People of the Plains
The earliest inhabitants of the Interior Plains belonged to many different groups of American Indians. Their nomadic culture was unique because of the geography and resources of the area.
Most Plains Indians depended on the bison or buffalo for their survival. But occasionally, they farmed on small plots of land, too.
Some of the larger Plains Indian nations are the Cheyenne Arapaho, the Comanche, the Sioux, the Crow, and the Kiowa.
The Plains Indians who lived in more permanent villages included the Osage, Pawnee, Dakota, and Wichita.
These tribes raise corn, squash, and beans. Wild crops, like sunflowers and tobacco were gathered, too.
The Plains people used the bison for housing, food, clothing, and even tools. Life was centered on following the bison herds across the plains.
When a Spanish explorer named Coronado first saw a group of Plains Indians, he described many of their traditions, such as skin tepees, travois pulled by dogs, and the use of sign language.
The early Plains Indians did not use horses to hunt. No horses existed in North American until the Spaniards brought them from Europe. But with the horse, the Plains Indians could hunt better and travel farther following the herds.
A culture centered on owning and trading horses developed among the Plains tribes. By the 1800s, Plains families owned an average of 35 horses, which were a sign of great wealth and success.
Tribes would often hunt together in the spring and summer. In July, bands of tribes gathered into large camps to hold ceremonies, including drums, song, and dance.
In these encampments, important decisions were made for future hunting, raiding, and trading.
More settlers to the Plains threatened the Plains Indian way of life. At one time, the U.S. government encouraged bison hunting. This was meant to force tribes to give up their nomadic ways and settle on reservation lands.
The bison almost became extinct during this time.
The Plains tribes fought against the U.S. Army in many conflicts, trying to preserve their customs and lands. These conflicts are called the Indian Wars.
A famous victory won by the Lakota Sioux and the Cheyenne was at the Battle of Little Big Horn.
Because of their skills in riding and their knowledge of the environment, the Plains Indians were often the victors in battles with the U.S. Army.
But one of the most important events at the end of this time happened in South Dakota. This was called the Wounded Knee Massacre because many Indians, including women and children died during an attack by the U.S. Army.

The Army was ordered to move the Indians back onto their reservation.
Today, many of the Plains Indians and their tribal governments try to preserve the traditions and culture of their ancestors.
And today, the U.S. Government recognizes nearly 600 Indian tribes, including many Plains Indians, as sovereign nations.
This means that tribes can make most of their own decisions and control the resources of their lands.
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