



## **NORTHWEST NATIVE AMERICAN DWELLINGS Mid-1800's**

### 3.6 INTRODUCTION

#### 3.8 The First People who Lived in the Northwest

#### Mid-1800's Map

### 3.9 THE PLATEAU GROUP

#### 3.10 Semi-subterranean House

#### 3.11 Plateau Long House

#### 3.13 Plateau Long House Cross Section

### 3.14 THE GREAT BASIN GROUP

#### 3.15 Sweat Lodge

#### 3.17 Great Basin Wickiup and Variation

#### 3.19 Activity Sheets

### 3.20 NORTHWEST COAST GROUP

#### 3.21 North Coast Tillamook House

#### 3.22 Alsea Semi-subterranean House

#### 3.24 Activity Sheet

### 3.25 NATIVE AMERICAN DWELLINGS ACTIVITY SHEETS



## The First People Who Lived in the Northwest

Indigenous people of the Northwest have lived here since time immemorial. This means they have lived here for a longer period of time than we have a written record. They have been and are part of large tribal nations, including smaller bands, or groups, of people within the tribal nations. Historically, these groups functioned as extended families and each had its own way of living, working, caring for one another and designing and building dwellings or structures. Often, tribal bands of people would live where food was most accessible and they would use the materials and resources available in those areas to design and build their structures.

The Northwest has been a good place to live over the many centuries. Since the climate is mild, it is seldom too hot or too cold. There are streams, rivers and the ocean for food and transportation. The reeds and grasses that grow along these waterways have historically provided the materials for weaving mats and buckets, which were used as household items and as clothing. Wood was used for clothing, shelter, canoes, storage boxes and carved decorations. Decorations were made of shells and stones, as well. The Native Americans here used the large rock cliffs for their paintings, called petroglyphs, to illustrate their legends.

The ocean and rivers in the Northwest have provided almost everything needed over time. This made it possible for indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest to build more permanent structures, sometimes housing hundreds of people.

Sometimes, native groups in the Pacific Northwest have been divided up into three distinct geographical areas. These areas covered several states and Canada, but we will look at the portions in the northwestern part of the United States that are now Oregon, Washington, Idaho and northern California.

1. The Plateau: The area that drains into the Columbia, Snake and Klamath Rivers.
2. The Great Basin: The area between the Rocky Mountains and the Cascade Range, including eastern Oregon, southwestern Idaho and northeastern California.

3. Northwest Coast: The Willamette Valley and the strip of land on the Pacific coast, west of the Coastal Mountain Range.

Over time, the people of these cultures had a winter village to which they returned each year. A summer and fall settlement was more temporary, as the people moved around depending on where food was available. Their buildings were designed for certain uses. The more elaborate ones were often used for ceremonials, of which they had many. No matter where they lived, the houses they built were original designs that fit the surrounding environment and the kind of life they lived. The building design was different with each cultural group, but among the members of a group, the designs were often quite alike.

The houses of the northwestern Native Americans were similar to those of the people who lived farther north in British Columbia and Alaska, the Tlinget, Haida, Nootka and many others. These houses were very large, with heavy wood timbers. The floors were often covered with wooden planks. The interiors of the houses often had overhead racks for drying, and floor storage and a shelf around the outside walls to store their possessions. (Source for this material "Space, Style and Structure." See, "Books, Websites, Films, Videos and Field Trips.")

As we look at Native American dwellings on the following pages, keep in mind that these were traditional style buildings around the mid-1800's in Oregon. While we can still find some examples of these today, indigenous people continue to live contemporary lives, but whose ancestors may have built some of these types of buildings.

**AFO acknowledges the numerous tribes and groups who call what is now Oregon their home since time immemorial. We honor their ongoing relationship with the land, plants, animals and people of Oregon. We respectfully acknowledge and honor all indigenous peoples past, present and into the future and are grateful for their continued guidance and teachings about their homeland. The land of Oregon still carries the stories of their nations. Through educating Oregon's young people, we seek to facilitate continued learning, growth, and community building; which we recognize is an evolving process of listening and actively responding that we must persist in attending to.**



**Currently, there are the following federally recognized tribes in Oregon:**

Burns Paiute Tribe

Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon

Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

Coquille Indian Tribe

Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians

Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes (Nevada and Oregon)

Klamath Tribes

**For further resources on Northwest Native Americans, please see the following:**

Honoring Tribal Legacies

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/honoringtriballegacies/teachings/>

Mesoamerican Cultures and their Histories

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/mesoinstitute/free-curricula/>

Native Histories along the Lewis and Clark Trail

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/nativehistories/curriculum/>

Oregon Department of Education: Native American Education

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/nativeamericaneducation/pages/default.aspx>

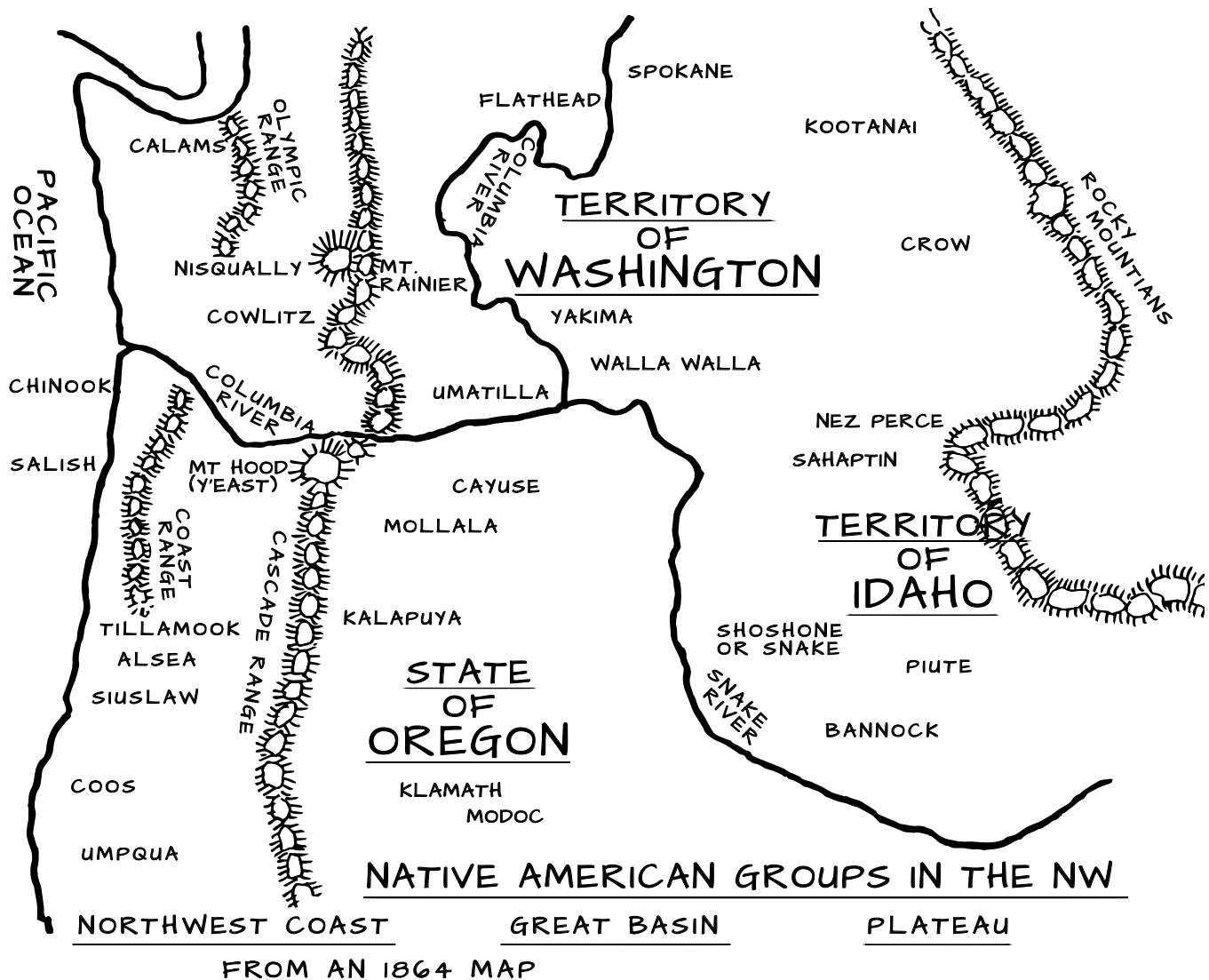
SB 13 Essential Understandings

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/Essential%20Understandings%20of%20Native%20Americans%20in%20Oregon%20June%202020.pdf>

The Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde Curriculum

<https://www.grandronde.org/history-culture/culture/curriculum/>

*Many thanks to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA PDX).*



NOTE: The map on this page shows examples of indigenous language groups that existed in the state of Oregon in the mid-1800's after the US Government's westward expansion had begun. While it gives a good idea of the many different tribal nations, it's important to understand that the map is not necessarily complete. There were many individual tribal nations and bands - likely more than are shown and each had/has its own story.

***Includes the Klamath and Mollala***

The Plateau Group was generally rather nomadic—they moved around seeking good supplies of food. Their summer homes were built quickly and usually left behind when they moved on. Their winter homes were a little more permanent. They were of two types.

**Characteristics of the structure: Semi-Subterranean House**

Probably the first kind of Plateau house was the Semi-Subterranean, which means it was partly dug down into the ground.

**Roofs**

The roof was covered with bark, or brush, tied together in bundles, called “thatch.” Sometimes a second cover of earth dug from the pit was put over the first cover, which made the house warmer and cozier.

**Shape and Size**

A pit was dug about four to six feet deep, with a smaller pit in the center for the fire. They were usually round and from 8 to 20 feet in diameter.

**Windows and Doors**

The people usually climbed in through an opening in the top. This opening also served as a way for the smoke to get out. There were no windows.

**Construction Materials**

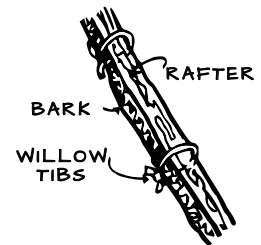
Long poles with the bark removed formed the main structure. They were covered with cedar planks (boards) or cedar bark. Mud was used to fill in holes and make the house weather-tight. The wall supports went from the top of the pit and slanted toward a round hole at the top.

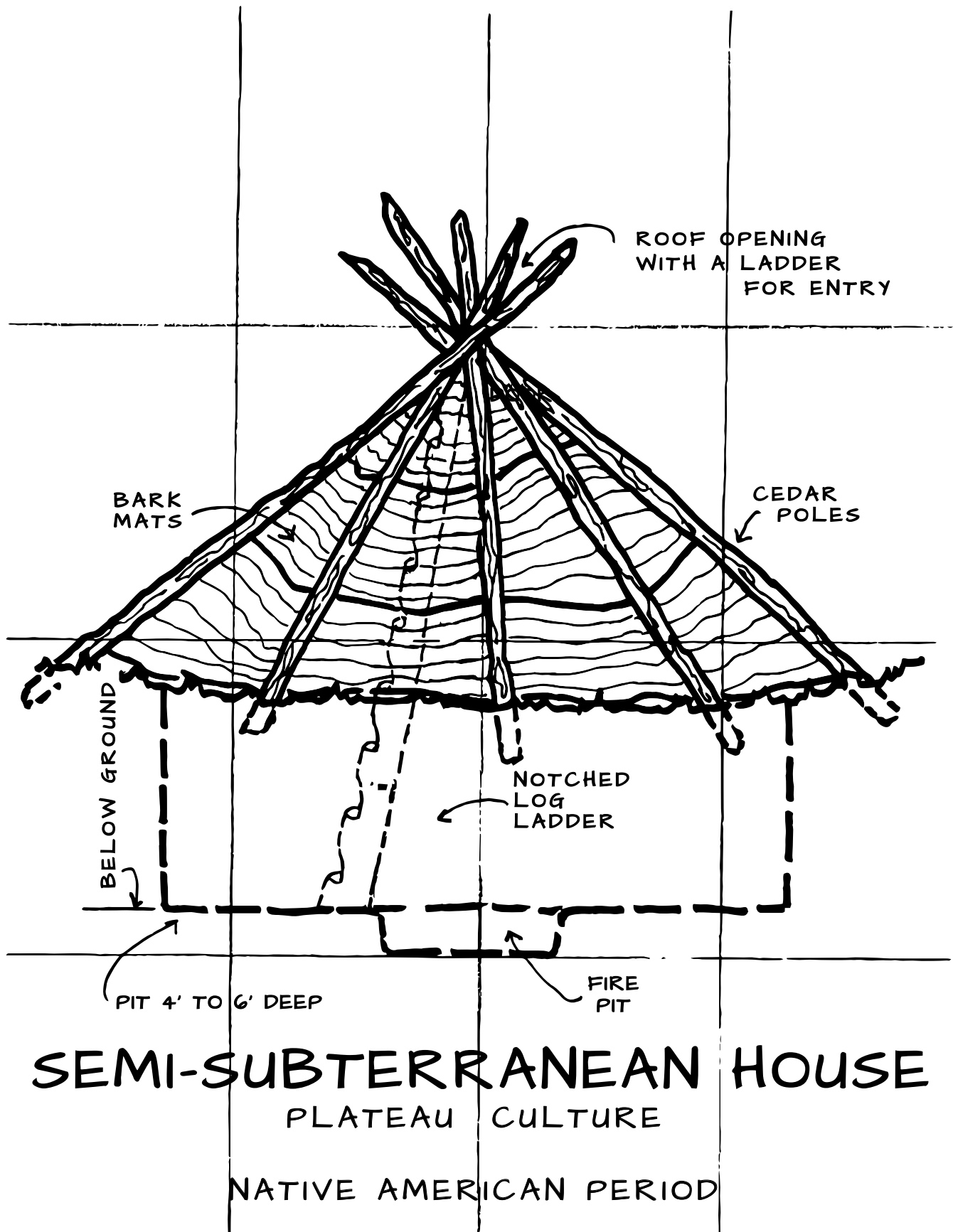
**Details**

Only one or two families lived in each of these houses. The floor was covered with mats and the beds were piles of grasses. Clothing and food was hung from the upper parts of the structure.

People today build similar earth shelters, although they are a little more permanently constructed. Earth shelters are very energy efficient—that is, they require less energy to keep warm or cool.

The Semi-Subterranean House is probably the oldest form of house. Examples have been found by archaeologists that date back many thousands of years. There were many variations as the house was adapted by many cultures.






***Includes the Klamath and Mollala***

The most important building of the Plateau groups was the Long House or Long Lodge. They were, as the name indicates, quite long and housed several families—some housed 40 or 50 people.

**Characteristics of the structure: The Long House**
**Roofs**

The roof was part of the wall structure. The wall poles or rafters came together at the top and were held together by a ridge pole. Often there were two ridge poles that held the rafters together and also formed a slot the length of the structure which allowed the smoke to escape.

**Shape and Size**

Long houses were rectangular and were 20 to 80 feet long and 15 to 20 feet wide.

**Windows and Doors**

The ends of the house were either square or rounded, or one of each, with a door in one or both ends. Doors were mats, or sometimes hides or wood. There were no windows.

**Construction Materials**

The foundation was usually at ground level or an excavation (pit) was dug a foot or so deep with deeper pits for the fires. The inside was one large room. Each family had a section for their own use, but often two families shared a fire for cooking and warmth.

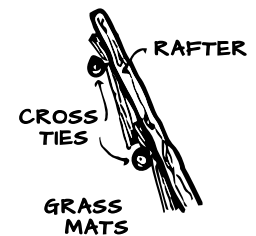
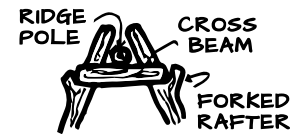
A series of rafters (poles) at the top and bottom of the walls rested on the wall poles that were anchored in the ground. The wall poles formed an “A” shape. Cross pieces between the rafters held every-thing in place. All these pieces were held together with “switches,” which were tough pieces of willow that could be tied around the logs.

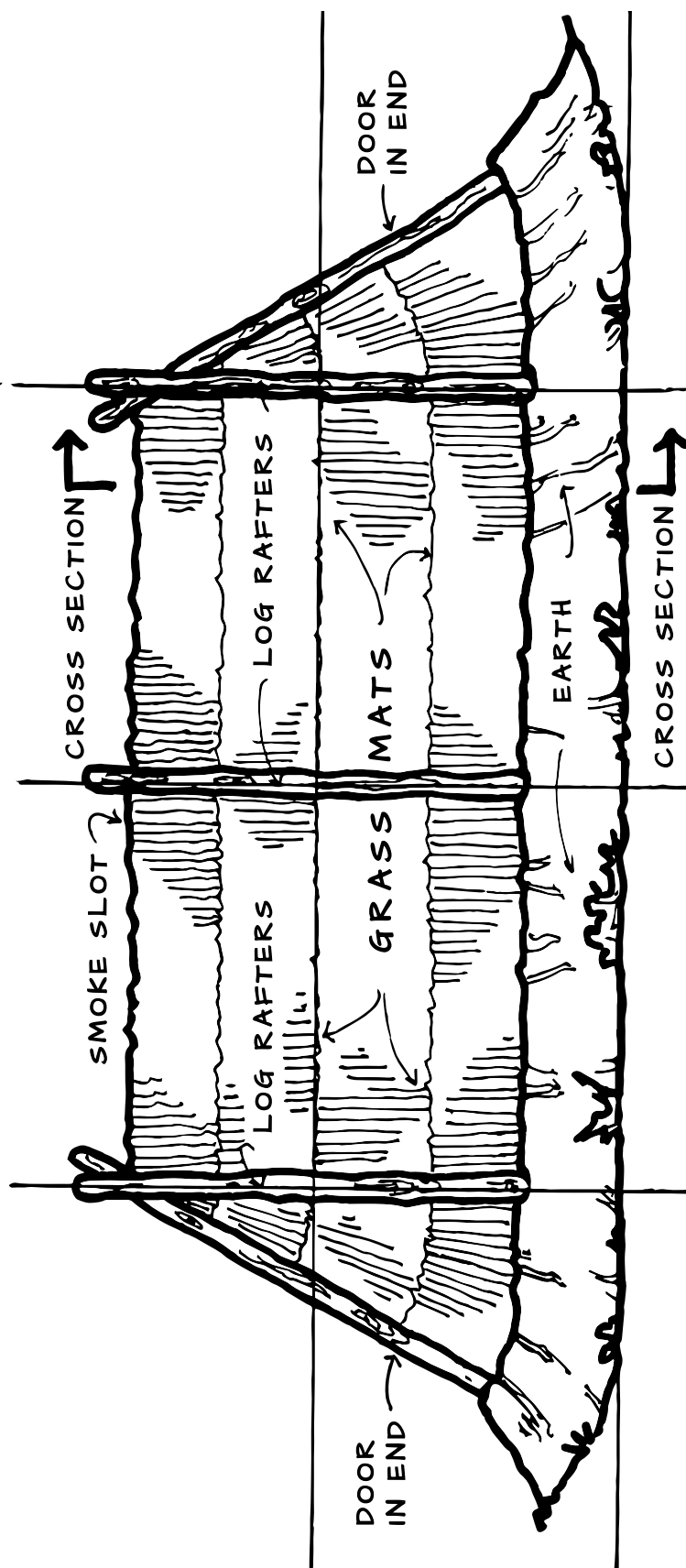
**Details**

The walls were covered with “tule,” or bulrushes and cattails layered or in bundles called “thatch.” Bark was also quite common.

Often earth was built up around the base of the house to keep the weather out and the warmth inside. In the winter, additional mats were added. Firepits were shallow basins, often lined with rocks.

Floors were covered with mats. Storage was at either end. Beds were made of brush, mats and furs. The central area, which contained the fire pit, was left as an open aisle.

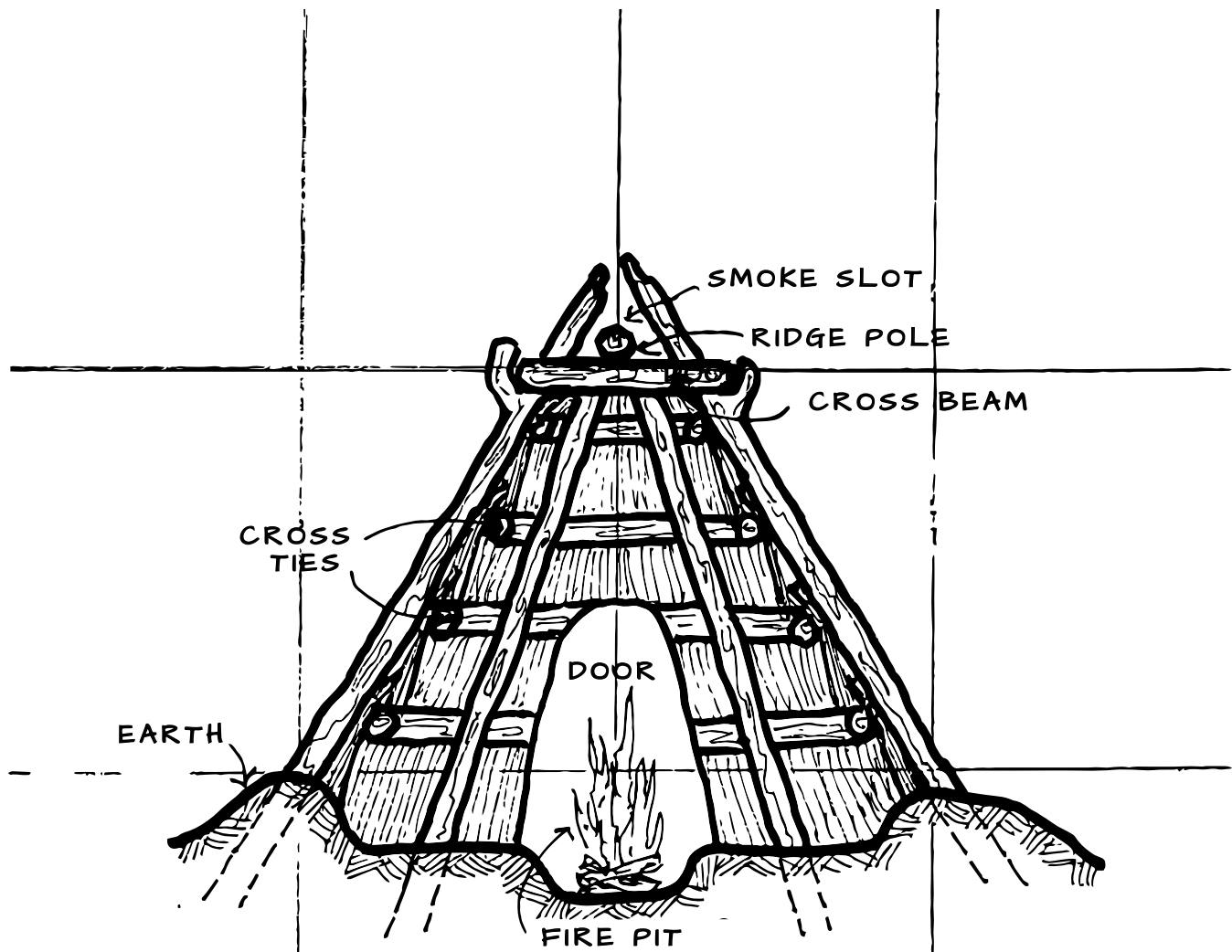




## PLATEAU LONG HOUSE

NATIVE AMERICAN PERIOD





RAFTERS EMBEDDED  
IN THE GROUND

## CROSS SECTION\*

INSIDE A LONG HOUSE LOOKING  
OUT THROUGH THE DOOR  
AT THE END

\*THINK ABOUT CUTTING THROUGH AN  
APPLE AND LOOKING INSIDE



Some form of the Sweat Lodge was common in most Native American groups. It was used both for relaxation and cleansing the spirit.

### Characteristics of the style: The Sweat Lodge

#### Roofs

The roof was part of the wall structure and was covered with mats and earth.

#### Shape and Size

The dome shapes were smaller in size than Wickiups (see page 3.17) – usually four feet to six feet in diameter, and four to five feet high.

#### Windows and Doors

There was a small door covered with a mat.

#### Construction Materials

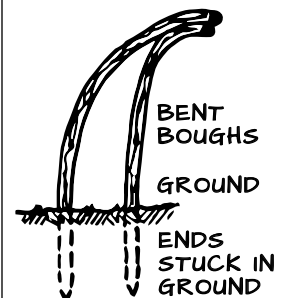
Large boughs were stuck in the ground and around the pit and bent into half circles and stuck in the ground on the opposite side.

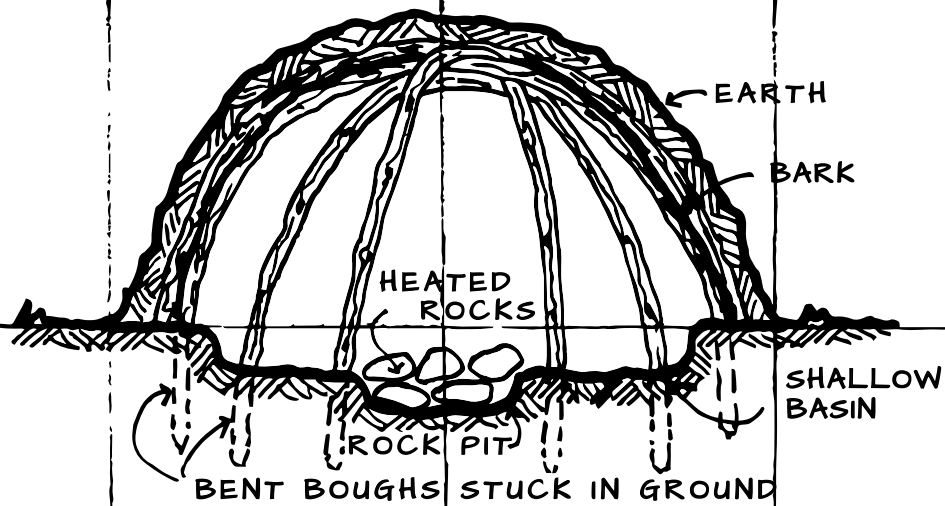
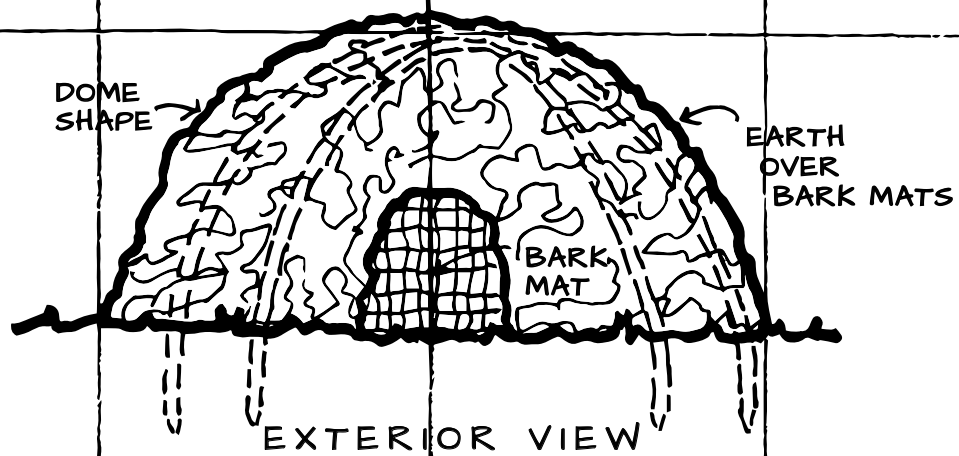
Grass or bark mats were tied to this framework with willow twigs and mud was put over them.

#### Details

Rocks were heated outside and then placed in the pit and the person inside poured water on them, which made steam. When the steam made them too hot, they ran outside and dove into the cold stream that was always nearby.

The Scandinavians have a similar idea they call a sauna. Some homes today have one of these saunas inside near the shower, instead of a stream.





SWEAT LODGE


***Includes the Northern Piute and the Shoshone/Bannock***

In prehistoric times the Great Basin was full of lakes and the water movement formed many caves in which people lived. When they later began to build places to live in, they often used the same cave or dome shape. The universal structure of the Great Basin is the domed Wickiup. The same type of shelter was good for either summer or winter and could be used for many different types of activities besides places to live. There were usually three or four Wickiups in a group.

**Characteristics of the style: The Wickiup**
**Roofs**

The walls and roof were all one. The outside was covered with grass thatch or mats that were bound down with small willow bands.

**Shape and Size**

The structure was usually between eight and 14 feet in diameter and six feet to eight feet in height. The shape was a dome or conical (a cone shape).

**Windows and Doors**

There was only one door, which usually faced to the east and was arch-shaped.

**Construction Materials**

They could be built quickly out of materials that were easy to find. The long willow branches that grew near the water were easily formed into arches by sticking the ends in the ground and making a dome shape. Another shape was made by putting one end of the branch in the ground and tying the other ends together at the top to form a cone shape. This was similar to the teepee shape used by the midwestern Plains people, but it was finished in a different way. Both of these shapes were the base for the construction of the Wickiup, which is what these Native Americans called their houses.

**Details**

The floor was covered with grass or mats. Sometimes earth was piled up a foot or so around the outside for security and insulation. These structures had very little furniture. Beds were grass or bark matting and covers were often woven fur. Storage for food and personal belongings was in bags or baskets that often were hung overhead. Fires were outside except in very cold winters when they risked a fire in order to keep warm. The Great Basin structures worked well for the way the people liked to live.





GRASS MATS  
OVER WILLOWS  
BENT INTO  
AN ARCHED  
SHAPE

GRASS MATS  
WITH WILLOW  
BINDINGS

DOOR

## GREAT BASIN WICKIUP

GRASS MATS  
OVER WILLOWS  
BENT INTO A  
CONE SHAPE

GRASS MATS  
WITH WILLOW  
BINDINGS

DOOR

## WICKIUP VARIATION

NATIVE AMERICAN PERIOD

## THE PLATEAU AND GREAT BASIN GROUPS

3.18

## Native American Dwellings

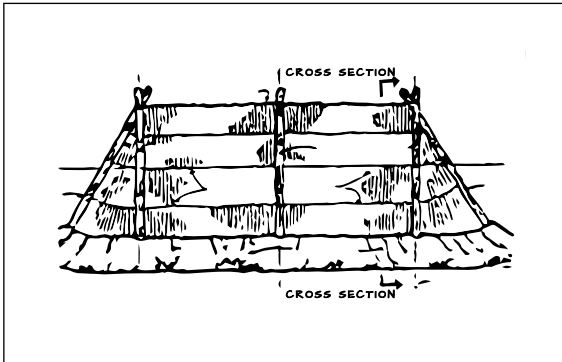
NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Below are pictures of three of the most important buildings of the Plateau and Great Basin Groups of Native Americans

**sweat lodge****long house****semi-subterranean**

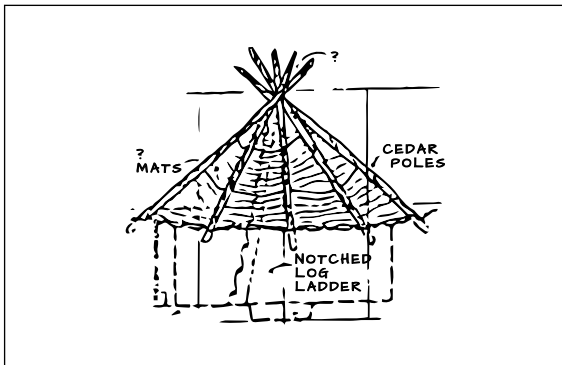
- a. Label each building  
b. Explain the use of the building  
c. State two characteristics of each building



Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Use: \_\_\_\_\_

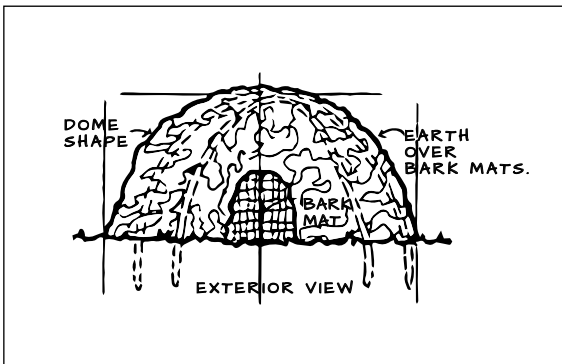
Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_



Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Use: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_



Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Use: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did Native Americans feel about their homes and the environment?

3. Name at least one tribe of the Plateau Group:

**THE GREAT BASIN GROUP****3.19***Native American Dwellings*

NAME

DATE

1. Name at least one tribe of the Great Basin Group:

2. Draw and label the home of the Great Basin Group.

3. State the main use of the structure:

4. List three characteristics:

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5. This home was similar to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Midwestern Plains people.



***Includes the Salishan, Nisqualli, Chinook, Tillamook, Alsea, and the Calapooya in the Willamette Valley***

This was one of the most complex cultures in the new world. One reason was the way the people lived their lives. Their position in the community was very important and was determined by their wealth and title, which was passed along from one generation to another. Of course, the chief had the highest rank, but there were other ranks. Another reason was their great ability to make things out of wood. It was the main substance of their culture because trees were so abundant in the area. The most important was cedar, but fir and spruce were also used.

The two most common structures in the Oregon coastal area were the Tillamook and the Chinook Long Houses.

**Characteristics of the style: The Tillamook House**

**Roofs**

The roof on a Tillamook house was a single pitched or shed roof. Chinook houses were different than Tillamook, often with gable roofs. The Tillamook house was made of logs, usually covered with planks.

**Shape and Size**

The shape was usually a rectangle quite a bit longer than it was wide. An average size was about 25 feet by 50 feet.

**Windows and Doors**

Doors were often circular—rounded at both the top and bottom, and there was one at each end. There were no windows, but a clever detail had been worked out that allowed sections of the roof to be slid open from the inside by using a pole. In good weather this allowed a great deal of light to come into the otherwise very dark interior.

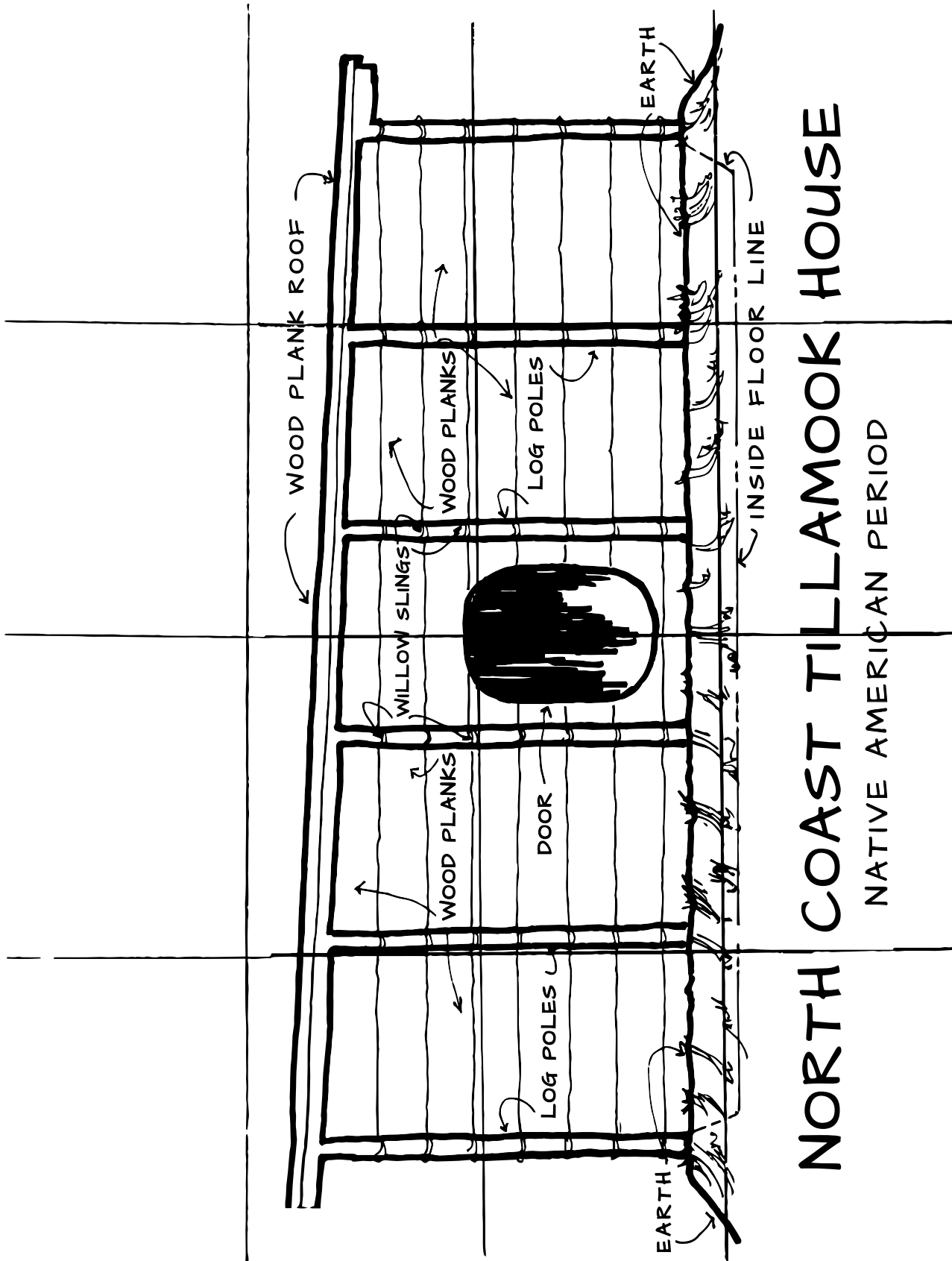
**Construction Materials**

The house might be built directly on the ground or over a pit dug in the ground. The walls were supported by logs buried in the ground and going straight up to the roof. The highest wall usually faced the river or the ocean. Cedar planks were slung crosswise on willow loops (tough flexible twigs used to bind things together).

**Details**

Portions of the house often had a second level. Sometimes the inside was partitioned to give the families privacy. Some had a raised platform around the outer edges. This made sitting more comfortable.





**NORTH COAST TILLAMOOK HOUSE**  
NATIVE AMERICAN PERIOD



The Alsea who lived along the middle Oregon coast around the Alsea River had a variation of the Semi-Subterranean House. This type of structure is one of the oldest forms known, and has many variations.

### Characteristics of the style: Semi-Subterranean House

#### Roofs

The roof was separate from the walls. Roof rafters (supports) were attached to the wall logs and slanted up toward the center to allow for drainage. Large woven mats were layered over the rafters.

#### Shape and Size

A pit was dug four to six feet deep and lined with cedar planks or mats. It was from eight to 20 feet in diameter.

#### Windows and Doors

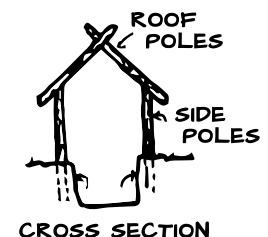
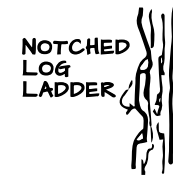
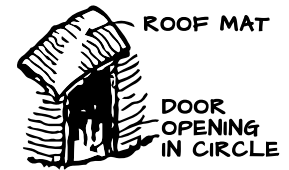
An opening was left between the mats as a door. There were no doors. Light came in through the smoke hole.

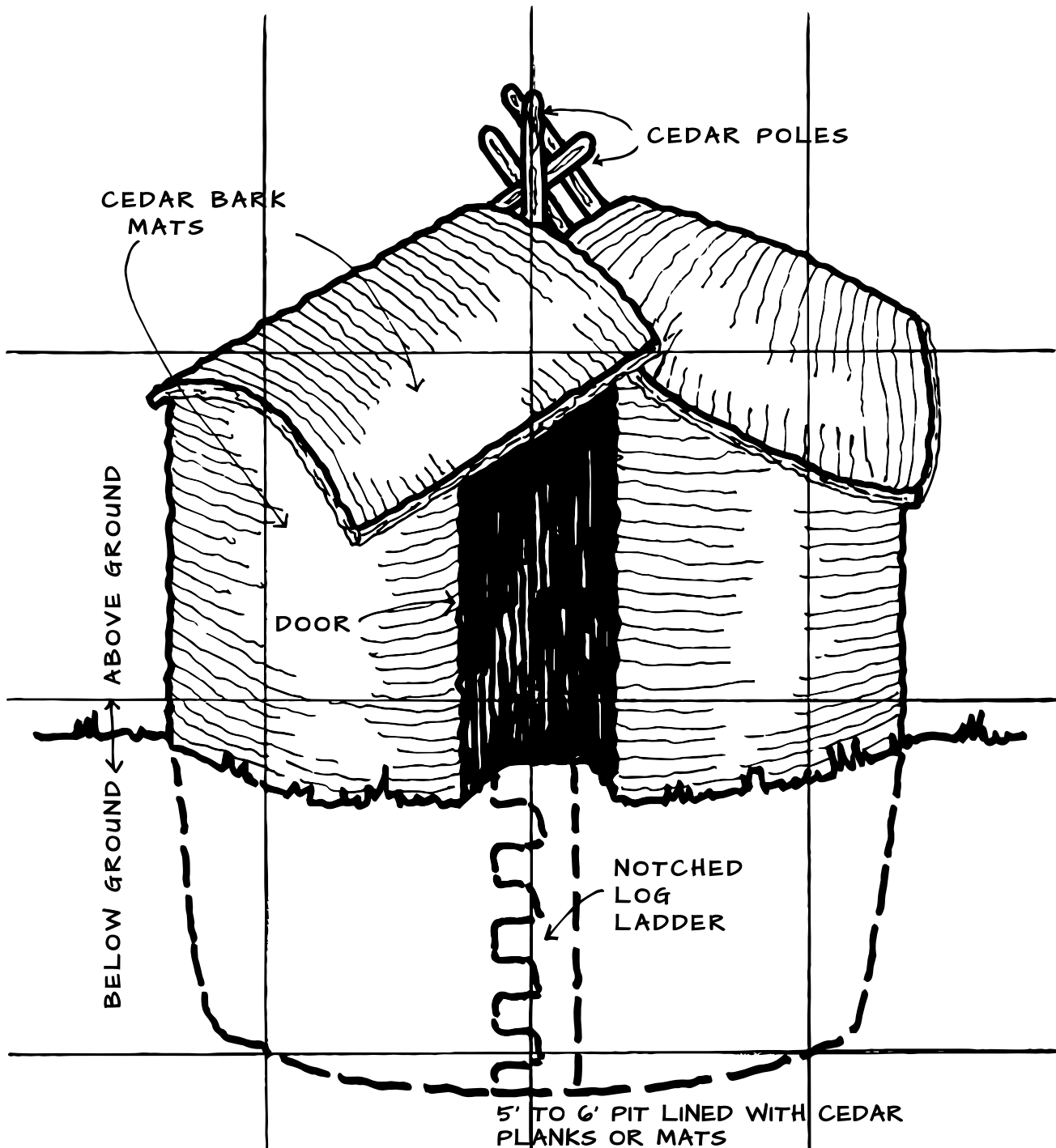
#### Construction Materials

Poles were buried in the ground and extended straight up from the top of the pit five or six feet. The roof rafters were tied to the poles. Mats woven of bark or grasses covered the walls.

#### Details

The bottom of the pit was reached by a notched log forming a ladder. Only one or two families lived in these houses, and usually for a rather short time. Clothing and food was hung from the roof rafters.





## SEMI-SUBTERRANEAN HOUSE

THIS EXAMPLE IS A COAST ALSEA HOUSE  
THERE WERE VARIATIONS IN ALL CULTURES

NATIVE AMERICAN PERIOD

## THE NORTHWEST COAST GROUP

3.24

## Native American Dwellings

NAME

DATE

1. Name at least one tribe of the Northwest Coast Group:

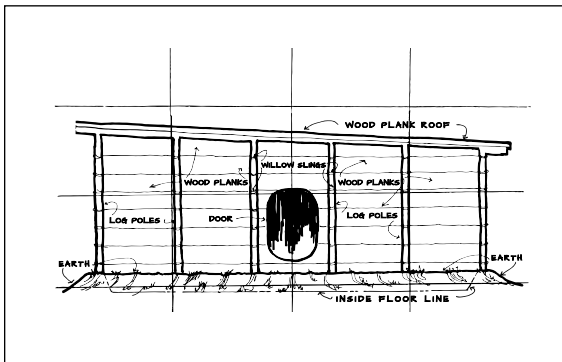
2. The Northwest Coast Group had a very complex structure. Wealth and position in the community were very important. Therefore, what do you think their homes might be like?

3. Below are pictures of two of the most important structures of the Northwest Coast Group:

## Tillamook House

## Alsea Semi-Subterranean House

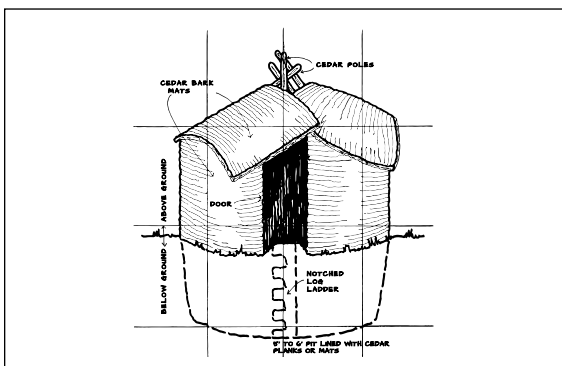
- Label each structure
- Explain the use of the structure
- List two characteristics of each structure



Building:

Use:

Characteristics:



Building:

Use:

Characteristics:

**GENERAL QUESTIONS****3.25***Native American Dwellings*

NAME

DATE

1. Why was the Northwest such a desirable place for Native Americans to live?

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2. What Northwest materials did they utilize in building their homes?

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3. What, in your opinion, makes the Northwest a pleasant place for you and your family to live?

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4. How do we use Northwest materials in building our homes?

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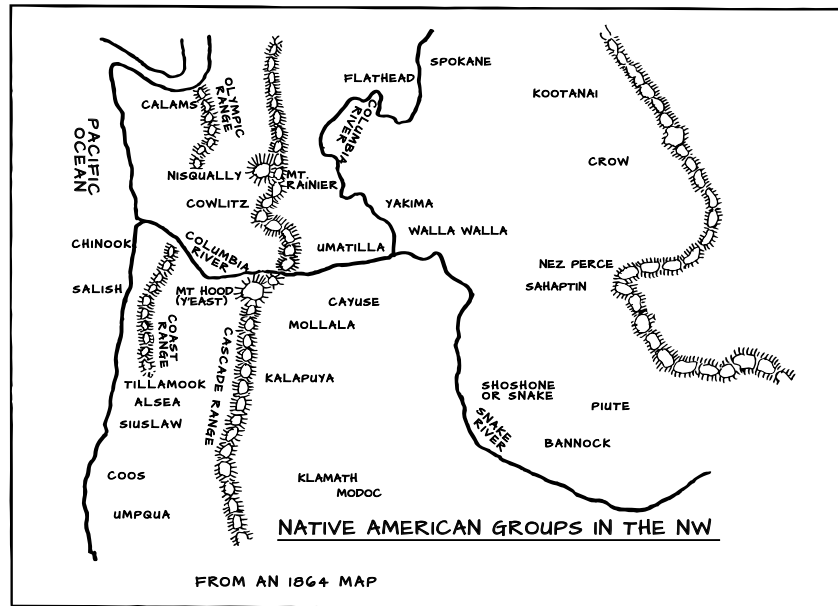
## MAP WORK

3.26

## Native American Dwellings

NAME

DATE



1. Draw a line to match the three cultural areas of the Northwest Native Americans to the description:

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Plateau:         | The area between the Rocky Mountains and the Cascade Range, including eastern Oregon, southwestern Idaho and northeastern California. |
| Great Basin:     | The Willamette Valley and the strip of land on the Pacific Coast, west of the Coast Mountain Range.                                   |
| Northwest Coast: | The area that drains into the Columbia, Snake and Klamath Rivers.   |

2. Label the map with the following information:

- Northwest States: Washington, Idaho, Oregon
- Three cultural areas of Northwest Native Americans
- Snake River
- Pacific Ocean
- Rocky Mountains
- Columbia River