



# Exploring Influences and Perspectives through Ledger Art — Grades 7-12

## Summary

This lesson will take the students on a journey through the treaty and reservation eras, while introducing them to the influences and perspectives seen in the stories of ledger art. After presentations, experiential learning, and discussion, students will create an art project that tells a story about an Indian treaty and/or its aftermath. The narrative piece of art will be based on the style of a historical ledger artist (Curley, Crow) or on the style of a contemporary Indian artist inspired by ledger art (Terrance Guardipee, Blackfeet).

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

- EU 3–Beliefs, Spirituality, Traditions, Oral History Persist
- EU 4–Reservations–land reserved
- EU 5–Federal Indian Policy
- EU 6–History from Indian Perspectives
- EU 7–Tribal Sovereignty

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

- Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard #2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

- Anchor Standard #3. Refine and complete artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #8. Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Anchor Standard #11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding, including artistic ideas and works by American Indians.

## About this Lesson

John W. Bercier, a Chippewa Cree artist and art teacher in Butte, 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: The Project Reservation Experiment

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### Materials:

Download from <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>:

- “The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspective” PowerPoint
- Images by Curley and Terrance Guardipee in “Selected Images from the Montana Historical Society Exhibit”
- Handouts and worksheets (below)

**Note:** Teachers should note (and later discuss

with their students) that the opening activity in no way provides an accurate experience of reservation hardships but is designed simply to help students gain new emotional insights. Applying the following questions and understandings through discussion, inquiry, and activities will provide the cultural context for critical thinking and depth of learning.

### Preparation:

- Instructors should familiarize themselves with

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the “Art of Storytelling” material, including the handouts and worksheets below.

- Print the PowerPoint script and preview the PowerPoint.
- Print handouts and worksheets.
- Before class the teacher outlines several areas of the room by placing tape on the floor. These areas should be various sizes, with some small enough to make it difficult or uncomfortable for students to perform required tasks. Chairs should be removed or pushed aside.

**Procedure:**

**On Day 1**, divide students into groups (same number as taped-off areas in the classroom) and appoint a leader for each group. Hand the leader a treaty written in Greek (**Handout 1**). This is to give an example of language barriers and the difficulties this caused during treaty negotiations.

Tell the students that the agreement explains the art assignment, that they need to sign it in order to participate, and that they will receive a 0 for the assignment if they do not sign the paper.

After collecting the treaties, tell students that they have actually signed an agreement to stay within a confined area indefinitely. The actual document in Greek reads: “Whereas, my teacher has my ultimate good at heart and understands what I need to develop as a student, human being and artist, Therefore, I agree to stay within the confined area established by my teacher. I understand that I will need to stay there indefinitely. In exchange, I will gain insight and an educational experience that will deepen my understanding of Indian history.”

Send each group to one of the taped-off areas. The environment within the area bordered with tape should be unpleasant and create difficulties for the group to draw and take notes. The students will be standing and documenting during the presentation. (If the teacher makes one area big enough so that students can all sit, this will bring up issues of equity, reflecting the fact that reservations are not of equal size, and that some have more land base and are more resource-rich than others.)

Once students are placed within their “reservations,” distribute worksheets and tell the students they must complete the worksheet despite any difficulties they may have with the space. (Teachers may want to experiment with the quantity and quality of supplies available

within the confined area—this will make for great discussion and further discovery.)

Show PowerPoint and have students complete **Worksheet 1**.

**On Day 2**, send students back to their assigned reservations and provide leaders **Handouts 2-6**, which define treaties and reservations and provide information on specific ledger artists. (One set of handouts for each group, or “tribe,” may create problems in interpersonal communication. This will raise questions about scarcity and stress and cooperation versus competition, all pertinent issues.)

Require students to complete **Worksheet 2**.

**Worksheet 2** asks students to use the information from the handouts to create symbolic elements representing a series of key terms (for example, “reservation” and “treaty”). Each group will jointly create symbols for some key terms, while students will be individually responsible for creating symbols for other key terms. Explain to students that they will be using these symbols in their final art project (a ledger art-style illustration telling a historical story about an Indian treaty and/or its aftermath). Remind them that ledger artists often used symbols to represent larger ideas (e.g., dots showing the movement of men on foot) and that these symbols were shared and understood within tribes. (That’s why the group is jointly creating some symbols.) Ledger artists were also individuals with their own style, which is why students will create some individual symbols. What they don’t complete, assign as homework.

**On Day 3**, allow students to return to their regular work stations and debrief. Teachers may want to ask students how it felt to be placed in the predefined areas, how it affected the quality of their work, what adaptations they had to make, and how it changed their thinking or emotional response to Montana Indian history as it relates to the federal Indian policy periods.

After discussing the reservation experiment, look as a class at artwork created by Curley and Terrance Guardipee (images are part of kit inserts and are also on PowerPoint). Analyze each artistic style, make inferences about possible intentions, representation of symbols, etc. Then talk with students about the final art assignment: to create an art project, using predetermined symbols, that tells a story about an Indian treaty and/or its aftermath.

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## Activity 2: Telling a Story about Indian History through Art

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### Materials:

- Pencils, pens, and/or markers. (Printmaking on maps or ledger paper can be used for advanced methods.)
- Heavy drawing paper, old maps, or copies of templates (available at <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>).
- Completed worksheets from Activity 1.
- Online Resources for Cultural and Historical Background, Extension and Related Lessons. See <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt> for recommendations.

### Procedure:

This final project builds on the Project Reservation Experiment. Remind students of their final assignment: to create an art project, using predetermined symbols, that tells a story about an Indian treaty and/or its aftermath. The narrative piece of art will be based on the style of a historical ledger artist (Curley, Crow) or on the style of a contemporary Indian artist inspired by ledger art (Terrance Guardipee, Blackfeet). (Teacher may want to create a written assignment/rubric detailing his/her expectations.)

Brainstorm with students and have them create concept sketches before they begin working on their final projects.

Teachers may want students to engage in further historical research before beginning to sketch.

### Evaluation or Assessment:

Students will be evaluated or assessed on their demonstration of knowledge, understandings, skills, and abilities of the Essential Understandings, historical contexts, and Arts content as outlined in the learning objectives (below). Assessment will be based on how well the students answered the questions during the visual presentation, the level of inquiry, research, and the outcome of the art activities.

### Objectives to Evaluate or Assess:

Students will be able to:

- Exchange ideas about the use of symbols to express abstract concepts.
- Communicate an understanding of ledger art (whose perspective is seen and told) and its history, both verbally and through individual (or collaborative) artistic activity.
- Communicate significant facts about the treaty and reservation periods.
- Discuss the perspective of storyteller and identify differences and similarities between the historical ledger art of Crow artist Curley and the contemporary art of Blackfeet artist, Terrance Guardipee.
- Define “treaty,” “reservation,” and “sovereignty.”
- Understand how federal Indian policies affected Montana Indians historically and today.

### Essential Student Questions:

What are some of the ways the federal Indian policy periods affected the lives of individual Indians and their tribes?

How was the treaty-making process flawed? Why and in what way(s)?

Whose perspective is told and seen in historical ledger art? How is this significant to the historical periods? How is it significant to the Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians (EUs)? Is there one EU in particular?

What are some ways Plains Indian artistic styles of historical ledger art impact contemporary ledger art?

How does culture and art change in the face of larger historical forces? How are some aspects of culture and art preserved, regardless of these outside forces?

How can symbols, style, perspective, and story be used effectively in narrative and contemporary ledger art?

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# HANDOUT 1

Ότι,  
καθηγητής μου μου έχει απόλυτη επιτυχία στην καρδιά και  
καταλαβαίνει τι χρειάζομαι για να αναπτυχθεί ως φοιτητής, άνθρωπος  
και καλλιτέχνης,

ως εκ τούτου, συμφωνώ να παραμείνει εντός του περιορισμένο χώρο  
που καθορίζεται από το διδάσκοντα.

Κατανόω ότι θα πρέπει να μείνουν εκεί επ' αόριστον. Σε αντάλλαγμα,  
θα αποκτήσουν γνώση και εκπαιδευτική εμπειρία που θα  
εμβαθύνουν την κατανόηση της Ινδικής ιστορίας.

Υπογραφή (Signature):



# HANDOUT 2: Treaties

A treaty is an express agreement under international law entered into by actors in international law, namely sovereign states and international organizations. According to “Government to Government,” published by the National Congress of American Indians and National Council on State Legislatures (June 2000):

When European settlers came to America, they dealt with the tribes as sovereigns and often negotiated treaties with them. Hundreds of treaties between Indian nations and the United States have been negotiated by the president and ratified by two-thirds of the Senate. Indian treaties have the same status as treaties with foreign nations. Because such treaties are made under the U.S. Constitution, they take precedence over any conflicting state law. . . Treaties vary widely in their terms and provisions. They commonly included a guarantee of peace, a provision of land boundaries, a guarantee of hunting and fishing rights, education of Tribal members, and a statement that the tribe recognized the authority of the United States and, in return, received a promise from the United States of protection.

Treaties with tribes in Montana Territory did not begin until 1855, more than 70 years after the first treaties were negotiated in the eastern portion of the United States. According to Darrell Kipp, a Blackfeet tribal historian and language specialist,

The effect of the treaty period to tribes in Montana was the huge loss of millions of acres. As an example, when the Blackfeet Tribe signed the Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855, they remained in control of about 28,000,000 acres; however, because of Presidential proclamations, treaties and agreements after 1855, the Blackfeet Tribe’s land base was reduced to its current 1.5 million acres. Viewing the loss of this land base from a different perspective, the locations of the Ft. Peck Indian Reservation, Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation and Rocky Boy Reservation, and all the land surrounding these reservations today, are located in what was the original Blackfeet Territory in 1855.

Treaties between the U.S. government and Indian tribes ended in 1871 when Congress passed a legislative rider that attempted to limit the power of the president to enter into treaties with Indian nations. Since 1871 the president has recognized and given federal status to other Indian tribes and established new reservation boundaries through Presidential Executive Orders. Indian tribes in Montana would again lose large areas of their land bases because of Presidential Executive Orders.

(Excerpted from “A History and Foundation of American Indian Education Policy,” Stan Juneau, published by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2001)

## **The Trouble with Treaties**

While treaties recognized Indian sovereignty, there were many problems associated with treaties and treaty negotiations. According to *Montana: Stories of the Land* (Helena, 2008), 126:

There were four basic problems with the treaties. First, the treaties were based on the Euro-

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## The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives

### Handout 2: Treaties *(continued)*

American idea that land could be bought and sold. Plains and Plateau Indian tribes fought to control territory, but they did not believe that land was something an individual or tribe could own, much less buy or sell. In most Plains Indian traditions, the land was the supreme provider of all life. It was literally made up of the blood and bones of the people's ancestors. These opposing ideas led to many conflicts over the land.

Another problem was the language difference. U.S. government representatives spoke English; tribal leaders each spoke their own tribal language. Every idea had to go through several translations—and often the translators were not very skillful. So there were many misunderstandings.

A third problem was that government representatives misunderstood the structure of Indian tribes. They assumed that Indian chiefs could speak for their people the way a U.S. president could do. But this was not the way tribes organized themselves. Different tribes had different political structures. Individual bands had military leaders, political leaders, and spiritual leaders. The people looked to these chiefs for their wisdom and experience, but they were not necessarily obligated to do what they said.

Sometimes negotiators for the U.S. side took advantage of this loose organization of tribal leaders. If one chief refused to sign a treaty, the negotiators would simply find a different chief who would sign. But the government still expected all tribal members to comply with the treaty, no matter which chief signed. Then, if some bands or individual tribal members did not comply with terms of the treaties, the U.S. government sent in military troops to force them to comply.

The fourth big problem with the U.S.–Indian treaties was that the U.S. government often did not live up to its agreements. It allowed white settlers to trespass on Indian land that it had promised in the treaties to protect. It paid tribes in supplies they did not need. Or it sent low quality, spoiled food and broken equipment. And corrupt government contractors and agents often simply stole tribal money. Sometimes new administrations ignored deals negotiated by earlier government officials. A few times Congress refused to ratify (formally approve) treaties that had already been signed. Congress often changed the terms of treaties after they were signed—without informing the tribes.

### **Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855**

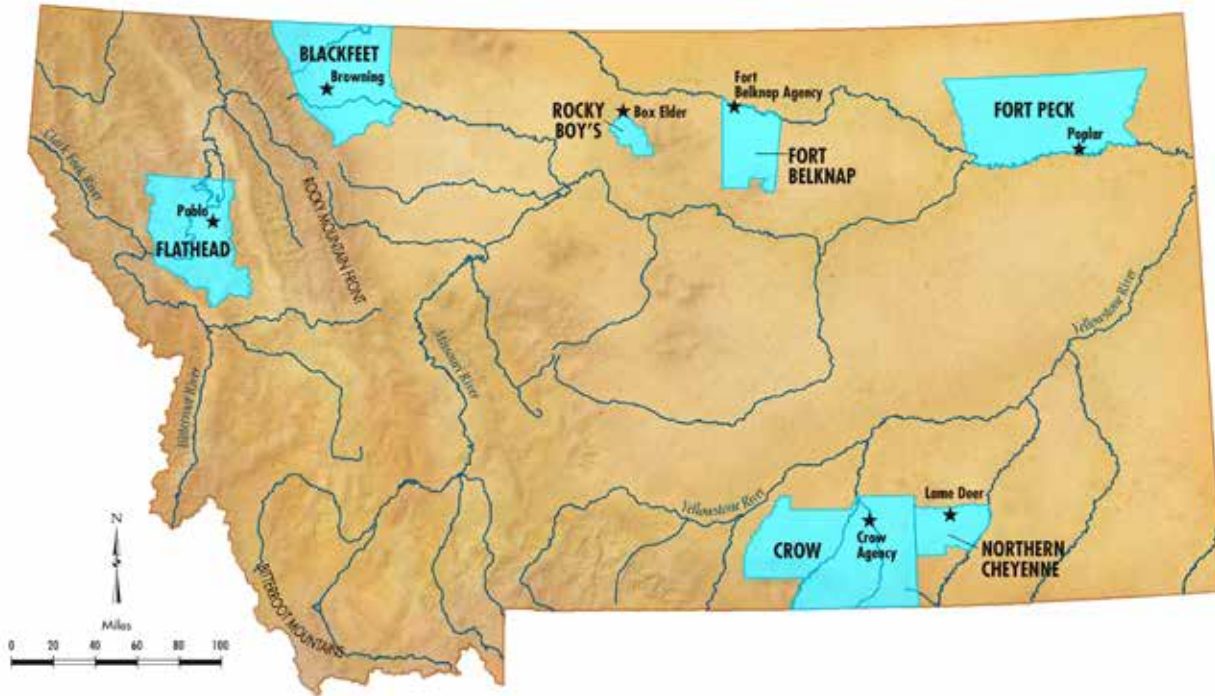
Montana Indians negotiated many treaties and agreements. One of the treaties that affected and still does affect the Blackfeet is the Treaty with the Blackfeet, 1855 (Lame Bull Treaty).

Information about the 1855 Treaty with the Blackfeet can be found on the page “Making Treaties,” on Trailtribes.org. The full text of the treaty can be found on the Blackfeet Nation’s website. See <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt> for links.

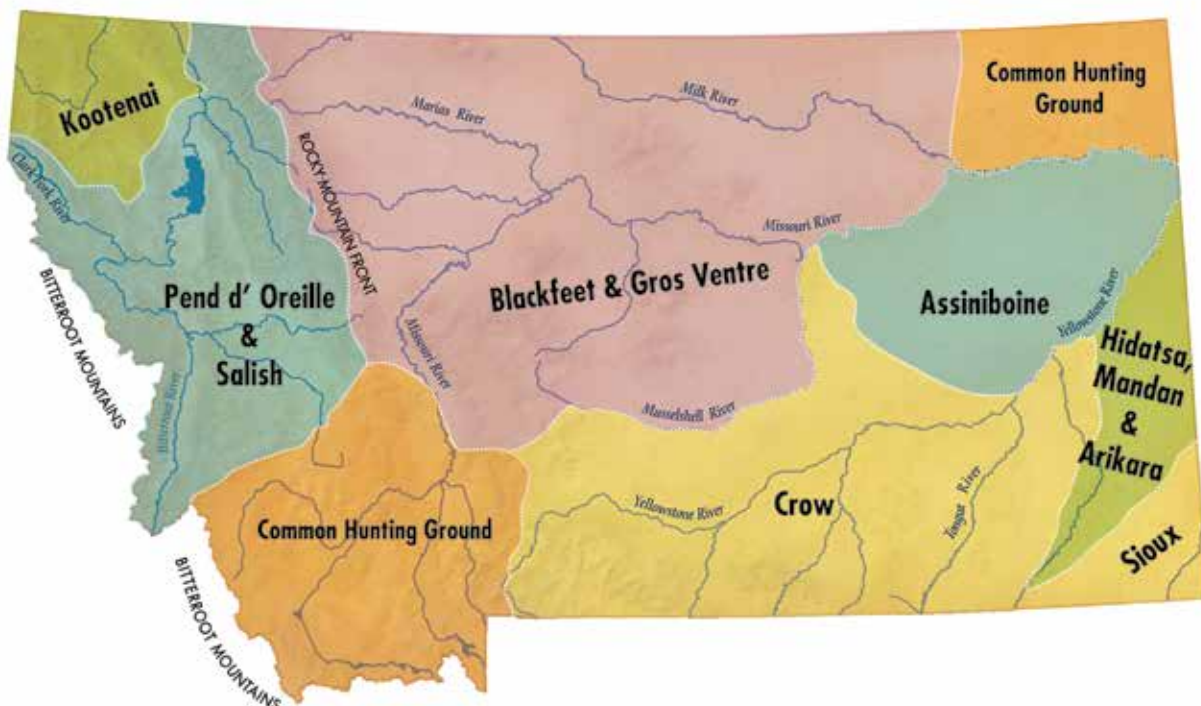


# HANDOUT 3: Reservations

## Current Montana Reservations



## Tribal Homelands, 1855



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## The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives

### HANDOUT 3: Reservations *(continued)*

Reservations are lands that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties, statutes, and executive orders and were not “given” to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

- I. Both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.
- II. Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.
- III. Acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.

Indian Nations located in Montana Territory prior to the passage of the Montana Constitution in 1889 held large land bases as negotiated through their treaties with the United States. The treaties assigned tribes to certain areas and obligated them to respect the land of their neighbors. However, in the 1860s, as miners and others rushed into the prime gold fields that often lay along or within the designated tribal lands, tribal life was disrupted. The new inhabitants demanded federal protection. These demands resulted in the garrisoning of Montana and the eventual relocation of the tribes to smaller and smaller reserves.

The federal government and many Montana citizens did not understand the lifestyles of Montana’s Indian tribes. Consequently, communication with the tribes was often through non-Indian perspectives, expectations, and points of view. However, the federal government did understand that these tribal groups were sovereign nations and that the United States needed to enter into treaty negotiations with the tribes.





# HANDOUT 4: Sovereignty

Excerpted from the Montana Office of Public Instruction's *Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* (2016).

Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.

## Background

Before colonization, Indian tribes possessed complete sovereignty. Within the governmental structure of the United States and the complex history of tribal-federal relations, tribes are now classified as domestic dependent nations. This means tribes have the power to define their own membership, structure and operate their tribal governments, regulate domestic relations, settle disputes, manage their property and resources, raise tax revenues, regulate businesses, and conduct relations with other governments. It also means that the federal government is obligated to protect tribal lands and resources; protect the tribes' right to self-government; and provide social, medical, educational, and economic development services necessary for the survival and advancement of tribes (Echohawk).

A very important but often unappreciated point is that tribal sovereignty does not arise out of the U.S. government, congressional acts, executive orders, treaties, or any other source outside the tribe. As Felix Cohen puts it, "perhaps the most basic principle of all Indian law... is that those powers which are lawfully vested in an Indian tribe are not, in general, delegated powers granted by expressed acts of Congress, but rather inherent powers of a limited sovereignty, which has never been extinguished" (Cohen 122).

Sovereignty can be defined as "The supreme power from which all political powers are derived." It is inherent—it cannot be given to one group by another. In government-to-government negotiations, states and Indian nations exercise or use their sovereign powers.

"Sovereignty ensures self-government, cultural preservation, and a people's control of their future. Sovereignty affirms the political identity of Indian Nations—they are not simply a racial or ethnic minority" (Chavaree).

## Citations

Chavaree, Mark A. Esq., "Tribal Sovereignty," *Wabanaki Legal News*, Volume 2, Issue 1, Winter, 1998.

Cohen, Felix S. Ch. 7 "Sect. 1, Introduction - The Scope of Tribal Self-Government." *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*. U.S. Government Printing Office. 1945. 4th Printing. See: [thorpe.ou.edu/](http://thorpe.ou.edu/), Cohen's Handbook. p. 122.

Echohawk, John E. "From the Director's Desk." *Justice Newsletter*. 2000. See: [narf.org/pubs/justice/2000fall.html](http://narf.org/pubs/justice/2000fall.html).



# HANDOUT 5: Curley (c. 1856–1923), Crow

As Euro-Americans moved West, Indians in Montana were losing their old ways of life. During this time many Indian people wanted to remember the old ways, so they drew them from memory, using the materials that were available to them. These new materials included different kinds of paper, like notebook paper or paper from books that kept track of sales in stores and the railroad (ledger books). They used pencils and colored pencils to draw their stories—the same sorts of stories that they had traditionally drawn on tipi liners and robes.



Curley, Crow Indian Scout, General Custer's Scout (Crow), 1883

*Photograph by F. J. Haynes, (1853–1921)*

*Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Haynes Foundation Collection, H-936*

One of Montana's ledger artists was Curley, a Crow Indian warrior who also served as a U.S. scout during the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In the photograph here, Curley is shown wearing the White Swan robe—decorated with both beadwork and pictographic drawings representing battle scenes. White Swan, who was Crow, painted the lower half of this beautiful robe. A different artist, or artists, painted the battle scene in the upper half of this robe. That artist may have been Curley since the composition of several of the warriors' feet, arms, and faces resemble warriors in ledger artwork attributed to him.

As an artist, Curley utilized a unique and lively graphic style by portraying warriors with elongated bodies, small curved feet, and no hands. His artwork reflects the continuity between traditional hide painting and ledger art. Similarly, his biography reflects the continuity of Crow culture and traditions and adaptation to the new realities of U.S. hegemony.

Curley was born in approximately 1856 in Montana Territory, the son of Strong Bear (Inside the Mouth) and Strikes By the Side of the Water. His Crow name, variously rendered as Ashishishe, Shishi'esh, etc., literally means "the Crow." He resided on the Crow Reservation in the vicinity of Pryor Creek and married Bird Woman. He enlisted in the U.S. Army as an Indian scout on April 10, 1876.

Curley later lived on the Crow Reservation on the banks of the Little Bighorn River. He served in the Crow Police. He divorced Bird Woman in 1886 and married Takes a Shield. Curley had one daughter, Awakuk Korita ha Sakush ("Bird of Another Year"), who took the English name Nora. For his army service Curley received a U.S. pension starting in 1920. He died of pneumonia in 1923, and his remains were interred in the National Cemetery at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, only a mile from his home.



# HANDOUT 6: Terrance Guardipee

## **Terrance Guardipee (born 1968), Blackfeet**

Terrance Guardipee is an internationally acclaimed Blackfeet painter and ledger artist, consistently recognized for the traditional depiction of his Blackfeet heritage and contemporary innovation demonstrated in his work. Guardipee was one of the first American Indian artists to revive the historical ledger art tradition and was the first ledger artist to transform the style from the single page custom into his signature map collage concept. In all his artwork, Guardipee utilizes antique documents dating from the mid-nineteenth century and typically originating from the historical and present-day Blackfeet homeland in Montana.

Terrance Guardipee lived in Montana until he attended the Institute of American Indian Arts located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he studied two-dimensional arts. His educational experience at IAIA enabled him to incorporate the contemporary color palate he is known for in a manner that is consistent with Blackfeet tradition. Presently, Guardipee lives in Seattle, Washington.

Guardipee's innovative artwork is featured in the permanent collections of prestigious institutions such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Gene Autry Museum, the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College, and the Museum of Natural History in Hanover, Germany. Furthermore, Guardipee was the featured artist at the National Museum of the American Indian in 2007, and was selected to create an image for The Trail of Painted Ponies at the 2008 Fiftieth Anniversary Heard Museum Indian Art Market. The leading institutions in the Native art community consistently acknowledge Guardipee's innovative incorporation of authentic Blackfeet images into his own contemporary form of art.



# WORKSHEET 1

**Answer the following questions.**

1. What types of topics were addressed in men's pictographic art?

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2. Define ledger art.

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3. Name one thing that distinguishes Blackfeet ledger art from Cheyenne ledger art.

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4. List three symbolic elements pictographic artists commonly use (e.g., horseshoes to represent horses).

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# WORKSHEET 2

As a group, create visual symbols representing the following terms/concepts using information you remember from the PowerPoint and information from your handouts.

Treaty

Reservation

Sovereignty

As individuals, create visual symbols representing four terms/concepts relating to Indian history from this list or four other terms that are meaningful and appropriate for the project. If you can't create a symbol quickly in class, take notes that will allow you to create the symbol for homework. Remember: You will be using these symbols in a narrative piece of art that tells the story of a treaty and/or its aftermath.

Annuity

Negotiation

Assimilation

Tribal leader or chief

Scarcity

Starvation

U.S. negotiator

Congress

U.S. president

Land loss