

## Section

# 2

## The Western Gulf Culture Area

### Main Ideas

1. The Karankawas, who lived along the Gulf Coast, hunted and gathered plants to survive.
2. The Coahuiltecan lived in dry southern Texas.

### Why It Matters Today

American Indians near the Texas coast knew that the Gulf of Mexico could be a major food source. Use current events sources to learn about commercial fishing in the Gulf today.



**TEKS:** 2A, 9B, 10A, 21B, 22D

### myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the cultures that lived near the Gulf Coast.

### Key Terms and People

- hunter-gatherers
- nomads
- wigwams
- mitotes

## The Story Continues

A mystery had arisen. Archaeologists working near Corpus Christi had found several human skeletons. Who were these people? The archaeologists identified them as the remains of Karankawa Indians. But another puzzle remained. One skeleton came from a person who was six feet tall, taller than the average early American Indian. The others were also unusually large for people of their time. Scientists struggled to explain why the Karankawa were larger.



### The Karankawas

Known for their height, the Karankawas were hunter-gatherers who lived from the area near present-day Galveston south to Corpus Christi Bay. **Hunter-gatherers** are people who hunt wild animals and gather plants for food. The Karankawas fished, hunted sea turtles, and collected shellfish. They also gathered eggs and hunted deer and small animals.

The Karankawas were **nomads**, or people who moved from place to place. Within the Karankawa home range were a variety of ecosystems. Different parts of this territory were better suited to life at different times of the year. Each season, the Karankawas relocated to a region that could provide everything they needed to live at that time of the year. They had designated camp sites to which they returned every year as the seasons

changed. During the fall and winter months when fish were plentiful, they lived along the Gulf Coast. They used dugout canoes to paddle through the bays and inlets. During the spring and summer, when herds of bison and deer were more common, they moved inland. Because of this migration, the Karankawas enjoyed a rich and varied diet, which may help explain their large stature. A French explorer described a summer among the Karankawas.

### TEXAS VOICES

“I passed the entire summer in this country with them in going everywhere in search of food because they possess no cabins or fields. That is why they travel in this manner the entire summer. The men kill a few deer and a few buffaloes and the women search for wild potatoes.”

—Simars de Bellisle, quoted in *The Karankawa Indians of Texas*, by Robert A. Ricklis

Karankawa men hunted with large wooden bows and arrows. To fish, they used bows and arrows or fish traps. Women collected plants, cooked food, and took care of camps. They built portable huts called **wigwams** from bent poles covered with animal skins and reed mats. Each wigwam could house seven or eight people.

**Reading Check Finding the Main Idea** Why did the Karankawas move to different regions at different times of the year?

## ★ Daily Life of the Karankawas

Because the Gulf Coast has hot summers and mild winters, the Karankawas did not need much clothing. Some men did not wear anything. Others wore deerskin breechcloths, short cloths worn around the waist. Women wore skirts of deerskin or grass. In addition, both men and women painted themselves with bright colors. To keep insects away, the Karankawas rubbed alligator fat and dirt on their skin.

Europeans who arrived in Texas in the 1500s noted that the Karankawas treated their children with kindness. Each Karankawa child was given two names, one of which was known only to close family members. The Karankawas believed that the secret name carried magic that protected children from danger.

Nothing could protect them from European diseases, however. The Karankawas, like other Texas Indian groups, had never been exposed to European diseases. The Karankawas fell ill and died at an alarming rate. In addition, they fought with other American Indians, the French, the Spanish, and later, Americans. By the mid-1800s there were no Karankawas left.

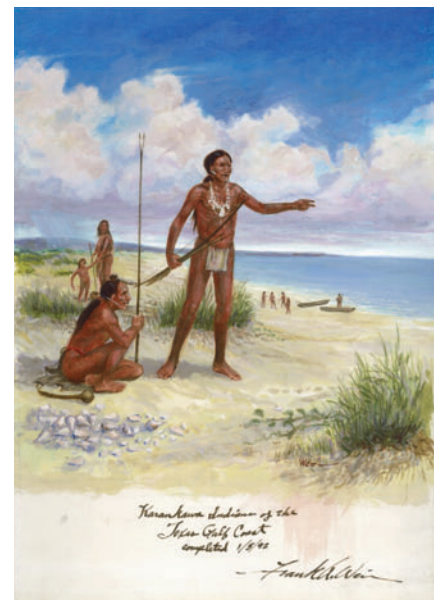
**Reading Check Evaluating** Analyze the impact of European contact on the Karankawas.

### Analyzing Primary Sources

**Analyzing Information** What part of Bellisle’s description suggests that the Karankawas moved from place to place?

### Interpreting Visuals

**Karankawas.** The Karankawa Indians lived along the Texas Gulf Coast. **What tools are these Karankawas using?**





The Coahuiltecan and other Texas Indians hunted deer.

## ★ The Coahuiltecan

Southwest of the Karankawas lived a people that historians call the Coahuiltecan. They lived in far southern Texas and northern Mexico, where the dry climate would not support much farming. The Coahuiltecan were not a single, unified group. Rather they included many independent groups who happened to live near each other. Spanish writers describing their ways of life lumped all of these groups together. Like other coastal groups, the Coahuiltecan moved with the seasons.

Many archaeologists believe that the Coahuiltecan made few tools. But they did have stone hammers and knives, and they used bows and arrows to hunt. They hollowed out gourds, such as melons and squashes, and wove baskets to store food. Because they were nomads, the Coahuiltecan did not build permanent houses. Instead, they placed animal skins over bent branches for shelter. Inside these huts were grass or deerskin beds and fire for cooking and heating. The men wore little clothing, and the women wore grass or deerskin skirts. Both men and women wore their hair long, hanging down to the waist.

The Coahuiltecan worked hard to survive, but they also made time for fun. At times groups would gather for feasting and dancing. They held all-night celebrations that the Spanish later called **mitotes**. These gatherings celebrated major events, such as religious ceremonies, victory in battle, or the gathering of a plentiful food supply.

The arrival of Europeans changed the lives of the Coahuiltecan. Many died from European diseases. Those remaining faced attacks from Apache Indians, who had been driven into Coahuiltecan territory. Many Coahuiltecan began to live among the Spanish and abandon their traditional ways of life. By 1800 few Coahuiltecan groups remained. The few who were left joined other Indian groups.

**Reading Check Analyzing Information** How did the Coahuiltecan use wildlife and plants to survive?

## ★ Section 2 Review

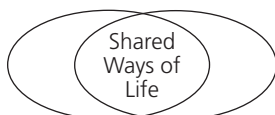
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ONLINE QUIZ

### 1. Define and explain:

- nomads
- wigwams
- mitotes

### 2. Comparing and Contrasting

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to show what the Karankawas and Coahuiltecan had in common and how life was different for the two groups.



### 3. Finding the Main Idea

- How did seasonal migration help the Karankawas adapt to their environment?
- Who were the Coahuiltecan?

### 4. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

**Summarizing** Write a one-page short story about the Karankawas.

Consider the following:

- their seasonal movement
- their food, clothing, tools, and shelter