

## Life on the Plains

The scene described in "You're There" might have taken place in the **Great Plains cultural region** of North America. The Great Plains was—and still is—a fairly flat region. Hundreds of years ago, much of it was covered with a sea of grass, waving in ever-blowing wind. Unlike the Eastern Woodlands, few trees grew on the dry Great Plains. But millions of buffalo grazed the huge area.

Tribes of the Great Plains include the Lakota, also known as the Sioux, as well as the Pawnee, and Osage. Among the later arrivals were the Cheyenne, an Algonquian-speaking people.

For a long time, most Plains people followed a farming and hunting life. Because much of the land was dry, they settled their villages along rivers. Here they could get water for their crops—corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins. They built **lodges** to live in.

These were large, round huts built over a deep hole. The walls of a lodge were made of earth, packed over a wood frame.

The plentiful buffalo were central to the lives of the Plains Indians. People used

these animals as a major source of meat. The people made buffalo hides into articles like clothing and blankets. They carved buffalo horns into bowls. They even used the stomachs of buffalos, hung from four poles, as cooking pots for stew.

In summer and fall, groups of Plains Indians traveled to hunt the massive beasts. A buffalo could weigh well over a ton and could run very fast. The hunters were on foot. It was difficult for them to get close enough to use their bows and arrows. Plains Indians could kill their prey by crouching near them in an animal disguise, or by getting the buffalo to stampede over a cliff.

While on the hunt, people lived in **tepees**. To make a tepee, women set up poles in a circle, their tops coming together at a point. Then they covered the frame with buffalo hides. People also used the poles to transport buffalo meat and other goods. They made a **travois** (truh VOY) by lashing the load to two poles. Dogs then pulled the travois. A travois's load could weigh about 75 pounds.

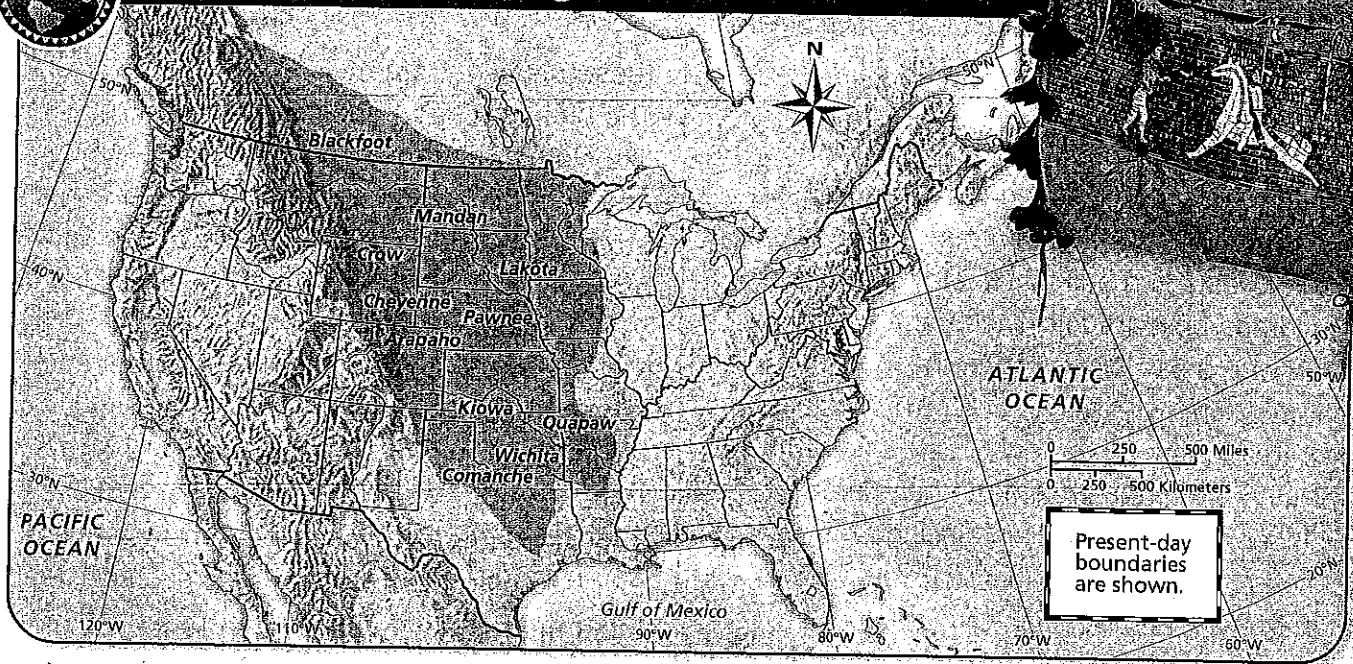
**REVIEW** How did village life differ from life during a hunt? **Compare and Contrast**

▶ Native Americans lived in tepees on the Great Plains. Hunters often used disguises to be able to approach buffalo herds without being seen.





## Great Plains Cultural Region



► **Women of the Great Plains cultural region often made saddlebags, like the one above, with porcupine quills.**

**MAP SKILL** Region How would you describe the location of this region?

### The Cheyenne

In the 1500s, people from Spain brought the horse to the regions of the Aztec and Maya in Mexico. The tribes living near Spanish settlements were the first to learn of the horse. Some horses broke free and wandered north. In the late 1700s, the Cheyenne tamed some of the descendants of these horses which had become wild. The Cheyenne also got horses by raiding other tribes and by trading. Using the horse, the Cheyenne changed their way of life. Buffalo hunting became a major way to gain food.

The horse made buffalo hunting much easier. Mounted on a swift horse, a single Cheyenne hunter could ride close to a herd of buffalo. Then, he could use

his bow and arrow to kill the animals. Later on, Plains hunters also used guns to hunt.

The horse also made the Cheyenne settlements much more mobile, or easy to move. A horse-drawn travois could move four times as much weight as a travois pulled by a dog. And horses could move twice as fast. Now Cheyenne women could more easily move tepees and set up new camps. The Cheyenne developed a way of life based on moving to different places in different seasons. They now referred to the past as the time "when we had only dogs for moving camp."

The horse became so important to the Cheyenne and other Plains people that they measured wealth in horses. Sometimes tribes raided other tribes to capture horses. Riders became skilled in war as well as in hunting.

**REVIEW** How did the Cheyenne change the way they hunted buffalo after the horse arrived? **Cause and Effect**

► **The Cheyenne and other Plains Native Americans used the horse-drawn travois and the tepee to move easily to hunt buffalo.**

