

# Family Life

PART 2

## KEY QUESTION

How accurate is the stereotype of the Native North Americans?

## Marriage

The Sioux Indians usually married between the ages of 12 and 15. Before marriage, the young man and woman were not allowed to be alone together.

The couple would meet outside the tepee of the woman's parents. A blanket would be thrown around them. Here they could talk in private, but still be in public. This was the most privacy they were allowed when getting to know each other!

"Marriage among my people was like travelling in a canoe. The man sat in front and paddled the canoe. The woman sat in the stern but she steered."

Source A

Anonymous



www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

By Mr Field

## Proposal

Marriage Proposal = asking someone to marry you

### How was marriage asked for?

There were a number of different ways that marriage was proposed. The most common of marriage was an arranged marriage.

#### Arranged marriage

According to some sources, the parents of a man would watch the girls carefully to pick one that had desirable qualities and the same social standing as themselves.

The family of the man would give gifts to the girl's parents. This was known as a bride price - a price the man's family would pay the woman's family in return for the marriage. This would prove the man was a good provider. Her parents would then set a date.

#### Other proposals

There were also other ways a man could propose to his intended wife. One of these was by waiting for her on a path where he knew she would pass.

He would hide and step out just as she walked past. If the girl didn't want to marry him, she would just walk on by. If she said 'yes' they would exchange the marriage-token. The girl would decide a date.

The marriage brought two families closer together. It gave the parents of both families security - they knew they would be looked after in their old age by their children and grandchildren.

# Polygamy

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Polygamy = having more than one wife at the same time

A wealthy man might have more than one wife. The number of wives a man could have was only limited by his ability to support them.

If a man was a successful hunter he might bring home a great deal of work. The more able bodies to do the work, the more the family could get done. Having more wives meant that the work could be shared.



Many men were killed in war and hunting, so there were more women than men. If a man's brother died, he would be expected to marry the widow to take care of her children.

To the Sioux Indians, Polygamy seemed a perfect solution. It meant one wife did not have too much work, and everyone could be properly looked after.

# Divorce

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The wife was highly honoured because she did all the work except hunting, fishing and fighting. She was well treated. However, if the marriage was not working, divorce was easy for either partner.



To be divorced the man would announce publicly that he had "thrown away his woman" - men usually did this by banging a drum. The woman could divorce her husband simply by moving all her belongings back to her parent's tepee.

1. How did Sioux men and women get to know each other? [1]
2. What was the most common form of marriage? [1]
3. In an arranged marriage, what did the family of the man give the girl's parents? [2]
4. Describe another marriage proposal. [4]
5. How did marriage bring families closer together? [2]
6. What does polygamy mean? [1]
7. How many wives was a man allowed? [1]
8. Explain two reasons why the Sioux Indians thought polygamy was the perfect solution. [4]
9. Why was a wife highly honoured? [1]
10. How could a man divorce his wife? [1]
11. How could a wife divorce her husband? [1]
12. Using **Source A**, together with the rest of your work, try to answer the following question:  
[Your answer should be fully **explained** and **at least** seven lines long!]  
"**Who was in control in the Sioux Indian marriage?**" [6 marks]

Now ask for the bonus activity!