

Summary: Peoples of the Northwest

The Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest region stretches from Alaska to northern California. It lies between the Pacific Ocean on the west and the mountains to the east. There are many islands and bays. Thick forests cover much of the land.

American Indians who lived in the area around 1500 got everything they needed from the land and water. On land they gathered berries and fern roots. They hunted deer, geese, elks, and bears. One key resource was salmon. They caught so much salmon that the surplus was dried to eat during the year. They also ate seals, whales, and shellfish. The forests were another important resource. People made houses from wood and decorated them with carvings. They used cedar logs to make totem poles and placed them in front of their houses. The tall poles told the history of families who lived there. Canoes were also carved from cedar and used to carry goods. On important occasions, families held potlatches. Families demonstrated their wealth by giving gifts to the rest of the community.

The Tlingit

The Tlingit (KLINK-it) were one of the largest American Indian groups in the Pacific Northwest. They lived near the coast or on rivers. They shredded bark to make clothes. In cold weather they wore animal skins.

The Tlingit society is divided into clans. A clan is a group of related families. Strict rules told people how to act toward other clans. Several families from the same clan lived together in big houses. Each family had its own area. Families gathered by a central fire to talk and cook. During the winter, people stayed inside. They had time then to weave, carve, paint, and sew. They held ceremonies and potlatches.

About 17,000 Tlingit live in southeastern Alaska now. Their clans and traditions are strong. They still have potlatches for important occasions.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

surplus *adjective*, extra

potlatch *noun*, large feast that lasts for days

clan *noun*, group of related families

After You Read

REVIEW What two important resources helped the Northwest Indians live? Underline the words that tell where the Indian people in the Northwest got the things they needed. Highlight two important resources.

REVIEW How were clans important to the Tlingit? Draw a box around the words that say what a clan is. Underline the sentence that tells how clans influenced how people lived.