



# WORK IN SKINS

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## *Worldwide Comparisons Exercise*

*Adapted from Teaching eHRAF [Exercise 2.4 “Hide Working and Tanning Leather”](#) by Christiane Cunnar*



# WORK IN SKINS

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*In this exercise, you will  
compare methods,  
materials, and tools used by  
societies across the world to  
work in animal skins*

*Fes Tannery. Men conditioning hides. By Patrick Morin CC-  
BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons*



# EXERCISE DETAILS

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**TIME:** 40 minutes

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- HRAF Access
- Worksheet and pen or other materials for recording answers

## **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

*At the end of this assignment, you will be able to:*

- explain and analyze cross-cultural differences in technology for working in skins across multiple culture groups
- describe the material traces left by various stages of work in skins
- analyze how technologies for work in skins reflect a culture's access to different natural resources
- describe the social context of work in skins across multiple societies
- gain experience in team based secondary data collection and analysis techniques
- construct effective and efficient search strategies in eHRAF in order to retrieve data relevant to a specific topic/assignment.



# METHODS OF WORK IN SKINS REVEAL ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

*Left Image: Cree Woman working on a large moose hide - Waterhen River area, Northern Saskatchewan. By Provincial Archives of Alberta. Public Domain Image via Wikimedia Commons. Upper Right Image: Fez Tannery. Michal Borowski CC by SA 3.0Vi12Ham*



## ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

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*The materials used for softening and preserving hides as well as dyeing them reflect a culture's access to different natural resources.*

Cultures located in coastal areas or in proximity to waterways, such as the *Yakut* of Siberia, often use fish products such as fish oil or fish liver as softening agents to process hides.

*Omul Fish being prepared for smoking. Photo By Jan van der Crabben CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

*Blue Oak Bark by Yath at the English language  
Wikipedia CC-BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

The *Tarahumara* of  
Mexico use tree products  
such as pulverized oak  
bark for tannins.

.....  
**TARAHUMARA**





# PAWNEE

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The *Pawnee* of the northern Plains (now Nebraska) use elm bark.

*Elm Bark. Photo by Ptelea at en.wikipedia. Public Domain Image via Wikimedia Commons*

Toivo Immanuel Itkonen (1984) reports that the *Saami* in Northern Europe made red leather by using alder bark, mixed with ashes and warm water.

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# SAAMI

*Alder Bark. By Walter Siegmund CC-BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons*



# ASSIGNMENT PART 1

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In groups of 5 members, have each individual select one word or term from the list below.

## List of agents used in hide work in and dyeing

Brains (from animals)	Fish
Liver	Salt
Oil	Bark
Fat	Lime
Butter	Water

*A Cree woman cleans green deer hides prior to tanning them. 1939. Unknown Photographer. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Red Lake Agency. Public Domain Image.*

Each individual should now conduct an advanced search for OCM subject "work in in skins" in combination with the chosen terms from the list.

*\*For help with Advanced Searches in eHRAF World Cultures, click [here](#).*

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# ASSIGNMENT PART 1:

*Execute The Search*



# ASSIGNMENT PART 1

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While researching their materials, each group member should fill in a data table, such as the following example.

## Cross-Cultural Use of Material X for Work in Skins

Society Name	How Material is Used	Special notes
<b>Society A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Applied to hides before tanning (Efuwozor 2016)</li></ul>	By women, in large groups of 40 (Dane 2016). Gathered by children (Ellis 2010).
<b>Society B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Applied to hasten the tanning process (Ellis 2010)</li><li>▶ Also used to soften leather (Cane 1990)</li></ul>	Applied by men, with tanning work done by women. Secretive process of acquiring it (Cane 1990).



# ASSIGNMENT PART 2

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As a group answer the following questions for each material. (5 minutes for each material)

**Question 1:** What common steps, access, or spaces are needed to acquire this material across multiple societies?

*British Women Working in Tannery in Nottingham. Unknown Photogrtapher. 1914.  
UBC Library Digitization Centre via Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain Image*

# ASSIGNMENT PART 3

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As a group select the two tables with the most detailed information about materials. As a group, discuss and answer the following questions for both materials.

**Question 2.** Is there a gender, class, age group, or population subset, most likely to be using this material? Explain. (5 minutes)

**Question 3.** What evidence would the harvesting and use of this material leave in the archaeological record? (5 minutes)





*The Sioux Indian women of the Teton or Western Dakota tribe sustained and perpetuated village life using their agricultural and domestic skills. Among the Dakota women's many skills were porcupine quill work and bead embroidery. They also performed such essential tasks as dressing hides for clothing and shelter, caring for the children and cooking. Public Domain Image via Wikimedia Commons*

# RESOURCES

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*Assignment Rubric, Tips, References*

# RUBRIC

➤ The following rubric is suggested for evaluating responses:

	Unsatisfactory (0%)	Needs Improvement (25%)	Satisfactory (75%)	Outstanding (100%)
<b>Assignment Part 1:</b> <u>Data Collection</u>	<p><i>Unsatisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tables for material use in eHRAF are absent</li> </ul>	<p><i>Needs Improvement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tables for material use are sparsely filled in and include only a few (2-3) societies.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Satisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tables for material use include multiple societies with regular notes</li> </ul>	<p><i>Outstanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tables for material use include multiple societies with a variety of notes and most include citations.</li> </ul>
<b>Assignment Part 2:</b> <u>Questions 1</u>	<p><i>Unsatisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Answers are absent or mostly incomplete</li> </ul>	<p><i>Needs Improvement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Answers are only partially completed and/or inaccurate</li> </ul>	<p><i>Satisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Answers are partially complete and refer back to table.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Outstanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Answers are almost entirely complete and refer back to table</li> </ul>
<b>Assignment Part 2:</b> <u>Questions 1-2</u>	<p><i>Unsatisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Major points are not clear.</li> <li>▶ Specific examples are not used.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Needs Improvement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Commentary on research findings is not comprehensive and /or persuasive.</li> <li>▶ Major points are addressed, but not well supported.</li> <li>▶ Responses are inadequate or do not address topic or response to the questions</li> <li>▶ Specific examples do not support topic or response to the questions.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Satisfactory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Evaluation and analysis of research findings is accurate. Major points are stated.</li> <li>▶ Responses are adequate and address the question at hand.</li> <li>▶ Content is accurate</li> <li>▶ A specific example from the research is used.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Outstanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Evaluation and analysis of research findings is accurate and persuasive.</li> <li>▶ Major points are stated clearly and are well supported.</li> <li>▶ Responses are excellent and address questions</li> <li>▶ Content is clear.</li> <li>▶ Several specific examples from the research are used.</li> </ul>

# FURTHER READING

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- For more exercises and teaching resources related to human societies past and present, explore [\*Teaching eHRAF\*](#).
- For a more detailed version of this particular exercise with additional questions and activities check out [\*Exercise 2.4 Hide Working\*](#) by Christiane Cunnar.
- Check out the [\*Advanced Search Tutorial\*](#) for detailed instructions on conducting searches in eHRAF World Cultures.
- For information on hide working practices in the archaeological record, check out [\*eHRAF Archaeology\*](#).