What Are Totem Poles?

Totem poles are tall wooden sculptures that are made by Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America. They tell stories and represent important cultural beliefs.

Why Do We Make Totem Poles?

Here are some reasons why totem poles are made, explained in simple steps:

1. **Storytelling:** Each totem pole tells a story. The carvings on each pole can represent animals, people, and events that are important to the community.
2. **Honoring Ancestors:** Totem poles can honor family members or ancestors, keeping their memory alive for future generations.
3. **Celebrations:** Often, totem poles are created for special occasions like potlatches, which are ceremonies that celebrate and share with the community.
4. **Identifying Clans:** Different animal symbols and designs on the pole can represent clans or families. Each clan has its own unique symbols, which help to show their identity.
5. **Art and Culture:** Making totem poles is a form of art. They are beautifully carved and painted, and they showcase the creativity and skills of the artists.

How Are Totem Poles Made?

Creating a totem pole is a big process:

1. **Choosing the Wood:** Carvers usually use special trees, like cedar, because it is durable and easy to carve.
2. **Designing:** The artist plans the design and figures out what animals and symbols will be included.
3. **Carving:** Using tools, the artist carefully carves each detail into the wood.
4. **Painting:** Once carved, the totem pole is painted in bright colors to make the designs stand out.
5. **Raising:** Finally, the totem pole is raised in a special place, where the community can come and admire it.

Conclusion

Totem poles are important cultural symbols that carry stories and meanings. They are a way for Indigenous peoples to express their history, beliefs, and respect for nature and family. Making a totem pole is not just about art; it’s about sharing and preserving culture.