Native Americans were hunter-gatherers. They gathered maize, squash, beans and turnips (asking permission from the spirits of the land before pulling them up).

They also hunted deer, rabbits, ducks and turkeys, but the central event of their life was the buffalo hunt (on horseback).

Men and women had clearly defined roles. Men went off to the hunt and to war (on horseback). Women (and any males too timid to go through initiation) gathered food, stayed at home and looked after children.

Native American’s lived in Tipis because they were warm in the winter and cool in the summer, the shape protected against the harsh winds, they were easy to move and fitted the nomadic lifestyle.

Native American Religion.

Although many Native Americans believed in a great spirit - called Wakan Tanka - their religion was animistic. It was based on the desire to appease ‘the spirits’, which they did in a variety of ways.

- When a young man came of age, he would take part in a ceremony which involved fasting, self-harm, going into a trance and seeing an animal that was a spirit friend.
- One of these ceremonies - the Sun Dance - featured a structure with a central pole signifying the sun, from which the young men hung themselves by their nipples.
- Native Americans believed that spirits caused the harsh weather of the Plains, as well as illness. They thought that ‘medicine men’ could speak to these spirits, and ask for their help.
- They performed the Mandan Buffalo Dance, which they thought would bring buffalo to them.