Learning about the Seals of Montana Tribal Nations

Artwork by Carroll College Education Students

Dear Students,

Thank you for your interest in learning more about Montana American Indian tribes. In this lesson, you will be learning about the seals of the Montana Tribal Nations. There are descriptions of each seal with important background information regarding the tribal seal.

American Indian tribal nations are inherent sovereign nations and they possess sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments.

Suggested Assignments: Your teacher may offer various types of assessments to gauge your understanding of this topic. i.e. poster presentation, participation in an on-line discussion forum, and multimedia presentation formats such as a video or podcast. This lesson provides one example of a possible assignment.

Review each tribal seal and the key concepts and then answer the essential questions and submit to your appropriate teacher. In addition, you will also design your own personal seal that reflects your individual culture and identity.

Essential Questions and Key Concepts:

(Be sure to look up definitions for words in bold print to help with your understanding)

What are **symbols?** How do they communicate **ideas?**

What are **seals?** Why do tribes have seals?

How are the seals and their symbols different from one another?

What do these differences suggest about **diversity** among Montana tribes?

How are the seals or symbols similar to one another? Why are there **similarities?**

Which symbols represent **historical events**? How or why are those events important?

Which symbols represent **nature** or **natural resources**? How were nature and natural resources important in the past? How are they important for us today?

Which symbols represent **culture** or **cultural identity**?

Which symbols represent specific **people**? How are these individuals important to their tribes (in the past, presently, or in the future)?

How were you **inspired by** the tribal seals, their symbols, and the stories/histories behind them?

How could you create an ***original*** **symbol** to represent your own identity? Why would your seal be different from anyone else's symbol?

How could we **express** or **describe** our identity using original symbols?

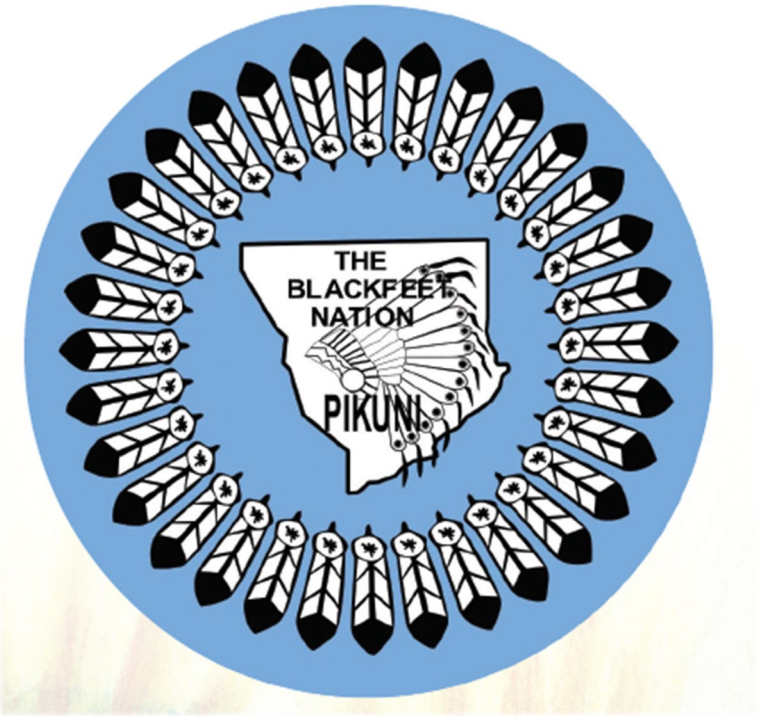
How can art or images be used to communicate ideas?

Key Concepts

- American Indian individuals and tribes are still here with distinct and intact governments, languages, and cultures that contribute to modern Montana.
- The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Essential Understandings Key Concepts

Now you will create a self-identity seal that uses at least four symbols that represent aspects of your individual identity. In preparation to create four symbols, write down things that influence your identity (such as family, likes, talents/abilities, interests, values, what I like about myself, etc.). Have fun and be creative in how you define yourself. Submit your personal seal to your teacher along with your answers to the Essential Questions.



BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION
Blackfeet (Amskapi – Pikuni)

Tribal Seal Description: The Blackfeet seal was created in 1980. "The Blackfeet Media Department sponsored a contest for the design. A panel of judges consisting of artists, elders, and community members chose it.

The design is black and white on blue sky. A multitude of single eagle feathers creates a circle. Inside the circle is the current land base of the Blackfeet Nation. . . Colors and design represent the earth, the cosmos, the elements, the plants and the animals, as well as the people.

The circle represents the cycle of life. The many feathers equate to the bands of the numerous Blackfeet are arranged in a circle, like life. The sun rises in the East and circles to the West. The moon rises and sets in this circular motion, as does the cosmos. Blackfeet people pitch the lodges with the doors to the East, knowing that they start life with the circle in mind.

The feathers represent the majesty and mysticism of the eagle. Eagle feathers represent long life, energy, power, and accomplishment or coup."

[The war bonnet was to be changed to a Blackfeet-style, straight-up war bonnet; however, the creator of the seal, Lawrence Tailfeathers, passed away before he had a chance to change the drawing.]

CROW INDIAN RESERVATION
Crow (Apsáalooke)

Tribal Seal Description: "The Crow Cultural Commission designed the Crow tribal emblem [tribal seal] and flag and the graphic illustration were designed by Lawrence Big Hair. . . .

The emblem on the flag [which is the tribal seal] is encircled. This represents the Path of All Things.

There is the sun and its rays. These represent the clans of the Crow.

Three mountains are depicted. They are the three mountains on the present day Crow Reservation: the Wolf Teeth, the Pryor and the Big Horn Mountains. They are considered sacred by the Crow. The two rivers depicted are the Big Horn and the Little Big Horn Rivers.

The tipi is white because it represents purity and goodness. The tipi has the foundational structure of the four base poles. They represent the never ending Cycle of the Seasons. The tipi has the two ventilator flap poles. They are the sentries that watch over the home: the Coyote by day and the Owl at night. The tipi is anchored by stakes, which were gifts from the badger who said the stakes have the strength of his claws when they are imbedded in the ground. The tipi is flanked by the two war bonnets, representing the Crow clan system.

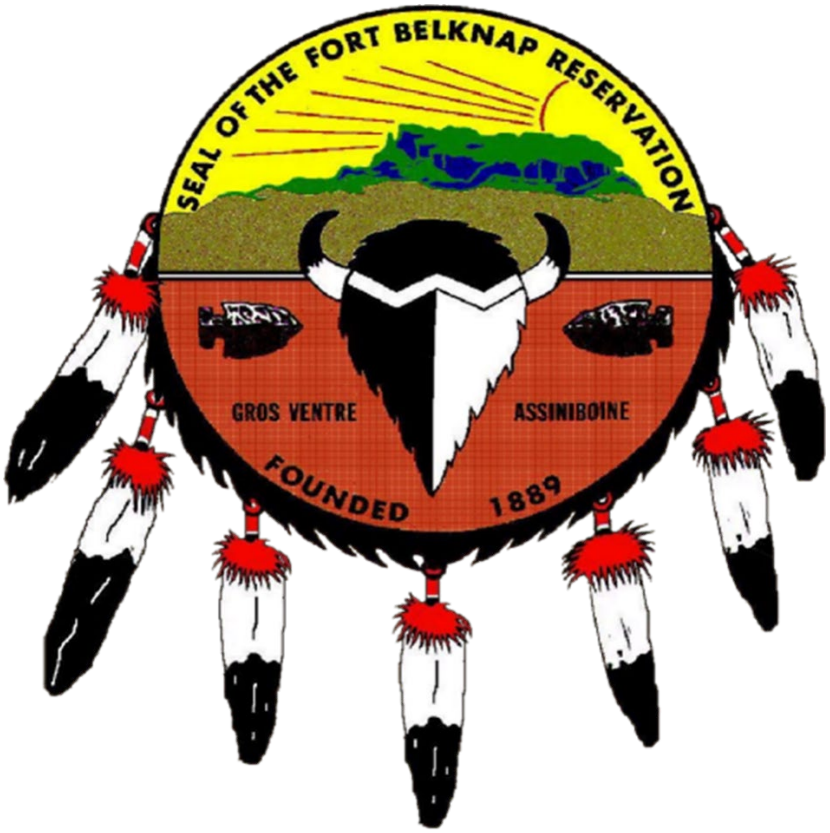
The Crow belief system has four major foundations, and each is represented on the emblem: the clan system, the sweat lodge, the sacred tobacco bundle, and the pipe. The tipi on the emblem represents the white tipi given to Yellow Leggins by White Owl.

The sweat lodge is a gift from the Creator since the beginning of the Crow. The sacred tobacco bundle represents the foundation of the religion of the Crow. The pipe is the spiritual gift from the Seven Sacred Buffalo Bulls and Buffalo Woman. When the pipe is lit, the mind is to be filled with good, pure thoughts and peace."

A People of Vision

FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION
Bitterroot Salish (Séliš), Pend d'Oreille (Qlispé), Kootenai (Ktunaxa-Ksanka)

Tribal Seal Description: "The official seal of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes shows one of the last chiefs, Chief Koostatah, standing on a rock outcropping that overlooks roaring white water. The current seal was inspired by a talented young tribal artist, Corky Clairmont, who had not yet reached high school at the time. This was the early '60s. Corky is now passing his artistry to a new generation at Salish Kootenai College. He said in an interview that his original intention was to show the people connecting to the land and water. He chose one of the last chiefs to help capture that sacred connection. The original work was revamped in the early 1980s, which made the raised hand more of a pointing gesture. More colors and textures were also added."



FORT BELKNAP RESERVATION
Gros Ventre (A'aninin) and Assiniboine (Nakoda)

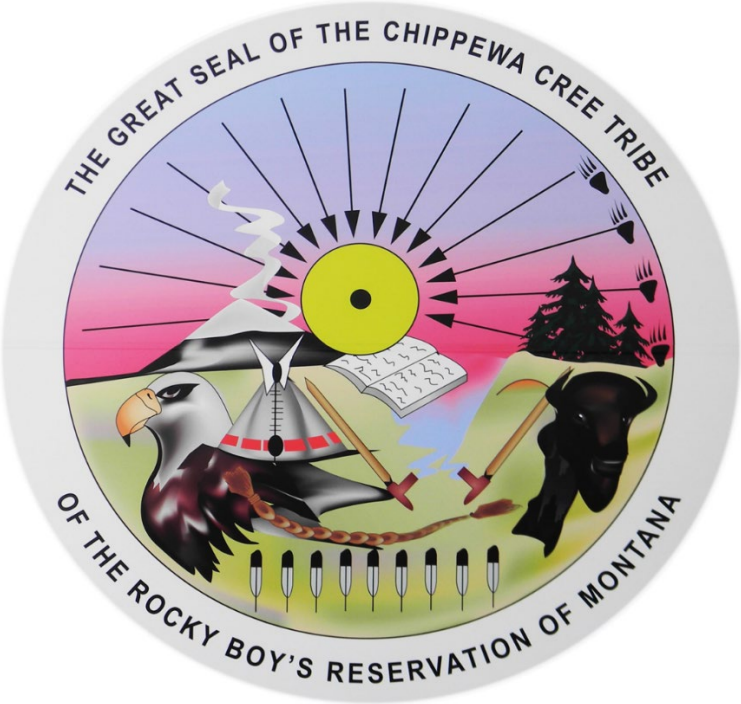
Tribal Seal Description: "Created by George "Sonny" Shields, the emblem of the Fort Belknap Reservation's seal is the traditional shield, symbolizing the shield's protection of the two tribes, the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine. The shield illustrates the protection for the two tribes [in] the past, present and future, and protection against the loss of tribal culture, tribal identity and tribal land base. The circular shape of the shield symbolizes life itself, or the constant cycle of life, each living thing dependent on one another for life.

The four directions and the four seasons are symbolized in the use of the four colors: red for summer, yellow for fall, white for winter, and green for spring.

The buffalo skull symbolizes the existence of two tribes on the reservation, who function as a whole. The colors divide it, yet the skull remains as one. The skull has a jagged line from horn to horn representing the Milk River, a major tributary of the Missouri. Snake Butte is illustrated above the skull. This butte is a well-known landmark for tribes throughout the North.

The two arrowheads facing each other emphasize the strong traditional ties with the past.

Seven feathers hang from the shield. Each feather is for every two of the twelve council members who represent the reservation's three districts and the center feather represents the tribal chairman."



ROCKY BOY'S RESERVATION
Chippewa (Ojibwe), Cree (Ne-i-yah-wahk)

Tribal Seal Description: "The Chippewa and Cree have come from two nations of the American continent. Each tribe has come together to form the present day Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. The picture of this seal represents the circle of life on the Rocky Boy's Reservation. Baldy Butte is the sacred mountain of the tribe. The sun represents life rising from the east. Also, the sun's rays represent the fifteen Sacred Grass Dance Chiefs who are active in preserving the culture of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. The sun also represents the Sacred Grass Dance Drum of the tribe.

The Sacred Four Bodies text under the sun represents good health and good fortune for the tribe, so that they can prosper in education. Tribal customs and traditions are integrated into each of the schools on the Rocky Boy's Reservation. The eagle represents strength, wisdom, bravery, and honor, all elements conceived from the bird that represents the thunder and lightning of the sacred sky.

The buffalo, a source of food and shelter for the tribe for many years, is also a sacred animal representing the source of life and a Sundance element. Bear paw tracks represent the Bear Paw Mountains where the Chippewa Cree now make their present home. Also, the bear is a sacred animal of the tribe.

The tipi is where all values and customs are derived from as well as the life and traditions the Chippewa Cree have always held. The sacred pipes were held by the last official chiefs of the Chippewa and Cree, Chief Rocky Boy and Chief Little Bear. The braid of sweet grass is an element of communication to the Creator and the Spirits. The nine eagle feathers represent the nine elected chiefs of the Chippewa Cree Business Committee.

In conclusion, these elements of the Great Seal are formed together to represent the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation of Montana, in values, traditions, and customs, so greatly valued by the Chippewa Cree People. (As told by Lloyd Top Sky, 1991)"

LITTLE SHELL CHIPPEWA TRIBE
Chippewa (Ojibwe) Métis

Tribal Seal Description: "The seal and flag of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe was designed in 2006 by then Tribal Vice-Chairman James Parker Shield.

Shield came up with four different versions for a new tribal flag and seal, which he had printed in the tribe's newsletter so tribal members could vote on which one they liked best. This design, with the buffalo, eagle staff and Métis flag, was the top choice.

The buffalo was central to the survival and economy of the Pembina Chippewa (from whom the Little Shell are descended) and the Métis people. The buffalo image faces West to symbolize the migration of the Little Shell Chippewa and Métis from the Great Lakes region in Minnesota to what is now North Dakota and Montana.

Years ago, tribal spiritual leader Henry Anderson was presented with a single eagle feather by a Chippewa man from Wisconsin. The eagle feather is very old and now hangs from the "crook" in the eagle staff that is behind the buffalo. The eagle staff represents the full-blood, traditional heritage of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe. The eagle staff was made by Henry Anderson and presented to the tribe. It is carried by a tribal leader or veteran, leading the Grand Entry at the Little Shell Chippewa Pow-Wow each year.

The red and white background colors of the "Assiniboia" flag used by the Métis people represent the mixed blood heritage of the tribe. The yellow "feur de lis" represents the French heritage of the mixed blood Chippewa while the green shamrock represents the Scots/Irish heritage. The yellow background on the Little Shell flag depicts the color of the sun." **Note:** The Little Shell received federal recognition in December of 2019.

FORT PECK INDIAN RESERVATION
Assiniboine (Nakoda) and Sioux (Dakota, Lakota) Tribes

Tribal Seal Description: "The seal was created in the 1980s. The Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) received a request from oil companies drilling on the reservation to purchase water from the tribes. The oil companies requested a map of water ways on the reservation. After the map was created by TERO, it was discovered that the water ways on the map resembled the outline of a buffalo in the middle of the reservation boundaries. The seal includes this representation of the buffalo and the Fort Peck Reservation boundaries were added to the drawing displayed on a hide."

Northern Cheyenne Reservation
Cheyenne Tribe (Tsetsêhesêstâhase- So'taa'eo'o)

Seal Description: "The Northern Cheyenne Flag was developed during the tribal administration of Chairman John Wooden Legs. The diamond shape represents the Morning Star, which was also another tribal name of Chief Dull Knife [who is pictured with Little Wolf in the center of the Morning Star symbol]. His descendants are called "The Morning Star People."

The Morning Star on the flag has a simple design but its message is the past and present survival of the people. The Morning Star will rise each day and bring light to the Cheyenne people now and to those yet to be born. The Northern Cheyenne identify themselves as the people of Chief Morning Star and Little Wolf, who led their people on a heartbreaking journey back from their forced placement in Oklahoma to their homelands in the great Northern Plains."