

Summary: Peoples of the Plains

The Great Plains

The Great Plains stretch from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and from Texas into Canada. They used to be grassland. In the east, where there was more rain, the grass grew eight feet high. In the west, where the land was drier, the grasses were shorter.

American Indians have lived on the Plains for thousands of years. Their most important resource was the great herds of buffalo that used to roam the Plains. The Pawnee and Omaha farmed the Eastern Plains. The Pawnee included four groups who lived where Nebraska and Kansas are today. They lived in villages near rivers and built earth lodges. In the spring and fall they worked their farms. In the winter and summer they hunted buffalo. American Indians used all parts of the buffalo. They ate the meat and used the skins for teepee covers, blankets, clothing, drums, and shields. Buffalo bones were carved to make tools. Buffalo hair was used for rope.

Plains Indians decorated their belongings with paint and porcupine quills. The dry Western Plains were not good farmland. The Western Plains Indians were nomads. They followed the herds of buffalo, carrying their belongings from place to place on travois.

The Comanche

Spanish explorers brought horses to North America in the 1500s. Horses made it easier to hunt, travel, and fight. The Comanche moved to the Great Plains in the 1600s. By the 1700s they had spread across what is now Texas and Oklahoma. They were nomads and fierce warriors. They controlled a large area of the Plains.

The Comanche nation was divided into smaller groups that lived and hunted together. Each group chose war and peace chiefs. The chiefs met to discuss issues that affected all Comanche. About 8,500 Comanche live in the United States now. They have their own government and continue to value their traditions.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

lodge *noun*, a house made of bark, earth, and grass

nomad *noun*, a person who moves around and does not live in one place

travois *noun*, similar to a sled, used by nomads to carry their possessions



After You Read

REVIEW In what ways were the lives of the Eastern and Western Plains Indians different? Circle the names of the Indian nations that lived in the Eastern Plains. Highlight the sentences that describe how they lived. Then draw a box around the sentences that describe life on the Western Plains.

REVIEW Why were horses important to Western Plains Indians? Circle the sentence that tells how horses helped the Plains Indians.