
Totem poles

Totem poles are tall wood carvings. They are made by West Coast First Nations.

Most totem poles are carved from cedar wood.

You can see totem poles in many places throughout B.C. There are totem poles in Stanley Park in Vancouver. There are also totem poles in Victoria, Sechelt, Alert Bay and Haida Gwaii.

A work of art

A totem pole is a work of art.

A totem pole can welcome visitors to a building.

The totem pole can also be a monument. It can honour a famous person or event. For example, a totem pole might honour the memory of the chief of a tribe.

During a feast, or potlatch, totem poles can be put up to greet important visitors.

Tell stories

Totem poles can also tell stories. They show stories through the carvings. The stories can be legends or myths. The stories can be the history of a family.

What are the carvings?

Some of the carvings on totems are animals. Common animals include bears, wolves, whales, frogs, eagles and ravens. Each animal has a meaning.

For example, in Haida culture, the raven can be a magician. The raven tells the story of the beginnings of Haida Gwaii.



This is a totem pole in Masset.

Submitted by Kimberley Alcock • Photo: Alaska View Lodge, Haida Gwaii