

Grade 3 Informational

Living Off the Earth

Imagine a life quite different from the one you live. Imagine there are no ready-made houses or clothing. Imagine that you can't just go out and buy food or medicine, because there are no stores. Instead, you must depend on what nature offers. How would you get along? What would you do?

The ways that Native Americans lived can give some answers. Two hundred to three hundred years ago, the people who lived in the area that is now the United States made their homes and clothing from what the earth supplied. They used plants for medicine, and they caught or gathered all their food.

Shelters and Clothing

Some Native American tribes lived where there was plenty of food. These people stayed in one place and used wood, stones, mud, or clay to build homes that would last a long time. Other tribes, such as the Apache, moved often in search of food. They needed shelters that they could take with them, so they built tipis. It was easy to move a tipi. The Native Americans could take down the tipis and put the long poles of wood and buffalo skins onto a "travois." This was a sled that a horse pulled.

Some Native Americans made clothing and shoes called "moccasins" from animal skins. In the southwestern areas, the Pueblo people made clothing from cotton that they grew and wove into yarn. The Navajo people wove wool into blankets and rugs. Along the northwestern coast, the Chinook tribe was one of several tribes that made clothing from the bark of the cedar tree.

Native Americans needed tools in order to build shelters, to make clothing, and to grow, hunt, and prepare food.

Tool Time

Where there were trees, people used wood to create bows, arrows, spears, and digging sticks. A digging stick was a piece of hard wood about three feet long. People stripped the stick of all bark and sharpened one end into a point. They poked holes into the ground for planting seeds. These sticks also lifted out roots and dug up plants that could be eaten.

Some people made tools from stone, too. They found rocks along riverbanks, lakeshores, and ocean coasts. From these stones, Native Americans made hammers, farming tools, and the heads of axes and arrows. They used thin, sharp pieces of stone to cut meat. They also scraped animal hides to make leather.

Bone was another useful material for making tools. People made sewing needles out of

animal bones. They also made awls. An awl had a slim handle and a sharp point. People used awls for punching holes in leather. They could then sew the leather into tipi coverings, clothing, or moccasins.

Tying Things Up

In order to sew, fish, or tie things together, Native Americans made their own rope, cord, string, and line. Many plants are made of fiber, a material that is like thread. People twisted, rolled, or braided strands of fiber together. More fiber could be twisted to the ends of these strands. The string or rope could be as long as people needed.

Some Native Americans also made cords from the sinew of animals. Sinew is the stretchy band of tissue that fastens a muscle to a bone.

Plenty of Plants

Native Americans ate plants, of course. But they also used many plants as medicine. And when water wasn't easy to find in the southwestern desert, people in that area knew to cut open a cactus. There would be water inside.

A fistful of dry grass could mop up morning dew from rocks and plants. The water would then be squeezed from the grass into a jug or pot.

A plant with many uses was the cattail. This plant grows in wet areas. The top of the cattail looks like a brown, fuzzy sausage. The western Paiute tribe was one tribe that twisted the plant's leaves into rope or wove them into baskets, mats, cradles, and hats. The fluffy part inside the head of the cattail made great diaper material and bandages.

Life for most people in the United States is quite a bit different today. With department stores and supermarkets, people don't have to make many of the things they use. But the Native Americans did, and the earth gave them everything they needed.

Grade 3 Narrative

**Babbitt, Natalie. *The Search for Delicious*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969. (1969)
From the Prologue**

There was a time once when the earth was still very young, a time some call the oldest days. This was long before there were any people about to dig parts of it up and cut parts of it off. People came along much later, building their towns and castles (which nearly always fell down after a while) and plaguing each other with quarrels and supper parties. The creatures who lived on earth in that early time stayed each in his own place and kept it beautiful. There were dwarfs in the mountains, woldwellers in the forests, mermaids in the lakes, and, of course, winds in the air.

There was one particular spot on the earth where a ring of mountains enclosed a very dry and dusty place. There were winds and dwarfs there, but no mermaids because there weren't any lakes, and there were no woldwellers either because forests couldn't grow in so dry a place.

Then a remarkable thing happened. Up in the mountains one day a dwarf was poking about with a sharp tool, looking for a good spot to begin mining. He poked and poked until he had made a very deep hole in the earth. Then he poked again and clear spring water came spurting up in the hole. He hurried in great excitement to tell the other dwarfs and they all came running to see the water. They were so pleased that they built over it a fine house of heavy stones and they made a special door out of a flat rock and balanced it in its place very carefully on carved hinges. Then one of them made a whistle out of a small stone which blew a certain very high note tuned to just the right warble so that when you blew it, the door of the rock house would open, and when you blew it again, the door would shut. They took turns being in charge of the whistle and they worked hard to keep the spring clean and beautiful.