

**TOPIC:**

Sami: The indigenous people of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

**PROJECT PERSONNEL:**

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**GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT:**

The Sami (Lapps) are the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia. Their language and culture is unique to the region. In Norway, the Sami number about 45,000. There are two main types of Sami – the nomadic people and the sea people.

The nomadic Sami have traditionally moved throughout the region with their reindeer herds. They follow the reindeer across wide expanses of land in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The reindeer has been essential to the survival of the Sami, who have lived in northern Scandinavia for thousands of years. Their culture is one of hardship, driven by the extreme survival skills needed to get through the long grueling winters on the arctic plains, where the temperature can dip below –50 degrees Fahrenheit. The reindeer has been absolutely essential to their existence, providing the Sami with food, clothing, shelter and tools. Today, only 1,500 Sami are still herding reindeer. Many have moved to different parts of the country, or lead “ordinary” modern lives. As they abandon their traditional way of life, the Sami culture is also rapidly disappearing.

**TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW (VOCABULARY)...**

*Joik*: (“y-oik”) Traditional Sami singing/chanting. Traditionally sung a cappella, sometimes accompanied by a drum. It usually has short lyrics or no lyrics at all. This type of song can be deeply personal or spiritual in nature.

*Nomads*: Nomadic people, also known as nomads, are communities of people that move from one place to another, rather than settling down in one location. Sami nomads raise reindeer herds, and move with them so as not to deplete pasture beyond recovery in any one area.

*Lavvu*: A traditional Sami tent, comparable to a Native American teepee. The traditional lavvu consists of wooden poles interlocked together so that they form a tripod. Upon the assembly of the forked poles, the straight poles are then laid up against the tripod in a circular fashion, finally covered by a large piece of canvas. In the middle, one can put a fireplace, for light and warmth. The Lavvu is very stable in the strong winds in northern Scandinavia.

**WHY ARE WE STUDYING THIS IN THE POLAR REGIONS?**

The Sami people, along with Inuit tribes in Canada, Greenland and the Arctic regions of Alaska and other indigenous groups in the Arctic, are severely threatened by the effects of global warming. As such, it is important to be aware of the challenges of these groups.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT US HERE IN THE UNITED STATES?**

The fate of the Sami people in the north of Scandinavia has parallels with the fate of other indigenous peoples, such as Native Americans and Inuit populations here in the U.S. As members of these groups move to cities and abandon their traditional way of life, it is more important than ever to preserve and further develop the culture and traditions of these indigenous groups.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC:**

For more information, please visit the Norwegian University of Tromsø’s online exhibit “Sapmi – Becoming a Nation” at <http://sapmi.uit.no/>