

LESSON SIX: Clothing

Time 30 minutes

Trunk Resources

Graphics

- #13 Cheyenne Chiefs
- #14 Little Chief
- #15 Comanche couple
- #16 Comanche man

Activities

- Magnetic dolls and assorted clothing
- Character cards.

Objectives

1. Students will compare and contrast Native American clothing with their own clothing.
2. Students will select appropriate Native American dress for different occasions.

Historical background

Plains Indians' clothing has changed through the years due to trade and influences from other cultures. Variations also existed between tribes.

Before the Europeans came to this country, Native Americans had little knowledge of seaming to shape garments. Most clothing was made by women who sewed with buffalo sinew, punching holes with a bone awl. Buffalo skin was the basic fabric for clothing of the Plains tribes.

Skin Dresses

Women wore simple dresses made of tanned hide (or buckskin). Sometimes these dresses were tube-shaped with separate "sleeves" that attached and tied at the shoulders.

Shirts

At one time, only warriors wore shirts for special occasions. Later, shirts were worn for warmth during cold weather. They were made of buckskin and were sometimes beaded, quilted, painted, or decorated with hair, ermine fur, or fringe.

Furs

Native Americans primarily used furs as robes, blankets, and decorations. Both men and women wrapped heavy buffalo robes around themselves for warmth in the winter. Robes were decorated in numerous ways.

Moccasins

Most Native Americans usually wore moccasins for footgear. Some moccasins had hard rawhide soles stitched to buckskin uppers, and others were made of one piece of buckskin with soft soles. Moccasins typical in the Plains tribes were held on with a drawstring and had low cuffs. Some were beaded, quilled, or painted. For winter wear, buffalo skin was used with the fur turned inside.

Leggings

Leggings were worn by both sexes. Women's came to the knee; men's reached from heel to hip. They were buckskin tubes that fitted over the legs and tied to the belt. Fringe and decorative strips of quill or beads were often added.

War Bonnets

Among the tribes of the Plains, the war bonnet had a double meaning. First it was the emblem of a warrior's achievements on the field of battle, every feather representing a major exploit; and second, when worn, it was regarded as a mighty charm, protecting its wearer and sending up his prayers to the Great Spirit. Not every Indian was permitted to own or wear a war bonnet, and no Indian could make one for himself. A man's friends were in charge of making the bonnet.

Jewelry

Plains Indians wore bear-claw necklaces, earrings, shell earrings and drops, shell gorgets, and a variety of other articles, some indicative of status. Body and face paint were usual, red pigments being perhaps most frequent. Later, glass beaded jewelry was common. In most cases, elaborately decorated clothing was used for ceremonies, special occasions, and burials. Fringes, pendants, and ornamental strips served aesthetic purposes and often symbolically indicated the wearer's military accomplishments.

Typical dress

Simple, unadorned skins were most common for everyday wear. A breechcloth, leggings, and moccasins were typical dress for men during the summer months. In winter weather, men wore a shirt, hip-length leggings, moccasins, and a buffalo robe. Women wore simple buckskin dresses with knee-length leggings and moccasins.

Ceremonial clothing

Both men's and women's ceremonial clothing were elaborately decorated. Men's shirts, leggings, and robes were brightly painted, beaded, and/or quilled. Women wore dresses decorated with the teeth of animals killed by their husbands. It was customary to use only two teeth, and the number of teeth indicated how successful a hunter her husband was.

Headgear was usually reserved for these festive occasions. Men wore war bonnets and buffalo-horn caps.

Sources: Mary Strohl and Susan Schneck, *Native Americans*.

Vocabulary

Beadwork – Ornamental decoration using glass or plastic beads.

Breechcloth – Worn by men and boys, this soft square of leather hangs from the waist by a belt.

Buckskin – Usually refers to deerskin, but sometimes is used to mean any animal skin.

Ceremonial dress – An outfit worn for a special celebration such as a dance, marriage, or burial.

Leggings – Buckskin tubes which fit over the legs and tied to the belt.

Moccasins – Footwear, usually made from tanned hide. Some moccasins have rawhide soles. Moccasins are sometimes partially or fully decorated.

Quillwork – Ornamental decoration using the spines of a porcupine.

Rawhide – Hide that has not been processed but has been left to dry and become hard.

Robes – Full hides wrapped around the body for warmth.

Activities

1. Ask students to discuss why they chose the clothing they wore today (comfortable, warm or cool, fashionable). If students were going to a wedding or party, how would their clothing differ from what they have on today (dress, shirt, tie, suit, hat)?
2. Show students graphics [#13 Cheyenne Chiefs](#); [#14 Little Chief](#); [#15 Comanche couple](#); [#16 Comanche man](#). Explain that Plains Indians wore similar clothing, however, different tribes wore variations of these garments—such as adding fringes, and varying hat styles, and decorations. Point out the different garment pieces and explain. (See the backs of the graphics for descriptions.)
3. Distribute the [magnetic doll clothing pieces](#) to the students (one piece of clothing to each person). Have each student stand up, show his or her piece of clothing, and then discuss as a group what each piece is and when it might be worn or what it might have been used for, (i.e., for a special event, everyday life, winter or summer). Point out the decorative pieces of clothing and explain that these would be worn for special occasions only.
4. Divide the class into two groups. Give each group a [magnetic doll](#) and a set of clothing. Give one [character card](#) to each group and ask the group to dress its doll for the activity explained on its card.

5. Have each group show its dressed doll to the class and explain why it is dressed this way. This activity may be repeated with the other character cards.

Extended activity: Comparing Clothing

Trunk Resources

Magnetic clothing pieces.

Teacher Resources

Paper, glue, pencil, old mail-order catalogs or magazines, crayons or markers (optional).

Activity

- a. Distribute three magnetic clothing pieces to each student.
- b. Using an old mail order catalog or magazine, have students find a piece of clothing that relates to all three Native American garments. Cut out the clothing from the catalog and glue each garment to the sheet. Alongside each garment the students should draw or trace the corresponding Native American piece of clothing.
- c. Have students list the similarities and differences of the two articles of clothing. For example: zippers, buttons, style, fabric, and construction. Teacher should mention the process and time involved in obtaining materials to make garments.