native americans
A HISTORY LESSON IN 10 PAGES OR LESS
colorado tribes

From the Loveland Museum collection: Arapaho Camp 1870
The indigenous or native peoples who first lived on the Great Central Plains of North America were comprised of thirty-one tribes. At the height of their size and strength in the early 1800s they numbered around 200,000 people. As a rule, a tribe would stay in its own area except during warfare and trading. There were three major tribes in the area now known as Colorado: the Cheyenne, the Arapaho and the Ute.

The Cheyenne and the Arapaho were the two dominant tribes in the plains area of Colorado. Both tribes were similar to each other but very different also. They had different languages and could not understand one another, and their cultures were very different. Similarly though, they were both large game hunters who depended greatly on the buffalo as their central source of clothing, food, tools and ceremonial celebration.

The third major tribe of Colorado was the Ute. They lived in the mountains of Colorado and were the oldest and largest modern tribe of the mountain natives. They once occupied all of the mountainous lands of Colorado, over one-half of the state. They followed a peaceful way of life until the 1800s. They were hunters, gatherers, and were adept at basketry and made some undecorated earthen ware. Their culture was very different from that of the Cheyenne and Arapaho and often these differences caused wars amongst them.
The tribe that we will focus on in this lesson will be the Arapaho. Historians believe that Arapaho tribes came to the plains of Colorado beginning in the early 1800s. The Arapaho first lived in the Great Lakes region but some moved west toward the Rocky Mountains.

Arapaho were originally corn farmers as well as hunters. The Arapaho were nomadic and followed the American Bison (buffalo) herds. The tribes moved their camps around from place to place and did not stay in one spot for long. Their quest for food and supplies made them some of the first people to live off the land in this area of Colorado and they found rich natural resources wherever they moved along the plains.

They lived on the plains in areas that we now know as Sterling, Greeley, Fort Collins, Windsor, Loveland and other surrounding towns, because of the central location, great rivers and flat terrain.

The Arapaho hunted the buffalo with bows and arrows. They used most every part of the animal they could for food and other supplies such as clothing, tools and other items that were used in their camps.

The Arapaho also hunted for antelope and deer. All of these animals move a lot to find the best sources of drinking water, so the Arapaho moved along the many rivers and streams in the region. The Arapaho used the water to drink, cook, wash and find animals.

Map Source: http://www.learner.org/interactives/historymap/indians.html
ACTIVITY ONE

What did you learn?

Have the student write answers on a piece of paper.

What is a natural resource? Name several natural resources that you can think of...

What does it mean to “live off the land?”

What would a difference be in the natural resources found on the plains versus in the mountains? (different animals, different plants, different trees?)

What does it mean to be nomadic?

Why did the Arapaho move around so much?

ACTIVITY TWO

The American Buffalo

Look at the graphic on next page, as you read this section.

The Arapaho depended greatly on the buffalo for a variety of tools and food. Their clothing, food, shelter, cooking utensils, weapons, and decorative items were all made from buffalo in some form or fashion. Almost every part of a buffalo could be used.

The buffalo were also sacred to the Arapaho and other Native American tribes. Holy men had visions when they practiced medicine and performed healing ceremonies- visions where they would seek to communicate with the Great Spirit through the buffalo. This might be done by prayer spoken to a living buffalo or by the ritualistic use of buffalo parts such as the skull. Their medicine bundles would always feature parts of the buffalo and/or stones associated in the mind of the holy man with the buffalo.

If a child's name included the word "buffalo" in it, the Native Americans believed that the child would be especially strong and would mature quickly. Although a name in itself is not the guarantee of an automatic transformation, a "buffalo" child usually fulfilled the expectations of others by striving to accomplish what his name implied.

Public domain image (pexels.com)
The Arapaho

ACTIVITY TWO

The American Buffalo

What are the things you recognize that make sense to use?

What things are odd to you?

What buffalo part would you want to try to use?

ACTIVITY THREE

The Arapaho

Look at the photo:

What is their tipi made from?

What are their clothes made from?

What else can you say about the picture?

From the History Colorado Collection, Arapaho family
Tipi

A tipi (sometimes seen as teepee or tepee) is a tent, traditionally made from animal skin and wooden poles. Tipi’s were used by the Arapaho because they were warm and easy to fold up for travel.

On the next page, you will find a template to make a tipi from paper. If you cannot print this template, think of other ways you might be able to build one.

Trade and Beads

Native Americans lived off of the land, meaning that they had to FIND or MAKE what they needed to live. However as new settlers started moving to Colorado, Native Americans were able to get things that were made in other places. Items were exchanged in a trade instead of using currency or money.

What types of thing do you think they traded for? (Sample answers: tools and weapons made from steel, horses, beads, bells).

One of the most popular items they would trade for was beads. Native Americans originally used bone and quills as beads, but later traded pioneers and explorers for colorful trade beads, made from glass and ceramic. They would use these beads to make amazing decorations on their clothing, moccasins (shoes) and other ceremonial items. Beadwork is a form of artistry to Native Americans and they would use trade beads to weave complex patterns.

Younger kids: Time to trade! Find things that you are willing to trade for fun, or for something else in the house. For example, find something you are willing to get rid of in your room and trade it with a family member. OR, set up a trading post for fun and see who will trade with you in your house! Be creative!

Older kids: Read more online about the Arapaho tribes and their beadwork. Sketch some of the designs you find or write about what you find.
Materials:
- brown construction paper
- crayons or markers
- scissors
- glue
- pencil

Directions:
- Copy pattern on brown construction paper.
- Draw Native American designs and symbols.
- Fold along dotted lines.
- Glue Tab A to Tab B on the inside of tipi.
- Cut a flap for the door. Add sticks from nature for the poles.
ACTIVITY SIX

The directions below can be modified for whatever materials you might be able to find at home. Be creative!

Drums With Paper and Cloth Drumhead

Materials:
• heavy brown paper sack
• scissors
• cheesecloth
• pencil
• ruler
• shellac
• brush
• wrapping twine
• rubber band
• coffee can for frame (open at both ends)
• can opener

Directions:
1. Use a can opener to remove the bottom from a coffee can so it is open at both ends.

2. Cut a heavy brown paper sack open and spread it flat.

3. Center the coffee can on the paper sack and trace around it.

4. Using a ruler and a pencil, make marks 2" (5 cm) outside the circle. Join these marks, making a second, larger circle. Cut out this larger circle.

5. Using the paper circle as a pattern, cut a matching circle from the cheesecloth.

6. Hold the paper and cheesecloth circles together under running water to dampen them.

7. Place the cheesecloth circle on top of the paper circle. Put both circles on top of the coffee can. Hold them in place with a rubber band.

8. Tie wrapping twine tightly over the rubber band. Leave a loop for a handle if desired.

9. Allow the paper and cheesecloth circles to dry thoroughly.

10. Apply 3 coats of shellac to the drumhead, allowing it to dry after each coat. (White glue may be used instead of shellac, but the sound is not as resonant.)

11. Decorate the drum with Native American symbols and designs.

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Ceremonial Dances Summer Holidays
Many of the Native American tribes had different spoken language, making it difficult for them to understand each other or the pioneers and homesteaders they encountered. Many times, they would need to use sign language to communicate.

Look at the samples of sign language below, or look up other samples online.

Can you create your own sign language?