

From Nomad to Farmer

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Science



Many historians and scientists believe that the earliest people in North America may have traveled here from the continent of Asia many thousands of years ago. At that time, Earth was experiencing an Ice Age. Much of the water that separates the northern parts of Asia and North America would have been frozen at the time. It may have formed an ice bridge that people were able to walk across. Perhaps they were hunters following their food. Perhaps they were adventurous and wanted to explore. We do not know for sure. Their migration to North America, however, may make them the ancestors of the people we call Native Americans.

We do know that the earliest North Americans were nomads. They traveled from place to place instead of settling in one place. Eventually, these nomads began to establish permanent settlements. They had already learned to gather plants growing in the wild. After a time, they began to learn about agriculture. Agriculture is raising plants and animals for human use. With more reliable sources for food, they didn't need to move around so much.

As they began to look for more permanent homes, they paid attention to the resources of specific locations. They wanted to live near water sources, such as streams or rivers. This helped ensure that they could water their crops and take care of the water needs of humans and animals. It's not surprising, then, to discover that most early villages were located very close to water sources.

People moved around less often than before. However, they were still slowly migrating to other areas. Every time a group or tribe moved into a different natural environment they had to adapt to the climate and resources of that area. The clothing they wore, the kind of houses they built and even the kind of food that they ate depended upon the region in which they lived. Over time, four major cultural regions developed in North America: the Eastern Woodlands, the Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest, and the Desert Southwest.

Name _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) The "ice bridge" theory has never been proven, but could be true. Do you think it is a reasonable explanation for how Native Americans came to North America?

2) What might be a benefit of living life as a nomad?

3) Besides having a fresh water source, how could living by the river meet the tribe's needs?

4) Why did tribes in different areas live in different kinds of houses?

5) In which of the four cultural regions would you choose to build a home? Explain your choice.
