**Ho-Chunk Indian Fact Sheet**

These Facts For Kids were written for young people learning about the Ho-chunks for school or home-schooling reports. We encourage students, especially older kids, to visit our main [Ho-chunk](http://www.native-languages.org/hochunk.htm) website for more in-depth information about the tribe, but here are our answers to the questions we are most often asked by children, with Ho-chunk pictures and links we believe are suitable for all ages.

url: <http://www.bigorrin.org/hochunk_kids.htm>



    **Ho-Chunk Tribe**

***How do you pronounce the word "Ho-Chunk"? What does it mean?***
*Ho-Chunk* is pronounced exactly like it looks, "ho-chunk." Sometimes it is spelled "Ho-chunk," "Ho Chunk," "Hochunk," or "Hocak" instead. The reason for all the different spellings is that the Ho-Chunk language was originally unwritten. The name comes from the tribe's own name for themselves, *Hocąk*, which means "big voice."

***Are the Hochunks and the Winnebagos the same tribe?***
Yes. *Hochunk* is the people's own name for themselves. *Winnebago* is what their Algonquian neighbors called them. Literally, "Winnebago" means "smelly water." This was not intended as an insult--the Algonquians called them Winnebago Indians because they lived near Lake Winnebago. (Lake Winnebago got this name because it had a strong fish odor in the summer.) Some Hochunk people, especially in Nebraska, call themselves Winnebagos today. Others, especially in Wisconsin, prefer their original tribal name, Hochunk.

***Where do the Ho-chunks live?***
The Hochunks are original residents of the Great Lakes area, particularly [Wisconsin](http://www.native-languages.org/wisconsin.htm) and [Illinois](http://www.native-languages.org/illinois.htm). Many Hochunk people still live in Wisconsin today. Others were forced to move westward by the US government, and most of their descendents live in Nebraska today.

***How is the Winnebago Indian nation organized?***
There are two Winnebago tribes today: the Ho-Chunk Nation in Wisconsin, and the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. Though the Ho-chunk people consider themselves one tribe culturally, the two governments are politically independent. Each Winnebago tribe has its own laws, police, and other services, just like a small country. However, the Ho-chunks are also US citizens and must obey American law.

In the past, each Ho-chunk village was led by one war chieftain (who was in charge of military decisions and law enforcement) and one peace chieftain (who was in charge of mediation and negotiations.) The war chief was always a man, but occasionally the peace chief could be female. Ho-chunk chiefs were chosen by a council of clan leaders. Today, Ho-chunk leaders (called "presidents" in Wisconsin and "chairmen" in Nebraska) are popularly elected, just as senators and governors are, and can be either gender.

***What language do the Ho-chunk Indians speak?***
Most Ho-chunk people speak English today, but some people, especially elders, also speak their native [Ho-chunk language](http://www.native-languages.org/hochunk.htm). If you'd like to know a few easy Ho-chunk words, "haho" (pronounced hah-hoh) is a friendly greeting, and "pinagigi" (pronounced pee-nah-gee-gee) means 'thank you.' You can also view a picture glossary of Ho-chunk words [here](http://www.native-languages.org/hochunk_animals.htm).

Today Ho-Chunk is an ***endangered language*** because most children aren't learning it anymore. However, some Ho-Chunk people are working to keep their language alive.

***What was Ho-chunk culture like in the past? What is it like now?***
Here are links to the [Ho-chunk Nation of Wisconsin](http://ho-chunknation.com/) and the [Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska](http://www.winnebagotribe.com/), where you can learn about the Ho-chunk people past and present.

***How do Ho-chunk Indian children live, and what did they do in the past?***
They do the same things all children do--play with each other, go to school and help around the house. Many Ho-chunk children like to go hunting and fishing or camp outdoors. In the past, Indian kids had more chores and less time to play, just like colonial children. But they did have [cornhusk dolls](http://www.native-languages.org/dolls.htm), toys and games to play with. [Lacrosse](http://www.delvallacrosse.com/lacrosse_history.htm) was a popular sport among teenage boys as it was among adult men. Like many Native Americans, Ho-chunk mothers traditionally carried their babies in **cradleboards** on their backs. Here is a website with [Native American cradle board](http://www.native-languages.org/cradleboard.htm) pictures.

***What were men and women's roles in the Ho-Chunk tribe?***
Ho-Chunk men were hunters and sometimes went to war to protect their families. Ho-Chunk women were farmers and also did most of the child care and cooking. Traditionally Ho-Chunk chiefs and warriors were almost always men, but there have been a few female peace chiefs in the Ho-Chunk tribe, and some women became warriors and wore men's clothing into battle. Both genders took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine.

***What were Ho-chunk homes like in the past?***
Unlike other Siouan tribes, the Ho-chunks never lived in tepees. They lived in settled villages of rectangular houses shingled with birchbark. Here are some pictures of [birchbark houses and other Native American homes](http://www.native-languages.org/houses.htm). The Ho-chunks also built sweat lodges and large council buildings for ceremonial and political purposes. Today, Ho-chunk people live in modern houses and apartment buildings, just like you.

***What was Ho-chunk clothing like? Did they wear feather headdresses and face paint?***
Ho-chunk men wore a [breechclout and leggings](http://www.native-languages.org/breechcloth.htm), and sometimes a shirt as well. Women wore a tunic-like deerskin dress. The Ho-chunks also wore [moccasins](http://www.native-languages.org/moccasins.htm) on their feet. In cold weather, they wore buffalo robes. In colonial times, the Ho-chunks adapted European costume like cloth blouses and vests, decorating them with fancy beadwork and ribbon applique. Here is a webpage with pictures of [Ho-chunk clothing](http://www.nativetech.org/clothing/regions/region8.html), and here are some photographs and links about [traditional Indian dress](http://www.native-languages.org/clothing.htm) in general.

The Ho-chunks didn't wear long [warbonnets](http://www.native-languages.org/headdresses.htm#warbonnets) like other Siouan tribes. A Ho-chunk warrior would usually wore a porcupine roach, sometimes with feathers attached to it. Neither men nor women cut their hair unless they were in mourning. A Ho-chunk man would usually wear two long braids, and a Ho-chunk woman would wear one braid. Here is a website with pictures of [Native American hair](http://www.native-languages.org/hair.htm). The Ho-chunks often painted their faces and bodies, using different colors and designs for war paint, religious ceremonies, and festive decoration.

Today, some Ho-chunk people still wear moccasins or a beaded shirt, but they wear modern clothes like jeans instead of breechcloths... and they only wear roaches in their hair on special occasions like a dance.

***What was Ho-chunk transportation like in the days before cars? Did they paddle canoes?***
Yes--the Ho-chunk Indians made birchbark canoes for fishing and trading trips. Here is a website about [Native American canoes](http://www.native-languages.org/boats.htm#canoes). Over land, the Ho-chunks used dogs as pack animals. (There were no horses in North America until colonists brought them over from Europe.) The Ho-chunks used snowshoes to help them travel in the winter. Today, of course, Ho-chunk people also use car s... and non-native people also use canoes.

***What*** ***was Ho-chunk food like in the days before supermarkets?***
The Ho-chunk were farming people. Ho-chunk women harvested crops of corn, beans, and squash. Ho-chunk men hunted deer, buffalo, and small game and went fishing in the rivers and lakes. Here is a website with more information about [traditional Native food.](http://www.native-languages.org/food.htm)

***What were Ho-chunk weapons and tools like in the past?***
Ho-chunk hunters primarily used bows and arrows. Fishermen used fishing spears and nets. In war, Ho-chunk men fired their bows or fought with war clubs and lances. Here is a website with pictures and information about [Native American Indian weapons](http://www.native-languages.org/weapons.htm).

***What are Ho-chunk arts and crafts like?***
The Ho-chunks were known for their [quillwork](http://www.native-languages.org/quillwork.htm), [beadwork](http://www.native-languages.org/beadwork.htm), [basketry](http://www.native-languages.org/basketry.htm), and [pottery](http://www.native-languages.org/pottery.htm).

***What kinds of stories do the Ho-chunks tell?***
There are lots of old Ho-chunk legends and fairy tales. Storytelling is very important to the Ho-chunk Indian culture. Here is a page of [traditional Ho-chunk stories](http://www.mpm.edu/wirp/ICW-140.html). Here's a website where you can read more about [Winnebago mythology](http://www.native-languages.org/hochunk-legends.htm).

***What about Ho-Chunk religion?***
Religions are too complicated and culturally sensitive to describe appropriately in only a few simple sentences, and we strongly want to avoid misleading anybody. You can visit this site to learn more about [Winnebago religion](http://www.newlisbon.k12.wi.us/imc/nl_hist/Winn/religion.htm) or this site about [Native American spirituality](http://www.native-languages.org/religion.htm) in general.

***Can you recommend a good*** ***book for me to read?***
You may enjoy [Four Seasons of Corn](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0822526581/natilangofthe-20), which is an excellent book for kids about Winnebago life past and present. Older kids may be interested in [Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/080612976/natilangofthe-20) or this interesting [autobiography of a Winnebago Indian woman](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0472061097/natilangofthe-20). You can also browse through our new reading list of [American Indian books](http://www.native-languages.org/books.htm) in general.

***How do I cite your website in my bibliography?***
You will need to ask your teacher for the format he or she wants you to use. The authors' names are Laura Redish and Orrin Lewis and the title of our site is Native Languages of the Americas. We are a nonprofit educational organization working to preserve and protect Native American languages and culture. You can learn more about our organization [here](http://www.native-languages.org/faq.htm). Our website was first created in 1998 and last updated in 2015.

Thanks for your interest in the Ho-chunk Indian people and their language!