



The Mi'kmaq

TERRITORY

The Mi'kmaq people lived near the Atlantic Ocean's coast and shoreline. We know the area today as Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, the Saint Lawrence River and Eastern Québec. They also lived in the land of Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire in the United States.

FOOD AND SHELTER

Mi'kmaq settlements often moved like a seasonal tide. For Spring and Summer, Mi'kmaq households moved closer to water, like on the edge of a bay or river. Fall and Winter would signal it was time to move further inland. Shellfish provided a large part of the food the Mi'kmaq ate. However, they also ate fish, seals, sea-bird eggs, caribou in the northern areas and moose. They would also gather wild roots, berries and other edible plants growing in abundance in the area.

The word wigwam comes from the original Mi'kmaq "wikuom". A traditional Mi'kmaq wigwam had 5 main spruce poles. They used birch bark sheets to cover the poles. At the top, they left open a space for the fireplace smoke to escape. Other poles kept the sheets in place and woven mats, twigs or animal furs covered the ground. Many families painted figures of animals or

birds on the bark
sheets.



CLOTHING

Deer and moose skins made up most of the Mi'kmaq leggings, coats and moccasins. Fur robes kept them warm in winter. Many Mi'kmaq used animal claws, teeth and even porcupine quills to decorate clothing. They also used bird feathers and dried fish skins for decoration. Men wore leggings and a loose robe over the shoulders. Women wore leggings and longer robes often belted at the waist.



TRIBAL CULTURE

Leadership in Mi'kmaq communities meant more about a person's reputation than a person's power. If someone showed great skill in fishing or hunting or other skills, that person's opinions would be more respected.

Transportation was very important to the Mi'kmaq. They made birchbark canoes, sometimes 3 metres to 8 metres long. The Mi'kmaq used many kinds of snowshoes and even built sleds to carry things over the snow. We still use the Mi'kmaq word "toboggan" today for these winter sleds.





SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Mi'kmaq storytelling would often last for several days and involved dancing, singing and even feasting on special occasions. According to their legends, a character named Glooscap used Prince Edward Island as his pillow. When a giant frog swallowed all the world's water, Glooscap hunted the creature and gave all the water back to the world. Glooscap's twin brother wanted to make rivers crooked and mountains impossible to climb. Glooscap fixed the rivers and mountains so that people could live on the land.

The Mi'kmaq believed everything was connected in nature and deserved a great level of respect. They would often use a phrase, "Msit no 'kmaq", when talking about the world. The phrase means "All my relations."

Below: Mi'kmaq at Tuft's Cove settlement, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, 1871; Right: Detail of etching *Grand Passage in the Bay Fundy on the Western Shore of Nova Scotia* by J. F. W. Desbarres. Image shows high-sided Mi'kmaq canoe and other vessels between present-day Brier Island and Long Island, Nova Scotia.

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

The Mi'kmaq were some of the first aboriginals in North America to greet Europeans on the continent. Europeans first came for fishing, exploring and trading. The Mi'kmaq helped with the fur trade and introduced the Europeans to their neighbours, the Algonquian.

Unfortunately, Europeans brought with them European diseases. Historians now believe over half the Mi'kmaq population died due to exposure to these diseases from Europe. As a result, the following waves of European settlers and explorers found much of the land unpopulated.



The Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq were some of the first Aboriginal Peoples in Canada to meet Europeans coming to North America.

1. Where did the Mi'kmaq people live?

2. What did the Mi'kmaq use to build their wigwams?

3. Name five things the Mi'kmaq used to decorate their clothing.

4. What Mi'kmaq word do we still use today for a sled in winter?

5. What did the phrase, "Msit no 'kmaq" mean to the Mi'kmaq people?

6. According to historians, how did the land of the Mi'kmaq become so unpopulated?



The Mi'kmaq

Use the information pages, library resources, the internet and other sources to help you complete your answers.

1. The Mi'kmaq made birchbark canoes up to eight metres long.

a) Measure your family's car. How many metres long is it?

b) How many people do you think would fit in a canoe eight metres long? Would you like to take a class trip in a birchbark canoe? Why or why not?

2. Mi'kmaq stories often involved the larger-than-life character Glooscap. Find a legend or story about Glooscap and read it. Summarize the story into three sentences.

3. The Mi'kmaq ate wild roots, berries and other plants.

a) Research and list four wild roots, berries or plants from the East Coast of Canada people can eat.

b) Pick one item from your list and describe at least two different ways to prepare it for eating. For example, do people eat it raw, boil it in water, or heat it in some way?
