

## Body Rituals of the Snaidanac

Much of the Snaidanacs' day is spent in ritual and ceremony. The centre of this activity involves the human body; its appearance is vitally important for these people. While this is not unusual, the ceremony and philosophy concerning the body are entirely unique to the culture. The fundamental belief appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is toward decay and disease. As humans are trapped inside their ugly bodies, their only hope to avoid the decay and disease is religious ritual and ceremony. To an outsider this preoccupation may seem pointless, but these religious practices greatly reassure the people, and if they choose to live this way, we should not question it. Every household has one or more shrines for this purpose. They appear to treat a box or chest built into the wall as the most important place in the shrine. In this box, the natives keep strange charms and magical potions. These include miniature paintbrushes and coloured sticks with tiny brushes. Beneath the charm-box is a small font or basin. Each day, every member of the family, one after the other, enters the shrine room, bows his or her head before the charm-box, mixes holy water in the font and then proceeds with a brief rite similar to Christian baptism. The holy waters come from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests undertake excessive measures to make the liquid ritually pure.

Adapted from Ruth Sandwell et al. *Early Contact and Settlement in New France* (Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2002), pp. 33–60. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.

Adapted from Miner, H. "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist*, 58:3 (1956), pp. 503–507.