Native Americans

Native: This refers to the place of a person's birth.

Indigenous: People who were in a place first.

Cultural: The ideas, behaviour and traditions of a group of people.

Nomadic: Moving from place to place.

Aim: to be able to describe the main features of Native American life.

The first people to live in a land are called **indigenous** peoples. People lived in the United States long before the arrival of Christopher Columbus (1492) and the Europeans. These people are called Native Americans. This means they were the original settlers. The Native Americans are the indigenous peoples of the United States.

The Native Americans were grouped into **tribes** or **nations** usually based on the area they lived in and their culture such as their religion, customs, and language. Sometimes smaller tribes were part of a bigger tribe or nation

Different tribes and cultures lived in different areas. In the middle of the country lived the Plains Indians, including tribes such as the Comanche and Sioux.

Did you know: Sometimes these peoples are referred to as Indians or American Indians. This is because when Columbus had first landed in America, he thought he had sailed all the way to India. He called the locals Indians and the name stuck for some time.

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Native American Tribes:

Groupings were generally based on peoples that shared the same culture, language, religion, customs, and politics. There are over 1000 Native American Tribes in the United States.
Sometimes tribes were also grouped by the region of the United States they lived in (like the Great Plains Indians) or by the type of language they spoke .

Arctic/Subarctic - These Native Americans survived some of the coldest weather on the planet. They include the Inuit people of Alaska who lived primarily off of whale and seal meat.
Californian - Tribes living in the area include Mohave and the Miwok.
Great Basin - This is a dry area and was one of the last to have contact with Europeans. The Great Basin tribes include the Washo, Ute, and Shoshone.
Great Plains - One of the largest areas and perhaps most famous group of American Indians. Tribes of the Great Plains include the Blackfoot, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Comanche and Crow.
Northeast Woodlands - Includes the Iroquois Indians of New York, the Wappani, and the Shawnee.
Northwest Coast/Plateau - These Native Americans were known for their houses made of cedar planks as well as their totem poles. Tribes include the Nez Perce, Salish, and the Tlingit.
Southeast - The largest Native American tribe, the Cherokee, lived in the Southeast. These tribes tended to stay in one place and were skilled farmers.
Southwest - The southwest was dry and the Native Americans lived in tiered homes made out of adobe bricks. Famous tribes here include the Navajo Nation, the Apache, and the Pueblo Indians.

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The Plains Indians

The Sioux

We are going to focus on a nation from the Plains cultural area called the **Sioux** (pronounced 'soo'). Many Sioux tribes were **nomadic** people who moved from place to place following bison (buffalo) herds. Much of their lifestyle was based around hunting bison.

On a blank page in your book, you are going to show through dual coding (images / text) how the Sioux lived.

We will look at:

- Houses
- Food
- Clothing
- Roles
- War
- Beliefs

The Sioux lived in tepees made from long wooden poles and covered with buffalo hides. The poles would be tied together at the top and spread wide at the bottom to make the shape of a circle. Tepees could be taken down and set up quickly. This enabled entire villages to move on a regularly. This suited the Sioux as they moved from place to place following the buffalo.

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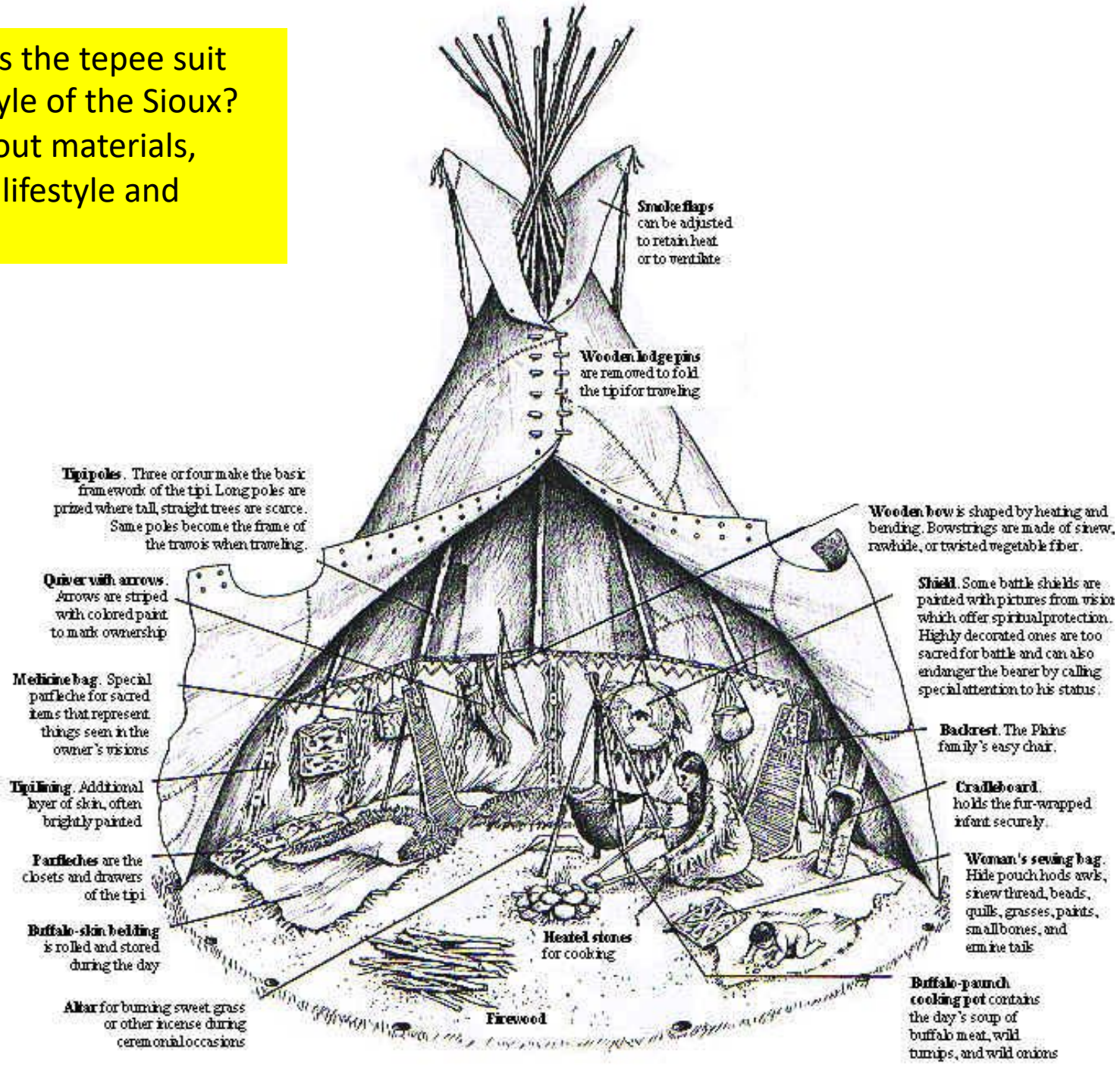
How does the tepee suit the lifestyle of the Sioux? Think about materials, nomadic lifestyle and climate.



What did the Native American Sioux eat?

Some Sioux grew crops like corn, squash, and beans, however the majority of the Sioux gained most of their food from hunting.

Their primary food source was meat from buffalo, but they also hunted deer and elk. They would dry the bison meat into a tough jerky that could be stored and lasted for over a year.

They used all of the buffalo, not just its meat for food. They used the skin and fur for blankets and clothes. They tanned the hides to make the coverings for their tepees. Bones were used as tools. The bison hair was used to make ropes and the tendons could be used for sewing thread and bow strings.

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Draw your own version of this diagram

Buffalo are huge and dangerous animals. The Sioux had to be brave and clever to hunt them. Sometimes a **brave** would run the buffalo down with his horse and use a spear or an arrow to take down the buffalo. This was difficult and dangerous but could be done with practice and skill. Before they had horses, the Sioux would cause a large herd of bison to stampede toward a cliff.

Native American warriors were known as braves.

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Beliefs

The Great Spirit

The Great Spirit was a supreme being that watched over everything including the other spirits of the world. There were different versions of the Great Spirit. The Sioux called the great Spirit **Waken Tanka.**

Medicine Men and Women

The spiritual leaders of the Native American Indians were the medicine men and women of the village or tribe. These men and women often used herbs to help heal sick people. They also called on the spirits to help the tribe asking for assistance in areas such as healing, good weather, and help in battle.

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Beliefs

Vision Quests

In order to get closer to the spirits, some men went on vision quests. They would go off into the wilderness alone. Usually they would fast (not eat) and sometimes they would take drugs or inflict wounds on their bodies. In the end, they hoped to gain a vision from the spirits that would guide them or help them make an important life decision.

Dance

Dancing often had religious significance. The Sun Dance and Buffalo Dance are famous examples of this.

Circles

Circles had special significance for the Sioux. They believed in a circle of life, the seasons worked in a circle and the sun and moon were circles. The bottom of tepees formed a circle and tepees were also arranged in a circle when they set up in a new area.

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warfare

The Sioux can be described as having a 'warrior society.' The Plains were vast open spaces where neighbours rarely saw each other, but warfare was common as some tribes looked for opportunities to fight. Bravery in war was the best way for a man to win 'honour' and status in the tribe. Most boys looked forward to the days when they could join the warrior society.

Counting Coup

The greatest sign of bravery during battle was to touch the enemy (with either bare hands or a special long stick called a coup stick). Warriors would keep count of these blows or 'coups'. Acts of bravery were more important than killing the enemy, to kill someone from a distance with a bow and arrow gained less points than getting close enough to tap him with his coup stick.

Having counted his coups, the warrior would proudly display them.

The usual way of recording them was by the addition of feathers to their war bonnets or by notches on their coup sticks.

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Weapons

Before 1850, the Sioux made their weapons from stone, bone and wood but as white traders came onto the Plains, metal replaced stone. Indians traded for metal blades and steel knives.

The bow and arrow was an efficient weapon it was accurate and could be fired rapidly by skilled archers. The Sioux began to trade for rifles in the 1850s onwards. However, they could not mend the rifles when they broke or make their own gunpowder or bullets, so the gun made them more dependent on white people and their technology.

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Fighting for horses was a common cause of war between tribes. Capturing horses was a highly valued act of bravery. The Indians did not see land as property and never fought with the idea of conquering another tribe.

Surprise raids were a common form of battle. This gave them chances for brave acts, but reduced the chances of being killed. Women rarely went on these raids, bit did take up arms if their camp was attacked.

Scalping

Death on the battlefield sometimes led to scalping. By removing the skin and hair from the top of the head, the Sioux believed that a person could be stopped from entering the next life. Native Americans removed the scalp from enemies, so they had less enemies in the after life. Europeans felt this was horrific and took it as evidence that they were savage people.

1. Write a paragraph to summarising the importance of warfare to the Sioux.
2. What aspects of Sioux warfare would have been surprising to Europeans?

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Family life

The Sioux lived in large family groups. that included all generations-young and old.

Women:

- Tepee making was the job of women. This was hard and difficult work. It involved hours of scraping, softening and stretching buffalo hides.
- Butchering the buffalo, collecting roots, berries, seeds and plants.
- Beadwork and making clothes were important skills and could gin a woman high status if she was talented in this area.

Children

Children were highly valued as the future**.** Sioux children did not go to school and learnt by copying adults in their games. At the age of six a boy could ride and help with the horses and a girl could help dig vegetable roots and collect firewood. Young girls often had the job of looking after babies ad very small children.

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Family life

Men

Men hunted the buffalo and were warriors. They had to look after the horses and protect the group. Sometimes a wealthy man might have more than one wife.

Older People

Older people were important as givers of advice and passing on the history of the tribe. They helped to bring up children. However, when they became too old or weak to keep up with the group when they moved, they could be left behind. This was called exposure.

Write a list of similarities and differences between Sioux life and life in Britain today.

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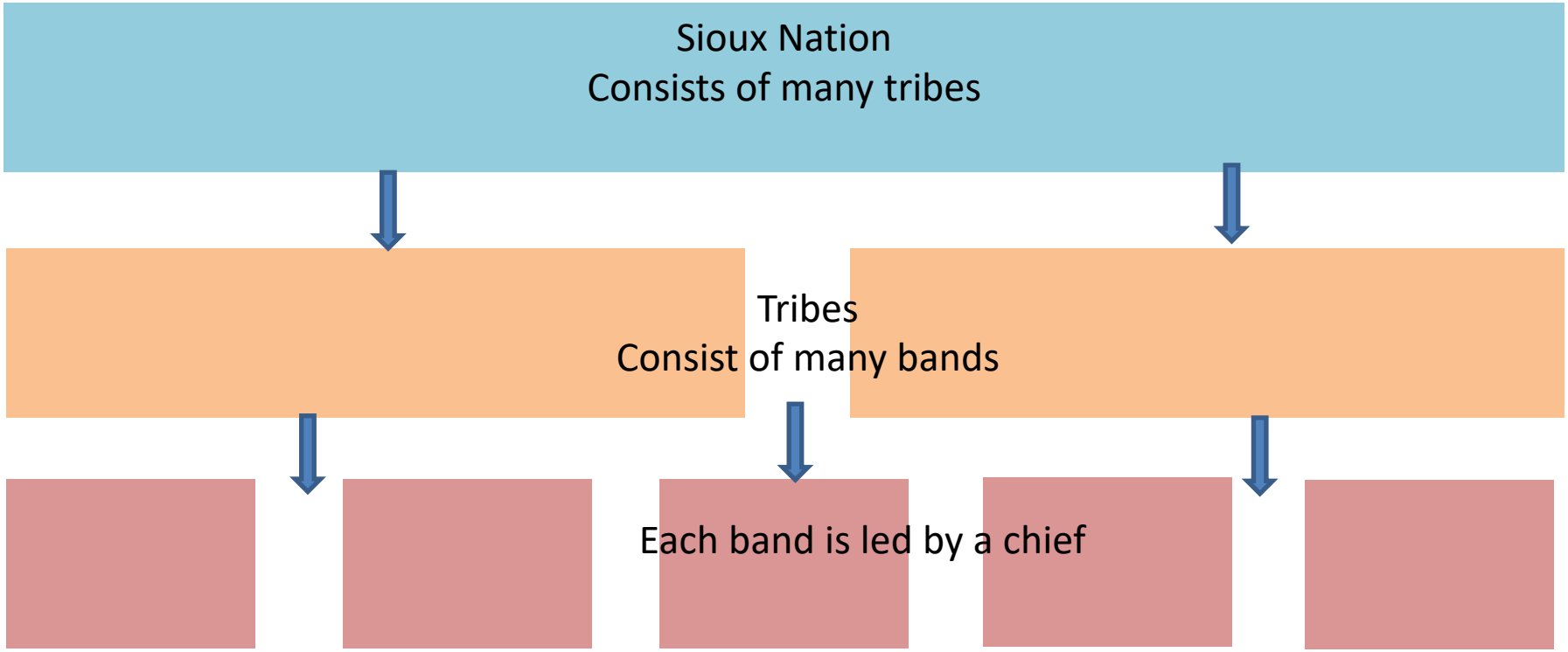
Tribal Structure



Copy this diagram into your books

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Chiefs

Chiefs were chosen because of their wisdom, spiritual power and skill as hunters and warriors. They might not remain chiefs for life. Famous chiefs include Red Cloud and Sitting Bull. Chiefs were given a special pipe and a brightly coloured shirt fringed with human hair which represented the people of the tribe.

Councils

Important decisions were taken in councils. The man of the band would discuss what to do. The advice of the medicine man, chief and elders would be listened to. Normally council members kept talking until they all agreed. While they talked they would smoke a ceremonial pipe.

Medicine Man

To the Sioux there was a connection between every aspect of their lives and religion. They believed the medicine man could cure sickness because he could use the power of the spirits. The medicine man would try to drive out evil spirits and also used practical remedies made from plants.

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