

Northwest Coastal People Slide Notes

Slide 1: Map of NW Coastal Tribes

The Northwest Coastal tribes lived along the Pacific Ocean from Southern Alaska in the north to Oregon in the south. This map shows some of the tribes.

Extension: The Tlingit (KLING-git) lived along the southern coast of Alaska and traded copper and caribou skins with other tribes. The Haida (HI-duh) lived on Queen Charlotte Island in British Columbia and Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. They were famous for their giant canoes and were the first to carve totem poles. The Makah (mah-KAH) lived on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state and were great canoe makers and whale hunters.

Slide 2: Tlingit Performers

This is a photo of Tlingit (KLING-git) performers with their button blankets, drums and headdresses. Notice the different head pieces. Today we'll be making art inspired by button blankets - we'll learn more about these later.

Extension: What do you notice about the two men with the wooden headdresses? (If a man was a chief he might wear a carved headdress and a woven Chilkat blanket as a sign of status.)

Slide 3: Chief Shakes Tribal Plank House

This is a reconstruction of a Tlingit (KLING-git) plank house located on Shakes Island in Alaska. Plank houses are Native American homes used by tribes of the NW Coast. They were made from cedar trees and were very large because there had to be room for many families. Some were painted with beautiful designs and some had carved totem poles standing out front. There were no windows, just a smoke hole in the roof. The walls were often 15-20 feet high.

Extension: They were able to build these large permanent homes because they did not need to migrate. They made their living by fishing and using the resources of the forests.

Slide 4: Tlingit Plank House

Another Tlingit (KLING-git) plank house from Alaska. Notice the totem poles and carved decorations on the front of the house.

Slide 5: Masked Qagyuhl Dancers

During the winter when it was stormy and rainy, dances were performed inside the plank houses. Masked dances created an illusion and were often full of magic tricks - sometimes the masked dancers appeared through trap doors or swung through the air on a rope to look like they were flying.

Extension: Notice here the masks as well as the totem poles. The carved masks worn during potlatches and other performances were very elaborate. When the dancers put on the masks, they took on the personality of the spirit the mask represented.

Slide 6: Ovoids, U-Shapes and S-Shapes

These are the most common forms in NW Coastal art. The ovoid is the central building block. An ovoid is a squared off circle and its lines are usually thickest on the top and thinner on the sides and bottom. These lines and shapes can be seen in the symbols used for eyes, ears, claws, feathers and fins, which appear over and over again in NW Coast art. As we look at the next few slides, look for these shapes.

Slide 7: Totem Poles

These were large carved poles used to display the crest and social status of a family, often displayed outside the plank house. carved from cedar trees, some were up to 80 feet high, as tall as a 5 story building. Most had both animal and human forms carved into them, usually representing the family crest.

Extension: The Tlingit (KLING-git) and Haida clans are represented by an eagle or raven. The Tsimshian are represented by an eagle, a raven, a killer whale, and a wolf. Totems were usually painted black, red, blue and sometimes white and yellow. It usually took help from most of the village to raise the totem pole. Sometimes the owner gave a big pole-raising potlatch and invited hundreds of guests from other villages.

Slide 8: Canoes

The art of carving canoes was passed down from father to son and no one except official canoe carvers were allowed to carve the canoes. They were made from a cedar log that had been split in half. Canoes provided transportation up and down the coast. They could be larger than 60 feet long and carried as many as 60 people.

Extension: They were traditionally used for meeting and trading with other tribes, fishing and hunting. The Makah and Nootka used canoes for hunting whales in the ocean and often carved elaborate pictures and painted designs on their canoes.

Slide 9: Bentwood Boxes

There are examples of boxes made from a single cedar plank. Decorated bentwood boxes were important items that stored both food and family regalia.

Slide 10: Baskets

Baskets were used for storage and trade.

Extension: Painted baskets were common like the Tlingit (KLING-git) basket on the left. The Haida bark basket on the right would have been used to collect clams.

Slide 11: Hats

Since it rained a lot on the NW Coast, clothing was more important for blocking the rain than for keeping warm. They wore capes and hats as protection against the rain. Some capes were made from cedar bark. Women pounded the inner bark into long, fine fibers. Hats were made from tightly woven cedar roots and were often painted, just like baskets.

Slide 12: Chilkat Blankets

One of the most common things Tlingit (KLING-git) women wove were Chilkat blankets. It took three goats to get enough wool for one blanket and a year to complete the weaving.

Extension: They were highly sought by NW Coastal People nobility long before the first explorers came to the region. The blanket was widely known and highly valued, even during the days of its maximum production.

Slide 13: Button Blankets

Button blankets are unique to the NW Coast of British Columbia. Initially the buttons were sparsely sewed on, but as they became more available, the designs became more and more elaborate. Nowadays, the blanket is made from blue or black duffle and trimmed in red shroud, which is a heavy felt-like material. We'll be making art inspired by button blankets today!

Extension: Upper right: Tlingit children and adults in traditional dress at Saxman Native Village near Ketchikan, Alaska. Lower right: members of the Quileute Nation.