

## **INDIANS AND THE BUFFALO:**

- Before the whites arrived in the Sixteenth Century, there were no horses in America so the Indians hunted on foot. They had two methods: trying to kill single animals using bows and arrows, or forcing a herd of buffalo to stampede over a cliff.
- These methods did not produce a lot of meat so the Indian population was kept low. With the arrival of horses the Indians could kill more buffalo and the number of Indians began to increase.
- The main source of food was the large herds of buffalo that moved around looking for fresh grass to eat. Buffalo meat could be preserved by drying it to make pemmican. Dried buffalo dung was used as fuel for cooking.
- Tanned buffalo skins provided their clothes and shoes. Buffalo fur or bones were used to decorate their clothes.
- Buffalo skin also provided bags, blankets, drums, saddle covers. Buffalo bone was used for arrowheads, dice, jewellery, war-clubs, knives and needles.
- The tipis the Indians lived in were also made of buffalo hide, stretched over long wooden poles. These made the frame of the tipi and the travois that helped them move their things when they moved camp.

## **INDIAN LIFE 1:**

- The Indians lived in small groups or bands of about 10 to 50 families. Each person had a job to do to help the group survive.
- Each band belonged to a tribe, who met together only occasionally. Several tribes made up a nation. For example, the Sioux nation included several tribes, such as the Oglala Sioux and the Hunkpapa Sioux.
- Each tribe had a chief, but these men offered advice; they did not force the others to follow their wishes. No decision would be acted on until the whole tribe had agreed to it.
- Decisions were often taken by the group as a whole. There were therefore no police or prisons. Wrongdoers were punished by the band. The severest punishment was to be driven out from the band. It was almost impossible to survive on your own on the Plains.

## **INDIAN LIFE 2:**

- There was much more equality in Indian society than in the Whites' society. All the Indians in the band would have done similar tasks, worn similar clothes and lived in similar tipis.
- Women looked after the tipi, the children, food, water-collecting, making clothing. The Indians moved around so they did not have many possessions. However, the things they did have were often highly decorated and it was the women who did this work..
- The children were taught the things they needed to know to be adult Indians.
- Men looked after the horses, defended the camp and hunted buffalo.

## **INDIAN LIFE 3:**

- Law and order was much simpler than in White society. Indians lived in small bands and they were always on the move. All the people of the band knew each other and depended on each other. They relied on custom and tradition to guide their actions. The elderly were therefore very important in the band as they remembered the past.
- The old and sick were looked after, but if they were too old or sick they were sometimes left behind to die when the group moved on. It was more important to provide food for the whole tribe than to look after one person.
- In the Nineteenth Century the whites sold guns to the Indians. This helped to increase the Indian population. By 1840 there were about 2,000,000 Indians living on the Plains.

## **INDIAN BELIEFS 1:**

- Indian beliefs were totally different from those of the Whites who wanted to control and exploit nature. For example, the Whites changed the Plains with wind-powered water pumps and barbed wire so that they could exploit them.
- Indians believed that they should change their way of life to suit nature. For example, they changed their way of life so that they could live on the Plains.
- They believed that you should only take from nature what you needed, so there would always be enough for tomorrow.
- The Indians believed that everything –all animals, birds, fish, plants, even landscape features such as rocks and streams -had a spirit. This meant that the environment and everything in it should be treated with respect.

## **INDIAN BELIEFS 2:**

- They believed that there was a Great Spirit who gave life to everything. The Great Spirit created the earth, so it could not be owned, bought and sold.
- They also believed that human beings came from the earth and would return to the earth when they died.
- The circle was important, as a symbol of the circles of life: the circle of the seasons, the circle of the moon and the sun, the circle of life and death.
- They believed you could contact the spirit world through visions. Women used their visions to learn about healing. Young men were sent out from the band on their own and often gained their adult name from the animal they saw in visions while they were on their own e.g. Little Bear. They also made contact with the spirit world through dances.