

Plains Introduction



Pipe Bowl



Pipe Bag



Lakota Dress



Scenes of Plains
Indian Life



Shield



Baby Bonnet

The vast Great Plains region consists of over a million square miles between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Many different groups of native peoples have lived in the Plains. Some Plains tribes include the Pawnee, Commanche, Kiowa, and the Dakota and Lakota (or Sioux).

The Sioux people are perhaps the most familiar to people living in the Upper Midwest. *Sioux* is actually a name given to them by others. The word derives from Ojibwe word meaning *snake-like* or *enemy*. *Dakota*, a word that means *friend*, is what they called themselves. Once all the Dakota spoke the same language. As white settlers moved into Minnesota crowding the Dakota who moved westward on to the Plains, they gradually formed three groups speaking different dialects. Today, we refer to the eastern people as the Dakota or Santee. The western people are known as the Lakota or Teton, and those in the central area are known as the Nakota or Yankton people.



We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth, as "wild." Only to the white man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land "infested" with "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it "wild" for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the "Wild West" began.

- **Chief Luther Standing Bear, Oglala Sioux**

Transformation of the Plains Peoples

The image of the mounted Plains warrior wearing a feather headdress has become for many people a portrait of all American Indians. Movies and television have played their role in perpetuating this stereotype well into our time. That image is not even an accurate one of the Plains people, much less of all Indians. For over 2000 years, before the arrival of the Europeans, many Plains people lived as hunters and farmers on the margins of the Great Plains in permanent villages of earth-covered lodges. They raised corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers, and hunted game.

In the 17th century, the Plains Indians acquired some of the horses that had been brought to North America by the Spanish. By the 18th century, most of the Plains farmers had been transformed into nomadic buffalo hunters. The nomadic period, which extended only from about 1750 to 1880, is a relatively short one in the long history of the Plains people.

The Great Plains

The vast Great Plains region consists of over a million square miles between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, running north to the prairie provinces of Canada and south to Texas. The terrain includes bluffs, mesas, wooded valleys, and rugged wasteland, but mostly it is grassland. In the 18th century, this grazing land supported the abundant buffalo herds that furnished the Plains people with everything they needed for survival. Before acquiring the horse, Plains people hunted buffalo on foot, carrying their few possessions on travois, pole sleds pulled by dogs. Horses permitted greater efficiency in hunting and much greater mobility. Even tipis grew larger once horses were available to transport the longer poles required.

Development of Art

As more efficient hunters, the Plains people had more time to devote to making art. The Plains art of the 18th and 19th centuries grew out of their nomadic lifestyle. Because they were constantly moving to new hunting areas, their art, like their other belongings, had to be portable. The everyday objects of their lives provided surfaces for rich decoration.



Attributed to Cadzi Cody, Wind River Shoshone, Great Plains region (United States), Wyoming, Wind River Reservation, Scenes of Plains Indian Life, about 1900, Elk hide with pigment, Gift of Bruce Dayton, 85.92

Men painted representational scenes on their robes, shields, and tipis.



Northern Plains region, Lakota, Woman's Dress, 20th century, Leather, cotton, copper & glass beads, Gift of James David & John David 74.64.5

Women embroidered clothing with glass beads and porcupine quills and painted geometric designs on hide containers.

The People Today

Conditions were very difficult for Plains people in the 20th century. In spite of this, many have struggled to preserve their traditions. Today over 20,000 Lakota people live on the two adjoining reservations of Pine Ridge and Rosebud in South Dakota, and many others live in urban and rural areas throughout the Midwest. Plains people have a renewed interest in practicing their ancient traditions, generating a flowering of Native American culture and spirituality, language, music, visual arts and business enterprises. They continue to speak their Native languages and to tell their own stories. The Sun Dance, which is their most sacred ceremony, is once again held annually during the summer in many areas of the Plains.

Tribal Web Sites

Comanche web site: <http://www.comanchenation.com/>

Pawnee web site: <http://www.pawneenation.org/>

Pipe Bowl

KEY IDEAS

- Tobacco is a special plant for Native Americans, its ceremonial use is very different from the way most Americans use tobacco today.
- Tobacco is used as a medicine, in ceremonies, and given as gifts in traditional American Indian cultures.

Introduction

Native American pipes are often called "peace pipes." Although native people did sometimes smoke when making treaty settlements, pipes were used for many purposes. Because the Plains people believed that smoke carried their words to the Great Spirit, smoking was like saying a prayer. Implements associated with the use of tobacco, including pipes, are considered sacred.

Before talking of holy things, we prepare ourselves by offerings... one will fill his pipe and hand it to the other who will light it and offer it to the sky and the earth... they will smoke together... then will they be ready to talk.

- **Chased-By-Bears, Santee Sioux**

Symbolism

The image of a bull elk with his outstretched neck and antlers low on his shoulders is carved in shallow relief on the underside of this elbow-shaped pipe bowl. In Lakota culture, elk are often associated with relationships between men and women and marriage. A stem would have been connected to this bowl for smoking. When the stem was connected to the bowl, the pipe represented the universe. When not being used the pipe and stem were always separated.

Pipestone

This pipe is made of a prized stone that is obtained at a quarry near Pipestone, Minnesota. According to legend the red, orange and yellow stone is sacred and linked to ancient ancestors of Indian people. Today, the area where the stone is found is designated as Pipestone National Monument. Only Indian people are allowed to mine or sell the stone. Many Native American sculptors continue the ancient tradition of pipe carving.

Visit the [Pipestone National Monument Website](#).

Elk Dreamer's Society

The circle or hoop near the elk's foreleg may connect this pipe bowl with the Elk Dreamer's Society. The hoop suggests the idea of protection. Dreamers wore this symbol to protect themselves from the power of other animal dreamers, and carried hoops made of twined willow branches or other herbs in dance performances. A mirror was sometimes suspended in the center of the hoop with two crossed cords symbolizing the four directions. The mirror allowed the dreamer to "reflect" his elk power at those who opposed him or to bring others under his power. Although we don't know for certain if this pipe bowl was used in elk ceremonies, it is known that Elk Dreamers preferred small yellow pipes. Perhaps the carver of this pipe bowl purposely chose a yellow-colored stone.



Lakota
Great Plains region (United States)
Pipe bowl, about 1860
Stone
The Christina N. and Swan J.
Turnblad Memorial Fund 89.88



Scenes of Plains Indian Life

KEY IDEAS

- Hide painting, an ancient tradition among Plains people, was used to record important events.
- This painting depicts important elements of Plains culture - horses, buffalo, and aspects of the Grass

Introduction

Painting on animal hide is an ancient tradition of Plains people. This painting is made on an elk hide. If you look closely, you can see the shape of the four legs, neck, and tail. A Shoshone man named Cadzi Cody painted events he experienced during a time of great change for the Shoshone people: parts of a Sun Dance, a Grass Dance, and a buffalo hunt. These events changed with the times or were lost altogether during Cadzi Cody's adult life on the Wind River Reservation.

Details

The Sun Dance is the most sacred of all Plains ceremonies. During the Sun Dance, men went without food and water and participated in religious ceremonies that included a buffalo head on a pole, seen at the center of this painting. The Sun Dance ceremony was held to thank the Creator for the abundance of the earth and to ask that the needs of the community continue to be met.

Dancers wearing eagle feather bustles and war bonnets dance a Grass Dance around the center of the painting. The Grass Dance has much in common with today's pow-wows, a time for celebrating and socializing. Near the edge of the hide, hunters on horseback are hunting buffalo. The buffalo was so important to the survival of Plains people that they considered it to be sacred.

Elk Hide History

At the time this hide was painted, the Shoshone people were confined on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Most of the buffalo had been killed by white hunters and the railroad and white settlers demand for land that made up the buffalo's habitat. The government had outlawed the sacred Sun Dance until 1935 in an effort to force Indians to give up old traditions and participate in a new way of life as defined by the government. Cadzi Cody painted events he experienced during a time of great change for the Shoshone people.

He included a scene of the traditional buffalo hunt on this elk hide to make the painting more salable to white tourists visiting the reservation. By including scenes of hunting, dancing, and ceremony, Cadzi Cody was able to earn much needed income from an outside market for images of Indian ceremonies. Today the Sun Dance continues to be practiced by many Plains people in modified ways.



Attributed to Cadzi Cody, Wind River Shoshone
Great Plains region (United States)
Wyoming, Wind River Reservation
Scenes of Plains Indian Life, about 1900
Elk hide with pigment
Gift of Bruce Dayton, 85.92



The Horse

For over 2000 years, before the arrival of the Europeans, many Plains people lived as hunters and farmers on the edges of the Great Plains in permanent villages of earth-covered lodges. In the 17th century, the Plains Indians acquired some of the horses that had been brought to North America by the Spanish, and by the 18th century, most of the Plains farmers had been transformed into nomadic buffalo hunters. The revolution in lifestyle that the horse brought to the Plains can be compared to the revolution in lifestyle brought by the car 200 years later.



One of two spotted horses on Cadzi Cody's painting

On this elk hide, the blue, red and yellow horses represent real horse colors found in nature, such as sorrel, bay or buckskin. There are even two pinto or spotted horses on the elk hide. While the human figures seem stiff as paper cut-outs the horses run, prance, leap and rear into the air, evidence that Cadzi Cody was a skilled observer of the valued horse.

Pipe Bag

KEY IDEAS

- Pipe bags containing a pipe and tobacco were carried into battle.
- Both traditional porcupine quills and glass beads from European trade decorate this bag.
- Women embroidered bags and were highly respected for their skill and sense of design.

Introduction

A Plains man carried both tobacco and a pipe in this pipe bag. A pipe bag was as important as a horse or a weapon for a man going into battle. The undecorated portion of hide at the top of the bag was tucked under and flapped over a belt.

Glass beads strung on a thread and stitched on the bag form this design. Glass beads were introduced to Native Americans by European fur traders, and because they were easy to use and easy to find they gradually replaced quills as the most common form of decoration. The quills that adorn this bag came from a porcupine. The quills were flattened and dyed, then wrapped around strips of rawhide and stitched in place.

Who Made It?

Geometric shapes create abstract patterns which probably signified the military society of the man who carried it, but making bags like this was the responsibility of women. Women chose symbolic colors and embroidered beads and quills to create patterns found on clothing and many other items used by their communities. A woman who was skilled at embroidery and created beautiful designs was highly respected in Plains cultures.

Colors

The colors used to dye the porcupine quills came from plants and mineral deposits. The colors chosen to decorate an object like this pipe bag were symbolic, but the object itself determined their meaning. On a pipe bag red is the most sacred color and may represent blood or life. Black and dark blue sometimes mean victory or the number of enemies killed. White stands for winter, which was an honorable time for war.

Video

Teri Brightnose, Ojibwe/Cree, demonstrates the Native American tradition of quilling in this video clip.

Movie Length: 5 minutes & 43 seconds

Access this video clip on the online version of Surrounded by Beauty:
<http://www.artsmia.org/surrounded-by-beauty>



Lakota
Great Plains region (United States)
Pipebag, about 1885
Leather, glass beads, porcupine quills
and feathers
Bequest of Dorothy Record Bauman
74.63.15



Compare It

The Lakota artist who created the pipe bag belonged to a nomadic people, always on the move following herds of buffalo. The objects the Lakota made and decorated had to be easy to carry, lightweight and durable. Compare the pipe bag with these clay vessels made by the Caddo people of the Mississippi Valley region. The Caddo people could create bulky or fragile containers that would be difficult to move because they didn't need to move them! The Caddo people were farmers who stayed in one spot and farmed the land around them.



Clay Vessels

Arkansas, Caddo, Mississippi Valley (United States) Arkansas or Oklahoma

Bowl & Vessel, 1250-1500

Ceramic

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 90.2.7 and 90.2.3

Crow Shield

KEY IDEAS

- It is the spiritual power of the *image* on a shield rather than the shield itself that provides protection for its owner.
- The buffalo on this shield came to a young Crow man named Humped Wolf in a dream.

Introduction

A rawhide shield was the most important element of protection for a Plains man riding into battle. But it was not the rawhide that protected him. The protection came from the spiritual power of the image that was drawn or painted upon the shield. The image of the buffalo, which appears on this shield, came in a dream to a young Crow Indian man by the name of Humped Wolf

Humped Wolf's Vision

After being wounded in battle, Humped Wolf wandered onto the prairie during a blizzard and became lost. Humped Wolf came upon a freshly killed buffalo. To protect himself from the elements, he crawled inside the carcass. It was here that he received his vision.

Humped Wolf later described his vision to the elders, who instructed him how to represent his vision on a shield and care for it. The dark bent lines painted in the upper left area represent the bullets or arrows the shield will repel. Owl feathers were attached in hopes of capturing the ability the owl has to see in the dark, which would be of great benefit to a man in battle.

Using The Shield

During a battle, many Plains men circled their enemy using only their shield for protection to demonstrate their faith in its religious and spiritual power. The shields had to be cared for in specific ways that would preserve their protective powers. Humped Wolf's shield could never be placed on the ground. When Humped Wolf was traveling and needed to rest, he placed his shield on a sagebrush plant.

Humped Wolf made another version of this shield, which is now in the collection at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York. A third version is in a private collection. Many other shields are also in collections around the world. Every shield belonged at one time to a Plains man who followed strict guidelines to preserve its protective power. For some traditional Plains Indians, the power of these shields is still alive and it is hurtful if the shields are not cared for properly.



Full-Mouth Buffalo (Humped Wolf)
Apsaalooka (Crow)
Great Plains region (United States)
Shield, about 1870
Bison hide, deer hide, owl feathers and pigments
The Christina N. and Swan T. Turnblad
Memorial Fund and gift of the Regis Corporation
87.51



Detail of Crow Shield featuring the bullets or arrows & owl feathers

Lakota Dress

KEY IDEAS

- This dress was the "best dress" of a Lakota woman.
- Plains people incorporated a creation story into the design of the yoke.

Introduction

This was the "best" dress of a Lakota woman, made from animal hide and decorated with glass beads. She might have worn it while she danced.

Imagine how the beads would sparkle in the sunlight, and how the fringe would swish and sway. Bells sewn onto the lower part of the dress would tinkle with her movements. Although we may appreciate the dress's beauty in this photograph or a case in a museum, it was made for dancing.



Northern Plains region (United States)
Lakota
Dress, 20th century
Leather, cotton, copper and glass beads
Gift of James David and John David
74.64.5

Symbols

The beaded yoke is more than just a decoration. It shows a blue sky reflected in a prairie pond that is the home of the sacred turtle. The U-shape at the lower center of the yoke represents the turtle. In the creation stories of many Plains people, the Creator placed mud from under the sea on the back of the turtle to form the earth. The turtle came to be a protector of women since they too have the power of creation, by giving birth.



Detail of Lakota Dress featuring the turtle

Style

This dress was made from the skins of two animals, probably deer or elk, in a style specific to the Lakota people. It was women's work to tan hides, cut and sew the skins together and bead the yoke. Before European contact most Plains clothing was made from animal skins. This dress was made in the 20th century, well after Plains people had come into contact with European-Americans, but still was made in the traditional way.



Beading Hide Moccasins

The Legend of Grandmother Turtle

In one of the creation stories told by the Cheyenne, neighbors of the Lakota, before people lived on the earth it was covered by water. The Creator wanted to use mud from under the water to make solid ground, but needed a place to put the mud on top of the water. Turtle rose to the top of the water to carry the mud that became earth. To this day, turtles walk very slowly because they carry the weight of the world on their backs. Some Native Americans refer to the earth as Turtle Island.

Video

Teri Brightnose, Ojibwe/Cree, demonstrates the Native American tradition of beading in this video clip.

Movie Length: 3 minutes & 25 seconds

Access this video clip on the online version of Surrounded by Beauty:
<http://www.artsmia.org/surrounded-by-beauty>



Baby Bonnet

KEY IDEAS

- Cloth baby bonnets came from Euro-Americans in the 19th century.
- Traditionally Plains women decorated objects with quill and beadwork designs.

Introduction

This baby bonnet was made relatively recently, in 1991, by Todd Yellow Cloud Augusta, a member of the Oglala band of tribe. In traditional Plains culture, beadwork was the art of women. In the 19th century they would obtain undecorated cloth baby bonnets from the Sears Roebuck Catalogue, and then richly decorate them with glass beads or porcupine quills. Although Augusta has broken a Plains tradition by doing beadwork (women's work), he continues another tradition - that only men can create representational art. Here, the bonnet is covered with pictographs, scenes showing daily life in times past.



Todd Yellow Cloud Augusta
Great Plains region (United States), Oglala
Lakota
Baby Bonnet, 1991
Cotton, glass beads
The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial
Fund, 91.93

*Ho! Ye Sun, Moon, Stars, all ye that move in the heavens,
I bid you hear me!*

Into your midst has come a new life.

Consent ye, I implore!

Make its path smooth, that it may reach the brow of the first hill!

- Omaha song introducing a child to the cosmos

Details

On one side of the bonnet, a man wearing a buffalo hide robe is leading six horses that are depicted in many different colors. Horses were a favorite decorative subject because they were a measure of wealth.



On the other side of the bonnet the artist shows a woman drying meat on a rack. Plains men traditionally were the hunters, but women were responsible for tanning hides and preserving the meat for winter.



American Flags

On the top of the bonnet, Augusta beaded a five point yellow star surrounded by a pair of crossed flags. Flags have been popular in American Indian art and especially with the Lakota since the mid-19th century. They were given as gifts when Plains elders visited Washington DC, and by government officials visiting the western territories as early as 1790. Flying an American flag in camps and reservations was a sign of friendly intentions toward visitors. The flag was awarded to American Indian veterans who honored the warrior tradition by enlisting in U.S. armed forces. Stars with five

points, like those on the bonnet, were adapted in the late 19th century from the American flag, replacing earlier four pointed stars that symbolized the four directions.

Style

The representations of everyday scenes on the baby bonnet are different than the abstract designs on the Dakota Pipe Bag or the Lakota women's dress. In the designs on the bag and the dress, abstract forms symbolize the natural world. Although the representational style on the bonnet is not as common as the abstract style found on the bag and dress, both are traditional in Plains beadwork. One is considered a proper style for men (representation) and the other style is reserved for women (abstract). Some colors that appear on the bonnet are not found on the dress or bag. They reflect the greater variety of colored beads available now, as well as the personal taste of the artist.



Detail of Lakota Pipe Bag



Detail of Lakota Dress