

Read the two interpretations below about the Plains Indians.

How are the interpretations different?

Why are the interpretations different?

Which interpretation do you find more convincing?

Interpretation A

Adapted from ‘Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border’ by Major Randolph Marcy, 1866.

Marcy only fought the Indians for a short time and then escorted settlers across the Plains in the 1840s. The government asked him to write the official guidebook giving essential advice to those travelling on the Plains. He spent the rest of his military career in Washington.

The Plains Indians have none of the good points of human nature. They do not know the basics of civilisation or Christianity. Those I have met are simply beggars who continually pester strangers. They are not grateful and the more you do for them, the more they expect. The only way to make these vicious thieves respect authority is to treat them so harshly that they know we are superior.

Interpretation B

Adapted from ‘My Friend the Indian’ by James McLaughlin, 1910.

McLaughlin was a Canadian who moved to the United States in 1863 and married a Sioux woman. He later worked for twenty years as an Indian agent responsible for reservations in Dakota. In 1895, he became Inspector of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington.

The Plains Indians are misunderstood by the whites. Underneath their savage appearance is a very human heart and mind. They had an independent life on a land that provided them with everything that they needed as their needs were simple – they were happy and took each day as it came. As a result the Indians loved the Plains. They are wise and reliable friends.