. Can you detect any bias in the film?

## CONCLUSION

Canada has been home to a huge number of Native communities for thousands of years. In the past, some of these societies were loosely organized and scattered over a vast territory. Others were compact and centralized.

The peoples of the Plains, for example, hunted bison on foot, and moved all their worldly goods from place to place according to the rhythm of the hunt. On the other hand, the Iroquois of the Eastern Woodlands built large, permanent towns and farms after they acquired agriculture around 500 CE. Social life also varied tremendously. Inuit society was based on life-long trading partnerships

because no one could survive without hides and oil. Among the coastal peoples of the Northwest, traditions of inherited rank and privilege meant that their societies emphasized wealth, power, and earthly possessions. Yet the Northwest Coast peoples also had a unique way of redistributing wealth, known as the "potlatch" (which no European would have understood).

It is dangerous to categorize—or to make generalizations about—the cultural life of the Native peoples of Canada. Although you have examined five representative groups in this chapter, they remain five societies, each with their own characteristics and traditions.

## SUMMARY ACTIVITIES

1. Prepare an organizer that will help you understand the similarities and differences which exist among the Native peoples of Canada.
2. Have your teacher form the class into groups. Each group should select a nation from one of the major Native culture areas of Canada. Using the information provided here as a base, and after conducting further
3. Visit the cultural centre of a local aboriginal group. List any new information you learned from this visit.

research in your school library or from other sources, prepare a report on aspects of that nation's culture. Share your findings with the rest of the class.

## ON YOUR OWN

1. Invite a member of a local aboriginal group to visit your class and to recount a legend or myth that explains the history of his or her people.
2. The following names are Native in origin. Find out more about their origin and what they meant in the original language.

|           |          |          |              |
|-----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| Canada    | Quebec   | Ontario  | Saskatchewan |
| Yukon     | Saguenay | Winnipeg |              |
| Moose Jaw | Kamloops | Kelowna  |              |