

## Discovery sheet 4

# Moccasins

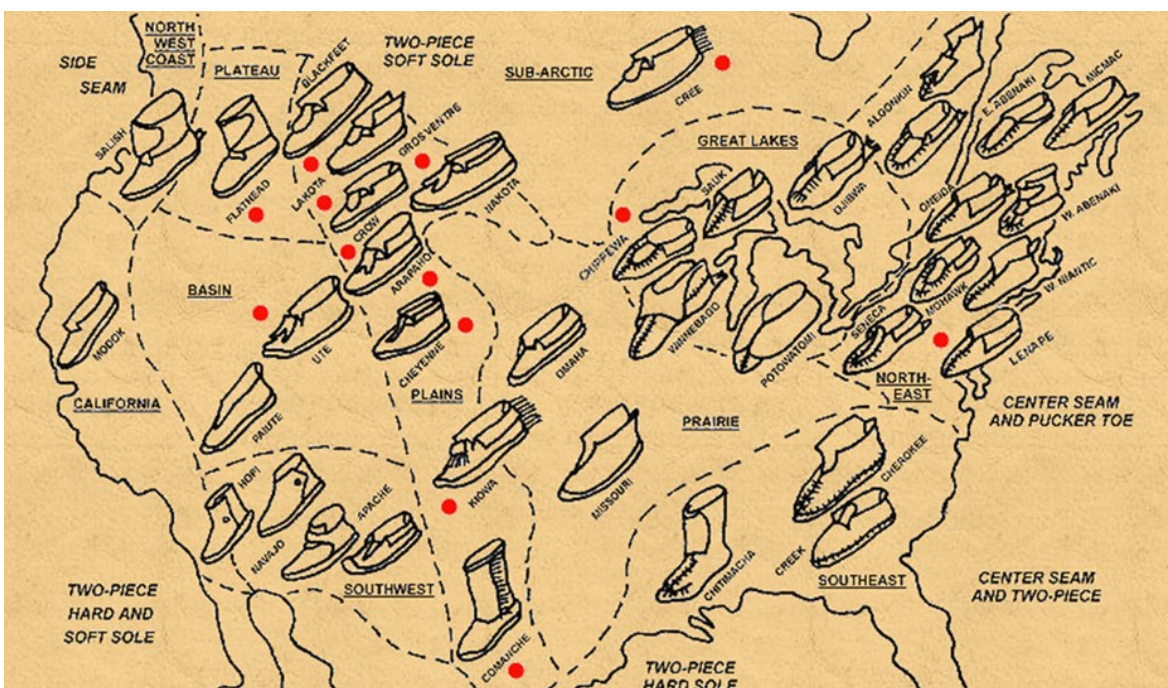
The word Moccasin comes from the Algonquian language Powhatan, and has used to mean any kind of Native Indian sewn footwear.

Moccasins are just one type of traditional North American footwear. The different design and construction of the shoes would show the area or tribe. Some shoes in the plains and prairies had fringes to wipe out the foot print of the wearer. Shoes, when worn, were usually made from deer hide.

Hard-soled moccasins were made from a double layer of hide to protect feet from cactus, prairie-grass or sharp rocks. The turned up toe of many two-piece moccasins (like that of the Apache) prevented sharp objects from injuring toes.

Soft-soled moccasins made from a single piece of leather (from the Eastern Forests) and were made by bringing up the sole of the shoe around the foot and puckering the material around the instep. Some soft-soled moccasins from the Plains and Northwest Coast were made from one piece but they were sewed along one the side of the foot rather than the centre.

Many moccasin styles had cuffs which could be turned up and tied around the ankle with a leather thong in bad weather. The map shows how different styles of shoes were created in different areas.



## Bead work artistry

The bead work decoration on a moccasin would be made before the shoe was sewn together.

For thousands of years porcupine and bird quills, seeds and small stones with holes in were used for decorative work on clothing until approximately 1850. The French and English trade of glass beads from Italy replaced quills as the decoration of choice for many Native American artists. The many bright colours and different shapes available meant the quills didn't need to be found and plucked, washed, sorted, and dyed before work could begin. Quillwork is beautiful and unique to the artist but there are limits to the colours and designs which can be made.



Bead patterns on moccasins and clothing could be inspired by both local traditions and the area.

Animals and fish, plants and flowers, paths and trails, mountains and rivers were all depicted by Native American artists. Some designs were based on angular, geometric patterns which may or may not have had some spiritual importance. Beads were applied with a "lazy stitch" where a string of beads is threaded on a length of thread, then attached to the leather by a stitch every 2-10 beads. This can give a raised effect or be tighter to the material.

If you have ever come across the phrase 'walk a mile someone's shoes before you judge them', you might like to know that it was written by the American campaigner, Mary T. Lathrap (1838-1895). Lathrap was a white poet, evangelist and social justice campaigner and the poem which was first called "Judge Softly". The line is not shoes, but moccasins, and raised awareness of the many issues for survival of Native American people and their traditions.

"Pray, don't find fault with the man that limps,  
Or stumbles along the road.  
Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears,  
Or stumbled beneath the same load"

## Suggested Activity

Use the template to decorate your own shoe with ideas taken from your own surroundings

- Use your favourite colours
- Capture the shape of a favourite image, building, animal or flower
- Show the shape of a favourite walk
- Use a supportive word from a helpful friend
- Make a collage design with different colours, letters or shapes ripped from an old leaflet

On your next walk, gather small items, such as tiny leaves, fallen blossom, feathers, to build layers and textures into your design.

**If you have an old shoe why not add some decorations. Will you make both shoes the same or different?**

