

Name: _____

Date: _____

Handout 6C: Shelter–The Tipi

Directions: Read the following text. Refer to the glossary as needed for definitions of unfamiliar words. Then, reread the text and annotate three to five things you notice and three to five things you wonder about.

From the Nez Perce National Historic Trail website

Shelter–The Tipi

The Indians on the Plains hunted the huge herds of buffalo that roamed the grasslands. They used the meat, the hides, the bones, and virtually all parts of the buffalo to make almost everything they needed. The buffalo didn't stay in one place, but roamed across the prairies in search of areas where grass was plentiful. The people followed them, and so they needed portable homes that could be moved quickly and easily.

The Nez Perce and other tribes called their beautiful portable homes “tipis.”

Tipis were made from buffalo skins held up by poles. The poles were most often made from lodgepole pine—so named because the trees grow tall and slender and strong and are just the right size and strength for tipi poles or “lodge” poles. The bark is removed from the tree as soon as the tree is cut down; if the bark is left on the tree for very long it hardens up and can't be removed. The peeled poles are pretty and strong.

It took between 10 and 40 hides for one tipi, depending upon how big the buffalo were and how big the tipi was, and new tipis were made in the spring to replace old ones that had worn out. Modern tipis are made from canvas.

The inside and outside of a tipi was often decorated with “paint” made from natural dyes and colors. The front of the tipi was laced together with sticks, and the top of the tipi had “smoke flaps” that could be held open with poles to let smoke out, or folded shut to keep out snow and rain. In the heat of summer, the bottom could be rolled up to let a cool breeze pass through.

Name: _____

Date: _____

The big difference between a tent and a tipi is the tipi's liner. This is a short wall of hides that is strung around the poles on the inside of the tipi cover. It makes the tipi like an "envelope house" where the cold air from outside enters at the bottom of the tipi cover, goes up several feet between the cover and the liner, then enters the tipi already pre-warmed. It creates a ventilation system that ensures that the tipi is cool in summer, warm in winter, and not nearly so smoky or wet as a tent. It's an engineering marvel.

Oftentimes in the spring, all the members of a tribe gathered at one great camp. A council tipi or "lodge" was built in the center and different bands or family groups put their tipis in a circle around it. Each band had a certain section of the circle so that people could find each other easily. A person would always know where to find an old friend because their tipi would be in the same place each spring.

When women gathered together to work on a new tipi, they enjoyed a special feast. It took about a day for them to make a new tipi.

When it was time to move the tipis, the women did the work, too. Generally speaking, two people who are taking their time can put up or "pitch" a large tipi in about 20 minutes. In contests, though, two Indian women could put up a tipi in less than three minutes! When it was time to move, the women would take down (or "strike") the tipi; it was rolled up and tied to a travois, along with the other things to be moved.

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

hides: the skins of larger animals such as buffalo or cow

ventilation: the movement of air in a space

engineering: the practice of using mathematics and science to do practical things such as designing and building structures, tools, and machines

travois: a type of sled used by native peoples to carry goods, consisting of two poles joined by a frame and drawn by a horse or dog