



◀ Pacific Northwest Indians celebrate at potlatches like this one.

that plants and animals, like people, were alive and had rights, which had to be honored.

To honor their family histories, Pacific Northwest Indians made **totem poles**. Totem poles are tall logs that are carved and painted with symbols of animals or people, called totems. The totem poles often told stories about the family or family members.

To mark an important event, such as a wedding or the appointment of a new chief, a family sometimes held a **potlatch**. Potlatches are special feasts at which the guests, not the hosts, receive gifts. The host might give out hundreds of gifts at the feast, and the feast could last for several days. In return, the host received the respect of the community. Today, potlatches remain an important Pacific Northwest tradition.

Pacific Northwest 5.1.2 5.1.3

Pacific Northwest Indians live on the coastal lands from what is now southeastern Alaska to northern California. The narrow coastline and offshore islands of the area provide many plants and seafood for the people who live there.

Pacific Northwest Indians made good use of the forests around them. They cut down trees to make canoes and homes and to carve wooden items such as boxes, dishes, spoons, and masks. The Pacific Northwest Indians cut down only the trees they needed. These Indians believed

The Makah

Much of what we know about the cultures of Pre-Columbian Native Americans comes from artifacts. Most of what we know about the Makah came from artifacts found at Ozette.

Ozette is located on the Olympic Peninsula in what is now Washington State. Hundreds of years ago, a mudslide buried the Makah village there. In the 1960s, erosion caused buried items from Ozette to come to the surface. From 1970 until 1981, the Makah people and a team of archaeologists and students from

Washington State University uncovered artifacts from Ozette. They gathered more than 55,000 items, including baskets, boxes, clothing, toys, and tools.

A “Sea” Economy

The Makah lived in villages on the Pacific coast and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. They fished for halibut and hunted porpoise, seal, and sea otter. They often traveled by canoe to trade with their neighbors.

Whale hunting was of special importance to the Makah. Hunters set out to sea in canoes large enough to hold 60 people. When a whale was killed and brought to shore, the Makah gave thanks

for a successful hunt. They used every part of the whale, including the bones.

Every year during spring and summer salmon swim from the sea upriver, or against the flow of freshwater rivers, to lay their eggs. During this “salmon run” a family could catch more than 1,000 pounds of fish. Some of the fish was eaten right away. Most of it was dried or smoked, and then stored to be used throughout the year.

Makah Culture

Makah families and individuals can earn ownership of Makah songs. The owners are then responsible for keeping the song alive. At potlatches and festivals, owners sing the songs of their ancestors.

THEN and NOW

Totem Poles 5.1.2

THEN No one knows when the first totem poles were made. However, Europeans first saw them in the 1700s, when they explored the Pacific Northwest coast. The totem poles featured detailed carvings of animals and people called totems. Each totem was a family symbol. The order of the totems on the pole told a story, but only people who knew the story could read the pole. Native Americans passed down the stories of their totem poles to their children and grandchildren.

NOW By the early 1900s, the art of making totem poles had nearly disappeared among Indian groups. Since 1950, however, more Native Americans have learned to carve the poles using the traditional methods of their ancestors. As in the past, totem poles today are often placed in front of the group’s community house to decorate it and to mark it as a place of celebration. Unlike in the past, modern totem pole artists combine several carving styles on one pole.



How have totem poles helped keep Native American traditions alive?

