

## Symbols

Traditionally, Native Americans have used birds and animals and linear designs to communicate. Use the list describing the use of some of these symbols to write your interpretation of what this photo represents.

To some nations the **circle** represents a harmonious relationship with nature and all living things on Earth. It may represent history through its shape. All things from past, present, and future are connected.

The **Sun** is symbolized by different forms that come together in a circle. In most Native American cultures the Sun represents the Creator, which created the Earth, sky, moon, and people. The Sun keeps people warm, gives light so the crops will grow, and allows people to see nature.

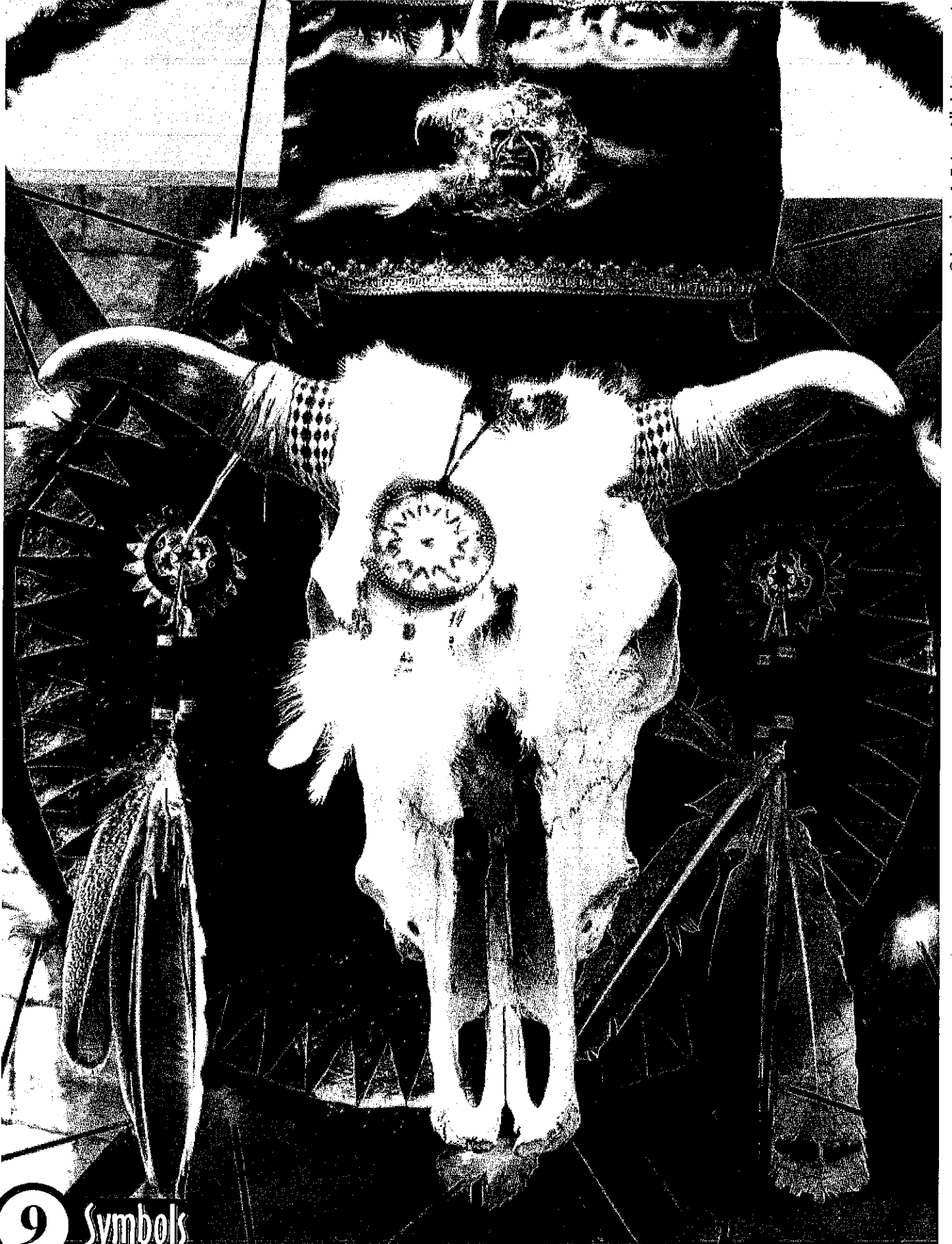
**Zig-zag lines** represent movement. In some cultures it was the meeting of Mother Earth reaching up to Father Sky.

A **dream catcher** is a woven hoop with webbing in the center. The web catches dreams. Good dreams are funneled to the owner of the dream catcher while bad dreams are caught in the web and cannot escape. Traditionally, the dream catcher is hung near where a person sleeps. Often feathers and fetishes, charms, are attached to the dream catcher to bring further good luck in specific areas.

**Feathers** were used to honor the Creator, to honor thankfulness, to honor a brave deed, or to ask for something. Feathers were used many different ways among the many different Native American people. They were used to adorn prayer sticks, spears, dream catchers, tomahawks, and headdresses. Certain kinds of feathers can mean different things. Eagle feathers represent bravery and courage. Some nations used twelve eagle feathers together to represent the number of months in a year. Turkey feathers represented the wildness of Earth. For some nations twenty-eight feathers banded together represented the number of days that the moon showed its phases. There are also twenty-eight ribs in a buffalo, or American bison.

The **buffalo** was the most important animal to the Native Americans of the Plains. It provided them with everything from clothing and shelter to food and tools. Buffalo hides were used for clothing and for protecting the teepees. Buffalo bones were made into knives and scrapers. Often buffalo hides and skulls were used in dances for ceremonial occasions, some of those specifically honoring the buffalo. The buffalo was honored for all that it provided for many Native American people.

There are thousands of symbols used by Native Americans. Some symbols, such as the circle, were common to most Native American tribes. Other symbols of animals were particular to specific regions. Tribes in the Southwest often used symbols of lizards, whereas tribes in the Northwest used fish. Symbols were a way to communicate before these tribes had a written language. It was also a way to communicate to other tribes who spoke different languages. But perhaps most important, it was a way to communicate feelings to the Creator. What symbols do you use today?



**9** Symbols