



Native American Totem Poles

Totem poles are sculptures carved from large trees, such as the Western Red Cedar. In North America, totem poles are part of the cultures of many indigenous people – the people who first lived in America before Europeans arrived a few hundred years ago. Totem poles serve many purposes beyond their beauty, and their meanings are as varied as the cultures that make them.

There are many types of totem poles. Some totem poles represent stories or important events. On these poles, each figure on the totem represents part of a story. Other totem poles are put in front of a family's home to represent the owner's family or social status. Memorial poles are carved in honour of a family member who has passed away.

Another interesting type of totem pole is the shame pole. Shame poles are carved to embarrass and ridicule someone who has done something wrong. Shame poles are taken down once the person has made up for what they did. A famous shame pole erected in Cordova, Alaska, included the face of an oil company businessman. It is said to represent the unpaid debt the oil company owes for damages caused by the oil spill in Valdez, Alaska.



Colours used to paint totem poles were limited. Artists relied on natural ingredients and colours. Black was the most common, made by grinding soot, graphite or charcoal. Red came from red ochre, a clay-like material.

Common figures found on totem poles include the raven (a symbol of The Creator), the eagle (representing peace and friendship), the killer whale (a symbol of strength), the thunderbird, the beaver, the bear, the wolf and the frog.

Though the totem pole has been a part of history for decades, totem poles are still created today. Native carvers in the Northwest continue to carve totems as symbols of their cultural pride and clan kinship.



Task: Look at the images of North American totem poles. What are the similarities and differences?

Use the template on the next page or a plain sheet of paper to design a totem pole that tells your story. Look at the reference sheet for information about what characteristics different totems represent.

Optional extension tasks:

The Chinook tribes are some of the Native American peoples most well known for their totem poles. Research the Chinook people. You may wish to find out about where they lived, what clothing they wore, the type of houses they lived in, the transport they used, their weapons and their beliefs.

Present your findings as a fact file.

Your spirit animal:

Which animal represents your personality?

Draw the head of this animal.

Where you live:

Draw something that reminds you of your home.

A member of your family:

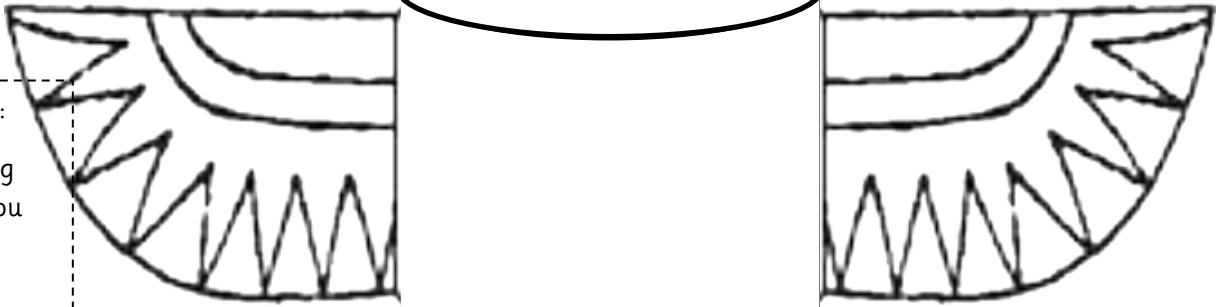
Draw their spirit animal. Who have you drawn? What animal did you choose?

A friend

Draw their spirit animal. Who have you drawn? What animal did you choose?

What you like to do:

Draw a something to represent a hobby or something you enjoy doing.



Totems:

Alligator:	maternal, vengeful
Ant:	group-minded; patient; active; industrious
Antelope:	active; agile; willing to sacrifice
Armadillo:	safety orientated, cautious
Badger:	courageous; aggressive; healing and energising
Bat:	long-living
Bear:	industrious; instinctive; healing; powerful; protective of the world; strong
Beaver:	determined; strong-willed; constructive; protective
Bee:	organised; industrious; protective; wise; social; enthusiastic about life
Buffalo:	spiritual; strong
Butterfly:	creative; transforming
Cat:	protective; independent; mysterious; magical
Cheetah:	swift; focused; insightful
Cow:	nurturing; maternal
Coyote:	intelligent; stealthy; tricky; mischievous
Crane:	independent; just; enduring; intelligent; vigilant
Crow:	strong morals; changeable; creative; spiritual; energetic; just
Deer:	intellectual; gentle; kind; caring; graceful; innocent
Dog:	noble; faithful; loyal; good at learning; protective; guiding
Dolphin:	kind; wise; happy; intelligent
Dragon:	wise; powerful; fiery
Dragonfly:	carefree; imaginative
Eagle:	intelligent; courageous; spiritual; daring
Elephant:	strong; powerful; wise
Elk:	strong; agile; independent; pure; noble
Falcon:	adventurous; passionate; leader
Fish:	graceful
Fox:	cunning; agile; quick-witted; diplomatic
Frog:	transforming; sensitive; beautiful; powerful
Gazelle:	strong

Goose:	reliable; prudent; vigilant; parental; protective
Hawk:	gives information; intuitive; victorious; visionary
Horse:	independent; enduring; mobile; powerful; free
Lion:	family-orientated; strong; energetic; courageous; protective
Lizard:	good at conversation; visionary
Llama:	good with others
Lynx:	trustworthy; protective; discreet; guiding
Moose:	headstrong; enduring; steadfast; wise
Mouse:	observant; orderly; organised; detail-orientated
Otter:	playful; friendly; dynamic; joyful; helpful; generous
Owl:	insightful; informative; wise; silent
Ox:	self-sacrificing
Peacock:	dignified; self-confident
Porcupine:	companionable; trustworthy
Rabbit:	humble; balance; intuitive
Raccoon:	curious
Raven:	thinker; courageous; self-knowing; protective; magical
Salmon:	proud; intense; confident; wise; inspiring; rejuvenating
Sea horse:	confident; graceful
Seal:	loving; imaginative; creative
Shark:	enduring; adaptable
Snake:	impulsive; shrewd; energetic; wise
Squirrel:	organised
Stag:	ruling; beautiful; generous
Swan:	graceful; balanced; innocent; soulful
Tiger:	strong; powerful; energetic
Turkey:	generous; life-giving
Turtle:	nurturing; shy; protective
Weasel:	strong; energetic; ingenious
Whale:	wise; giving
Wolf:	loyal; persevering; successful; intuitive; good at learning; spirited
Woodpecker:	sensitive; protective; loyal