(J) Plains Cree (1/3)

J1 (1 point). Below are six related words, meaning “little hat”, “little nail”, “little door”, “little head”, “minute”, and “little chair”. Which means which?

cipahikanis	minute
miscikwanis	little head
cehcapiwinis	little chair
sakahikanis	little nail
ascocinis	little hat
iskwahcemis	little door

J2 (4 points).

a. ᑎᐸᐦᐃᑲᐣ	tipahikan
b. ᐊᐢᒍᒋᓂᐢ	ascocinis
c. ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᐣ	sakahikan
d. ᒥᐢᑎᑲᐧᐣ	mistikwan
e. ᒋᐸᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ	cipahikanis
f. ᐃᐢᑲᐧᐦᒉᒥᐢ	iskwahcemis
g. ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ	sakahikanis
h. ᑌᐦᑕᐱᐃᐧᐣ	tehtapiwin
i. ᒥᐢᒋᑲᐧᓂᐢ	miscikwanis
j. ᐃᐢᑲᐧᐦᑌᒼ	iskwahtem
k. ᐊᐢᑐᑎᐣ	astotin
l. ᒉᐦᒐᐱᐃᐧᓂᐢ	cehcapiwinis

(J) Plains Cree (2/3)

J3 (5 points). Explain your answer.
For the first part, the rule for forming the diminutive in Cree is to add an *–is* suffix at the end of the word and change ("mutate") every instance of <t> to <c>.

There are many logical routes through the first part, many of them very good. Here's one way, which requires making comparatively few assumptions about what individual symbols might mean. First, we notice that the twelve items can be paired up into six very similar pairs:

ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᐣ	⇔	ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ
ᒥᐢᑎᑿᐣ	⇔	ᒥᐢᒋᑿᓂᐢ
ᐊᐢᑐᑎᐣ	⇔	ᐊᐢᒍᒋᓂᐢ
ᑎᐸᐦᐃᑲᐣ	⇔	ᒋᐸᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ
ᑌᐦᑕᐱᐃᐧᐣ	⇔	ᒉᐦᒐᐱᐃᐧᓂᐢ
ᐃᐢᑿᐦᑌᒼ	⇔	ᐃᐢᑿᐦᒉᒥᐢ

From the second column being longer, and all ending in the same symbol, we can be pretty sure these are the *–is* forms. (And that this writing s------ystem writes left-to-right.)

We can notice now that, disregarding the different endings for a moment, that each item from the first column is *almost*, but not quite, identical to its sister in the second column. The remaining difference is that every time one of { ᑎᑐᑌᑕ } appears in the first column, it is replaced by { ᒋᒍᒉᒐ } in the second – that is, just like in the Roman alphabet versions, a "mutation" is happening to make the derived form.

At this point it's simple to match the Roman pairs to Syllabics pairs based on *where* in the word these mutations occur. Each pair has a different pattern of mutation:

sakahikan ⇔ *sakahikanis* has no mutations,
as does ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᐣ ⇔ ᓴᑲᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ
tipahikan ⇔ *cipahikanis* has one at the beginning,
as does ᑎᐸᐦᐃᑲᐣ ⇔ ᒋᐸᐦᐃᑲᓂᐢ
mistikwan ⇔ *miscikwanis* has one in the middle,
as does ᒥᐢᑎᑿᐣ ⇔ ᒥᐢᒋᑿᓂᐢ
iskwahtem ⇔ *iskwahcemis* has one towards the end,
as does ᐃᐢᑿᐦᑌᒼ ⇔ ᐃᐢᑿᐦᒉᒥᐢ

(J) Plains Cree (3/3)

tehtapiwin ⇔ *cehcapiwinis* has two at/towards the beginning,
as does ᑌᐦᑕᐱᐃᐧᐣ ⇔ ᒉᐦᒐᐱᐃᐧᓂᐢ
astotin ⇔ *ascocinis* has two towards the end,
as does ᐊᐢᑐᑎᐣ ⇔ ᐊᐢᒍᒋᓂᐢ

At this point, we can also do a number of checks as well to show the internal consistency of our answer – that our answer for *iskwahcemis* has the same sequence at the end as *mistikwan* and *miscikwanis* have at the beginning, that *sakahikan* and *tipahikan* have the same endings, etc.

The system that emerges is the following. The full-size symbols represent CV sequences; there is one per syllable. The shape of them represents the consonant, and the direction they are rotated represents the vowel.

	a	e	i	o
no consonant	ᐊ		ᐃ	
t	ᑕ	ᑌ	ᑎ	ᑐ
p	ᐸ		ᐱ	
c	ᒐ	ᒉ	ᒋ	ᒍ
k	ᑲ			
s	ᓴ			

You can see one pattern clearly between *t, p*, and no-consonant. There are two rotational patterns in Syllabics, actually, although it can't be concluded for certain just based on these data: asymmetrical symbols (like the <c> series) flip, but symmetrical symbols (like the <t> series) rotate. (Otherwise, if they flipped like the other series, you wouldn't be able to tell apart <ta> and <ti> or <te> and <to>.)

There is one full-sized character per syllable; characters not represented in this way are given superscript characters. <s>, <m>, and <n>, when not right before a vowel, are represented by ᐢ, ᒼ, and ᐣ,respectively. <h> is represented wherever it occurs by ᐦ -- if it occurs before a vowel, the ᐦ is used before the appropriate bare vowel character. <w>, when it occurs before a vowel, is represented by the dot ᐧ *after* the vowel; like *h*, if the syllable is just wV the dot is used before the bare vowel character.