



# Personal Storytelling, Oral Traditions, and Narrative Art — Grades K-3

## Summary:

Students will learn about pictographic art and oral traditions by watching and responding to a PowerPoint, “The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives”; by considering important stories from their own lives, families, and communities; by examining the symbols Plains artists used in their pictographic art and the symbols we use today; by learning how to discuss and critique art; by creating a personal artistic piece using stylistic elements from ledger art; and by telling a personal story using visual language.

**This lesson is aligned with the OPI Indian Education For All (IEFA) “Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians” (EUs), particularly:**

- EU 1–Tribal Diversity
- EU 2–Individual Diversity
- EU 3–Beliefs, Spirituality, Traditions, Oral History Persist
- EU 4–Reservations–land reserved
- EU 6–History from Indian Perspectives

**This lesson is also aligned with the following Montana Art Content Standards:**

- Arts Content Standard 1: Students create, perform/exhibit, and respond in the Arts.
- Arts Content Standard 2: Students apply and describe the concepts, structures, and processes in the Arts.
- Arts Content Standard 3: Students develop and refine arts skills and techniques to express ideas, pose and solve problems, and discover meaning.
- Arts Content Standard 4: Students analyze characteristics and merits of their work and

the work of others.

- Arts Content Standard 5: Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods.
- Arts Content Standard 6: Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work.

## Teaching Note:

Educators can adapt this lesson, using parts or the whole. There are six distinct activities, and the lesson is designed so that one activity is done per day. However, this can be transformed into a unit study if educators focus on one image per day/week. Materials needed for each activity are specified under that activity.

## About this Lesson

Marina Weatherly, an artist and art educator from Stevensville, Montana, developed this activity in 2012. It was reviewed by the Indian Education Division of the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). Funding for this project was provided through a partnership between the Montana Historical Society and OPI.

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## Activity 1: Learning about Narrative Art and Oral Traditions of the Plains Indians

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### Materials:

- PowerPoint and script <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>
- Blank ledger art paper for journals (optional, <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>)

### Preparation:

Instructors should familiarize themselves with the material on “The Art of Storytelling” website (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>). Print out the PowerPoint script and preview the PowerPoint.

Have students make journals, in which they can write notes and make sketches. If you wish, make copies of the PDF “Fort Keogh blank ledger page” to use for journal pages. Have students title their journals “My Ledger.”

### Procedure:

Introduce the activity by presenting the learning objectives to the students.

Art is like a window into cultures and history. Culture refers to the customs, practices, and behaviors of a certain group or people. Looking at art can tell us something about the people who made the art and help us to appreciate and respect other people.

This art lesson will help teach us the story of several Montana Indian tribes during three time periods: thousands of years ago, in the late 1800s during a time of great change (a little more than a hundred years ago), and the present.

We will learn this story by looking at and talking about the art created by artists from those time periods. We will look at art from the Plains tribes of Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Hidatsa, and Blackfeet, and from the Plateau tribe of Salish.

We will make our own art to tell our own stories using some of the styles of the Indian artists. Styles are a certain way of doing something.

**Discuss:** Appreciation, respect, and how we show it.

### Present Background Information:

Stories hold histories, ideas, and events.

The storytellers in this lesson often told their stories with pictures called *pictographs*.

Long ago, the Indian tribes of Montana did not have a written language; they did not write things down using an alphabet. Instead, they communicated orally (by talking and telling stories.) This is called oral tradition.

The people held knowledge, history, and stories *inside* of themselves and communicated in many different ways: the spoken word, sign language, picture writing or pictographs, music, dance, drama, and how they dressed.

They often used symbols to communicate. Symbols are pictures that mean something. Not all tribes and artists use the same symbols.

Today, people may use books and computers to store knowledge, history, and stories. They still communicate with the spoken word and different art forms, but now we also use computers, the Internet, phones, radio, TV, and movies to communicate and tell stories.

Sometimes stories in books use pictures with words to tell a story. This is called an illustration.

Today, symbols are still used. What are some symbols used today? Everyone has a special story to tell.

**Discuss:** Ways to communicate and tell stories, past and present, and use symbols (give examples).

### Show PowerPoint Presentation, “The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives.”

**Teaching note:** These images tell a sequential story, historical through contemporary. For kindergarten, the first visual image, of a petroglyph, may be used to begin the discussion below for content and art elements. Depending on amount of time and grade level, additional slides may be added to instructional time.

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**General Questions for the Visual Presentation:** *While the students are viewing and discussing the images, engage the students by asking them the following guided questions, when applicable. Explain to the students they will be art and history detectives and will be looking for clues in the storytelling pictures to help them understand the stories better. Have students record answers to selected questions in their journals.*

Content	Art Elements & Principles of Design	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening?</li> <li>• Who is in the picture?</li> <li>• When did it happen?</li> <li>• Who made the picture? How many artists made the picture?</li> <li>• What tribe is the artist from?</li> <li>• Why was it made?</li> <li>• What are the figures wearing? Why? Hair style and headdress? Are they different or similar? How?</li> <li>• Which direction are the figures and animals moving? How are they moving?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of lines can you find? Did the artist draw the outside (outline) of their design first?</li> <li>• Shapes: What shapes do you see?</li> <li>• Do you see geometric shapes? What are they?</li> <li>• Are the people facing you or are they seen from the side?</li> <li>• Is there empty space? Big, little, or no space?</li> <li>• How are the shapes placed on the painting?</li> <li>• Who can find where pattern was used?</li> <li>• Is there movement? How did the artist show movement?</li> <li>• What colors can you find?</li> <li>• What materials did the artist use?</li> <li>• Can you find a symbol? What do you think the symbol means?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What action words can you use to describe what is happening?</li> <li>• Who can make a pose like that (<i>specify</i>) figure?</li> </ul>

**Understandings for Students K-3 Grades:**

Stories may be told in many ways. A long time ago, Montana Indian tribes told stories by speaking and making pictures. Because they did not have a written language, they used an oral tradition to tell their stories (EU 3).

The picture stories may be about the past, or about what is happening now. By looking at the artistic style, you can see what life was like a long time ago, and you might see how it has changed (Crow, Hidatsa, Salish). Many Indian artists today continue to tell stories with their art (Blackfeet and Salish artists).

Sometimes the picture stories tell stories about good or brave deeds. The tribes show respect to those who have done good or brave deeds.

All Montana tribes are different, and each person is different (EUs 1, 2). Their artistic styles show both differences and similarities (Crow, Hidatsa, Northern Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Salish art).

Indian artists often used symbols to tell a story. Symbols are like writing with pictures. Not all Indian artists used the same symbols. Each tribe may have their own symbols still in use today.

Indian artists often traded ideas, gifts, and goods.

A long time ago (and still sometimes today), Montana Plains Indians and Salish Indians used natural materials from animals, plants, and minerals. The artists would respect their materials. Often, the stories, styles, and materials changed with time.

Artists often cooperated to create art together.

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## Activity 2: Discussion and Inquiry (Single and/or Group Activity)

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### Materials:

- Images from website or PowerPoint
- Student journals

### Procedure:

Lead the class in a discussion of some of the following essential questions and/or choose a few of the questions for students to write about in their journals and share.

- What is an oral tradition?
- What are all the different ways a story can be told?
- Has my life been changed by something that has happened to me? How?
- What is an important event or memory I would like to show and tell others? Is it a family or community event?

- What good or brave deed have I done in my life that I am proud of?
- What important role do I have in my life? How do we show respect for each other?
- How have I cooperated or shared with someone else?
- How are we different from each other? How are we the same?

### Journal Writing Activities:

What symbols do I use today in my life (numbers, letters, signs, etc.)?

What symbols, shapes, lines, patterns, colors, and materials did the Crow, Hidatsa, Northern Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Salish artists use to tell their picture story (name the tribe associated with the slide chosen per activity)?

What would I use to tell my story the best?

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## Activity 3: Remembering and Retelling Important Stories

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### Materials:

- Family Story Assignment worksheet below or other worksheet with sample questions
- Student journals
- **Teaching note:** This is a multi-day lesson.

### Procedure:

Explain to students that ledger art allowed artists to preserve and share important memories. All of us have important memories that can be shared and preserved.

Ask students to talk to a family member to learn a story from their own family history or a memorable family event.

Provide students with sample questions (see Family History Ideas, below). Prepare your own questionnaire or use and/or modify the Family

Story Assignment worksheet. In either case, provide support for students who may not have access to someone who can help them with this.

Have students brainstorm (individually or collectively) about a memorable event that happened to themselves, a family member, their family, classroom, school, or community. Encourage them to choose only one to three moments in that event. Which was the most important moment? What symbol or images would you use to portray those moments? (Students can draw these symbols or images in their journal.) Ask the students to tell the class their story.

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**Discuss:** generosity, kindness, and respect. How do you show it? What is an act you have done that you are proud of? How did other people show you respect for that action? What is an activity you did with others that showed cooperation? What symbols or images can show this activity? Have students reflect and/or draw symbols in their journals.

**Related Extension Activities:**

Invite a parent, grandparent, or native elder to tell stories. Whenever possible, invite a native tribal member to tell their tribal stories and

share the use of some symbols they use on traditional tipis, moccasins, powwow clothing (regalia), etc. This should be discussed ahead of time in a culturally respectful manner prior to the classroom or special site visit.

Read to or have students read Indian Reading Series about Montana tribes (e.g., *Tepee, Sun and Time*). Are any symbols used in the story? List them in the student journal.

Have students act out a story, in the oral tradition.

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## Activity 4: Art Evaluation

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**Materials:**

- Images from PowerPoint or website

**Procedure:**

Teach your students how to properly critique an art project by training them in ways of looking and talking about art. (This skill will be practiced later when students offer peer critiques of each other's art projects.)

Choose a slide from the PowerPoint to model and practice critiquing a work of art. Stress that art should be judged in relationship to its intentions (for student art, that intention is often to fulfill a specific assignment).

Provide model sentences that avoid judgment. For example, "The first thing I see is ..." or "\_\_\_\_\_ stands out to me because of the (size, color, brightness, placement) contrast." (Marvin

Bartels, 2002.) In his essay, "Successful Art Class Critique," Bartel writes: "If it is peer evaluation, I ask students to avoid all judgmental comments. I stress description, analysis, and interpretation. These are comments that say what we see, why it makes an impression, and what it might mean or how it makes the viewer feel. No one may say, 'I like . . . ' or, 'I don't like . . . ' I ask them to simply say, 'The first thing I see is . . . ' 'This \_\_\_\_\_ stands out for me because of the . . . (size, color, brightness, placement, subject, etc.) contrast.'" [www.goshen.edu/art/ed/critique1.html](http://www.goshen.edu/art/ed/critique1.html)

Let students know that they will be critiquing each other's work using these tools. Discuss that during peer review it is important to use a proper voice and to pay equal attention to all classroom students (not more for friends, etc.).

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## Activity 5: The Creative Process: Introduction to Style (Traditional, Tribal, Individual)

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**Materials:**

- Untitled ledger drawing by Curley, (Crow) 1886 (show image from website or PowerPoint)
- White or tan paper
- Pencil or Sharpie, color pencils

**Procedure:**

Show image created by Curley.

Have students draw the main shapes from the image.

Instruct students to identify the middle of their paper with their hand. Then, using a pencil, have them draw only the main shapes of the

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figure in the style of the example. Tell them to leave out the clothing, hair, details, and accessories.

Remind students not to place their figure on the bottom of the page, but in the middle, where their hand was.

You may model each step for them on the white board, as they follow you. Emphasize side profile face, front-facing torso, profile legs, and other distinct features in the example.

**Have students personalize their figures:**

Tell them: “This figure is you. You are on your way to a very special event. How would you make this person look like you? What is the event? How would you dress for the occasion?”

Instruct the students to make their figure look like themselves by drawing their hair.

Then have them add clothing and accessories of their choice on the figure.

Emphasize that they are not copying what the Crow man is wearing.

They may decorate and color the figure using geometric patterns and symbols of their choosing from their journal and activities above.

Emphasize that the time period is now, and they should dress like they would today for a very special occasion.

It is the style of the figures in the art that will be emphasized.

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## Activity 6: Tell a Story with Visual Language

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**Materials:**

- Use materials that are readily available in the classroom. You may also experiment with traditional natural materials as noted on the slide.
- Choose one surface: the <http://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/IEFA/WinterCountTemplate.pdf> example from the website (make copies), large construction paper (white, or tan, with torn edges or plain), or recycled material.
- Choose media: one to outline and another for color (pencils, Sharpies, color pencils, paint (tempera), or crayons).

**Procedure:**

Based on previous discussions, have students illustrate a true important personal story or event in their life. Have students pre-draw ideas first in their journals before starting their ultimate project. Emphasize that students are to use only images and symbols, not written

words, to tell the story. The story could illustrate a good action or deed. There could be several moments and events in the same story, if they are related.

Ask students to make sure that only what is necessary to tell the story is included. Students can decorate their stories with shapes, patterns, and geometric designs.

Tell students that the style may be their own, but that they will use space similar to what they saw in the earlier examples. For example, events and figures are not placed along the bottom of the page, but over the entire page. You may model for them an example of a story/event from your life.

When finished, the students may show their story to the class. Have classmates try to “read” or interpret the story back to the artist in the oral tradition of recounting events. Then have the artist tell the story verbally while showing the picture.

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## **Extensions for Alternative/Additional Lesson: Group Collaboration and Cooperation**

### **Materials:**

- Large roll paper, white, yellow, or light tan. Preferred: Pencil or Sharpies, tempera paint, large brushes. Pencils and crayon could be used instead.
- This lesson would be a class or group collaboration. The students will first draw a rough copy of their story idea before applying it to the large paper. You may help them decide whose story goes where, and the size of each. Older students could cooperate together to make those decisions.
- The students will then draw and color their stories on one large roll paper, which could be displayed in the classroom or hallway.

### **Cooperation: Artistic Roles and Geometric Designs**

Same lesson and materials as above, but the students will divide into two groups. The students in one group will each draw and color their story; the other group will create their own geometric designs and patterns in bands between each or several stories, or around the edge of the paper.

### **Evaluation or Assessment**

Students will be evaluated or assessed on their demonstration of knowledge, understandings, skills, and abilities of both the Essential Understandings and Arts content as outlined in the learning objectives. Assessment will be based on how well the students answered the questions during the visual presentation, the level of inquiry, and the outcome of the art activities. If individual student journals were kept through the lessons, they could be utilized as a formative assessment by how well the following concepts of the essential student understandings are demonstrated, visually and through journal writing.

The four performance levels included in the Montana Art Standards: Advanced, Proficient, Nearing Proficiency, and Novice.

### **Objectives to Evaluate and/or Assess:**

#### **IEFA Concepts**

#### **Students will know:**

- By looking at art, you can learn about other people and their life.
- Montana Indian tribes had and still have an oral tradition for storytelling as a means of remembering and communicating.
- The concept of symbols and picture storytelling.
- Long ago, Indian men and women had different roles.
- A long time ago, art supplies used by Montana Indian tribes were made from natural materials (hide, plants, fiber, rocks, earth, etc.) and were, and still are, respected.
- Indian artists often traded ideas, gifts, and goods with each other, other tribes, and new people moving into their homelands.

#### **Art Concepts**

#### **Students identified:**

- Some lines, shapes, and patterns, including geometric designs, used by Montana Indian artists
- The use of space in the art
- How the storytelling artists showed movement and action
- Individual and tribal clothing and some art styles of a few Montana tribes

#### **Students will be able to:**

- Use lines and shapes to draw a figurative self-portrait in Plains Indian Crow pictorial style
- Create original artwork inspired by Plains Indian pictorial style that illustrates a personal story from an event that has meaning. Use available materials and basic elements of art and principles of design to create their story; present and discuss their artwork with their peers.

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## The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives

Personal Storytelling, Oral Traditions, and Narrative Art — Grades K-3 *(continued)*

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### **Resources for Visual Presentation:**

Images from the MHS “The Art of Storytelling” website ([mhs.mt.gov/education/IEFA/pictographicart.asp](http://mhs.mt.gov/education/IEFA/pictographicart.asp)), including ledger art examples; the Tribal Homelands, 1855, map; and the Current Montana Reservations Map

### **Optional for Cultural and Historical Background, Extension and Related Lessons:**

Glossary: [opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Search/Social%20Studies/Glossary.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Search/Social%20Studies/Glossary.pdf)

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians: [opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/essentialunderstandings.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/essentialunderstandings.pdf)

Montana Art Content Standards: [opi.mt.gov/PDF/standards/ContStds-Arts.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/standards/ContStds-Arts.pdf)

To find related OPI IE Model Lesson plans: <http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/IndianEd/Curric.html>

The Crow from the Indian Reading Series (Assiniboine): [apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book13.pdf](http://apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book13.pdf)

Tepee, Sun, Time from the Indian Reading Series: [apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book14.pdf](http://apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book14.pdf)

Winter Count Lesson in this MHS Storytelling Kit.

Geometry Design and Math Lesson: [opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Search/Mathematics/G%207%20Native%20American%20Designs.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Search/Mathematics/G%207%20Native%20American%20Designs.pdf)

To invite a tribal member see Tribal Resources, p. 11: [opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/dirindianed.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/dirindianed.pdf)

Oral history, communication: Long Ago in Montana Teacher Guide, 2nd gr, 2009. [opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Resources/LongAgo\\_MT\\_guide\\_DVD.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Resources/LongAgo_MT_guide_DVD.pdf)

Language Arts, general, K-4 lessons: [opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/ConnectingCultures.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/ConnectingCultures.pdf)



## HANDOUT: Family History Question Ideas

**The Basics:** Make sure you write the name and birth date of the person you're interviewing, as well as where they fit in your family tree. Then, choose any of the topics below and begin asking questions.

**Childhood:** What do you recall about your childhood? Where did you live and go to school? What do you remember best about your parents? What did you and your siblings do in your spare time? Were you an obedient child or a mischievous child? What styles of clothing did children wear then? What healthcare issues did you face (normal childhood diseases and accidents, or more serious)? What kinds of cures were used?

**Family Traditions:** Did your family have any special traditions, such as things that they did on holidays or birthdays? What about family heirlooms? Is there anything that has been handed down from generation to generation?

**Education:** Where did you attend grade school/high school? How did you get to school? Who were your teachers? Were there special events that you enjoyed? Can you describe those?

**Growing Up:** When did you leave home? Why did you leave and where did you go? How did your life change? Did you feel grown up? Were you a little scared?

**Historical Events:** Which significant historical events have taken place during your lifetime? Were there wars, natural disasters, or political changes? How did these events affect you?



**Hometown:** What was the name of the place where you grew up? Was it a big city or a small town? Were there any special activities or festivals at different times during the year?

**Immigration:** How old were you when you immigrated to the United States? Where did you come from and where and when did you arrive? How did you travel? By boat, plane, or train? How long did the trip take? What feelings did you have about coming to the United States? What was one of the biggest differences between the United States and your previous home?

**Occupation:** What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up? Did you ever help them out? Was your family financially comfortable? What was your first job? How old were you at the time? How did you get your job? What different jobs have you had during your life?

**Physical Characteristics:** What physical characteristics do people in your family share? Do they all have the same hair color or eye color? Who in the family do you resemble?

**Previous Generations:** Did you know your grandparents or great-grandparents? What were their names? Where did they live? What stories can you tell about them and their lives?

**Religion:** What part did religion play in your family? Were you very religious? Did you go to religious services on a regular basis?

**Other possible topics:** Education, politics, military service, recreation, entertainers of the era, family personalities, family pets, traveling, dating, clothing, family recipes, favorite songs or poems, family medical history, marriage and raising a family, and anything else that may be of interest to you and your family.



# WORKSHEET: Family Story Assignment

**Talk to a parent tonight about a favorite family tradition or event (holiday, birthday, community celebration). Be sure to get details.**

**Try to find out the following:**

How old were they? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did they live? \_\_\_\_\_

What was their role in the event? \_\_\_\_\_

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Who participated in the event with them? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did they feel about the event then? \_\_\_\_\_

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How do they feel about the event now? \_\_\_\_\_

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***Take notes during the discussion and be prepared to share them with the class tomorrow.***