

HODDER **GCSE** HISTORY FOR **EDEXCEL**



THE AMERICAN WEST, c.1836–c.1895

Dave Martin



DYNAMIC
LEARNING



HODDER
EDUCATION
LEARN MORE

CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Key topic 1 The early settlement of the West, c.1835–c.1862

Introduction	8
Chapter 1 The Plains Indians: their beliefs and way of life	9
Chapter 2 Migration and early settlement	24
Chapter 3 Conflict and tension	43

Key topic 2 Development of the Plains, c.1862–c.1876

Introduction	50
Chapter 4 The development of settlement in the West	51
Chapter 5 Ranching and the cattle industry	68
Chapter 6 Changes in the way of life of the Plains Indians	74

Key topic 3 Conflicts and conquest, c.1876–c.1895

Introduction	86
Chapter 7 Changes in farming, the cattle industry and settlement	87
Chapter 8 Conflict and tension	92
Chapter 9 The Plains Indians: the destruction of their way of life	104

Revise and practise 115

Glossary 117

Index 119

KEY TOPIC 1

The early settlement of the West, c.1835–c.1862

This key topic examines the early settlement of the West, c.1835–c.1862. At the start of this period the Great Plains were home to the Plains Indians, who lived a nomadic life. The Americans who came to the Plains were just travelling through – mainly settlers moving to Oregon, and Mormons to Salt Lake City. What contact there was between the Plains Indians and Americans tended to be peaceful. However, increasing numbers of Americans and the development of settlement on the Plains brought the two into conflict. Meanwhile, as this settlement ran ahead of the forces of law and order, there were problems with lawlessness.

Each chapter within this Key Topic explains a key issue and examines important lines of enquiry, as outlined in the boxes below.

There will also be guidance on how to answer the following question types:

- the importance question (page 28)
- the narrative question (page 42)
- the consequence question (page 49).

CHAPTER 1 THE PLAINS INDIANS: THEIR BELIEFS AND WAY OF LIFE

- Social and tribal structures, ways of life and means of survival on the Plains
- Beliefs about land and nature and attitudes to war and property
- US Government policy: support for US westward expansion and the significance of the Permanent Indian Frontier. The Indian Appropriations Act 1851

CHAPTER 2 MIGRATION AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

- Manifest Destiny
- The Oregon Trail from 1836, including the experiences of the Donner party and the Knight family, and the Mormon migration, 1846–47
- The California Gold Rush of 1849
- The development and problems of white settlement farming: early settlers in Kansas, the problems of living and farming on the Great Plains, and the Mormon success in the valley of Great Salt Lake

CHAPTER 3 CONFLICT AND TENSION

- The reasons for tensions between settlers and the Plains Indians
- The significance of the Fort Laramie Treaty 1851
- The problems of lawlessness in early towns and settlements
- Attempts by government and local communities to tackle lawlessness

TIMELINE

1824	Bureau of Indian Affairs set up	1849	California Gold Rush
1830	Indian Removal Act passed	1851 (Feb.)	Indian Appropriations Act passed
1836	Oregon Trail opened	1851 (Sept.)	Fort Laramie Treaty signed
1845	Concept of Manifest Destiny becomes popular	1854	Kansas–Nebraska Act passed
1845–48	Mexican–American War	1857–58	Mormon War
1846	Oregon Treaty agreed with Britain	1859	Colorado Gold Rush
1846–47	Mormon migration	1861	American Civil War

1 The Plains Indians: their beliefs and way of life

In 1834 the Great Plains were home to the nomadic Plains Indians, whose lifestyle was well-adapted to their environment. They were dependent on the buffalo and the horse for their survival and had an entirely different view of land and nature to the Americans of the eastern United States. To the Plains Indians no one could own the land although they were prepared to fight for hunting space. Once the US Government's policy became one of westward expansion, they focused on trying to 'civilise' the Plains Indians, confining them to reservations and setting up schools. The outcome of this policy was the Indian Appropriations Act 1851.

1.1 Background: the Great American Desert

Before we begin to study the people of the American West, we need to look at the Great Plains themselves. The Great Plains (Prairies), bounded in the west by the Rocky Mountains and in the east by the River Mississippi, stretch from the Canadian border in the north to the Mexican border in the south. This was where the Plains Indians lived. But to early travellers this was the Great American Desert.

ACTIVITY

Why would travellers have described the Great Plains as a desert?



The Great Plains

Landscape

In 1836 this was a region of gently rolling grasslands and slow-flowing rivers. In the north were the Black Hills, wooded hills surrounded by the 'Badlands', where soft rock was eroded into fantastic shapes.

Vegetation

In the west, near the Rocky Mountains, the grass was short. Towards the east it grew taller; this was the prairie grass. In some of the river valleys, and in the area closest to the River Mississippi, there was woodland. Berries, root plants and wild fruit grew in places. In the south the land became much drier. The grass was replaced by semi-desert plants, such as black chaparral and mesquite.

Climate

The climate of the region was, and still is, one of extremes of temperature, with strong winds all year round. In winter these winds brought blizzards and freezing cold. In summer they were very hot, drying up the land and rivers.

Wildlife

Well-adapted to living in this region was a wide variety of animals and birds. These included antelope, coyote, deer, gophers, rabbits and the great herds of buffalo (bison), plus eagles, grouse and hawks.

▲ Figure 1.1 North America: the different regions and types of vegetation

1.2 The Plains Indians: ways and means of survival on the Plains

The horse

Originally there were no horses in America. Spanish invaders in the sixteenth century brought the first horses to the continent. In 1640 the Pueblo Indians of Mexico revolted and captured many of the Spanish horses. From then on, horses were bred and traded between the Indian **Nations**.

By the 1680s and 1690s, Indian Nations like the Sioux and Cheyenne had horses. This allowed them to move out on to the Great Plains to live, and to hunt buffalo far more easily. The horse transformed their way of life. They were able to give up farming in the river valley and become **nomadic** hunter-gatherers living in small **bands**. The band was the basic unit of Plains Indian society. They could not live in larger groupings for very long as it would soon exhaust the pasture for their horses and the **game** available for food. As nomads, never staying in any one place for very long, they never developed a sense of ownership of the land (see Source A).

Source A An account by Iron Teeth, a Cheyenne woman

My grandmother told me that when she was young ... the people themselves had to walk. In those times they did not travel far nor often. But when they got horses, they could move more easily from place to place. Then they could kill more of the buffalo and other animals, and so they got more meat for food and gathered more skins for lodges and clothing.

As well as hunting, the horse was used as a means of transport for home and family, and it changed the nature of warfare. Warriors could raid over much longer distances and it gave a new reason for warfare – stealing horses. It also changed the way that individuals fought. It led to horsemanship becoming an important measure of bravery and status in Plains Indian society.

The horse was so vital to Plains Indian life that individuals counted their wealth by the number of horses they owned. Status and prestige were measured partly by the number of horses an individual could give away to those in need, or to those whom they owed gifts to.

▼ Figure 1.2 The estimated distribution of horses across the Great Plains

Nation	Date	Lodges	Population	Horses	Ratio of horses to lodges	Ratio of horses to people
Arikara	1871	180	1,650	350	1.9	0.2
Blackfoot	1860	300	2,400	2,400	8.0	1.0
Cheyenne (part)	1868	51	400	700	13.7	1.7
Comanche	1869	300	2,538	7,614	25.4	3.0
Crow	1871	460	4,000	9,500	20.6	2.4
Pawnee	1871	260	2,364	1,050	4.0	0.4
Sioux: Oglala/Brule	1871	600	5,000	2,000	3.3	0.4
Sioux: Hunkpapa/Miniconjou	1878	360	2,900	3,500	9.7	1.2



▲ **Source B** *Comanche Feats of Horsemanship*, a painting by George Catlin, 1834

GEORGE CATLIN 1796–1872

Catlin was born on 26 July 1796, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the fifth of fourteen children. He was an artist and entrepreneur of great vision and energy. He travelled widely in the West in the 1830s. His purpose was to make a collection of drawings and paintings to form an Indian Gallery. This would be a record of the Plains Indian society that he knew would soon disappear (see Source C). He wrote at the time, 'Nothing short of the loss of my life shall prevent me from visiting their country and becoming their historian.'

The exhibition, his completed masterpiece, contained over 500 drawings and paintings which he exhibited around America and Europe. It was based on his wide experience of Indian life, gained in eight years of travel, and he was obviously sympathetic towards the Indians. He also published his writings, *Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*, in 1841. The power of his visual images gave him a great influence on the way other Americans thought about the Indians, but his images can be used to portray Indians in a negative way – as savages – as well as in a positive way.



ACTIVITIES

- 1 Study Source B. What war skills does George Catlin show in his painting?
- 2 What evidence is there in Source B and Figure 1.2 that horses were important to the Comanche?
- 3 Both the Arikara and Pawnee Nations were farmers more than hunters. What evidence can you find in Figure 1.2 to support this conclusion?

Source C From George Catlin, *Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indian*, 1841

The buffalo's doom is sealed, and with their extinction, the Indians must surely sink into despair and starvation. The Plains offer them no other means of living.

ACTIVITY

Study Source C. Which word would George Catlin have used to describe the usefulness of the buffalo to the Plains Indians' lives: important or essential?

1.3 Hunting the buffalo

The Plains Indians did not farm the buffalo; they hunted them.

Buffalo Dances

Before setting out to hunt, the Plains Indians would hold a ceremonial Buffalo Dance (see Source D). This could last for several days. They would dress as buffalo and copy their movements. The purpose of the dance was to call on the spirit world for help in their hunting, and to call the buffalo herd closer to them. Plains Indians believed this would bring them good luck and ensure a successful hunt. The Buffalo Dance was as important as the sending out of scouts to find the buffalo herd.

Buffalo hunts

With horses the Plains Indians were able to hunt the buffalo very effectively. Bands sometimes joined together for the spring buffalo hunt. The hunt was carefully organised and policed by the members of **warrior societies**. They did this to make sure that the buffalo were not scared away before all was ready, and to ensure that not too many animals were killed in the excitement of the chase. Two or three successful buffalo hunts a year were enough to feed and shelter the band. This idea of the Indians living in harmony with nature has been challenged by some modern historians, who have suggested that the Indians were careless in their slaughter of the buffalo.

When the hunt began, the warriors would surround or **stampede** the buffalo and kill them by firing arrows at the running animals. Each warrior marked his arrows so that the buffalo he killed could be identified. Besides ensuring the survival of the tribe, the warriors would also gain honour and prestige from their skill in hunting. In order to get close enough to kill the animal, the hunter had to put himself and his horse in considerable danger.



▲ **Source D** *Buffalo Dance of the Sioux*, a painting by George Catlin



▲ **Source E** *Buffalo Hunt, Chase*, a painting by George Catlin, c.1863

Source F Black Elk, a Sioux Indian, born c.1863, describing the preparations for a hunt

Then the crier shouted, 'Your knives shall be sharpened. Make ready, make haste; your horses make ready! We shall go forth with arrows. Plenty of meat we shall make!'

Then the head man went around picking out the best hunters with the fastest horses, and to these he said, 'Young warriors, your work I know is good; so today you will feed the helpless. You shall help the old and the young and whatever you kill shall be theirs.' This was a great honour for young men.

After the hunt

Once the buffalo was dead, it was butchered by the women and children. Some of the body parts, such as the liver and kidneys, were immediately eaten raw as delicacies. Other parts were boiled or roasted, and the rest was cut into strips to be smoked or dried in the sun. This dried meat would keep for a long time. It could be pounded into a pulp and mixed with wild berries, such as cherries, to make pemmican.

The hides were worked by the women. First, the hides were pegged out to dry and scraped to remove all the flesh. This made **rawhide**. Some hides were then **tanned**, using the animals' brains, and worked to make them soft and pliable. They were then ready to be made into clothing or **tipi** covers.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Look at Source D. Explain how the Sioux re-enacted the buffalo hunt.
- 2 Look at Source E. What dangers of the buffalo hunt are shown?
- 3 Read Source F. Why was buffalo hunting important for individual warriors?
- 4 Imagine you were a newspaper reporter in 1834. How would you describe for your readers back East the preparations for the buffalo hunt, the hunt itself and what happened afterwards? You should also comment on the different roles of men and women.

Practice question

Explain the importance of the buffalo to the Plains Indians' way of life. (For guidance, see page 23.)

1.4 The importance of the buffalo

The buffalo were extremely important to the Plains Indians. Figure 1.3 outlines the many uses for the various parts of the buffalo.



▲ Figure 1.3 A hundred uses? How the Plains Indians used different parts of the buffalo

1.5 Indian homes – the tipi

The tipi (also called a **lodge** or **tepee**) was the home of each Indian family. It was made from ten to twenty buffalo skins, sewn together and supported by a frame of wooden poles arranged in a circle. It was the responsibility of the women. They made it, owned it, put it up and moved it (see Source K on page 16). It could be taken down and packed for transport quickly. This made it an ideal home for people who were frequently on the move.

At the top of the tipi there were two 'ears' or flaps that could be moved to direct the wind so that the smoke from the fire inside could escape. In summer the tipi bottom could be rolled up to let air in. In winter it could be banked with earth to keep the tipi warm. Sioux tipis were decorated by the men with geometric patterns and scenes recording their bravery in the hunt and in battle.

Inside, a fire would always be burning at the centre to provide heat and for cooking. The floor was covered with furs. Everybody had their place. Because the space was small there were strict rules about behaviour. For example, it was rude to pass between another person and the fire.

Source G A Sioux proverb

A beautiful tipi is like a good mother. She hugs her children to her and protects them from heat and cold, snow and rain.



▲ Figure 1.4 A modern artist's illustration of a tipi

Source I From Colonel Dodge, *Hunting Grounds of the Great West*, 1877. Colonel Dodge was a US army officer who had served on the Great Plains in the 1830s

The home or lodge of the Plains Indians is from twelve to twenty feet in diameter, and about fifteen feet high. The fire is built in the centre, and the smoke escapes through an opening at the top. The draught is, however, not effective, and the lodge is usually in cold weather too full of smoke to be bearable to anyone but an Indian. It is, however, well adapted to their needs. Its shape secures it from the danger of being overturned by windstorms, and with very little fuel it can be kept warm and comfortable even in the coldest weather.

The beds are piles of buffalo robes and blankets, spread on the ground as close to the outer circumference as possible. They serve as sleeping places by night, and seats by day. In this small space are often crowded eight or ten persons, possibly of three or four different families. Since the cooking, eating, living and sleeping are all done in the one room, it soon becomes unbelievably filthy.

Source H From George Catlin, *Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indian*, 1841

The lodges are taken down in a few minutes by the women and easily transported to any part of the country where they wish to camp. They generally move six to eight times in the summer, following the immense herds of buffalo. The manner in which a camp of Indians strike [take down] their tents and move them is curious. I saw a camp of Sioux, consisting of six hundred lodges, struck and everything packed and on the move in a very few minutes.

Source J Flying Hawk, a Sioux chief, quoted in a history published in 1947, comparing tipis to settlers' houses

The white man builds big house, cost much money, like big cage, shut out sun, can never move. The tipi is much better to live in: always clean, warm in winter, cool in summer; easy to move.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Look at Figure 1.4. How many uses of the buffalo can be seen in this tipi?
- 2 Describe how the tipi's design solved the following environmental problems facing the Plains Indians:
 - ☐ lack of wood
 - ☐ strong winds
 - ☐ extremes of temperature
 - ☐ need to move frequently.
- 3 Compare Source I to Source J. On what key points do Colonel Dodge and Flying Hawk agree?
- 4 On what key points do Colonel Dodge and Flying Hawk disagree? Can you suggest possible reasons why?

1.6 How was Plains Indian society organised?

Family life

Plains Indians spent the year travelling, hunting and camping with their band. This would consist of between ten and fifty families, each with their own tipi. As hunter-gatherers it made sense to stay in small groups. Within the family there were different roles. Men were responsible for hunting, looking after the horses and protecting the band. They were judged by their skills as hunters, warriors and horsemen. Women were responsible for the tipi, for preparing food and fetching water, and for making clothing. They were judged by their skill at crafts and as homemakers.

Women were highly valued as the bearers of children, and children were seen as the future of the band. Children did not go to school, but learned their essential life skills from their parents and relatives. They were taught to ride, and boys learned hunting and fighting skills, while girls learned how to maintain a home. Old people played an important role. They gave advice in council and passed on the history of the people. When they were too old to travel, they might be left behind. The survival of the band was more important than any individual.

Marriage and polygamy

Arranged marriages took place in some Indian Nations, but in most cases marriages were love matches. A young man would have to impress the young woman with his bravery, while a gift of horses or buffalo skins would convince her parents of his ability to support a wife. The horses did not mean that the bride had been sold. Instead it was proof of her husband's love for her and the high esteem in which her family held her. When a man married, he went to live with his wife's family. Indian descent is matrilineal, meaning that they trace their descent through their mother, her mother and so on, not through their father.

Most men had one wife, but rich men could have several wives (**polygamy**). Polygamy made sense in a situation where there were more women than men, and this was often the case because of the dangers of hunting and warfare. Polygamy was a way of making sure that all the women were cared for and that the band had as many children as possible. If a woman's husband was killed in warfare or while hunting, then she would remarry. Divorce was allowed. Either partner could declare a marriage over, but the woman kept the tipi.

Indian society and political organisation

In order to survive on the Great Plains an Indian band had to co-operate and be well-organised. From time to time bands would meet to camp and hunt together. At least once a year the bands would meet together as a Nation.

If he were painting today, Catlin would not use 'Red Indian' in his title, as this is now considered insulting by many. At the time of the publication of this book, there is an argument still going on whether the name of American football team, the Washington Redskins, should be changed.

▼ **Source K** *Red Indians using the Travois*, a painting by George Catlin, c.1839. A travois is when the tipi poles are tied together to form a sled, which is pulled by a horse, on which all the family's belongings are carried



Chiefs

Indian chiefs were not elected, nor did they inherit power. They became chiefs because of their wisdom, their spiritual power or 'medicine', and their skills as hunters and warriors. They might not remain a chief for life. Only great chiefs like Red Cloud and Sitting Bull were able to persuade the warriors of many bands and even of different Nations to follow them. When he was older, Red Cloud made peace with the settlers and agreed to live on a **reservation**. From then on, many Sioux no longer followed him, choosing instead to follow younger chiefs such as Crazy Horse.

Councils

Important decisions were taken in council. The men of the band would discuss what to do. The advice of the **medicine man**, chiefs and elders would be listened to with respect, but these men would not tell the others what to do. Normally, the council members would keep talking until everyone agreed. While they talked, they would smoke a ceremonial pipe. Plains Indians believed that the smoke would inform the spirit world and help them to make good decisions. Sometimes councils were made up of all the men of the band; at other times only the important men would meet.

When bands met together the council of the Nation would meet with representatives from each band. It could take important decisions, such as deciding to go to war, but the bands were not bound by the council's decision. As a result, some bands might be at war while others were at peace. Later this was a source of confusion for the settlers when conflict broke out. Was a band at war or not? Were all its members peaceful, or just some?

Warrior societies

All the men of a band belonged to a warrior society, such as the Kit Foxes of the Sioux. Their opinions were always important.

ACTIVITY

Look at Source L, the painting of a Sioux council by George Catlin. Explain how it helps you to understand the confusion Colonel Dodge writes about in Sources M and N about how Indian government functioned.

Practice question

Explain the importance of warrior societies to Plains Indian life. (For guidance, see page 23.)



▲ **Source L** *A Sioux Council*, a painting by George Catlin, c.1847

Source M From Colonel Dodge, *Hunting Grounds of the Great West*, 1877

Whatever the power of the chief and the council there is another power to which both have to yield. This power is the hunters of the tribe, who form a sort of guild. Among the Cheyenne these men are called 'dog soldiers'. This 'guild' comprises the whole working force of the band. It is they who protect and supply the women and children. From them come all orders for marches. By them the camps are selected. They supply the guards for the camp and choose the hunting parties. One of the most important functions of the dog soldiers is the protection of the game. Except when laying in the supply of meat for winter, only enough buffalo are killed for the current needs of the camp. Great care is taken not to alarm the herds, which will feed for days in the vicinity of an Indian camp of a thousand souls, while a half a dozen white men would have driven them away in a day.

Source N From Colonel Dodge, *Hunting Grounds of the Great West*, 1877

I cannot say exactly how these powers and duties of these three governmental forms [i.e. chiefs, councils and warrior societies] blend and concur ... and I have never met an Indian or white man who could satisfactorily explain them. The result, however, is fairly good, and seems well suited to the character, needs and peculiarities of the life of the Plains Indians.

1.7 Beliefs about land and nature

The spirit world

The Sioux believed in Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit (see Source O). He had created the world and all life. They believed that all living things had spirits. This included animals, birds, fish and plants, as well as human beings. Even the rocks, trees and streams had spirits. The Sioux believed that the spirits influenced their lives. This belief explains some of the things that the Sioux did.

Source O Black Elk describes the importance of the circle in Indian beliefs

Everything an Indian does is a circle, and that is because the power of the world works in circles, even the seasons form a great circle, and come back to where they were before. Our tipis are round, like birds' nests, and they are set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant us to raise our children.

Visions

One way to contact the spirits was through visions. Young boys were expected to go in search of theirs. First, they might use the **sweat lodge** to clean their body. Then they

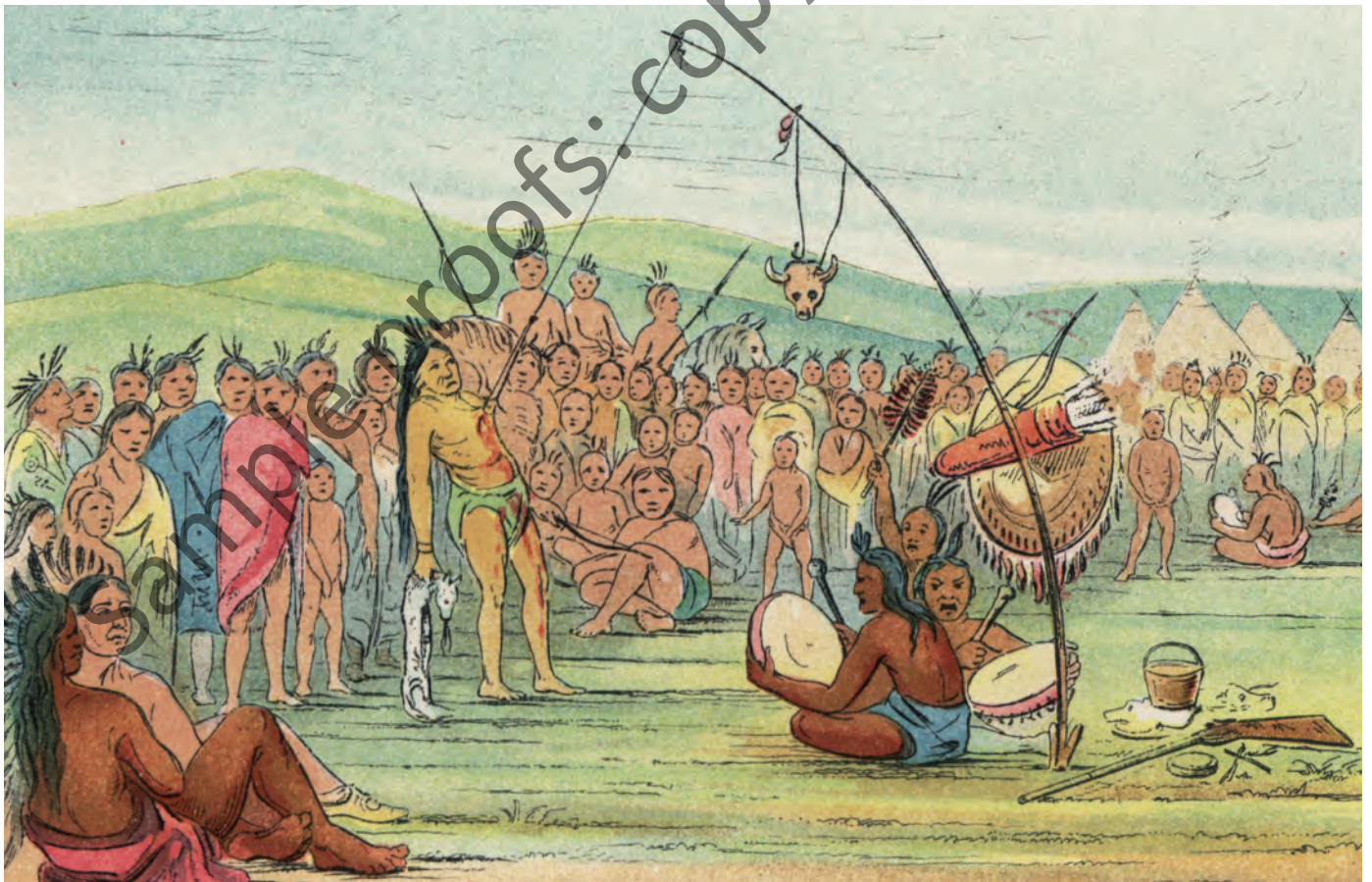
would pray and fast (go without food). Finally, they would receive their vision. This would be interpreted by the medicine man and their adult name would be given, often based on their vision. That is how Sitting Bull got his name.

Women could easily make contact with the spirit world. They developed this ability when they reached puberty and menstruated for the first time. They received training from a medicine woman on how to control their contacts with the spirit world. Then they received their adult name.

Visions would help the Sioux throughout their lives. Before the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull dreamed that he saw US army soldiers on horseback, riding just below the rim of the sun. They were upside down, and they were falling into the Sioux camp. He and his followers believed that this meant that the soldiers would die in the battle.

Dances and ceremonies

Another way to contact the spirit world was through dances, like the Buffalo and Scalp Dances, and ceremonies. The most famous was the Sun Dance which would be held when bands met together (see Sources P and Q).



▲ **Source P** *Sun Dance*, a painting by George Catlin, c.1837

Source Q A Sun Dance described by George Catlin, *Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indian*, 1841

We found him naked, except his breech-cloth, with splints or skewers run through the flesh on both breasts, leaning back and hanging with the weight of his body to the top of a pole which was fastened in the ground, and to the upper end of which he was fastened by a cord which was tied to the splints. In this position he was leaning back, with nearly the whole weight of his body hanging to the pole, the top of which bent forward, allowing his body to sink about half-way to the ground. His feet were still upon the ground, supporting a small part of his weight; and he held in his left hand his favourite bow, and in his right, with a desperate grip, his medicine bag. In this condition, with blood trickling down over his body, which was covered with white and yellow clay, and amidst a great crowd who were looking on, sympathising with and encouraging him, he was hanging and 'looking at the sun' without paying the least attention to anyone about him. In the group that was reclining around him, were several mystery-men beating their drums and shaking their rattles, and singing as loud as they could yell, to encourage him and strengthen his heart to stand and look at the sun, from its rising in the morning 'til its setting at night; at which time if his heart and strength have not failed him, he is 'cut down', receives the liberal donation of presents (which have been thrown on a pile before him during the day), and also the name and the style of a doctor, or medicine-man which lasts him, and ensures respect, through life.

Land

The religion of the Sioux affected their attitude to land. They believed that they came from the earth, just like the plants and animals. When they died, they believed they returned to the land. They were part of the land, and such land could not be owned by one individual, or even one Nation. The land was part of life itself. They called the land their mother and they said that ploughing the land was like ripping their mother's breast.

Some land was sacred, especially high places that were close to the spirit world. For the Sioux, this was the Black Hills. This was where they took their dead for burial. It was where their holy men went to seek guidance when important decisions had to be made.

Outside observers of Indian religion misunderstood many aspects of it. The Plain Indians' attitude to land was one of the most misunderstood. It was also the greatest source of conflict, as the ownership of land became an increasingly tense issue over the period 1850–70.

ACTIVITIES

- Look at Sources P and Q. You could also look back to Source D (*Buffalo Dance*) on page 12 and ahead to Source T (*Scalp Dance*) on page 21. Ceremonies in many religions share common features:
 - ☐ a congregation
 - ☐ holy objects
 - ☐ individual participants
 - ☐ music
 - ☐ priests
 - ☐ special places or special buildings.
 Can you find evidence of these features in the ceremonies shown and described?
- To some, Plains Indians appeared to be savages: wild, cruel and uncivilised. Which features of Plains Indian religion could be used to support this view?
- Copy the chart on the right. Then complete each box with an example to show how religion affected every aspect of the daily life of the Sioux. Some have already been completed for you. You need to try to decide how important an effect religion has in each example.
- Write a short paragraph that explains the attitude to land of the Plains Indians. Think about both their nomadic lifestyle and their religious beliefs.

Aspect	How was it affected by religion?
Land	
Chiefs	You follow a man who has strength and power from his visions – a man like Crazy Horse
Ceremonies	
Councils	
Hunting	
Medicine	You believe that evil spirits cause disease and call on the spirit world for help and healing
Name	Your name has come from your spiritual guardian, whom you saw in a vision
Village life	Your tipi is round and your band always pitches their tipis in a circle, with the doorway facing east
Visions	
War	

1.8 Attitudes to war

Warfare to the Sioux was not a matter of long campaigns fought by large numbers of men. There were no formal declarations of war, and fighting did not continue until one side had won or a peace treaty was signed. Instead, it was a series of raids by relatively small groups of warriors. Raiding parties would typically set out from a village three or four times a year.

Reasons for war

Plains Indians went on these raids to steal horses, to seek revenge or to destroy their enemies. They did not want to conquer land, as they believed that no one could own the land and they did not need to hold on to any piece of land as they were always on the move. They were as one with the land.

But there was rivalry for hunting and living space; this was essential to their survival. Before the arrival of the settlers on the Great Plains, the Sioux had driven the Crow from the Powder River country. Some historians have argued that the warfare between the Plains Nations helped to keep the bands together. Certainly, by 1840, the Sioux Nation had traditional enemies, the Crow and the Pawnee, and traditional allies, the Cheyenne.

Fighting did not happen in the cold winter months when snow covered the Great Plains. Instead fighting happened in the summer, after the Plains Indians had built up their food supplies by hunting the buffalo.

From the middle of our period, from the 1860s, wars were fought to defend the Plains Indians' way of life against the threat from settlers and soldiers. In some conflicts, such as Red Cloud's War (1866–68), the Sioux were forced to fight in winter as well as in summer.

Individual warriors fought for a number of reasons:

Source R Plains Indian war songs, first written down in the nineteenth century

See them prancing.	Crow Indian
They come neighing,	You must watch your
They come a Horse	horses.
Nation.	A horse thief,
See them prancing,	Often,
They come neighing,	Am I.
They come.	

- to prove their bravery and to gain personal glory – this might enable them to enter a warrior society or gain a wife
- to capture horses and weapons and become wealthy
- for leaders, chiefs like Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, to test their spiritual power, their 'medicine', and to increase their standing – if chiefs were unsuccessful, warriors would not follow them.

Plains Indians did not consider it heroic to die in battle. If they were outnumbered, it was more important to run away and stay alive as a provider for their family and their tribe, and to avoid losing their scalp. To the Americans this appeared cowardly.

Taking scalps

Plains Indians took scalps as evidence of their success in battle. The scalps were dried and hung as trophies outside their tipis. They were also used to decorate the warrior's war gear – shirts, lances and shields. The Plains Indians believed that if a warrior lost his scalp he could not go into the afterlife. You scalped your enemy so that he would not be there to fight you. This was also the reason for the mutilation of dead enemies. Mutilation happened less frequently, as Plains Indians rarely captured the bodies of their fallen enemies. Both these practices horrified the Americans who fought against them.

Source S From a speech made in 1862 by Little Crow, Santee Sioux leader, as remembered by his son

Little Crow is not a coward, and he is not a fool. When did he run away from his enemies? When did he leave his braves behind him on the warpath and turn back to his tipi? ... Is Little Crow without scalps? Look at his war feathers! Behold the scalp locks of your enemies hanging there on his lodge poles!



▲ **Source T** *Scalp Dance, Sioux*, a painting by George Catlin, c.1848

Counting coup

The arrival of the gun on the Great Plains might have made war more destructive. Yet it did not, because war was made into a ritual with the idea of 'counting coup'. It was braver to get close enough to touch an enemy, to count coup, than to kill him. Warriors were usually members of one of the warrior societies, such as the sash-wearing Kit Foxes. During a fight a Kit Fox warrior might peg the end of his sash to the ground. This meant that he would not move until the fight had been won, until he was rescued by another warrior pulling out the peg, or until he was killed.

Casualties were relatively low. Between 1835 and 1845 the Sioux were at war with their eastern neighbours, the Ojibwa. In that decade the Sioux lost 88 people, their enemies 129. Roughly half of these were women and children. So the Sioux lost fewer than four warriors a year. More men were lost as a result of hunting accidents than through fighting.

Source U Plenty Coups, Crow chief, describing a raid

We soon reached the timber ... and drove the enemy back easily. Three days later, we rode back into our village singing of victory, and our chiefs ... came out to us singing praise songs. My heart rejoiced when I heard them speak my name ... I shall never forget it, or how happy I felt because I had counted my first coup.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Look at Source T. What weapons can you see?
 - a) What else are the warriors dancing with?
 - b) What impression of the Sioux would this dance have given to outside observers?
- 2 Read Sources R, S and U. List the reasons why a) individual warriors and b) Indian Nations went to war.
- 3 Use your lists to write a paragraph that explains why Plains Indians went to war.
- 4 Write a second paragraph that explains how Sioux attitudes to war differed from those of the Americans they fought against.

1.9 US Government policy and the Permanent Indian Frontier

From the very beginnings of its founding colonies, the people of the United States of America had encountered the original inhabitants, the Indian Nations. The early history of this relationship varied from friendship and co-operation to hostility and open war. What tended to happen was that as settlement advanced, the Indian Nations were destroyed. To begin with the Indians were treated as sovereign nations to be negotiated with. Under early peace treaties Indian Nations surrendered some of their land to the United States. The land that they kept was their reservation. Over time the term reservation was used to describe any area of land on which Indians were confined whether they had historically lived on it or not, and the Indians became seen increasingly as a barrier. In 1824 the Bureau of Indian Affairs was set up within the US War Department to manage the relationship.

The Indian Removal Act 1830

In 1830 the Indian Removal Act was passed. This did two things. The first was to establish a Permanent Indian **Frontier** in the West, beyond the Mississippi. This was the boundary between the United States and Indian **Territory**. As new territories were created, Indian Territory shrank until it was what later became Oklahoma. The second thing the Act did was to allow the removal of the south-eastern Indian Nations so that their lands would be available for settlement. These Indians were moved to lands in Indian Territory. This measure was described as being for their protection, although thousands died during the forced removal, which became known as 'The Trail of Tears'. This removal process was completed by 1838.

Indian Appropriations Act 1851

By the 1850s, settlers were moving beyond the Permanent Indian Frontier onto the eastern edges of the Great Plains and travellers were crossing them. This westwards movement was something that the US Government encouraged, but it made more pressing the argument that the Plains Indians needed protection. Meanwhile, in 1849, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been moved from the War Department to the Department of the Interior. US Government policy focused on trying to 'civilise' the Indians by confining them to reservations and setting up schools. The outcome of this policy was the Indian Appropriations Act 1851. This set up legally recognized reservations, intended to protect Indians from westward expansion (see Source W).

ACTIVITY

Read Source V. Why do you think Orlando Brown wanted reservations to contain land suitable for agriculture?

Source V From a description of what an Indian reservation should be like by the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Orlando Brown, 1850

A country adapted to agriculture, of limited extent and well-defined boundaries; within which all, with occasional exceptions, should be compelled constantly to remain until such time as their general improvement and good conduct may supersede the necessity of such restrictions.

Practice question

Write a narrative account analysing the main developments in US Government policy towards the Plains Indians in the period 1836–61.

You may use the following in your answer:

- the movement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.

You must also use information of your own.

(For guidance, see page 42.)

1.10 Examination practice

This section provides guidance on how to answer the 'importance' question. First look at the question in the box and the guidance on how to answer. Then look at the steps in the diagram.

Explain **two** of the following:

- The importance of breeding and training horses to the way of life and means of survival of the Plains Indians
- The importance of religion to the way of life of the Plains Indians
- The importance of the Indian Appropriations Act 1851 to the way of life of the Plains Indians.

How to answer

You must first choose **two** of these three developments. Your choice should be based on the two you feel provide greater opportunity for you to focus on *importance*.

For the two you have chosen, **underline key points** in the question. This will ensure that you focus sharply on what the question wants you to write about. Remember for each development that you choose, the focus of the question is its **significance** for a further factor and/or event.

Step 1

For the first of your choices, jot down examples of its importance.

Example

The importance of breeding and training horses to the way of life and means of survival of the Plains Indians:

- allowed them to move onto the Plains
- hunting buffalo
- measure of wealth.

Step 2

Begin the answer with the actual words used in the question – this will ensure that the focus is sharp and clear. Start by introducing one example of its significance.

Example

Breeding and training horses was important as the horse allowed the Plains Indians to move out on to the Great Plains to live and transformed their way of life.

Step 3

Fully explain this using precise evidence. You will gain higher marks for using more accurate information.

Example

This was because they were able to give up farming in the river valleys and become nomadic hunter-gatherers. When the buffalo herds moved, having horses meant the Plains Indians could pack up their tipi villages on travois and follow them.

Step 4

Now you need to introduce another example of its significance.

Example

The horse also allowed the Plains Indians to hunt the buffalo far more effectively.

Step 5

Now fully explain this second example of significance using accurate and precise evidence.

Example

They could ride alongside the herds and kill them with their bows and arrows. This was important as it meant they could kill as many animals as they needed for food, clothing and shelter.

Step 6

You need to explain your other choice using steps 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

ACTIVITY

Now have a go yourself at explaining your other choice.