



What might this have been used for, and how was it made?



What might this dog be carrying?



What type of animal skin might this coat be made from?





# Native Americans and Their Land

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about Native Americans, the first people to live in North America. You will learn where Native Americans came from, where they chose to live, and why they established different ways of life.

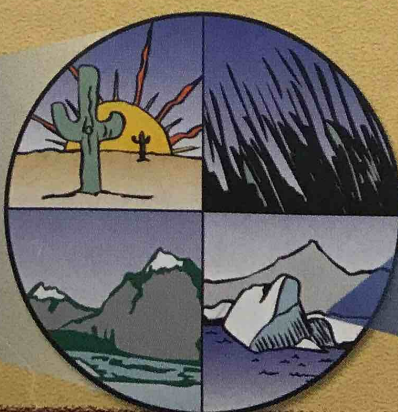
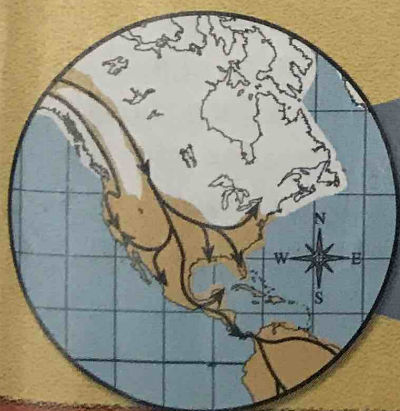
Most Native Americans tell **origin stories** to explain where they came from. In this chapter, you will read one of these stories.

Another idea about the origin of Native Americans is the theory of migration. Scientists believe that Native Americans first migrated (moved) into the Americas from the continent of Asia thousands of years ago. Over hundreds of years, they followed several **migration routes** into different parts of the Americas.

Native Americans migrated into many different **environments**. You will read about four of the environments in which they lived. One of these, the ice fields of the Arctic, was home to the Inuit people. You will discover how these Native Americans learned to **adapt**, or adjust, to that environment.

Have you ever looked through the zoom lens of a camera? A zoom lens lets you look more closely at the parts of a scene. The drawing below shows how reading this chapter is like looking through a zoom lens. You will begin with a view of Native Americans' migration to North America. Then you will zoom in on four environments in North America. Finally, you will take a close-up look at how the Inuit adapted to life in the Arctic.

## Native Americans Adapted to the Environments of the Americas



**goddesses:** female spirits who control parts of the world

## 2.2 Native American Origin Stories

Storytelling has always been important to Native Americans. Native Americans told stories to entertain one another and to teach about their beliefs and ways of life.

Some of these stories, called *origin stories*, tell how the Earth and its people came to be. Here is an origin story from the Hopis. This group of Native Americans lived in the Southwest, in what is now the state of Arizona.

### Hopi Origin Story

In the beginning, the Earth was covered with water. There were no animals or birds. Only spirits, gods, and **goddesses** lived inside the dark Earth. One day, the goddesses of the East and West decided to create a living creature. They made a bird from clay. The bird flew all around the Earth but could find no other life. Seeing how lonesome the bird was, the goddesses made humans to keep it company.

At first, the people lived happily inside the Earth. After a while, however, the rains stopped, and the crops failed. People began to argue with one another. The worried chiefs decided the people needed to leave the Earth's dark inside. One leader found

a ladder that led to a hole in the Earth's crust. The chiefs guided their people up the ladder to the Earth's surface.

Once there, the people did not know where they should settle, so each chief set out in a different direction with his followers. They traveled east, west, north, and south until they found good land upon which they could grow crops and build villages. This is how it all began for the Hopis.



Hopi women gather at a watering hole in the dry southwestern desert. The Hopi believe the Earth was created by goddesses.

## 2.3 Migration Routes of the First Americans

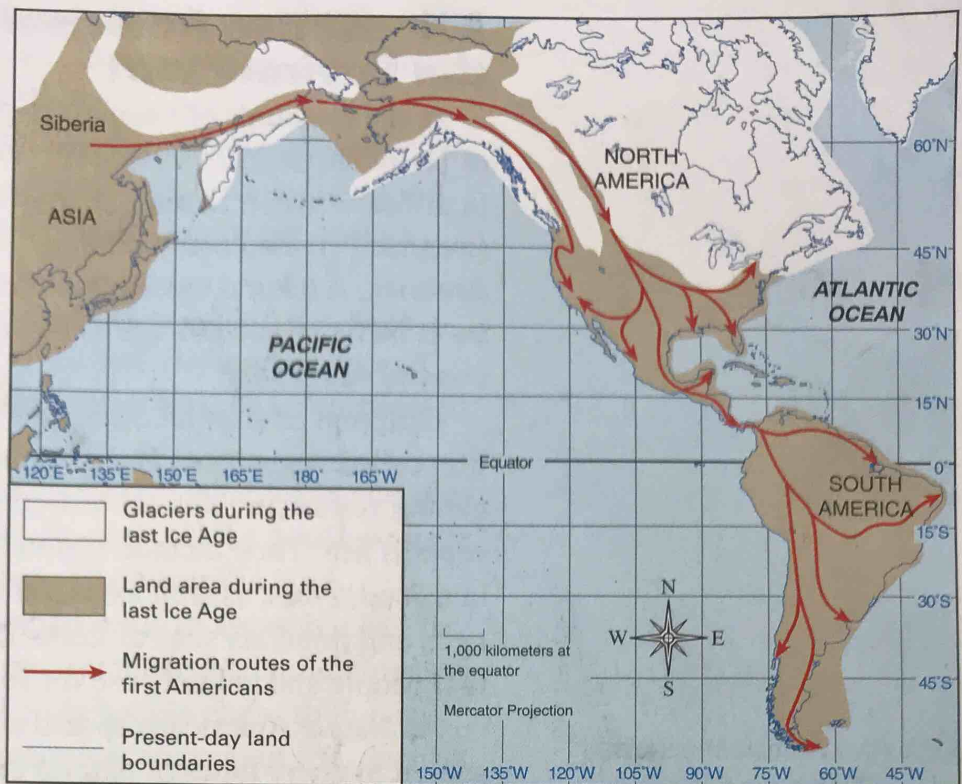
Today, most scientists agree that the first people in North America came from the continent of Asia at least 15,000 years ago. This **migration** happened during the last Ice Age. An Ice Age is a long period when much of the Earth's surface is covered with ice.

The last Ice Age began about 30,000 years ago and ended about 10,000 years ago. During that time, Asia and North America were not separated by the Bering Sea, as they are today. Instead, they were connected by a bridge of land almost 1,000 miles wide.

Most scientists believe that the first **migrants** were people from Siberia, called *Siberians*. The Siberians lived in northeastern Asia. They hunted **big game** such as mammoth (a large elephant-like animal), bison (also called *buffalo*), and caribou (reindeer).

Scientists believe that these large animals fed on the grassy surface of the land bridge. Over many years, they eventually wandered across it. Small groups of Siberian hunters followed the animals. In time they moved all the way to North America. Other Siberians may have reached North America by traveling along the southern coast of the land bridge in small boats.

For hundreds of years, Native Americans continued to hunt big game, following the animals south into North and South America. Some groups settled in different parts of these continents. Some Native Americans kept moving until they reached the southern tip of South America. The migrants' paths to their new homes are called *migration routes*.



Scientists believe that people followed these migration routes from Asia into the Americas at least 15,000 years ago.

**migration:** a movement of people from one country or area of the world to a new home in another country or area

**migrants:** people who move (migrate) from one country or area of the world to a new home in another country or area

**big game:** Large animals that are hunted for their flesh, skins, and other valuable body parts. ("Game" is another word for hunted animals.)

## 2.4 Native Americans and the Environment

In the hundreds of years following the last Ice Age, groups of Native Americans eventually stopped migrating and settled in different areas. During this time, changes in climate (weather) created many kinds of natural environments in North America. A natural environment is everything that surrounds us. It includes such things as sunlight, air, water, land, animals, insects, and plants.

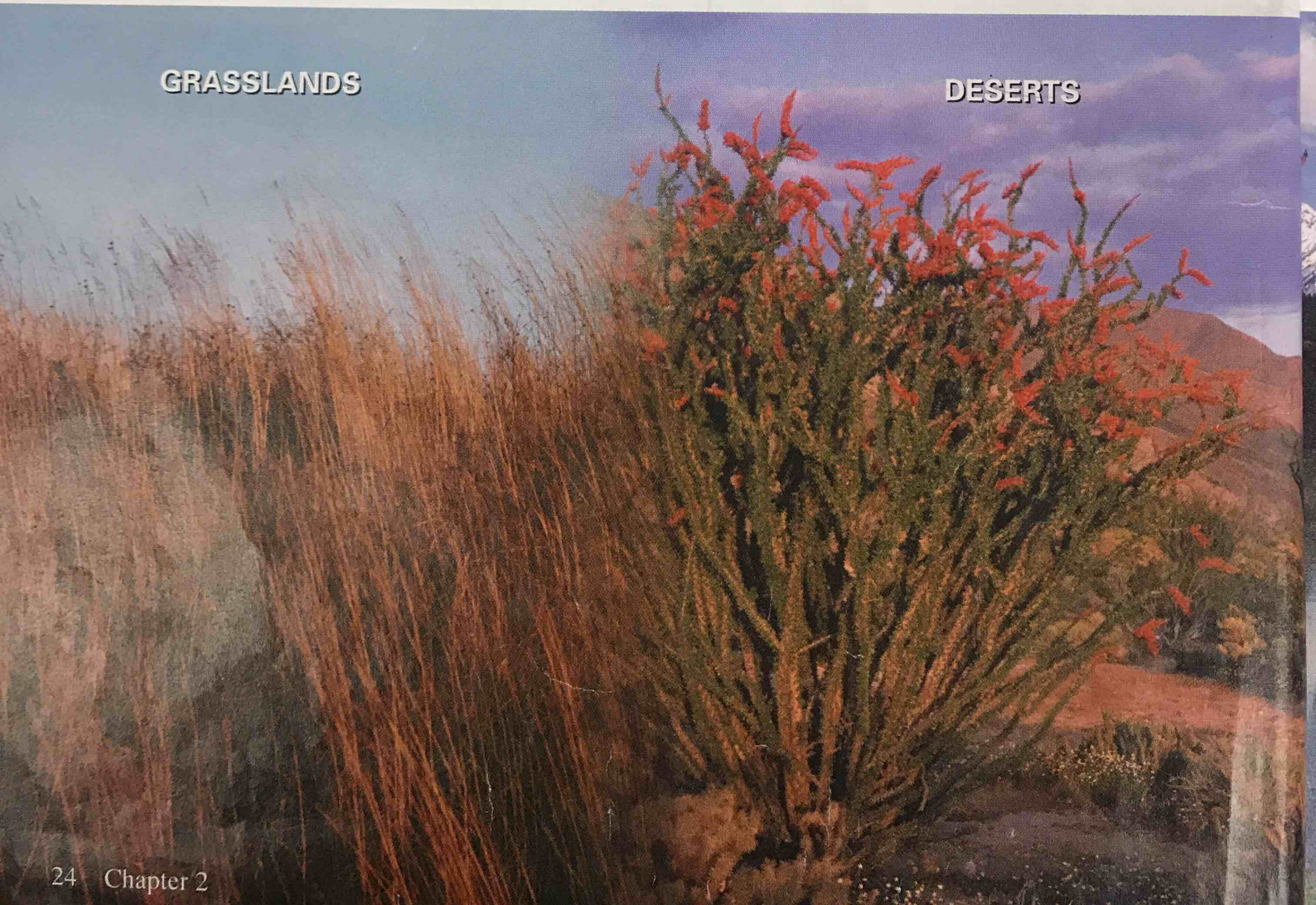
Different environments have different climates and plant life, called *vegetation*. Every environment also has its own natural resources. Natural resources are things that help to support life. They include features of the land, such as mountains and rivers, as well as useful materials like timber from trees and minerals such as copper. They also include everything that people and animals use for food.

As Native Americans spread across North America, they settled in many types of natural environments. Look at the four natural environments pictured below. What do these images tell you about each environment's climate, vegetation, and natural resources?

As Native Americans spread across North America they settled in many types of environments, including the four pictured here.

GRASSLANDS

DESERTS



One environment Native Americans settled in was the grasslands. Most grasslands in North America get only enough rain to support grass and small bushes.

A second type of environment Native Americans settled in was the deserts. Deserts get very little rain. People living in desert areas must often dig wells and ditches to get enough water for drinking and raising crops.

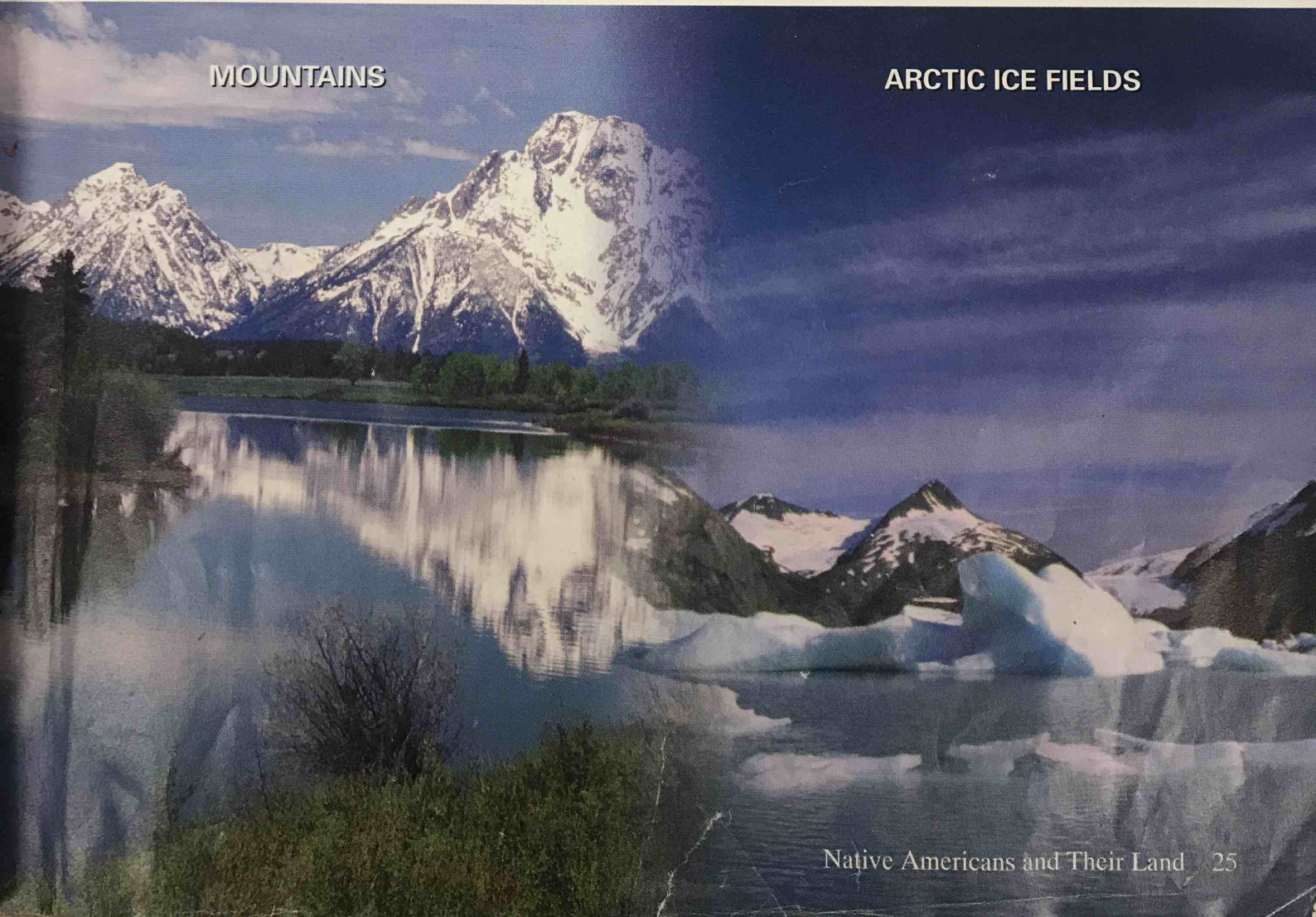
A third environment Native Americans settled in was the mountains. The mountains of North America receive lots of rain and snow. The lower parts of mountains are often covered by forests of pine, fir, and spruce trees.

A fourth environment settled by Native Americans was the ice fields of the Arctic. Near the North Pole, the Arctic is made up of huge ice sheets that permanently cover the land.

Most Native Americans chose to settle in areas that had the most natural resources. These environments had mild climates and plenty of food and water. Fewer people chose to live in areas where there were fewer resources to support life, such as the desert environment of the Southwest and the icy environment of the Arctic.

**MOUNTAINS**

**ARCTIC ICE FIELDS**





Here, an Inuit family sits in front of their camp at Plover Bay in northern Alaska. Inflated seal skins hang from the wooden poles on the tent frame. The Inuit attached inflated seal skins to harpoons and used them as floats.

## 2.5 Native American Adaptations to the Environment

Native Americans had to adapt their way of life to their surroundings. Each group had to find ways to use the available natural resources wisely so that it could survive in its particular environment.

One group that lived in a very harsh environment was the Inuit (IN-oo-it), who are also known as Eskimos. Like many Native Americans, the Inuit called themselves by a name that means “the people.” The Inuit lived in northwestern Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland, places that are part of the Arctic. The Arctic ice fields are a place of long, cold winters and land that is frozen most of the year.

The Inuit had to make special **adaptations** to their harsh environment. They hunted animals such as whales, walrus, seals, salmon, caribou, polar bears, Arctic foxes, squirrels, and birds. The Inuit did not waste any part of the animals they captured. They ate the meat. They sewed animal skins together to make clothing, blankets, and tents. They burned animal fat for fuel. They used bones to make dogsleds and tent frames.

**adaptations:** changes in a way of life that allow people to survive in a particular environment

They also carved bones into tools such as knives and harpoons (long spears).

The Inuit even learned to fill seal skins with air so that they would float. They attached the skins to walrus or whales that they had harpooned. These “floats” helped to tire out the animals when they tried to escape by diving under water.

To build shelters, the Inuit used the materials that they found around them. In the summer, they made tents by stretching the skins of caribou or seals over **driftwood**. Sometimes they placed heavy stones or pieces of bone at the bottom of a tent to keep it in place. In the winter, they built houses, called *igloos*, out of snow and ice.

To keep warm, the Inuit dressed in animal skins and furs. To protect their eyes from the bright glare of the sun shining on snow and ice, they made snow goggles. Snow goggles were made from bone or wood and had narrow openings to look through. The Inuit spread black soot (ashes from fires) on the inside to keep light from shining in their eyes.

**driftwood:** wood that has washed up onto the shores of rivers or oceans

## 2.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the first people who lived in North America. You used the idea of a zoom lens to take a closer look at Native Americans and their surroundings.

The first Native Americans came to North America from Asia during the last Ice Age. Over hundreds of years, Native Americans migrated to many different environments in North and South America.

Wherever Native Americans settled, they had to adapt to their environment. You “zoomed in” on four environments to compare their climates, vegetation, and natural resources.

The Inuit were a group of Native Americans who lived in the Arctic environment. Using the natural resources they found around them, the Inuit made several adaptations to this harsh environment in order to survive.

For thousands of years, groups of Native Americans were the only people in North America. How were their ways of life similar and different? How were they able to adapt to the very different environments you read about in this chapter? You will find out in the next chapter.