TEPEE MAKING

The Indian Reading Series
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THE INDIAN READING SERIES
Stories and Legends of the Northwest

Tepee Making
Series IV

Developed by the Kootenai Cultural Committee
of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

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Long ago tepees were made out of buffalo or deer hides. Today many tepees are made out of canvas.

When Indian women make a tepee, they do a lot of cutting and sewing. The women will cut the material and sew it together piece by piece.
When the sewing is done, the women will check the shape and size of the tepee. The back of the tepee should be a little shorter than the front. A round hole is cut in the front to be used as a door. The tepee will have two flaps in the front, at the top of the tepee. These flaps will be used to keep wind and rain out. They can be closed when the weather is bad. When a fire is built inside the tepee, the flaps can be opened to let the smoke out.
Lodge pole pine trees are used for tepee poles. The branches are cut off and the bark is peeled from the trees. The poles should be long and straight. Some large tepees use as many as fifteen poles.

Four poles are tied together near the top. They are set up to form a pyramid, then three poles are added to each side with two in the front for the doorway. When all poles are put in place, the frame will begin to form the shape of a tepee. Two poles are always used to open and close the flaps at the top of the tepee.
The canvas is tied to a single pole. This pole is then placed in the rear of the frame. The canvas is unfolded and wrapped around the frame. When all the poles are covered, the tepee will be loose.
Above the door opening there are two rows of holes. Wooden pegs are put through these holes to close the tepee.

The poles are pushed outward to make the tepee snug. After this is done, wooden stakes are pounded through canvas loops at the bottom of the tepee. These stakes hold the tepee to the ground so it won’t tip over. Finally, the door opening is covered with a flap.

Tepee making takes a lot of hard work and skill. A tight fitting tepee will not leak and looks nice. Indian women are proud when they make a nice looking tepee.
Kootenai tepees today are not painted as they were years ago. The Kootenai Indians painted animals and birds on their tepees. The kind of animal painted on a tepee meant the owner’s spirit was like that particular animal. It may have been a bear, deer, buffalo, or many other animals or birds.

Some tepees were painted with a ripple design, a symbol of green grass.

Other designs were mainly for decorative purposes, more or less to beautify the tepee.
Booklets available in the Level IV sequence are listed below. Numbers refer to the Planned Sequence of use in the Teacher’s Manual. Materials developed by these tribes and others in the Northwest are included in the Levels I, II and III sequences.

1. Warm Springs Animal Stories
   The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

2. Snail Women at Sq’ala’
   The Suquamish Tribe of the Port Madison Reservation

3. Blue Jay – Star Child/Basket Woman
   Muckleshoot Tribe

4. Assiniboine Woman Making Grease
   Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation

5. Coyote
   The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

6. How the Summer Season Came
   Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Belknap Reservation

7. Little Weasel’s Dream
   Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation

8. Fort Hall Stories
   Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation

9. The Bear Tepee
   Northern Cheyenne Tribe

10. Sioux Stories and Legends
    Sioux Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation

11. Kootenai Stories
    Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation

12. Chief Mountain’s Medicine
    Gros Ventre Tribe from the Fort Belknap Reservation

13. Coyote the Trickster
    Burns Paiute Reservation

14. Running Free
    Shoalwater Bay

15. Salish Coyote Stories
    Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation

16. Coyote and the Cowboys
    Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation

17. Napi’s Journey
    Blackfeet Tribe

18. Warm Springs Stories
    The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

19. Tepee Making
    Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation

20. Baskets and Canoes
    Skokomish Tribe

21. Warrior People
    Blackfeet Tribe