

## The Northwest Coast - Chapter 2 Lesson 4

### Rich Resources

The Kwakiutl gave great parties called potlach. This is a Chinook word that means "to give a way."

The Northwest Coast had plentiful natural resources. It had many cedar trees in its forests, and it was rich in game for hunting. The coastal waters and rivers were filled with fish and seals. Resources were so plentiful, the Kwakiutl had no need for farming. They got all they needed from hunting and gathering. The Kwakiutl lived on Vancouver Island along the Pacific coast. Displaying wealth and generosity was very important in Kwakiutl culture. Copper shields and stacks of blankets were common gifts. A single guest may be given 20 blankets.

The totem pole was a carved post with animals or other images representing a person's ancestors. This was another way the Kwakiutl showed wealth. With so much wood available the Kwakiutl became master wood carvers. Master carvers also made canoes out of a single cedar log. They used these canoes to hunt at sea. They hunted seals, sea otters and whales. These animals provided them meat for food, fur for clothing, and oil for lamps and heat.



### Customs and Traditions

The Shaman was an important person in the Kwakiutl culture. A Shaman was a person people came to when they were not feeling well. The believed the shaman could cure them. Men and women could both become shamans.

Kwakiutl shamans sometimes performed dance ceremonies. The shamans wore carved masks as part of these ceremonies.



Because food was plentiful, the Kwakiutl had plenty of time to create beautiful objects. masks, rattles and serving dishes were carved from wood. The objects reflected the respect the Kwakiutl had for the spirits they felt around them.

Because of the mild coastal climate the Kwakiutl could often wear light clothing. Women wove cedar bark into fabric. The Kwakiutl also wore clothing made of deer skin. In colder weather they put on animal fur.

The cedar trees provided the Kwakiutl with sturdy housing.

### The Kwakiutl Today

Today there are about 4,000 Kwakiutl. The forests and the sea remain important to their lives. Most of them men work in construction, logging or fishing. New foods such as sugar, flour, potatoes and tea have been added to their diets. Powerboats have replaced cedar canoes. shaman and doctors both serve the people when they are sick. The Kwakiutl still give potlatches today.