

Sizing American Indian Housing Styles

Traditional American Indian housing styles reflect the culture and environment of the people who made them and lived in them. They illustrate extended family relationships, how communities worked together, and the ability of people to plan and prepare for major projects. The size of these structures is important to their function, but it can be difficult to visualize. Physically “drawing” the footprint of a tipi, bark lodge, grass lodge, or earth lodge can help students visualize the structures.



You will need:

- String cut to length
 - Group of people
 - Open area large enough to hold the perimeter of the structure(s)
1. Cut string for the radius of the structure(s) you wish to “draw.”
 - Cheyenne Tipi – 4 m/13 ft. radius
 - Wichita and Affiliated Tribes Grass Lodge – 5 m/16.5 ft. radius
 - Kanza Bark Lodge – 10 m/33 ft. radius
 - Pawnee Earth Lodge – 15 m/49 ft. radius
 2. Student “A” stands in the center of the open area holding one end of the string.
 3. Holding the other end of the string, student “B” walks away from student “A” until the string is taut.
 4. Keeping the string taut, student “B” walks in a circle around student “A.” Student “B” is walking the perimeter of the structure. As student “B” walks in the circle other students will stand along the circle, marking the perimeter of the structure with the circle created by their bodies.
 5. Once the perimeter of the structure is created by the circle of students, use the structure’s footprint to discuss what life was like for people in the community who used the structure. For example: What does this structure tell us about the relationship between people and nature? What volume of materials might it take to build a structure this size, and how long might it take to assemble these?

