



## The Winter Count: Marking Time — Grades: 4-6

### Summary

Students will view a PowerPoint about a Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) winter count, learning what winter counts were, how the Yanktonais used pictorial symbols, and how they decided what to record. Then students will work in small groups to create a communal timeline that they will record winter-count style.

**These lessons are 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 5–Federal Indian Policy
- EU 6–History from Indian Perspectives

**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 #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.

### Essential Questions Students Will Answer Throughout the Lesson

What major event in history has impacted my family, community, environment, state, country, or a Montana Indian tribe?

Are any of those events similar to the ones depicted on the winter count?

What is the order of those events in time? Which personal symbols would I use to depict them? What are two ways I could organize the events spatially? What materials could I use?

What collaborative act have I done that required cooperation and group decision making. How did we make the decision together?

### 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 Winter Counts and the Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux)

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### Materials:

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

- Tribal Homelands, 1855 (Map)
- Current Montana Reservations Map
- “Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) Winter Count” PowerPoint and lesson plan

### Preparation:

Instructors should familiarize themselves with the material on the “Art of Storytelling” and print out the PowerPoint script and preview the PowerPoint.

### Procedure:

Introduce the activity by presenting the learning objectives to the students. By looking at artwork from other cultures we can learn something about the people of that culture. Culture is the life-ways of a group of people.

- We will be looking at a winter count robe—a type of calendar—made by the Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux). By looking at maps first, we will learn where and how some tribes, including the Dakota, lived a long time ago. We will also locate a few present-day Montana Indian tribes and reservations on another map.
- The winter count robe will tell us how the Yanktonai Dakota thought about time and how they told time. It will also tell us how they kept track of important events in their life that happened over a period of time, using picture writing or symbols that mean something. By talking about the materials used for the winter count, you will also learn about the close relationship traditional tribes had with the natural world.
- We will compare that information with how we tell and keep track of events in time

today.

- You will identify key events in your lives or history and create a linear timeline to organize the events in sequence. We will research time periods in Montana Indian tribal history or a time period and identify and select key events that most impacted the tribes and create a similar timeline using writing and symbols. Then you will create your own individual and/or group traditional winter count that records key events using your own personal symbols and adapted materials. You will present and discuss the timeline and winter count with your class.

### Visual Presentation: Place, Time and People—Ancestral Homelands and Reservations, Tribal Identification, and the Winter Count.

**Show Traditional Homelands Map.** Describe the ancestral homelands and traditional lifeways (pre-1800s).

**Emphasize:** Dependence on the natural world for survival by hunting and gathering. Migration: Tribes moved according to the availability of animals and plants, change of seasons, and neighboring tribal territories.

Tribes are not necessarily located where they are today. Locate and show the ancestral homelands of a few Montana tribes, including a tribe whose ancestral homeland or reservation is located nearest your community.

Locate several Dakota (Sioux) tribes. Explain that there are many branches of Sioux tribes. The Yanktonai Dakota are a subtribe of the Dakota Sioux, and some live in Montana today.

Ask students to identify a Montana Indian tribe’s ancestral homeland on the map.

**Show Current Montana Reservations Map.** Explain that many people during the colonization period were coming into the West.

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This period in history forever changed the traditional way of life of the Plains Indian tribes. They were no longer free to travel and gather resources as they once had, and so they adapted. Eventually, the tribes were placed on reservations, which is land reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties and agreements with the government.

Have students locate the Montana tribes and reservations on the map, and locate the Montana Dakota (Sioux) tribe and the Fort Peck Reservation.

Tell students that these are Dakota (Sioux), and they have many subtribes, one of them being the Yanktonai. Locate the two reservations of the Assiniboine tribe: Fort Belknap and Fort Peck. Each tribe is different in history, culture, and language. Today, some Montana Indians continue to express their unique traditions, culture, and language.

**Discuss:** How do you think life changed for Montana tribes from the pre-1800s to the present day?

**Show “Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) Winter Count” PowerPoint.** After the PowerPoint, review what you have learned about winter counts. Particularly, students should remember:

- To decide what important event to use for a certain year, the elders would get together at the end of a year and talk about all the important events that happened in the past year. They would choose one event that would represent that year, and the year would be named after that event forever. For many people to choose one main event would require cooperative decision-making, and the elders would have to reach a consensus.
- The job of record keeper, who drew the winter count, was passed down through generations from father to son. The record keeper would draw the symbols on animal hide, and later, as it became available, heavy fabric and paper. The women and girls in the tribe would scrape and tan the hides, and in

this way helped the men in creating the winter count.

- The hide, even though it was large, was very easy to roll up for traveling. It was very portable. They would use animal bones or the frayed end of sticks for a paintbrush and pigment (paint colors) made from plants, charcoal, and minerals (natural materials). The artists of this time period respected their natural materials and took care of them.
- The winter count helped people remember their histories, and today winter counts remind people who they are and where they come from. Looking at an Indian tribe’s winter count helps all of us understand the story of a people and their culture during a specific period in time.

**Discuss:**

- Why is it named a winter count?
- Which tribe created this winter count?
- Where did they live a long time ago?
- Do they have a reservation in Montana now?
- What are different ways the Indians in Montana told time and kept track of important events?
- How do we tell time and record time and events today?
- What symbols do we use today for time?
- What symbols do we use today for other things?
- Why are the symbols for the winter count painted on a hide?
- What materials did the Indians use to paint?
- What colors can you find in the winter count?

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## Activity 2: Creating a Personal History and Tribal Timeline and a Winter Count

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### Materials:

- Scrap paper and pencils for brainstorming

### For timelines:

- small- or large-scale roll paper, depending on group size
- black and color markers
- An example timeline from Social Studies text and the Fort Peck Reservation Timeline. See *Montana Tribal Histories Educator Resource Guide and Companion DVD*, developed by Julie Cajune and published by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2011. Copies were donated to public school libraries; an online edition is available through the Montana OPI website, or find links at [mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt](http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt).
- Background information on federal policy periods (colonization or other). See link at [mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt](http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt).

### For winter count:

- Scrap paper, pencil
- Choose one of the following for drawing surface: copies of the hide template (below), one per person or one per group; tan paper of choice, with edges torn to resemble hide; large roll paper, with edges torn.
- Media choices: charcoal, Sharpie, markers, crayons, oil pastels, tempera paint (and brushes).

### Preparation:

Find example of a timeline from Social Studies textbook to show students.

Read and make copies of the Fort Peck Reservation Timeline or another Montana Tribal History timeline.

Read and make copies of the federal policy periods, specifically colonization.

Choose and specify activity in groups (small or entire class) or individual?

Choose and specify time span and content of timelines. For the personal history timeline, specify individual, family, community, state, country, or world. For the Montana Tribal History timeline, specify tribe(s) and time periods. Each group could choose a different tribe, or one class could represent one tribe, etc. Students could choose a local tribe or a tribe and time period that relate directly to this lesson (Dakota and Assiniboine, 1800s). Emphasize that events may be natural or caused by people (man-made).

### Procedure:

#### Personal History Timeline

Ask students to think about, discuss, and identify major events that have impacted their own lives.

On scrap paper, each student will write down the events in order and create a symbol, in color, for each event. They will create a timeline with this information (show example of format). The events will be identified with the date (or time), the event title, and the chosen symbol for that event. If working in groups, students will decide, by vote, which events to use for their timeline and corresponding symbols that best depict the events. One person will write them down in order with the dates/times and the group will collaborate on ideas for symbols for each event, then take turns adding the symbols. Students will take turns and roles adding titles, dates, and symbols to the timeline, so everyone can participate. Students may present their timeline to their peers.

**Discuss:** Do the symbols reflect the meaning of the event? Are the events in order? How and why did the events have impact? On who or what?

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### **Montana Tribal History Timeline**

Follow the same procedure as above, but for content, students will research Dakota (Sioux) and Assiniboine tribal history by using the timelines of the Fort Peck Reservation. They will also research the federal policy period (EU 5) applicable to this lesson (colonization). Students will choose events, by vote, that they feel most affected and impacted the two Montana Indian tribes (see Resources).

**Alternative:** Research a Montana Indian tribal timeline (and time span) of your choice and related federal policy period to develop a timeline with symbols.

### **The Winter Count Timeline**

Same procedure as above, but the format will change. Students can use the same events, content, and symbols as above. Instead of a linear timeline, however, the events will be placed spatially as in the Yanktonai winter count, with the earliest event starting in the left corner and spiraling in on a curved line. (Show image of winter count.) Have students practice this during the planning stage on scrap paper.

Before starting the formal winter count, discuss how the materials the students have available are different from the materials the Yanktonais used. For example: “The Yanktonais used materials they had on hand to make a winter count, like hide. Instead of painting on animal hide with natural gathered materials or ink that we got through trade, we will be using paper and tools that we have on hand in our school.”

Remind students that they will have to preplan this design carefully to fit all the chosen events.

Have students choose a record keeper (vote), who will draw a spiral line that ends in the middle of the paper. Make sure the students leave room for the symbols and that the symbols are equally spaced on the line. They will turn the paper as they go, so each symbol is sitting on top of the line, and some of the symbols will be upside down or sideways.

Each group’s spokesperson or individual will show the finished drawing to the class and describe the events and symbols. Discuss.

## Vocabulary/Glossary

### Cross-Curricular Vocabulary

**Adapt:** To adjust to something

**Colonization:** Occurs whenever one or more species populate an area

**Cooperation:** The act of working together to achieve a common goal

**Communication:** Activity of conveying information

**Community:** A group of people who live in the same area, or the area in which they live

**Consensus:** An opinion or position reached by a group as a whole

**Culture:** The beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or people

**Diversity:** The condition of being different

**Environment:** All the external factors influencing the life and activities of people, plants, and animals

**History:** The study of the past; a record of what happened in the past

**Hide:** Animal skin

**Migration:** The act or process of moving from one region or country to another, as in seasonal migrations

**Portable:** Designed to be light or compact enough to carry or move easily from place to place

**Relationship:** A connection between two or more things, or the state of being related to something else

**Reservation:** Land reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties and agreements with the government

**Traditional:** A long-standing action or belief of a community or group, usually handed down from one generation to another

### The Language of Art

#### **Abstract/Realistic:**

**Abstract:** Art that is not realistic or real looking, but could be based on an actual subject

**Realistic:** Representational, recognizable images that look like what they represent

#### **Elements of Art used in lesson:**

Line, shape, space

**Pictograph:** Picture writing, a pictorial sign or symbol

**Symbol:** Something that stands for or represents something else

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**Evaluation or Assessment:**

Students will be evaluated or assessed on their demonstration of knowledge, understandings, skills, and abilities according to both the Essential Understandings and Montana Arts Content Standards as outlined in the learning objectives. This will be based on how well the students answered the questions during the visual presentations, 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, summative, or anecdotal assessment.

**Objectives to Evaluate or Assess:**

**Students will know:**

Art and symbols have meaning, and by learning about the art, the student can gain some understanding about another culture (traditional Dakota).

- Winter counts were a form of written communication and record keeping used by some Plains tribes to document and preserve historical events. They are painted on an animal hide.
- Symbols can have different meanings for different tribes and artists.
- Events have impact on cultures and people.

**Students will be able to:**

- Identify the ancestral homeland and current reservation locations of the Dakota (Sioux) and Assiniboine tribes.
- Identify the symbols and their meanings on the Yanktonai winter count.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of art from this lesson through discussion, individual artistic expression, and/or collaborative works.

**Related Books**

*Robes of Splendor: Native North American Painted Buffalo Hides.* New York: The New Press, 1993.

*Huckleberries, Buttercups, and Celebrations,* Jennifer Greene and Antoine Sandoval. Arlee, MT: Npustin Press, 2011.

*Keepers of the Earth,* Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, Golden, CO: Fulcrum Press, 1997.

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