



The American West: How did the Plains Indians survive on the Great Plains?

✓ effective presentation



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✓ mature organization skills

Introduction

The Plains Indians had lived in the Great Plains for hundreds of years, and had known and understood how to survive in the Great Plains and this knowledge had been passed on from generation to generation, so the Plains Indians were already adapted for survival. The Great Plains was well known for its extreme weather conditions, scarce water and not very many materials for fire, houses, etc. It was near impossible to adapt in this environment for the American settlers, but somehow the Plains Indians managed to achieve this and more.

a well written explanation - I would also mention the importance of the buffalo here



good map selection

Social Structure of the tribe

Problem:

Without structure, the Plains Indians would never have been able to cope with surviving on the Great Plains. Each individual person in a tribe was needed for the tribe to survive, but without someone to lead and organise everyone and everything would be absolute chaos. *good understanding*

Solution:

The tribes were composed of various blood groups (also known as kinships) and family members. If anyone ever decided to get married, it was generally arranged between the families of the bride and groom. The viewpoint of the Plains Indians was that a relationship should last for eternity, so it was very rare for marriages to end (although it has happened).

In each of the tribes, there were kinships that were separated by bands. There would be a band chief that would get support if his band could catch enough game for food and protected from enemies. The chief needed to be good at giving out advice, being wise, patient, have a quality of leadership and it also helped to be quite wealthy. *Excellent understanding*

If there wasn't much food around, the bands would split up into even smaller groups and go their own ways.

The men were responsible for hunting, defence of the tribe, attacking other tribes, creating weapons, controlling the infrastructure (how it's held together) and finally any religious operations.

The women had the stress of making the food, sewing all the clothing, constructing the tipis, bringing wood and water to the camp and all the while attending to the children.

Children were seen as quite an important part of the tribe, but not as important as the men and women because they were the ones that handled all of the important parts. But the children were seen as important because if the child turns out to be a boy, he could possibly become a successful warrior and bring the tribe good fortune. If the child turns out to be a girl, she might become very skilled in crafts, make

good clothing and create tipis that would keep everyone safe. They would have been brought up being taught to play games about adult pursuit of warfare, so boys would be given bows and arrows. The girls would be taught craft skills by their mothers.

The elderly were respected because of their wisdom, knowledge, experience and they were a good way of keeping traditions alive. They would also help the women (if they were able).

white would happen if they became too full to travel

The organisation of the tribe helped to keep the Plains Indians alive by everyone having a part to play; the women kept everyone warm, safe and cooked the food, the children were already becoming apprentices, the elderly gave advice and helped the women, and the men hunted for some of the main sources of the entire tribe. This is extended throughout all of the bands, as well as the spiritual and the story telling that would have made everyone feel a part of the same unit.

✓ very nice understanding

Shelter

Problem:

Shelter to keep family members warm and safe proved to be difficult for white American settlers. There was no wood and they needed to stay away from the extreme weather and they also needed to move quickly so that they could follow the buffalo herd.

Solution:

The Plains Indians crafted what is now called a tipi (we don't actually know how it's spelt because the Indians didn't write words; they drew instead) which is mainly made out of buffalo skins, and the triangular structure was ideal for the extreme climate. Inside it is warm and cosy in the winter, and cool in the summer, due to the flap that could be opened or closed depending on what the climate was, also the flap could be opened to let out the smoke that would come from the fire that would burn on the inside to keep everyone warmer. The fires would have been used for cooking, storytelling, rituals, gatherings and meetings. Native Americans painted on the tipis to symbolise their achievements and every tribe had their own individual style. (The chief of the tribe had the most achievements, so he would have more exciting and dynamic paintings).

detailed model



Weather Conditions

Problem:

The extreme weather conditions caused blistering heat during the day and minus temperatures at night. The heat usually caused the water to dry out and thus finding water was becoming a daily problem and finding a solution was becoming more difficult by the day. And without water, you can only last for a couple of days.

Solution:

One of the reasons that the Indians followed the Buffalo herds was because they always lead to lakes and rivers. Following the Buffalo herd did offer the Indians a good food source, but it wasn't the only reason the Plains Indians became nomadic. The harsh weather conditions differed in other areas of the Great Plains. For example, in some mountain-like areas it was safe to consider that it would become almost unbearably cold, and in lower areas where the landscape was sheltered from the raw winds, it would be warmer.

good understanding



Buffalo Hunting

Problem:

Living on the Great Plains was extremely difficult, especially trying to get food sources. It was against the Indians' belief to cultivate the land, and the fact that the land was fertile and very good for growing foods proved to make other food sources hard to find.

Solution:

The Great Plains were simply brimming with buffalo. The Plains Indians relied on the buffalo to survive, not only for the entire buffalo itself, but also the fact that they lead to rivers and lakes. This was one of the reasons the Plain Indians were forced to become nomadic.

Before the Indians had horses, they would try and hunt the buffalo on foot wearing animal skins (this made the Indians blend in, but mostly the skins were used to mask the scent of human). Another method for hunting was to cause the buffalo to have a stampede and force them towards the cliff edge, which would kill many without causing too much damage to the Indians (unless they were too slow) and this method was a lot faster than on foot.




effective
independent
research

The dead buffalo were then brought back to the camp where it would get butchered by anyone left at camp (mostly women, children and some elderly). Some parts were taken out and eaten raw, such as the liver and the brain, which were sometimes even eaten at the place of the hunted buffalo, to celebrate the successful hunt. The jerky (which is thin strips of dried meat)

wouldn't go mouldy after a couple of days and would stay that way for a long amount of time so the Indians wouldn't go hungry in the harsh winter weather. Similarly to jerky, pemmican was able to keep and not get rancid after a large amount of time. Pemmican was created from a mix of jerky and leftover meat, which was pounded into pulp along with berries and occasionally nut meats. They then poured the mixture into skin containers and used melted fat to seal it; this helped let it not get any air or other materials into it. This is only a small amount that was used from the buffalo. The Plains Indians' belief was that every part of an animal that was killed should be used. For example, the dried dung was used as a fuel which ensured that the entire tribe will be warm in the winter months. Also, bones were used as tools which gave benefit to the tribe, mainly the warriors (for hunting, wars, etc) but also for the women that needed to cut other parts of the buffalo so that they can be of use.

Diagram of a Buffalo

<p>Intestines- Buckets, cooking vessels</p>	<p>Skull- Painted and used in religious rituals</p>	<p>Sinews- Bowstrings, thread</p>	<p>Tanned Hide- Robes, tipi covers, bags, moccasins (shoes), leggings</p>
<p>Fat- soap</p>	<p>Tendons- Strings, cord, sewing thread</p>		<p>Raw Hide- parfleche (for carrying belongings or food stores), harnesses, shields</p>
<p>Fur- Blankets, mittens, straddle covers</p>	<p>Hair- String, stuffing for pillows and saddles</p>	<p>Bones- Knives, bone fleshing tools, sledge runners</p>	<p>Hooves- Glue, tools</p>
<p>Ribs- Sledges for children in the winter</p>	<p>Bladder- Food bags</p>	<p>Tail- Fly whisks, ornaments</p>	<p>Dung- fuel</p>

✓ a useful diagram

Please identify the 3 most important uses and revise only these for the exam

The introduction of horses to the Great Plains

Problem:

The Great Plains was a desolate and vast expanse of prairie grass dotted with large herds of wild buffalo across the entire desert-like land. The Plains Indians were all deeply dependant on the women bringing in the nuts and berries as well as the warriors bringing in the few buffalo that would cross their path. (At this point, the Plains Indians were too poor and unable to travel across the Great Plains to find better food or to follow the buffalo herds for water). In the spring leading onto early summer, the lakes and rivers were flowing heavily because of the heavy winter snow, but from the blazing summer heats the lakes and rivers turned into basically nothing, simply a trickle.

Solution:

The introduction of horses was the simple answer to all the problems the Plains Indians faced. The Spanish were the first to bring the horses to the Great Plains, although they weren't very eager to share their horses with the Indians. Eventually the Pueblo Indians rose up to the Spanish, drove them out and captured their horses, the Pueblo Indians then sold some of the horses to the rest of the Indians across the Great Plains, kept the rest and used them for meat and breeding.

detailed knowledge

The first horses the Indians used were only for trade and to be stolen from other tribes. Eventually the Indians realised that the horses had many other uses, mainly for hunting buffalo, which proved to become the Plains Indians advantage and made living on the Great Plains a lot better and easier. They were then dependant on what the horses did for them and added horses to their life style, and by around 1820, some Indians were measuring own wealth and the tribe's wealth in horses. *an important part*



Warfare

Problem:

Protection was needed during the 1800s, as enemy tribes would attack to prove their bravery, steal food, steal horses, or even to steal wives. In comparison, the white American settlers which had moved towards the west (despite the peace treaty made between both the Indians and the Americans) and decided that they wanted to settle in the Great Plains and they were willing to fight for it. They saw the Indians as savage because they were known to scalp enemies that they had killed, but they also thought of them as useless and didn't realise how good they were with nature and using whatever is around them as something that can be used. War was the inevitable outcome.

Solution:

Before the white American settlers, there was little evidence that the Plains Indians had anything to do with warfare due to the fact that the Indians didn't think it necessary to write about it. So only until the Americans came across the Great Plains in the 1840s was when it was known that the Plains Indians existed. Recent knowledge suggests that the Plains Indians were relatively peaceful towards other tribes up until the introduction of horses, where it was vital to have them as a sign of wealth and power causing tribe members to steal from other tribes.

Nevertheless, Plains Indians thought that conflict was simply a waste of men and put too much of a strain on the rest of the tribe. A way of getting through the conflict, if it did occur, was **counting coup**. Men would use a spear or a stick that was blessed by the Medicine Man and touch any of the fallen men that are opposed, this was seen as an act of bravery and it was even braver for the Indian warriors to escape conflict unharmed rather than to die in battle like the Americans. It was believed by the Sioux and Crow tribes that if you take the scalp of any fallen warrior, they wouldn't be able to carry on in the Spirit world as the soul would remain in the earthly realm.

Battles between the Americans and the Indians were frequent and from the late 1700s until the early 1900s, the battles continued. But main conflicts like

Red Cloud's War and the Sand Creek Massacre were a part of a large group of conflicts that caused the most impact to the American West.

Reasons for conflict were normally for the white American settlers to gain control over the Great Plains' terrain in order to either cross the Great Plains to get to the beautiful golden sands of California in eastern America, or to stay in the Great Plains itself, as it could have been a last resort for desperate, unemployed and homeless Americans.

I really like the way that you link ideas together, Kate.

Battle of Little Bighorn - 1876

The main conflicts between the Plains Indians and the Americans were between 1860 and 1890, and these were the few that caused enough impact for both sides of the war.

A couple of weeks earlier than the battle of Little Bighorn, the US Army faced Sitting Bull at the Rosebud River on 17th of June in 1876. The defeat of General Crook alongside his troops did not discourage General Alfred Terry. He carried on relentlessly and did not want Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull to slip away from his fingers, and thanks to his Indian 'spies' he managed to keep them both within his radar and knew exactly where they were. He instructed Colonel John Gibbon to bring some of his men towards the east by the Yellowstone River to where it met the Big Horn River. Then General Alfred Terry ordered General Custer to bring the stronger troops (known as the 7th Cavalry) to find the Indian's trail and follow it before they lost it and attack the tribe alongside Colonel Gibbon's force for combined effort.

Are you
now able
to explain
why the
Army
follows
how the
battle?

On the 25th of June in 1876, General Custer's Indian spies managed to find the enemy Indian camp. It was the largest camp they had ever seen, and although people pointed out that the 7th Cavalry did not have enough bullets for all of the Indians, General Custer didn't seem unfazed. He announced: "The largest Indian camp on the North American continent and I am going to attack it."

a very
useful
quote

General Custer had 600 men as well as two of his commanding officers, and split up separately to surround the entire Indian's camp. The three separate teams were all facing different problems. The first team (the one in command was Major Marcus Reno) was stopped by Lakota warriors. The second in command (Captain Frederick Benteen) then went to help and managed to regroup the rest of Major Reno's men, but unfortunately for them, they were surrounded by hundreds of Indians. General Custer was then on his own and with no help to save his men. He then faced the rest of the Indians with his small team of men and fought bravely (although sources suggest that some of his men attempted to flee, or shot themselves to avoid mutilation) but was almost instantly defeated. No one actually knows what happened to them, but archaeologists that had examined the ground in which they were in battle, had found from the bones that they never managed to cross the river.

Religion

Problem:

Hope was desperately needed in times of war and conflict, and the Plains Indians needed something that would help them get through when times were tough. Without a strong sense of belonging and peace, the Indians would be unable to survive living on the Great Plains, no matter how skilled they are in the matter of food, shelter etc.

Solution:

The Plains Indians' belief was the main source of their entire culture and way of living; it brought people together, and the way they believed that humans should work with nature rather than to tame it caused the Plains Indians to benefit the lifestyle of the surviving on the Great Plains.

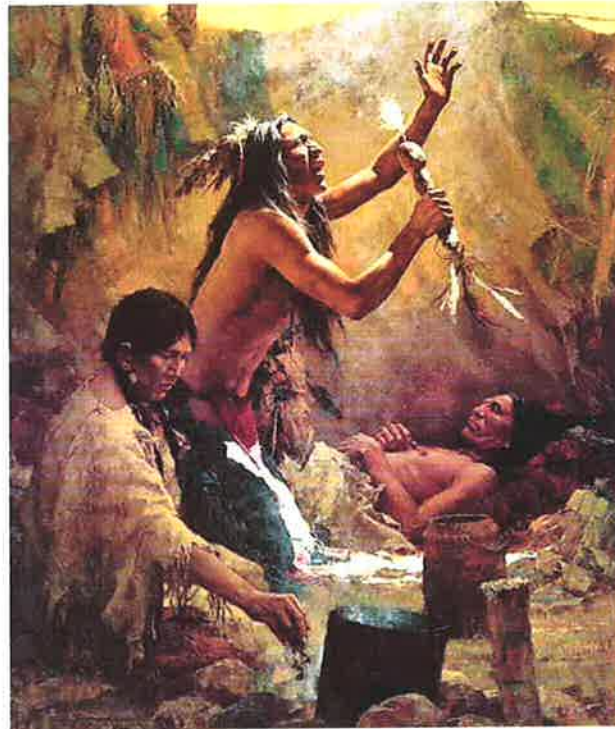
The Plains Indians believed in the Great Spirit, or Waken Tanka in Sioux (who had once created everything known to the world, and the world itself and looks over it). They also believed that every single thing had a spirit, including animals, plants, people, even rocks and rivers had a spirit. This caused the Indians to treat everyone (and everything) with respect and they thought that the spirits could influence their lives and what would happen in the afterlife.

The Medicine Man was one of the most important roles in the tribe as he could interpret the visions of young men, give out advice to everyone (even the chief), make contact with every living spirit and he was also able to cure sickness. Other people in the tribe would look to him as role model and he would cause their hopes to aspire if life on the Great Plains was looking bleak.

If there was something that caused the living on the Great Plains to be difficult, (for example when a buffalo herd cannot be found) then the Medicine Man would work with the entire tribe and try to contact the Great Spirit through rituals and dance.

Generally, the Plains Indians were very fit and healthy and the main problems caused was broken bones and flesh wounds from combat, bruises and cuts from buffalo hunting and few would get fevers and rheumatism from being out in the difficult climate for hours on end. The Plains Indians believed that illness

was caused by bad spirits which had possessed them. It was also their belief that the Medicine Men could use their power to eliminate the evil spirits and show them not to work against the spirit world, but to work with it.



The diagram above is of a medicine man trying to cure someone of being sick. (Or to eliminate the bad spirits that had possessed them.)

good spirit relation

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History B Schools History Project – The American West

✓ a mature approach
to research



14/16 - High Grade A

Well done, Katie!

I am extremely impressed with this excellent piece of independent research. You write fluently and your points are underpinned by thorough research.

Your explanations are persuasive and you consistently match problems to solutions.

Moving forward, please focus on developing your arguments in your introductions and conclusions.

Good Luck!

Kim 24-11-12