

Parfleche Student Worksheet

Objective: Students will create their own parfleche bags

Brief overview of parfleche items



A **parfleche** is a type of wallet or bag made from rawhide. Historically made by Plateau, Great Basin, and Plains women, they are usually decorated with brightly colored geometrical designs.^[1]

Overview [\[edit \]](#)

The increased mobility among the [post-contact Plains Indians horse culture](#) required that essential goods such as preserved foods (including [pemmican](#)), clothing, medicines, and ceremonial items be transported efficiently in lightweight and weatherproof packaging.^{[3]:29} While the most common form of the parfleche was the folded envelope or flat wallet, they were also constructed as laced flat cases, cylinders, and trunks.^{[3]:59}

The production of parfleche bags declined drastically when mercenaries hired by the US federal government slaughtered the [buffalo herds](#) to the brink of extinction. The federal government forced Indigenous peoples to relocate onto government-partitioned [reservations](#).^{[3]:38} While less visible to the colonists who were collecting them for museums, some tribes, particularly the [Nez Perce](#) were able to continue hunting and making parfleches throughout the 20th century. The [Niisitapi](#) and [Lakota people](#) continue to produce parfleches today.^{[3]:39}

Etymology [\[edit \]](#)

The name "parfleche" was initially used by French [fur traders](#) in the region, and derives from the [French language](#) *parer* meaning "to parry" or "to defend", and *flèche* meaning "arrow".^{[4]:717} "Parfleche" was also used to describe tough rawhide shields, but later used primarily for these decorated rawhide containers.^{[4]:717} Different Indigenous peoples have their own names for these versatile packages, including *ho'seō'o* ([Cheyenne](#)),^[5] *bishkisché* ([Apsáalooke](#))^[6] and *ho'úwoonó3* ([Hinono'eino](#)).^{[7][8]:25}

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Assignment:

Do some brief research if your tribe made something like a parfleche. What is the word for it in your language?

Also consider some of the ways these hides were decorated and dyed. What are some natural dyes your tribe may have used?

Words:

Parfleche (or word in your language

To carry: _____

Items that were used for dyes

le if your tribe used huckleberry, find the word for huckleberry
