

A Place to Call Home

Wisconsin DPI standards alignment:

Social Studies B.4.10 -- Explain the history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Wisconsin.

Social Studies A.8.9 – Describe how buildings and their decoration reflect cultural values and ideas, providing examples such as cave paintings, pyramids, sacred cities, castles, and cathedrals.

Social Studies E.4.3 – Describe how families are alike and different, comparing characteristics such as size, hobbies, celebrations, where families live, and how they make a living.

Social Studies E.4.13 – Investigate and explain similarities and differences in ways that cultures meet human needs.

English Language Arts B.4.1 – Write expressive pieces in response to reading, viewing, and life experiences (narratives, reflections, and letters) employing descriptive detail and a personal voice.

Goal: Students will become familiar with the housing styles used by Woodland Indians of the western Great Lakes.

- Objectives
- 1) Students will be able to give a general description of the interior and exterior of a wigwam.
 - 2) Students will compose a descriptive journal entry detailing the sensory experiences of living in a wigwam or bark lodge.
 - 3) Students will be able to list the three types of wigwams used by Woodland Indians of the western Great Lakes.

Note to teacher: Remind your students that this activity describes the type of housing used by Wisconsin Indians into the mid-1800s. European and Yankee settlers to Wisconsin strongly encouraged and sometimes forced Wisconsin Indians to begin using Anglo-styles of architecture for their homes. Contemporary Indians living in Wisconsin live in houses, apartments, trailer homes, etc. just like Wisconsinites of other backgrounds. You may want to invite your students to share their experiences of traveling to or living on a reservation. Let them tell their fellow students about the types of housing they noticed while there.

Prior to the arrival of European explorers in the 1620s-30s and until the mid-1800s, Woodland Indians of the western Great Lakes lived in wigwams. The word comes from an Anishinabe word, “wiigawaam,” and means “lodge.” There were different forms of wigwams, but all had some things in common. All wigwams were built with a frame of flexible saplings (young trees) that were planted in holes in the ground and then bent at

the tops and tied together to create the shape of the structure. The people then used bark, reed mats, hides, or furs to cover the frame and create a weather-tight structure. Many wigwams were meant to be portable: the mats, bark, fur, or hide covering could easily be rolled and transported when the family moved to a new area due to a change in seasons. The frames would stay in place and be re-used when the family returned to that camp. Read the descriptions of the houses and look below to see pictures of the different types of wigwams.

The Ojibwe (Chippewa groups in northern Wisconsin) lived in dome-shaped wigwams. They made wigwams meant for summer use and wigwams meant for winter use. Summer wigwams housed several families, while winter wigwams fit just one. Their summer camps also included buildings for storage and meetings.

The Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk, Fox, and Potawatomi lived in bark lodges. The frames of these lodges had peaked roofs, much like many houses today. Depending on what was available, these tribes covered the frames in birch bark, elm bark, or reed mats. Their villages also included council houses (which were used for ceremonies and meetings) and an open area for games and ceremonies. These tribes also changed housing when they moved to their winter camp. During the wintertime, they lived in dome-shaped wigwams like those used by the Ojibwe.

Inside the wigwams or lodges there was a central fireplace. Over the fireplace, there would be a smoke hole in the roof, allowing the smoke to escape. This could be closed in the event of rain to keep the interior dry. Sleeping platforms built of poles and padded with boughs, mats, or skins, were arranged along the sides of the lodge or wigwam.

Close your eyes and imagine that you live in a wigwam or a bark lodge. What sounds would you hear? Think about the sounds of the forest, the sounds of your whole family sleeping in the same “room” as you, etc. What would you smell as you drifted off to sleep? Think of the smell of the tree bark or sticks and grass covering of your house, the hides or boughs on which you are sleeping, the smell of the fire blazing in the center of your home, etc. What would your house feel like? Think about sleeping near the warm fire, the feel of sleeping on animal skins or furs, the feel of the packed dirt floor, etc. Write a journal entry describing the moments just before falling asleep in a wigwam or a bark lodge. Include the details of what your senses experience. Write a second journal entry about the moments just before falling asleep in your family’s house or apartment. How do you think your experiences are similar to or different from those of a Native family living in a wigwam or bark lodge?