THE NEZ PERCE OF THE PLATEAU

Pocket Label

Nez Perce
Shelter Stamp

Picture Dictionary Cards

cornhusk bag
camas bulb
buckskin

©2003 by Evan-Moor Corp. - EMC 3703
The Nez Perce (nehz PURS) lived in the Plateau region of the United States. Their original territory covered the canyon areas of the Snake, Clearwater, and Salmon Rivers of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Now most live in Idaho. The tribe officially called themselves “Nimi’ipuu” (The People). The French renamed them “Nez Perce,” which means “pierced nose.” A French interpreter gave the name to the group after he saw some of them wearing shells in their noses for decoration. Few of these Native Americans ever pierced their noses, but the tribe is still known today as the Nez Perce.

CLOTHING
The Nez Perce men and boys wore long, fringed buckskin shirts and leggings. They also wore belts, breechcloths, and moccasins. Feathered bonnets were also common for men to wear. During colder weather, men put on bison skin robes and gloves. Women and girls wore long, belted buckskin dresses and knee-length moccasins. Their dresses were decorated with items such as elk teeth, beads made of shell and bone, and porcupine quills. Women used vegetable and mineral dyes to make clothes colorful. They also wore cornhusk basketry hats. Nez Perce women carried their babies on their backs in cradleboards. Cradleboards were made of thick twigs and a covering of soft animal skin adorned with beads.

FOOD
The foods gathered and the game hunted varied with the seasons. In the spring, women traveled to valleys to dig root crops. These roots included camas bulbs, bitterroot, wild carrot, and wild potato. They gathered berries such as gooseberries, thorn berries, and currants. Women collected pine nuts, seeds, and black moss.

In the summer, the people moved the village higher in the mountains to set up temporary camps. Here the people gathered more roots, fished the streams for salmon, and hunted big game. Men hunted deer, elk, moose, bear, mountain sheep, and goat. They traveled by horse to the Montana plains to hunt buffalo and antelope. The men also hunted small game like rabbit, squirrel, badger, marmot, and ruffed grouse.

By late fall, the Nez Perce moved back into their traditional villages. Here they prepared for the long winter by drying and preserving foods.

SHELTER
Part of the year, the Nez Perce lived in longhouses called kuhetini-t (koo-HAT-in-eet). The longhouse had a wooden frame covered with woven tule mats. Tule is a marsh plant found near rivers and streams. Some longhouses were over 100 feet (30 meters) long. There were several rows of hearths in the center for families to cook their meals. A circular semisubterranean sweathouse, a woman’s monthly seclusion hut, and a submerged hot bath were also part of the village.

When the Nez Perce moved about, they erected wall-mini-ts (wahl-LEE-min-eets) made of tule mats or buffalo skins. These were similar to the tipis of the Plains tribes.

FAMILY LIFE
Several related, extended families made up a Nez Perce village. A headman led each village. He was a respected elder who was often the shaman. A shaman is the religious leader and healer. Nez Perce men made bows from the horns of mountain sheep. Boys developed good hunting skills early. Men trained and bred Appaloosa horses. The Nez Perce became known as experts in horse-riding skills.

Men spent the winter playing games and telling stories to the young. Men played vigorous team sports to prepare them for hunting big game. The stories imparted sacred traditions and practical knowledge to the children of the tribe. Women taught girls the traditional skills of cooking, weaving, and basketry. The cornhusk bags that women wove from hemp fiber were important for daily use and for trade.

Ceremonies were held to assure good harvests. Music and dance were central to the ceremonies. People played rattles, drums, and flutes. There were ceremonial songs and chants for births, marriages, deaths, hunting, and for war.
The Nez Perce have lived in the Plateau region of North America for a long time. The Plateau region is in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The area has mountains, forests, grasslands, and rivers. The tribe called themselves Nimíipuu. This means “The People.” The French called the tribe Nez Perce. **Nez Perce** means “pierced nose” in French. They did not really pierce their noses. Some of the men did wear shells in their noses for decoration. The tribe decided to keep the name Nez Perce.
The Nez Perce wore buckskin clothing. **Buckskin** is another word for deerskin. Men and boys liked long, fringed shirts and leggings. They wore belts, breechcloths, and moccasins. The women and girls wore long, belted buckskin dresses. They wore cornhusk hats on their heads and knee-length moccasins on their feet. Sometimes the people put on gloves and buffalo skin robes to keep warm in the winter.

The Nez Perce hunted and fished for their food. The men hunted big game such as deer, elk, moose, bear, mountain sheep, and goat. The men used Appaloosa horses to hunt buffalo and antelope. Boys were taught to hunt rabbit, squirrel, badger, and marmot. The men and boys fished for salmon. The women and girls gathered roots. Their favorite roots to eat were the **camas bulb** and bitterroot. They collected pine nuts, seeds, and black moss. The girls liked to gather all kinds of berries. During the winter, the people spent time drying and storing all the food.
The Nez Perce lived in different kinds of homes. Most of the year, they lived in tipis made of woven tule mats or buffalo skins. Tule is a plant that grows near rivers. The Nez Perce could take their shelter with them as they looked for food. They lived in longhouses in the winter. The longhouse was over 100 feet (30 meters) long and was made of poles and tule mats. Several families lived together in a longhouse. They also had an underground hot bath and sweathouse for ceremonies near the longhouse.

The Nez Perce lived in villages along streams and rivers. Several related families lived together in one village. Men did the hunting, using bows and arrows. Men trained spotted horses called Appaloosas. Men and boys played sports games. The men told stories to the children. The women taught girls cooking, weaving, and basketry. They made beautiful cornhusk bags. Everyone in the village enjoyed ceremonies. They danced and chanted to music made from rattles, drums, and flutes.
CREATE AN APPALOOSA ORNAMENT

The horse was important to Native Americans. The Nez Perce were considered the best equestrians in the Northwest. They trained and bred Appaloosas. These spotted horses were greatly valued because they could move swiftly into battle, outrun buffalo, and carry supplies. To show their importance, Appaloosas were adorned with beautiful blankets, harnesses, and beaded ornaments that were worn on their foreheads.

**STEPS TO FOLLOW**

1. Color the patterns on page 40, using earth colors.
2. Cut out the patterns for the ornament and glue them onto tagboard to make them stronger. Cut around the glued patterns to make two pieces.
3. Use a hole punch to make 6 holes on both the top and bottom pieces.
4. Put glue where indicated on the triangular piece. Overlap the circular piece. Allow glue to dry.
5. Thread and tie 8" pieces of yarn in the 12 holes around the ornament.
6. Tie feathers and beads to the ornament, if desired.
7. On the back of the ornament, write three ways Appaloosas helped the Nez Perce. (For example, they moved swiftly into battle, outran buffalo, and carried supplies.)

**MATERIALS**

- page 40, reproduced for each student
- 9" x 12" (23 x 30.5 cm) tagboard
- crayons
- twelve 8" (20 cm) pieces of yarn, twine, raffia, or ribbon
- scissors
- glue
- hole punch
- Optional: feathers and beads
CREATE AN APPALOOSA ORNAMENT

glue
CHIEF JOSEPH, NEZ PERCE LEADER

Chief Joseph has been called one of the greatest Native American leaders. His real name was Hinmaton Yalatikit (Thunder-that-dances-from-the-mountain). In 1877 the U.S. government told the Nez Perce they had to move from their beloved hunting grounds to a small reservation in Idaho. The Nez Perce refused to go to the reservation. Instead they decided to go to Canada to live. Chief Joseph led 800 people on a 1,800-mile (2,896 km) journey, always being pursued by soldiers. Time after time, Chief Joseph's outnumbered warriors fought off the cavalry. Finally, only 40 miles (64 km) from the Canadian border, soldiers ambushed the Nez Perce. Chief Joseph decided to save the 418 survivors (87 men, 184 women, and 147 children) by surrendering. He faced the soldiers and said these famous words: “I will fight no more forever.” Chief Joseph spent the next 27 years championing the human rights of his people. He will always be remembered for his great leadership, spirit, strength, and courage.

STEPS TO FOLLOW

1. Discuss the importance of Chief Joseph and the qualities that made him a great leader of his people. Utilize reference materials appropriate for your students.

2. Make a list of adjectives to describe a good leader (strong, trustworthy, smart, brave, loyal, polite, powerful, likeable, respectful, hardworking, honest, patient, curious, clever, daring, caring, etc.).

3. Have students color and cut out the cover feather on page 42. Have them glue it to the red construction paper, trimming around the edges.

4. Direct students to cut out the other feather and use it as a template to make five feathers in the remaining colors of construction paper.

5. Have students write a word that describes Chief Joseph on each of the five feathers.

6. Instruct students to punch a hole at the bottom of each feather.

7. Have students gather all the feathers together, putting the cover feather on top. Put a paper fastener through the holes.

8. Fan out the feathers to read about the qualities of a good leader.

MATERIALS

- page 42, reproduced for each student
- 4" x 9" (10 x 23 cm) strips of construction paper—one of each: red, blue, yellow, brown, green, and white
- crayons
- marking pens
- scissors
- paper fastener
- hole punch
CHIEF JOSEPH, NEZ PERCE LEADER

QUALITIES OF A LEADER

CHIEF JOSEPH