

First Peoples of the American West

Learn about the First Peoples of the American West by completing the following sections:



Section A – First Peoples of the American West Introduction

In this section, you will learn about the locations of three different regions in the American West.



Section B – Northwest Coast Region

In this section, you will learn more about how the environment in the Northwest Coast region influences the way some of the Native American communities in this region live by looking at images from the Autry Museum of the American West.



Section C – Great Plains Region

In this section, you will learn more about how the environment in the Great Plains region influences the way some of the Native American communities in this region live by looking at images from the Autry Museum of the American West.



Section D – Southwest Region

In this section, you will learn more about how the environment in the Southwest region influences the way some of the Native American communities in this region live by looking at images from the Autry Museum of the American West.



Section E – How does your environment influence your way of life?

In this section, you will answer the question *How does your environment influence your way of life?* by writing a paragraph about how the environments in the three different regions that you learned about in this lesson influence the way some of the Native American communities in these regions live. Then you will explore the environment that you live in.

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INTRODUCTION – The Autry Museum of the American West is a museum located in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, California. The Autry Museum tells stories about the diverse peoples of the American West. Groups of people who have something in common such as **culture**, **ethnicity**, interests, location, **race**, or religion are called communities. Native American communities have been, and continue to be, an important part of the American West. Even though Native American communities today no longer **depend** on their **environment** to survive like their **ancestors** did, their environment and ancestors continue to be an important part of their culture.

During this lesson, you will learn about some of the environments in different **regions** of the American West. You will also learn about some of the Native American communities that have been living in these regions and how their environments influence the way they live. Then you will answer the question *How does your environment influence your way of life?* using what you have learned throughout this lesson.

Let's get started! This map of North America is divided into different regions including the Arctic, California, Great Basin, Great Plains, Northwest Coast, Northeast Woodlands, Plateau, Southeast, Southwest, and Subarctic regions. You will be exploring several of the regions in the American West such as the Great Plains, Northwest Coast, and Southwest regions. Find and circle the Great Plains, Northwest Coast, and Southwest regions on this map.



The locations of the regions depicted on this map are approximations.

Glossary

Ancestors: family members who lived in the past

Culture: a way of life for a group of people including their beliefs, customs, and traditions

Depend: need help from someone or something

Environment: the surroundings or conditions in which people, plants, and animals live

Ethnicity: a group of people who have similar customs, religion, and/or origin in common

Race: any one of the groups that people are often separated into based on physical traits or ancestry

Regions: different areas of land that are separate from one another

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PART 1 – The Northwest Coast region stretches from the bottom of Alaska, through Canada, Washington, and Oregon to the top of California. Let’s explore the environment in the Northwest Coast region. An environment includes the natural surroundings such as deserts, forests, grasslands, lakes, mountains, oceans, and rivers in which people, plants, and animals live. Look closely at this image from the Autry Museum that shows the environment in the Northwest Coast region. Do you see the forest? The forest is part of the environment in the Northwest Coast region. What else do you see in this environment?



Describe what you see in this environment. Write what you see in the space below or on a separate document.

I see forests, _____

An environment also includes the conditions, such as climate, in which people, plants, and animals live. Climate is the weather over a long period of time. Look closely at the image that shows the environment in the Northwest Coast region a second time. How would you describe the climate? Does it look dry or wet? Does it look hot, warm, cool, or cold? Describe the climate in the Northwest Coast region. Write a description in the space below or on a separate document.

The climate in the Northwest Coast region is _____

In addition to forests, the environment in the Northwest Coast region includes lakes, mountains, and rivers. Part of the Northwest Coast region is also next to the Pacific Ocean. The climate in this region is generally cool and wet. It rains a lot there. The environment in the Northwest Coast region influences the way the Native American communities such as the Haida live. The Haida are a Native American tribe from the Northwest Coast region. They have depended on the natural resources available in their environment for thousands of years. Natural resources are anything from nature that people use like animals, plants, rocks, or water. Trees are an example of a natural resource that can be found in the forests of the Northwest Coast region.

Look at the image that shows the environment in the Northwest Coast region again. What other natural resources do you see in this region? Write the names of these natural resources in the space below or on a separate document.

Some natural resources in the Northwest Coast region are trees, _____

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PART 2 – The Native American communities living in the Northwest Coast region have made clothes, food, homes, and tools out of **traded** items and the natural resources available in their environment. The cedar tree is a natural resource that has been, and continues to be, important to different Native American communities living in the Northwest Coast region. Look closely at this image of a cedar tree from the Autry Museum. What do you think cedar trees can be used for?



Write what you think cedar trees can be used for in the space below or on a separate document.

I think cedar trees can be used for _____



Cedar trees provide different Native American communities in the Northwest Coast region with many things such as baskets, blankets, canoes, containers, homes, paddles, and house posts. The house posts in these images from the Autry Museum are artifacts. Artifacts are objects made by people. These house posts were carved out of cedar wood and painted. The paint was also made out of natural resources. These house posts were found in a Haida home. They are a type of totem pole that tell the history of a family and feature animals. Many Native American people continue to make totem poles today.



Glossary

Provide: give

Traded: switched or exchanged one item for another item

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PART 3 – The house posts in **PART 2** feature animals. Native American communities in the Northwest Coast region have close connections to animals. Animals such as bears, birds, whales, and wolves are important to both the Haida and Tlingit communities. The Tlingit are another Native American tribe from the Northwest Coast region. A **contemporary** artist named Preston Singletary is part of the Tlingit community. Preston Singletary made the glass rattle **sculpture** in this image from the Autry Museum. The rattle includes animals.

Look closely at the glass rattle sculpture in this image. What do you notice about this sculpture? What animals do you see? What else do you see?



Describe what you notice about the glass rattle sculpture. Write your descriptions in the space below or on a separate document.

One thing that I notice about the glass rattle sculpture is _____

A second thing that I notice about the glass rattle sculpture is _____

A third thing that I notice about the glass rattle sculpture is _____

This glass rattle sculpture has designs carved on the body of a bird. It represents the relationship between animals and humans like **traditional** rattles did.

Glossary

Contemporary: modern

Represents: serves as a sign or symbol of something

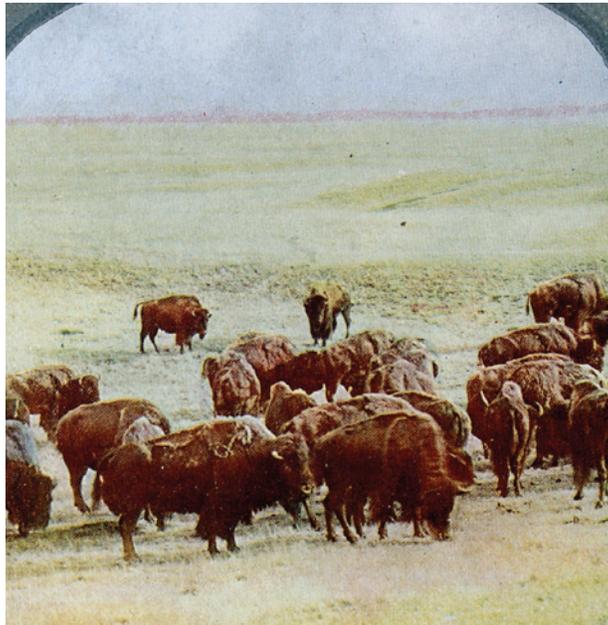
Sculpture: a 3D artwork made out of materials that are used in an interesting way

Traditional: handed down information, beliefs, or customs from one generation to the next generation

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PART 1 – The Great Plains region is located in the middle of the United States and in parts of Canada. Let’s explore the environment in the Great Plains region next. Look closely at this image from the Autry Museum that shows the environment in the Great Plains region. What do you see in this environment? Do you see deserts, forests, grasslands, lakes, mountains, oceans, or rivers?



Describe what you see in this environment. Write what you see in the space below or on a separate document.

I see _____

Look closely at the image that shows the environment in the Great Plains region a second time. How would you describe the climate? Does it look dry or wet? Does it look hot, warm, cool, or cold? Describe the climate in the Great Plains region. Write a description in the space below or on a separate document.

The climate in the Great Plains region is _____

The environment in the Great Plains region includes grasslands. Grasslands are areas of land that are covered with grass or grass-like plants. The climate in this region ranges from hot to cold. The environment in the Great Plains region influences the way Native American communities such as the Lakota live. The Lakota are a Native American community from the Great Plains region. They have depended on the natural resources available in their environment for thousands of years. Grass is an example of a natural resource that can be found in the grasslands of the Great Plains region.

Look at the image that shows the environment in the Great Plains region one more time. What other natural resources do you see in the Great Plains region? Do you see natural resources such as animals, plants, rocks, or water? Write the names of these natural resources in the space below or on a separate document.

Some natural resources in the Great Plains region are grass, _____

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PART 2 – The Native American communities living in the Great Plains region have also made clothes, food, homes, and tools out of traded items and the natural resources available in their environment. The bison is a natural resource that has been, and continues to be, important to different Native American communities living in the Great Plains region. Look closely at this image of a bison from the Autry Museum. What do you think bison can be used for?



Write what you think bison can be used for in the space below or on a separate document.

I think bison can be used for _____

Bison provide different Native American communities in the Great Plains region with many things. Bison meat provides food. Their bones can be used for tools. Bison skin could be used to make clothes, homes called tipis, and other things. Even containers, tools, and additional items could be made from bison horns. The Lakota drinking vessel in this image is from the Autry Museum. It is an artifact that was made out of bison horn.



Glossary

Vessel: something that contains or holds something else

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PART 3 – The bag with handles in this image is from the Autry Museum. Look closely at the bag in this image. It features bison. What else do you notice about this bag?



Describe what you notice about the bag. Write your descriptions in the space below or on a separate document.

One thing that I notice about the bag is _____

A second thing that I notice about the bag is _____

A third thing that I notice about the bag is _____

A contemporary artist named Joyce Growing Thunder Fogarty is part of the Sioux - Assiniboine community. Joyce Growing Thunder Fogarty made the bag in the image out of **leather**. The bag has beaded flowers and bison on it. The bison continues to be important to different Native American communities living in the Great Plains region today.

Glossary

Leather: a material made from animal skin

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PART 1 – The Southwest region is located in parts of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Mexico. Let’s explore the environment in the Southwest region too. Look closely at this image from the Autry Museum that shows the environment in the Southwest region. What do you see in this environment? Do you see deserts, forests, grasslands, lakes, mountains, oceans, or rivers?



Describe what you see in this environment. Write what you see in the space below or on a separate document.

I see _____

Look closely at the image that shows the environment in the Southwest region a second time. How would you describe the climate? Does it look dry or wet? Does it look hot, warm, cool, or cold? Describe the climate in the Southwest region. Write a description in the space below or on a separate document.

The climate in the Southwest region is _____

The environment in the Southwest region includes desert. The climate in this region is generally dry and hot. It does not rain a lot there. The environment in the Southwest region influences the way the Native American communities such as the Diné (Navajo) live. The Diné (Navajo) are a Native American **nation** from the Southwest region. They have depended on the natural resources available in their environment for thousands of years. A plant is an example of a natural resource that can be found in the desert of the Southwest region.

Look at the image that shows the environment in the Southwest region one more time. What other natural resources do you see in the Southwest region? Do you see natural resources such as animals, plants, rocks, or water? Write the names of these natural resources in the space below or on a separate document.

Some natural resources in the Southwest region are plants, _____

Glossary

Nation: a Native American tribe or a community of Native American tribes

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PART 2 – The Native American communities living in the Southwest region have also made clothes, food, homes, and tools out of traded items and the natural resources available in their environment. A sheep is a natural resource that has been, and continues to be, important to different Native American communities living in the Southwest region. Sheep were first brought to this region by **Spaniards** hundreds of years ago. Look closely at this image of sheep from the Autry Museum. What do you think sheep can be used for?



Write what you think sheep can be used for in the space below or on a separate document.

I think sheep can be used for _____

Sheep provide different Native American communities in the Southwest region with many things such as food, spoons, tools, and blankets. The blanket in this image from the Autry Museum is a Navajo blanket. It is an artifact made from wool. Wool is sheep hair. Many Diné (Navajo) people continue to weave blankets today.



Glossary

Spaniards: people from a country called Spain

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PART 3 – A Navajo blanket is an example of a textile. A textile is a woven work of art. The textile in this image is from the Autry Museum. Look closely at the textile in this image. What do you notice about this textile?



Describe what you notice about the textile. Write your descriptions in the space below or on a separate document.

One thing that I notice about the textile is _____

A second thing that I notice about the textile is _____

A third thing that I notice about the textile is _____

This textile has an eye-dazzler pattern, which means it is colorful and full of patterns. The textile was made by a contemporary artist named Melissa Cody. Melissa Cody is a weaver who is part of the Diné (Navajo) community. Weaving continues to be a part of the Diné (Navajo) culture. It is passed from generation to generation.

Glossary

Generation: a group of people who were born and living around the same time

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PART 1 – Now answer the question *How does your environment influence your way of life?* by writing a paragraph about how the environments in the three different regions that you learned about in this lesson influence the way some of the Native American communities in these regions live. Plan your paragraph before writing it by answering the questions in the chart below. Write detailed answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

PARAGRAPH PLAN QUESTIONS	MY PARAGRAPH PLAN
What is the first region that you learned about in this lesson? (Hint: Look on page 3.)	
How would you describe the environment (climate/natural surroundings) in this region? (Hint: Look on page 3.)	
What is an example of a natural resource in this environment? (Hint: Look on page 4.)	
What does this natural resource provide for some of the Native American communities in this region? (Hint: Look on page 4.)	
What is the second region that you learned about in this lesson? (Hint: Look on page 6.)	
How would you describe the environment (climate/natural surroundings) in this region? (Hint: Look on page 6.)	
What is an example of a natural resource in this environment? (Hint: Look on page 7.)	
What does this natural resource provide for some of the Native American communities in this region? (Hint: Look on page 7.)	
What is the third region that you learned about in this lesson? (Hint: Look on page 9.)	
How would you describe the environment (climate/natural surroundings) in this region? (Hint: Look on page 9.)	
What is an example of a natural resource in this environment? (Hint: Look on page 10.)	
What does this natural resource provide for some of the Native American communities in this region? (Hint: Look on page 10.)	

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PART 2 – Using My Paragraph Plan from PART 1, write a paragraph about how the environments in the three different regions that you learned about in this lesson influence the way some of the Native American communities in these regions live. Write your paragraph in the space below or on a separate document. Please include a title.

Title: _____

The first region that I learned about is the _____

The best way to describe the environment in this region is _____

A natural resource from this environment is a/an _____

This natural resource provides some of the Native American communities in this region with _____

The second region that I learned about is the _____

The best way to describe the environment in this region is _____

A natural resource from this environment is a/an _____

This natural resource provides some of the Native American communities in this region with _____

The third region that I learned about is the _____

The best way to describe the environment in this region is _____

A natural resource from this environment is a/an _____

This natural resource provides some of the Native American communities in this region with _____

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PART 3 – Let’s explore the environment that you live in. Think about what the environment you live in looks like. Your indoor environment can include the inside of your home. Your outdoor environment can include the area outside of your home. Draw a picture of your indoor environment, outdoor environment, or both environments in the space below or on a separate document.

MY ENVIRONMENT

PART 4 – Look at the picture that you drew of the environment you live in. Think about the natural resources that are in the environment you live in. Natural resources are anything from nature that people use like animals, plants, rocks, or water. Draw some of these natural resources in your picture. Then write the names of these natural resources near the natural resources that you drew.

PART 5 – Look at the picture that you drew of the environment you live in again. Think about the artifacts that are in the environment you live in. Artifacts are objects made by people. Draw some of these artifacts in your picture. Then write the names of these artifacts near the artifacts that you drew.

PART 6 – Describe what your picture shows in the space below or on a separate document.

My picture shows _____

PART 7 – Share your picture and your description with someone else.

Resources

Images

Bag with handles, made by Joyce Growing Thunder-Fogarty (Assiniboine/Sioux), leather decorated with beaded floral and animal design, circa 2011. Purchased by the 2011 Gold-Level Member Acquisitions Committee, Autry Museum; 2011.47.2

Bison display, photo by Sarah Wilson, 2020

Cheyenne or possibly Sioux drinking vessel, bison horn decorated with quill wrapped rawhide and feathers, 1890s. These types of horns were made for sale to non-Indians. Autry Museum; 630.G.145

Haida house post, one of a pair, carved and painted wood, Prince of Wales Island, Alaska, circa 1860. Gift of the Citizen's National Trust and Savings Bank, Autry Museum; 757.G.1

Haida house post, one of a pair, carved and painted wood, Prince of Wales Island, Alaska, circa 1860. Gift of the Citizen's National Trust and Savings Bank, Autry Museum; 757.G.2

Lantern slide of a cedar tree damaged by fire or disease, Southern California, late 1800s to mid-1900s. Autry Museum; LS.12490

Lantern slide of Cameron Lake, Vancouver Island, Canada, late 1800s to mid-1900s. Autry Museum; LS.12727

Navajo (Dine) blanket, first phase chief-style (beeldlei or hanolchadi), 1880-1910. Gift of Dr. Fred K. Hinchman, Autry Museum; 535.G.627

North America Map Illustration by Alban Cooper

Photograph by William Marion Pennington, a Navajo woman herding sheep, Navajo Reservation, (early) 1900s. Autry Museum; P.49188

Sculpture by Preston Singletary, *Balance of Power*, circa 2007. Purchased by the Gold-level Member Acquisitions Committee, 2008, Autry Museum; 2008.11.1

Stereoview photograph, title "A Bunch of Buffalo on the Plains", approximately 1890-1940. Autry Museum; 90.253.1764.1

Textile titled "Fixed Frequencies", made by Melissa S. Cody (Diné (Navajo)), 2014. Autry Museum; 2014.40.1

Text

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Do you want to see the work that you created on our Instagram or Twitter?

Ask an adult to send your picture and your description along with your name and your age to outreach@theautry.org for a chance to be featured on our social media! Accepting work from students of all ages. Must be 18-years or older to submit.