

Virginia Driving Hawk Snede's
The
Medicine Bag



TextProject
Background Builders

Staircase of Automaticity: Violet

The Medicine Bag: A Sacred Pouch

A medicine bag is not what you might think. It's not filled with pills or bandages. For many Native Americans, a medicine bag is a small leather pouch that holds sacred objects—things that have spiritual power and meaning. Each family passes down their medicine bag from father to son, generation after generation.

The bag might look old, dirty, or worn out to outsiders, but that's because it has been treasured and carried for many years, sometimes over a century. Inside are special items like stones from holy places, pieces of plants used in ceremonies, or objects from important family stories.

The bag connects the person wearing it to their ancestors and their tribe's spiritual beliefs. It's one of the most important things a Native American family can own.



This medicine pouch contains sage, a special plant that people have used for centuries to cleanse spaces and offer prayers.

Hollywood Indians vs. Real Native Americans

If you've seen Native Americans in movies or TV shows, you probably have the wrong idea about how they really live. Hollywood usually shows Native Americans wearing feathered headdresses, living in tepees, and riding horses across the plains while shooting arrows.

The reality is much different. There are over 570 different Native American tribes in the United States, each with their own languages, traditions, and ways of life.

Most Native Americans today live in regular houses and work just like everyone else. Some live on reservations, others live in cities. For those who live on reservations, life can be challenging. Limited jobs on the reservation mean that rates of poverty are high. But Native communities are working hard to improve their lives and preserve their culture.

However challenging the context, many Native American groups celebrate special events. At these events, community members wear beautiful traditional costumes that connect them to their ancestors. While Native Americans live modern lives, they also work to keep their traditions alive in meaningful ways.



The Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota has brought back buffalo herds.

Iron Shell's Vision Quest

Long ago, young Native American men went on vision quests to find their life's purpose. On a vision quest, a young man went alone to a high place like a mountaintop, fasted for days without food, and prayed until he received a sacred dream or vision.

Martin's great-grandfather went on such a quest during a very difficult time. The U.S. government had forced his people onto reservations, and many young men felt hopeless about their futures.

During his three-day quest, Martin's great-father had a vision about finding "the white man's iron." When he came down from the mountain, he found the broken pieces of an iron cooking pot left by white travelers. He took a piece of this iron for his medicine bag, believing it would protect him.

The tribal elders gave him the name "Iron Shell" because of this vision. Later, when he was forced to go to a government boarding school, he understood his vision's meaning when he learnt to work with iron by becoming a blacksmith. The vision helped him survive and find purpose even in terrible circumstances.



These remains of an iron cooking pot are like one that Martin's great-father have found on his quest.

Forced Removal to Reservations and Boarding Schools

In the late 1800s, the U.S. government forced Native Americans to leave their traditional lands and move to reservations—small areas of land set aside for them. This wasn't their choice. The government wanted the good farmland and gold that was found on Native lands. Laws were made that forced tribes to relocate, sometimes hundreds of miles away.

Life on reservations was hard. The land was often poor for farming. They couldn't hunt or live the way their ancestors had for thousands of years.

To make things worse, the government also created boarding schools far from the reservations. Native American children were taken away from their families and forced to attend these schools. At the schools, children had to cut their hair, wear uniforms, and speak only English. The government wanted to destroy Native American culture completely. Many children didn't see their families for years. This caused much pain and trauma that has affected generations of Native American families.



The Native American children in the boarding schools had to work hard, including building and repairing the places where they lived.

Staircase of Automaticity: Indigo



Cover image generated by ChatGPT



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons,

171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA. "TextProject" and STORYLABS logos are trademarks of TextProject, Inc.