

# Human Expression and Transmission of Culture – Winter Counts

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: Grades 3-5  
Suggested Duration: 1 – 3 class periods

## Stage 1 Desired Results

### Established Goals

(4) The history content standards for third grade are that each student will:  
(b) explain how perspective impacts the telling of historical events.

(4) The history content standards for fourth grade are that each student will:  
(a) understand tribes in Montana have their own unique histories.

(4) The history content standards for fifth grade are that each student will:  
(a) understand the unique historical perspectives of American Indians.

### Understandings

- History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. (Essential Understanding 6)
- Students will develop an understanding of how one American Indian tribe maintained historical records in addition to using oral traditions.
- Students will gain insight into how one tribal group perceived major historical events.

### Essential Questions

- Why is it important to record history?
- To what extent do multiple perspectives on historical topics influence our understanding?
- How is a winter count an example of written/recorded history? Explain.

### Students will be able to...

- interpret various symbols from a Nakota winter count and describe why this means of recording history complements tribal oral traditions.

### Students will know...

- winter counts were one form of written communication used by some tribes to document historical events.



Indian Education for All Unit

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## Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

1. Examine and interpret winter count symbols.
2. Students will draw pictures/images to retell a story from their own family history and share with the class. This could be done individually and as a whole class to document the school year.

## Stage 3 Learning Plan

### Learning Activities

Ask students if they know what a winter count is and facilitate a class discussion. Have them brainstorm possible answers and provide students with general background information regarding winter counts.

Share the Native American winter counts video from South Dakota Public Television which provides an overview of winter counts. The video is designed to use with elementary students and features an animated young Lakota boy explaining winter counts.

Pose the following question to the students – Besides winter counts what are some other ways American Indians maintained historical records of events and issues?

Tell students that tribes have used oral traditions supported by other evidence, such as paintings, beadwork, drawings, pictographs etc., in maintaining a cohesive history. In these lessons the focus will be on the tribes known as Sioux (Dakota, Lakota, or Nakota) and some of their winter counts.

Ask students which two Montana reservations have members of these tribes currently living there. (Answer: Fort Belknap and Fort Peck).

Utilize the lesson plans and instructional activities from the Montana Historical Society's Art of Storytelling curriculum. The Winter Count: Marking Time, grades K-3 and 4-6.

Refer to the Lone Dog's Winter Count: Keeping History Alive lesson plan for specific classroom activities and assessments regarding winter counts. Additional classroom activities can be found in the winter count resources from South Dakota PBS and the North Dakota State Historical Society

### Materials/Resources Needed & Teacher Background Information

[The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives](#) (K-12), Montana Historical Society

[Introduction, Winter Counts, Unit 3](#), North Dakota History Primary Sources, State Historical Society of North Dakota

[Lakota Winter Counts](#) video, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Institution

[Lone Dog's Winter Count: Keeping History Alive](#) lesson plan

[Native American Winter Counts](#) (video), South Dakota Public Television

[Waniyetu Wowapi \(winter count\)](#), South Dakota Public Broadcasting

The Winter Count: Marking Time – [Grades K-3](#), [Grades 4-6](#), Montana Historical Society

Human Expression and Transmission of Culture – Winter Counts – Grades 7-8