

New Baby in the Grass House

A newborn baby cries loudly in the grass house. Everyone wakes up! What a racket! But nobody minds at all. The new baby is a good addition to the family. Her sisters and brothers are glad to help with the extra work she causes.

The baby's father has come home after four days away. He left before the birth, believing that this would assure good health to the baby and her mother. Now he has returned, bringing a cradleboard with him. It once belonged to another baby, who is now healthy and strong, running and jumping with the other children of the neighborhood. By using this cradleboard, the family hopes for the same good fortune for their own baby daughter.

So far the tiny girl has no name; she is simply called New Girl Baby. If her mother or grandmother had learned a name in a dream before the baby's birth, she would be called that. Since a dream did not happen, she will get a name later, when the family knows her better. Names are important, and no one wants to rush in learning this one's name.

The new baby has already been to the river for her first blessing. The wise woman several houses away came to the house soon after the birth to perform a special ceremony. She carried the baby to the river, where she bathed her and prayed to Bright-Shining-Woman and Man-Never-Known-On-Earth. Bright-Shining-Woman grows fast from a tiny sliver of light in the sky to a round, full moon, so the wise woman prayed that the little baby would grow fast, too, just like the moon. The woman sprinkled water on the baby's head, quickly dipped her in the river, and prayed to Woman-Who-Has-Powers-In-The-Water.

When the next moon comes, the baby will be shown to the moon again. More prayers will be made for the health and rapid growth of this newest little member of the family. Babies are important in the life of the Wichita people.

Source: Willits, Ramona J. *A Place to Call Home: Anthropological Curriculum for Middle School Educators*. Archeology Popular Report Number 3. Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1997.