Customs & Traditions

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Science



Native American Indian groups in North America lived in different cultural regions, each of which developed its own customs and traditions. A custom is the specific way in which a group of people does something. This can include how foods are prepared, what clothing is worn, the kinds of celebrations and much more. The set of customs developed and shared by a culture over time is a tradition.

A culture's customs are often determined by the natural resources found in their environment. In the Desert Southwest region, cloth weaving developed as a custom. The area has fewer large animals whose skins can be used for making clothing or blankets. Cloth weaving was a way of meeting the need for clothing without using animal skins. In the Eastern Woodlands area, however, hunting and fi shing were daily activities. Since it was easy to get animal skins, developing skills like weaving were less important.

The traditional roles of men and women in the native tribes varied as well. In hunting cultures, men were often away from home during the day to hunt animals for food. Women did many chores around the village while they were gone. In cultures where crops were grown, it was usually the men who tended them.

Folklore was an important part of all Native American cultures. They had no written language. Telling the tribe's stories orally was the way they preserved them from generation to generation so they would not be lost. The tribe used chanting, storytelling and singing as a way to remember the tribe's folklore. The stories told the tribe's history, funny adventures and accomplishments. Folklore also helped unite the people of the tribe.

Religion was an important part of Native American cultures.

The celebration of the tribe's faith and worship often involved special ceremonies. Harvest ceremonies were a common way to give thanks to the tribe's gods for a good crop. Other ceremonies combined religious songs and dances with social activities. The ceremonies reinforced the people's trust in their leaders' ability to provide for their needs.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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) What is a custom?

_____

_____

2) What are the ways that Native Americans told their stories?

_____

_____

3) Contrast what you have learned about the historic Native American cultures and what you know about your own culture. How are they different? _____

_____ _____

4) In your own words, explain the importance of folklore.

_____

_____

Explain why some tribes developed weaving:

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS