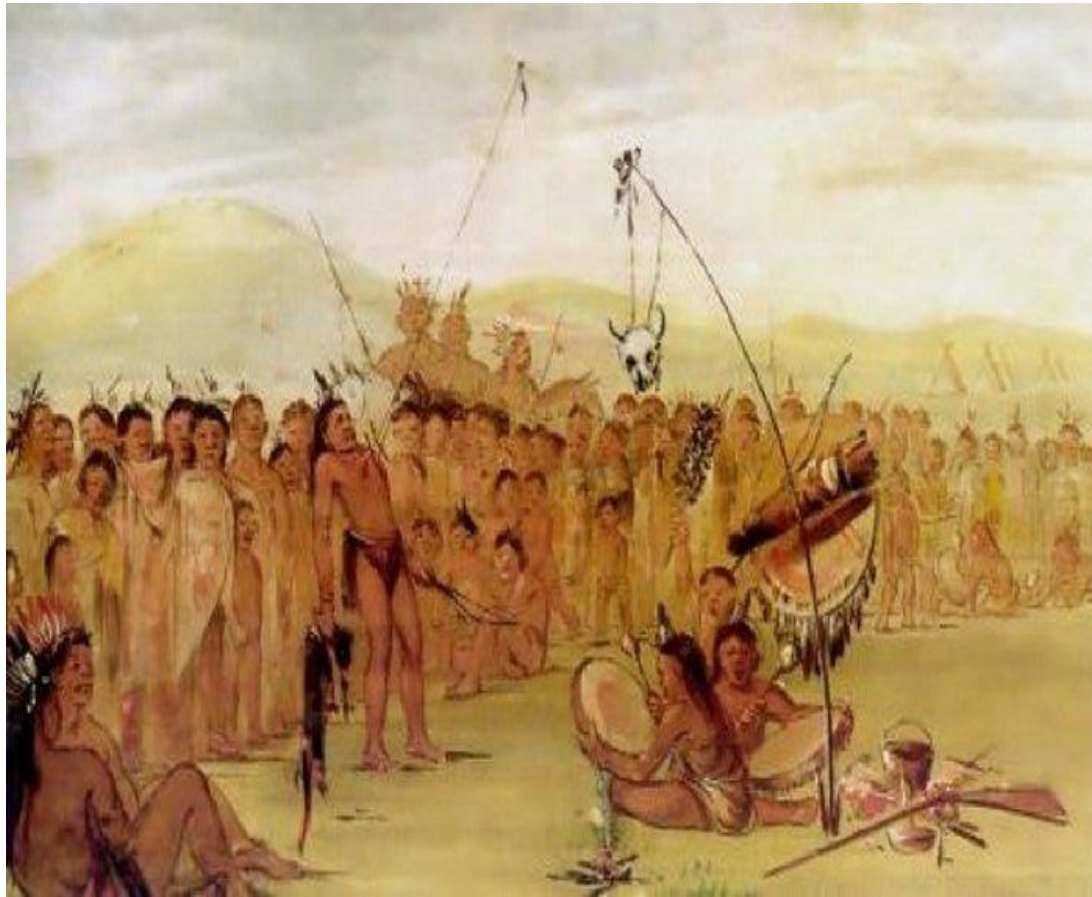


The Beliefs of the Plains Indians (case study the Sioux Tribe)

Starter: Can you define what a religion is and can you explain what you would expect a religious ceremony to look like?

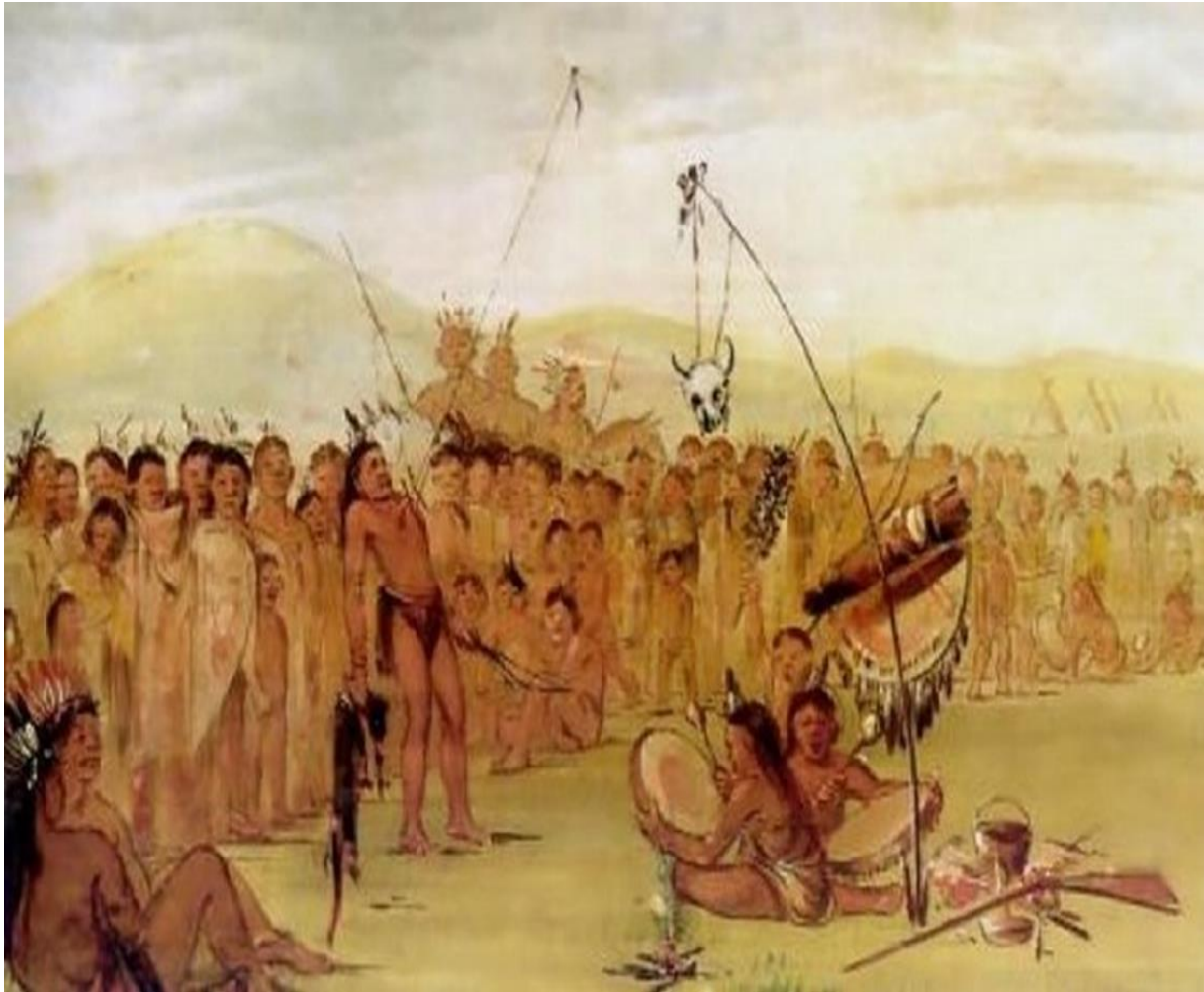


Describe the scene depicted in the painting

Explain what you think might be happening in the painting

Evaluate how white European settlers would be likely to react to such a scene.

The painting depicts a sun dance, the most important ceremony for the Plains Indians. Indians in different bands come together annually as a tribe to reaffirm their beliefs and ask for healing for the tribe, people and the earth and to ask for help and guidance from the spirit world. The actual details are not commonly known outside of the tribes but it was seen as uncivilised and savage by the white European settlers.



The Plains Indians believed in 'Wakan Tanka' the Great Spirit who created the world and all that lived. Everything had equal value and importance.

Dances were used when the whole tribe needed to contact the spirits. Before hunting, they would dance a Buffalo Dance to get the spirit world to call the buffalo to them.

How religious were the Plains Indians?



The religion of the Sioux tribe affected their attitude to the land.

Because they were part of the land, the land could not be owned by one nation or an individual.

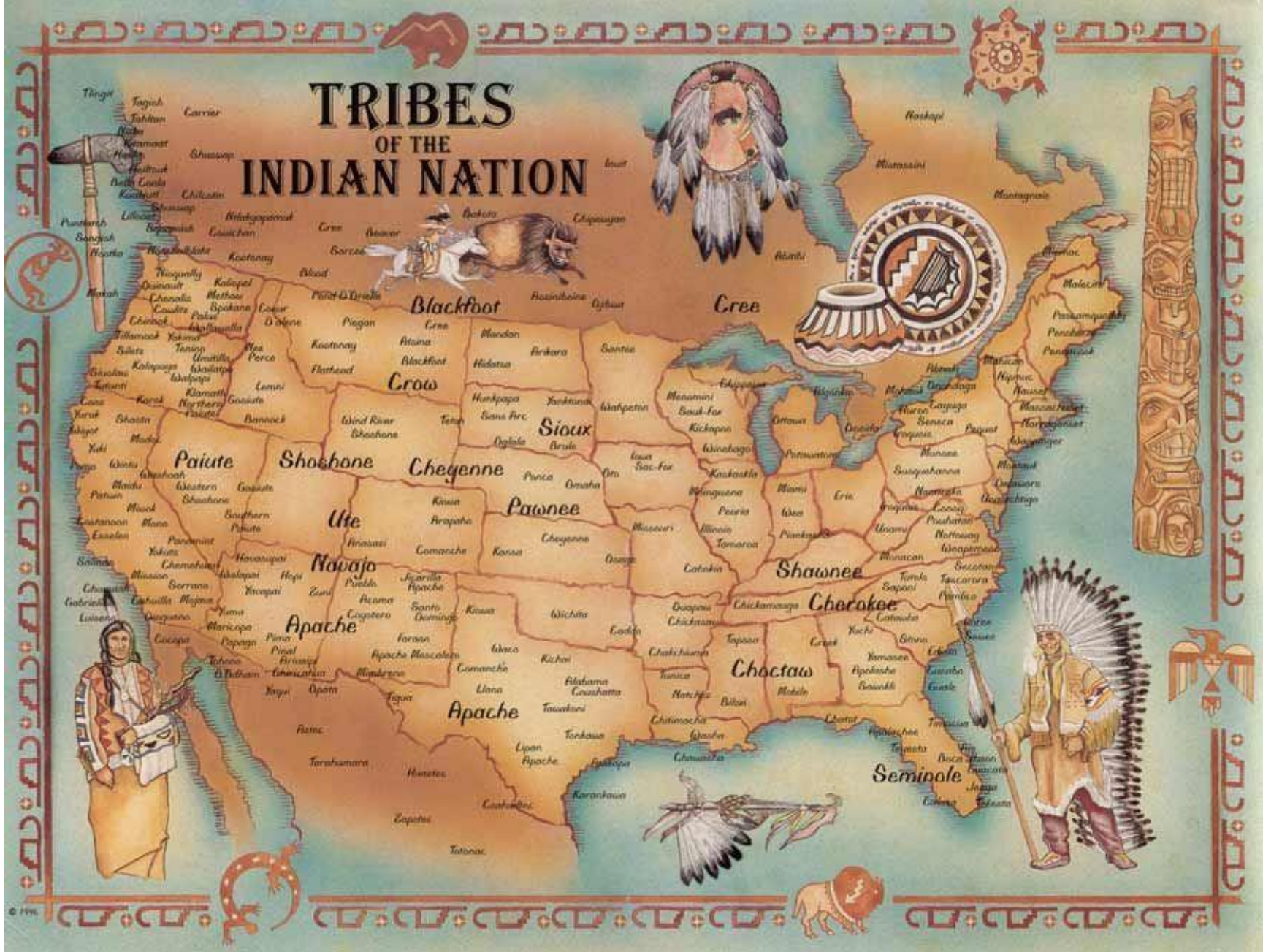
They called the land 'their mother' and said that ploughing the land was like ripping their mother's breast.

Some land was particularly sacred, especially high places that were closest to the spirit world. For the Sioux the Black Hills of Dakota were sacred. It was here they took their dead to be buried and where their medicine men went to seek guidance.

Task: Use the power point slide and the additional worksheet to answer the following questions:

1. What was the name of the Great Spirit?
2. What was dried and saved, shaped like a turtle for a girl and a lizard or rattlesnake for a boy?
3. What would the Native Americans have before a hunt?
4. What was the Sun Dance for?
5. What would the Sioux not do to the earth as they said it was like ripping their mother's breast?
6. Name a set of hills which were sacred to the Sioux.
7. What was a shaman?
8. Give two examples of circles that Native Americans believed in.

TRIBES OF THE INDIAN NATION



How was Indian Society organised?

Chiefs were chosen because of their wisdom or skills. They had no power of their own as every member of the Council had to agree with any decisions that were made. Even then the rest of the tribe or band did not have to obey.	The Tribal Councils advised the tribal chiefs. The council was made up of elders and chiefs from each band.	Tribes varied in size They were divided into bands that roamed the Plains separately so that there was enough food for everyone.
Tribes and bands were governed by a blend of chiefs, councils and warrior societies.	All the bands within the tribe came together each summer at the tribal gathering.	Each tribe had a powerful, warrior society made up of the men in the tribe.
The families in each band were often related to each other. They supported each other in their search for the buffalo and in time of trouble.	The warrior society in each tribe had a different name. Some were called Dog Soldiers; others, Elk Soldiers and Fox Soldiers.	The warrior societies protected women and children and made sure that they were safe when on the move.
Each band was led by a chief and a council of elders that advised him.	Members of the warrior societies searched for the buffalo and decided how many would be killed in the hunt.	The warrior societies were powerful because without them the Indians would not survive.
Women were responsible for the tipi (which belonged to her which gave her status) and looking after the children. Women also processed the buffalos and made food, goods and utensils from them.	Old people (elders) gave important advise and passed on the history of the tribe. When they got too old they might be left behind. The survival of the band was more important than any individual.	Although most men had one wife, some had several wives (polygamy). This made sense in a situation where there were more women than men (due to dangers of war and buffalo hunting). It ensured all the women were taken care of and that the band had many children.

KEY

Tribes/Bands	Chiefs	Warrior Brotherhoods
Women	Elders	Tribal Councils

Questions:

Grade 4/5

1. Give two important functions of the warrior societies.
2. What is polygamy? Why did this happen in some cases?
3. Why did tribes split down into smaller groups called bands ?

Grade 6+

1. Explain the importance of warrior societies to Plains Indians.
2. Explain why polygamy made sense in some situations to the Plains Indians.
3. Why, when there would be safety in numbers, did tribes break up into smaller units called bands?

Need extra or additional information? See pages 10 and 11 in the textbook.

Warfare



Indians took scalps as trophies of their achievements in battle and displayed them on their tipis. The scalp was also taken to ensure his enemies spirit couldn't take revenge in the afterlife. Europeans saw this as proof of the Indians' savagery although they used it against the Indians in some cases.



Real honour came from **counting coup**. This was getting close enough to an enemy, while alive, to touch him with a special ceremonial stick and then retreat. Success was recorded in feathers worn and horses captured. It took tremendous skill and bravery but European settlers saw this as cowardly.

Indians went to war to protect their hunting grounds or to obtain horses.

The elders would also use warfare as a way keeping the braves under control as they were given an opportunity to win honour and respect in battle.

It was also a way of keeping the tribe unified.

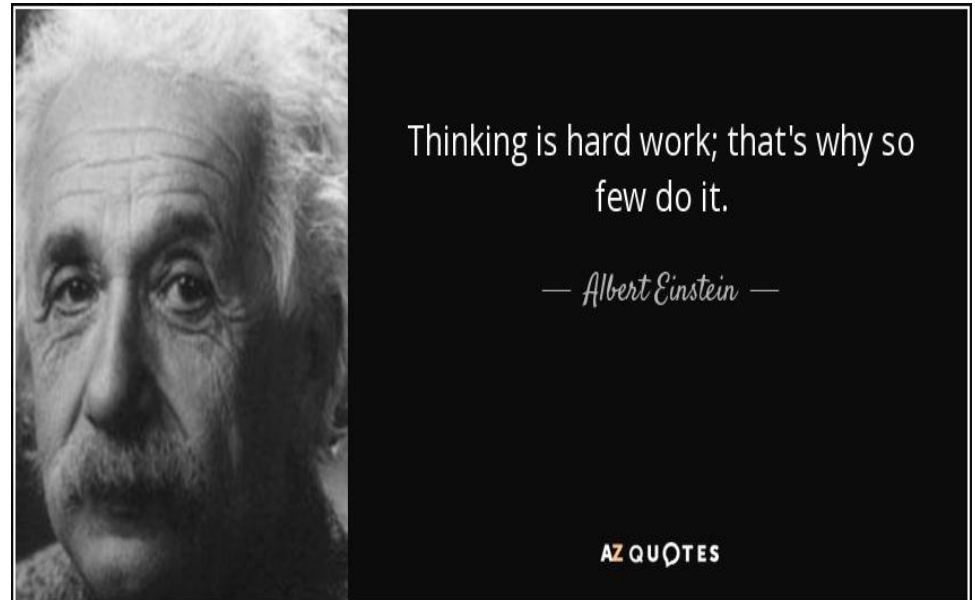
Beliefs and Warfare

- Use p13-14 of the textbook to answer the following questions in full sentences:
 1. What were the Indians' beliefs about nature?
 2. Why were the spirits important?
 3. How did the Indians' beliefs about the land differ to the white man's?
 4. How did the Indians minimise the number of casualties in warfare?
 5. Why did warriors take the scalps of their enemies?
 6. The white man saw 'counting coup' as cowardly. Explain what it is and how the Indians would justify it.



Star Challenge – complete the Activity on p14

From what you have learned so far, which aspects of the lives of the Plains Indians are going to have the most potential for conflict with the White European settlers?



Which Aspects of Plains Indians beliefs and ways of life do you anticipate would cause most conflict with white European settlers?

Describe some aspects of Plains Indians beliefs and lifestyles that may have caused conflict.

Explain why some aspects of Plains Indians beliefs and lifestyles may have caused conflict.

Evaluate which aspects of Plains Indians life and culture would clash most strongly with white European settlers and why.

Glossary:

Nomadic

Counting

Coup

Tipi

Raw

hide

Wakan

Tanka

Tanned

