

THE PLAINS PEOPLE

HORSES

By the 1700s, horses, which had originally been introduced to North America by the Spanish, had spread to the Great Plains. Once the Native Americans tamed the horses, it changed their way of life dramatically. Men could hunt on horseback rather than hunting for food on foot. People could travel great distances to trade with other tribes. Horses also allowed the people to follow the buffalo herds as they migrated across the Great Plains in the central part of North America.



BISON OR BUFFALO

Between 40 million and 100 million bison roamed the Great Plains in the 1700s. Before horses arrived, Native Americans stampeded groups of buffalo over a cliff or into an enclosed area where they could use their bows and arrows to bring down the animals. After horses arrived, hunters armed with a bow and arrows would ride alongside their prey to catch them. It was dangerous but important work! The animals were essential to the Native American groups living on the Plains. Bison provided food, clothing, and shelter. Plains natives used every part of the buffalo. The hide, meat, bones, and even the dung were all necessary for survival.



TEPEES

Tepees are a cone-shaped home made with long poles covered with animal hides. The frame was made of about 20 tall poles lashed together at the top. It took about the same number of buffalo hides to form the cover. Inside, you would find simple wood bed frames covered with hide blankets along the walls. Clothes and food were stored in pouches called *parfleches*. A lining would be strung around the inside wall of the tepee to offer a little more privacy. With a fire burning inside, it would be easy to see the shadows and activities of the neighbors without the decorated lining. The lining also gave an extra layer of protection against cold and rain. Two smoke wings near the top allowed smoke to escape from the cooking fire in the center of the tepee. A tepee was easy to set up and take down, so the groups that followed the buffalo herds could move locations quickly when needed. Not all Plains groups lived in tepees. Some groups stayed in one place for long periods of time and lived in lodges made of logs covered with grasses, sticks, and soil.

