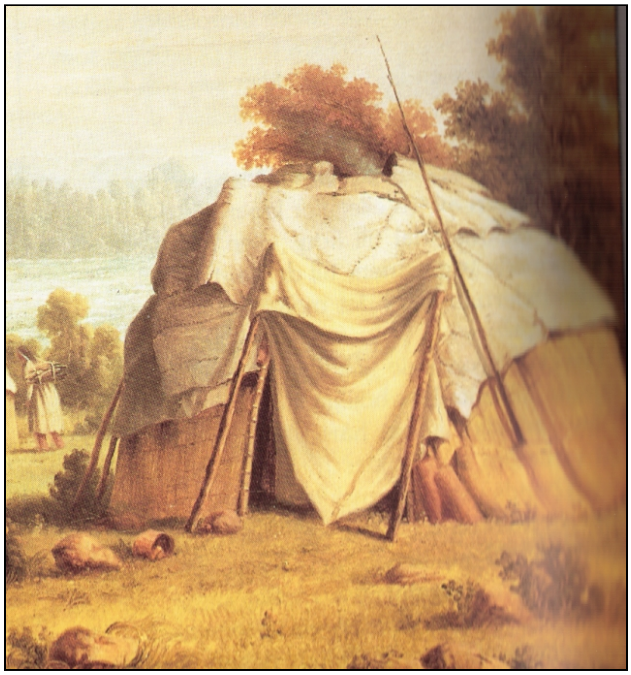
Name: _____ Class: _____

Home Sweet Home

By Sarah J. Bell
2005

The houses that Native American tribes constructed hundreds of years ago looked a lot different than the houses we're familiar with today. In this informational text, Sarah J. Bell describes the different houses that Native Americans built. As you read, take notes on how the environment affected the type of house Native Americans built.

Today, like all other Americans, Native people live in all kinds of modern housing. Long, long ago, however, they built their homes with the materials that were available where they lived.



"Ojibwa wigwam" by Paul Kane is in the public domain.

[1] "Oh, brrr. It's so cold!" The icy wind whips your hair as you walk quickly toward your house. You can hardly wait to sit down by the fire in your nice, warm wigwam.

Wigwam? That's right — if you grew up in North America 600 years ago, you might have spent your winters in a wigwam, tipi, or longhouse. Your house might have been made from wood, grass, animal skins, bark, or clay.

Long ago, hundreds of Native American tribes lived all across North America. Each group of people had its own way of life. Some lived in warm places, and others had long, cold winters. Some people hunted animals and gathered berries to eat. Other tribes grew their own food. People used the things they found in nature to help them survive.

If you were a Zuni child, you lived in the hot, dry Southwest. Zuni Indians grew beans, corn, and squash and stayed in the same place all year.

[5] The Zuni were pueblo builders, who built rectangular rooms using clay (adobe) or stone. Rooms were stacked together so they looked like apartment buildings. People climbed ladders to get from one room to another.

Pueblo families each lived in a single room. They had one or two built-in benches, millstones[1] for grinding corn, and a fireplace in the center of the room.

1. circular stones used for grinding grain

If you were a Chinook child, your life was quite different. The Chinook people lived in forests near the Northwest Coast. The children caught salmon, hunted deer, and gathered acorns with their parents. At night, people slept in wood plank houses.

On the other side of North America, Eastern Woodlands people such as the Iroquois built longhouses using poles and elm bark. Longhouses had no windows, but the roof had several smoke holes that let in some light.

If you were an Iroquois child, you shared a longhouse with your family and your mother's relatives. Longhouses could be up to 100 feet long. Each house had a long hallway down the middle, with "booths" (like rooms but with short walls) on both sides. Each family had its own booth, with platforms for sleeping. Families shared their cooking fires and food. Other tribes built similar longhouses.

[10] Not far away (in what is now New England), Abenaki children lived in wigwams with their families. In the winters, they moved into the woods to hunt and fish. Each spring, they moved to open areas to grow crops.

Wigwams were the perfect houses for Abenaki families. They could build a wigwam in less than a day from young trees and bark. The people slept on mats, tree branches, or animal skins inside the wigwam. During the day, everyone worked and played outside. When it was time to move, Abenaki families took their wigwam coverings and ropes with them. They left the frames behind. They could easily build new ones wherever they traveled.

Many tribes lived in tipis because they were easy to move. For example, the Sioux people traveled on the grass-covered Plains. Wood was difficult to find, so they used pack dogs to drag their tipi poles from place to place.

When they were ready to set up house, the women started with three or four main poles, tying them together at the top. Then they covered those with more poles and buffalo skins. An opening at the top let out the smoke from the central fire. The windproof buffalo skins kept the families warm during the cold winters.

All across North America, Native Americans lived in dozens of kinds of houses. Children worked and played in earth lodges, wikiups, hogans, chickees, pit houses, grass houses, and more. They learned from their parents how to find food, build shelter, and survive.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the main idea of the text?
    A. Houses today have borrowed from the structures and styles of Native American houses.
    B. Native American tribes made different types of houses using materials from nature and based on their needs.
    C. All Native American tribes built their houses based on what took the least amount of time, as they were constantly moving.
    D. Native Americans had a difficult time building sturdy houses, as they didn't have the materials we do today.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
    A. "The icy wind whips your hair as you walk quickly toward your house. You can hardly wait to sit down by the fire in your nice, warm wigwam." (Paragraph 1)
    B. "If you were a Zuni child, you lived in the hot, dry Southwest. Zuni Indians grew beans, corn, and squash and stayed in the same place all year." (Paragraph 4)
    C. "The Chinook people lived in forests near the Northwest Coast. The children caught salmon, hunted deer, and gathered acorns with their parents." (Paragraph 7)
    D. "Wigwams were the perfect houses for Abenaki families. They could build a wigwam in less than a day from young trees and bark." (Paragraph 11)

3. Which alternate title best expresses the main idea of the text?
    A. How to Build Your Own Wigwam
    B. Different Types of Native American Houses
    C. How Native American Homes Have Changed
    D. Why Native Americans Lived in Tipis

4. How does the author organize the information in the text?
    A. The author discusses specific Native American tribes and the different houses that they built.
    B. The author compares the houses that Native Americans built in the past with the homes Native people build today.
    C. The author lists the different types of Native American houses from the best built to the worst.
    D. The author describes the benefits of the different types of Native American houses and then the drawbacks.

5. What is the connection between the houses that Native American tribes built and their way of life?

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Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the text, the author discusses how closely Native American tribes lived together, even sharing houses sometimes. How do you think this strengthened their communities? What do you enjoy about living with your family? What were some of the challenges of living so close together?

2. In the text, the author describes different types of Native American houses. Which one do you think you would most enjoy to live in and why? What would be the most challenging part of living the way that the Native Americans lived?