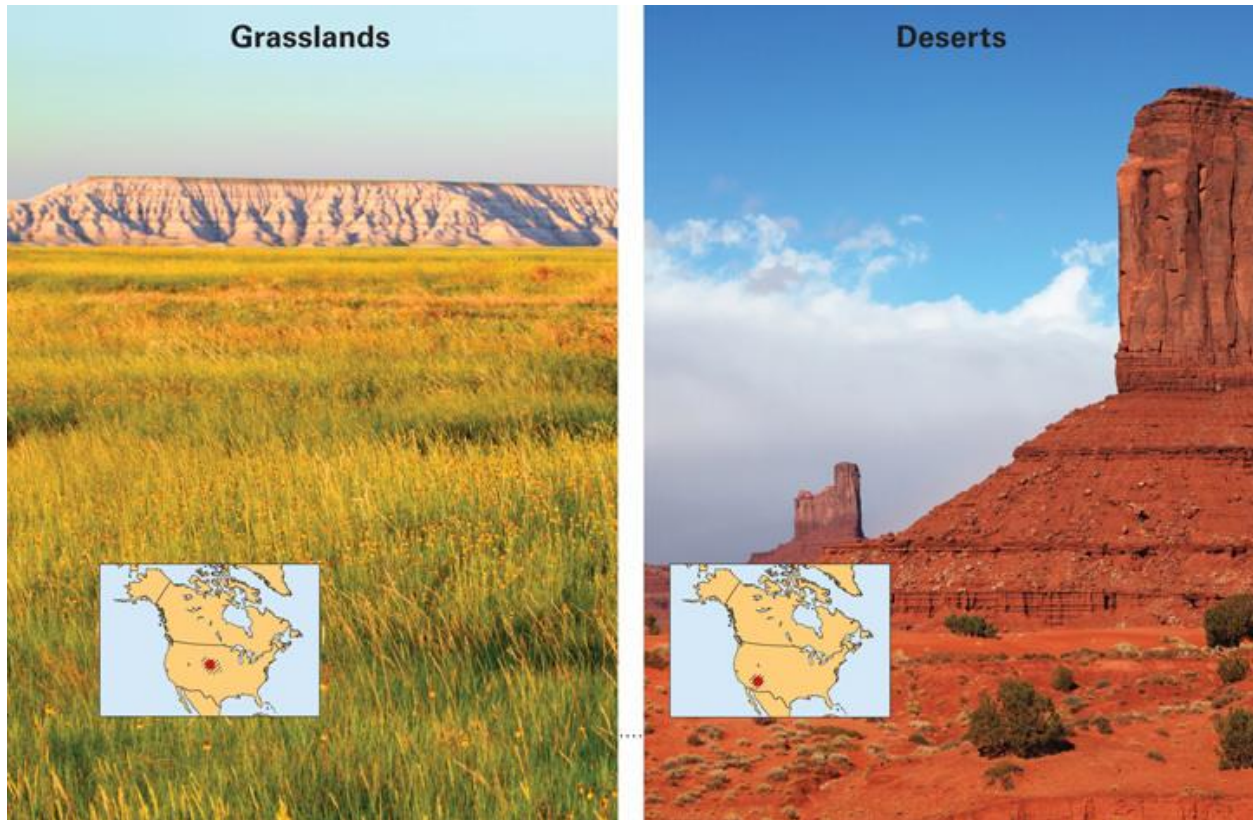


3. American Indians and the Environment

After the last ice age, there was a change in the climate that affected the plants and animals found in each area. Different areas each have their own environment. Sunlight, air, water, land, animals, insects, and plants are parts of an environment. A variety of environments appeared across North America following the ice age. Over time, early American Indians settled in environments that differed greatly from one another.



One feature of an environment is its climate. The climate supports certain kinds of vegetation. Animals that can live in the climate and eat the plants thrive. An environment also has natural resources, which include soil, water, trees, and minerals such as copper. Things that people and animals eat, like nuts, berries, and other wildlife, are natural resources, too.

In each place, people survived by changing their ways of life. They used what was around them in nature to build homes, make clothes, and get food. Their homes and clothing were made to fit the climate.

Look at the four natural environments shown here. What do the images tell you about the climate, vegetation, and natural resources of each environment?

One environment American Indians lived in was grasslands. Some grasslands in North America get only enough rain to support different types of grasses since most trees and bushes need more water to survive.

A second type of environment American Indians settled in was the desert, which gets very little rain. People living in desert areas often dig wells and ditches to get enough water for drinking and for raising crops.

Some American Indians lived in the rainy and snowy mountain regions of North America. While forests of pine, fir, and spruce often grow below the highest points, the tops of mountains have little or no plant life.

Other groups settled in the Arctic ice fields, which are near the North Pole. Here, huge sheets of ice cover the land for most of the year.

Most American Indians chose areas that were rich in natural resources. These environments had mild climates and plenty of food and water. Even though life was hard in places such as the desert of the Southwest and the icy Arctic region, some groups stayed in such regions where resources were scarce.

