

## Ways of Life on the Plains 5.1.2

Some Plains groups may have moved there because they were driven out of their former areas by **drought** (drou't). A drought is a long period without rain.

### The First Horses

Before there were horses in the Americas, Plains people hunted buffalo on foot. Hunters started grass fires to frighten a herd of buffalo. Often the herd would stampede over a cliff, falling on each other. The hunters could then gather the meat and skins that they needed.

Plains people used a **travois** (truh VOY) to carry their things. A travois is like a sled and carried people or belongings. At first, dogs were trained to pull the travois.

In the 1500s, Spaniards, people from Spain, came to the Americas. They brought horses with them. Some of their horses escaped. By the middle of the 1600s, descendants of these

runaway horses were wandering across the Great Plains. The Lakota captured and tamed these horses. By the middle of the 1700s, all the Plains Native Americans were using horses.

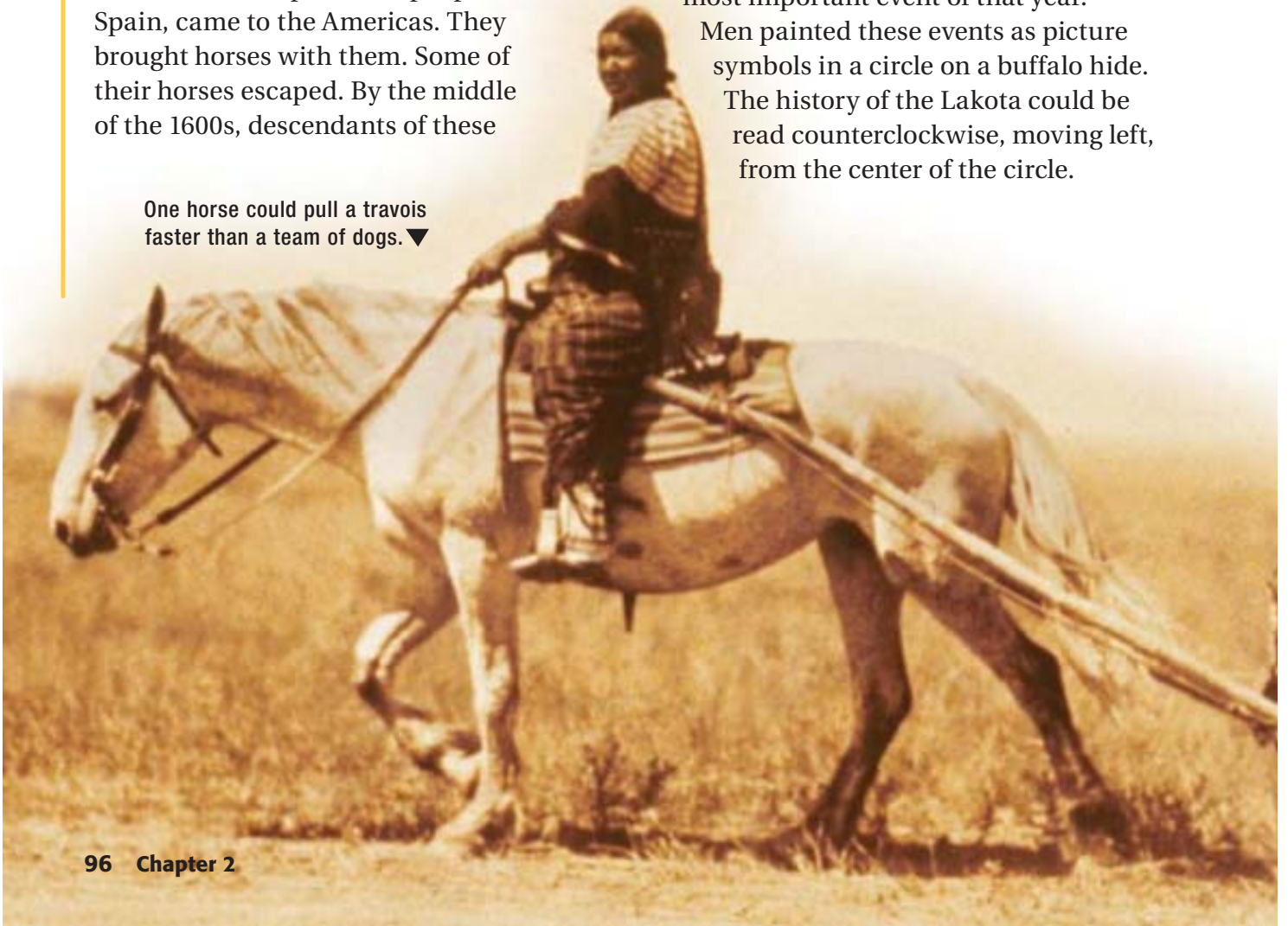
The horse completely changed the Plains way of life. Men now hunted buffalo on horseback. Horses pulled a travois faster than dogs, so the groups could move faster following the buffalo. Wealth was measured by the number of horses a person owned.

### Keeping Records

The Lakota used their extra time to make special calendars called winter counts. Study the winter count on the next page. When the Lakota settled in for the winter, they met to decide the most important event of that year.

Men painted these events as picture symbols in a circle on a buffalo hide. The history of the Lakota could be read counterclockwise, moving left, from the center of the circle.

One horse could pull a travois faster than a team of dogs. ▼



## Primary Sources



1845–1846  
Plenty of  
buffalo meat



1800–1801  
30 Lakota killed  
by Crow Indians



1853–1854  
Europeans bring  
striped blankets

## An 1800–1871 Winter Count by Lone Dog

This winter count was created by a Lakota man named Lone Dog. It is one of three copies of the official winter count that Lone Dog made. The official count was destroyed in a fire. The symbols are read in a counterclockwise spiral. The key tells the meaning of some of the symbols.



How does the winter count help you understand Lone Dog's life?

## Children of the Plains

There were differences among the customs of various Plains people, but most educated their children in similar ways. All Plains people taught their children good listening skills by telling them stories and singing songs about their cultures.

Training began when children were young. Children's games taught them useful skills. All the adults in a family took responsibility for the child's education.

Boys and girls received different training. Most of the boys' games taught hunting and shooting skills. Boys used miniature bows and arrows to stalk small game and to hit moving targets. Later they took part in shooting

matches and pretend battles. Boys learned the value of courage. One way to show courage was to touch an enemy without killing him. To do this, a special pole called a **coup stick** (KOO) was needed. Coup is the French word for "strike" or "hit."

Girls learned to sew by making doll clothes. They were given toy teepees to set up as their mothers set up the family teepee. Older girls learned how to use scraping tools to clean animal skins.

In most cultures of the Plains groups, a child's first success was given public recognition. For example, Blackfoot boys who won shooting matches were allowed to wear feathers in their hair like older men. Children were also praised for showing qualities that were admired, such as being generous and speaking well.

**REVIEW** How did the horse help Plains Native Americans hunt buffalo? *Cause and Effect*