

Point of View, Misconceptions, and Errors of Omission – Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Big Horn

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: Grades 6-8
Suggested Duration: Two 50-minute
periods
(possibly more)



Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals

(4) The history content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:

(b) analyze how historical events relate to one another and are shaped by historical context, including societies in the Americas;

(g) analyze how people's perspectives shaped the historical narratives they created.

Understandings

- Stereotyping, over-generalizations about a people, and resulting actions have contributed to conflict and cooperation between tribes and the U.S. government.
- Misconceptions about people, omitted points of view, and an author's embedded values should be noted, discussed, and corrected whenever noted.
- ...Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the "discovery" of North America. [EU3]
- An event can be observed from many viewpoints, depending on who is telling the story, when the event is written down, and the perspective taken. [EU6]
- Errors of omission occur when facts, information, and points-of-view are left out of a history or story. History is told from many points of view. [EU6]

Essential Questions

- How does who I am shape my views about the *Battle of the Little Big Horn*?
- How might only relying on one source, in this case textbook information, limit my understanding of this event?
- What might I misunderstand about the *Battle of the Little Big Horn* because of my own bias?



- What was the writer feeling, thinking, seeing, and trying to make me feel and see as this event was discussed in my history book?
- What is the possible impact on a reader's beliefs and actions?
- When did "Custer's Last Stand" become the "Battle of the Little Big Horn" and why?

Students will be able to...

- show respect and awareness of another's culture.
- identify and describe possible errors of omission in a historical account and summarize perspectives/points of view.
- draw conclusions about possible embedded values, omissions, and biases in a historical account.

Students will know...

- the stereotypes of Native Americans have caused permanent harm to individuals and tribes.
- some books and materials contain stereotypes and biases based on misperceptions about Indians. Good readers identify the biases, stereotypes, misconceptions, and errors of omission they read, and identify the intended and unintended effects.

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

1. Read and discuss a passage from your history book describing the *Battle of the Little Big Horn*. How does the passage from the history book describe this battle?
2. Research the *Battle of the Little Big Horn* on the internet, collecting ideas pertinent to getting a better understanding of the battle.
3. Analyze newspaper accounts of the battle for bias.
4. Complete the worksheets and lesson plan activities.
5. Identify the author's point of view/perspective and describe the embedded values based on the passage you read.

Ensure students utilize the definition of terms on page 9 of this lesson to briefly identify terms: *embedded values*, *error of omission*, *massacre*, *point of view*, *primary source materials*, and *secondary source material*.

Stage 3 Learning Plan

Learning Activities

Before starting, ask the class why it is important to get multiple perspectives of historical events. The teacher will lead a short discussion sharing the importance of including American Indian perspectives in their study of history.

Pose the following questions: Who has heard of the Battle of the Little Big Horn? What can they tell you about it? Who has been to the site?

After a brief discussion, tell students they will be learning about the battle and the multiple perspectives regarding this event.

Distribute the definitions worksheet (located on page 9 of this lesson) and review the terms.

The teacher will conduct an internet search using the phrase – Custer’s Last Stand and display on the Screen/Smart Board. Click on images and scroll through the various images displayed and discuss. Are there any common themes? Do these images project a certain point of view?

Do another search using the phrase – Little Big Horn Battle and facilitate another discussion comparing and contrasting the different images.

Next conduct a Visual Thinking Strategy to analyze a painting of the battle.

What’s going on in this picture? What do you see what makes you say that? What more can we find?



General Custer's death struggle. The battle of the Little Big Horn / H. Steinegger; S.H. Redmond del.; Lith. Britton, Rey & Co. S.F., print from [Library of Congress](#)

Facilitate a class discussion regarding their observations and reinforce key ideas regarding bias and perspectives about the battle.

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Now tell the class they will be now examining bias in text.

Display and analyze the following quote from the history textbook – *Discovering Tomorrow Through Yesterday Montana History* (1999, pg.78):

Chief Sitting Bull of the Sioux camped near the Little Bighorn River. General Custer split his troops. Those following Major Reno swung to the south, and the soldiers with Custer traveled north to engage the Indians. Custer was caught by surprise. He and every soldier were killed. The ambush in the summer of 1876 was so successful that Chief Sitting Bull said, "The whole battle was less than a pipe smoke.

...Indian warriors, waiting in the grass, jumped and killed all 208 soldiers, including General Custer, in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. (p. 163)

Ask students to read the quotes and pick out biased statements and facilitate a class discussion.

Note for teachers: one example of bias in the above quotes is the “ambush” in the fifth sentence. What word(s) can be used in the description besides *ambush*, and how might the perspective be different from Native Americans at the battle? How does the second sentence make the battle sound?



News accounts of the battle also provide an opportunity to examine bias in reporting and how that helps to shape public attitudes and perceptions towards American Indians.

Now display this news article from 1876 and facilitate a discussion of bias in the heading and text below.

Imagine this article was your only source of information regarding the battle.

How would you feel?

Who is on the “good side”?

How might this article influence readers’ perspectives regarding the Lakota and Cheyenne?

What is the difference between a massacre and a battle? Was this truly a “massacre”?

Source: [Bismarck weekly tribune. \[volume\] \(Bismarck, D.T. \[N.D.\] 1875-1878, July 12, 1876, Image 1 « Chronicling America « Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/chroniclingamerica/1876-1878/1876-1878-07-12-1876-01.html)

Now share the following quote from Brave Bear, a Lakota man at the battle:

As I went out [the] front [of] the lodge to mount my horse, women and children ran by me, saying soldiers were in camp fighting. I heard firing plainly now. My father held my shield towards the sun and said to the shield [and] the sun to protect me from the bullets. Then he put the shield on my right side and told me to go and die in the battle.

As I started towards the battleground, I met lots [of] women and children, mostly Sioux. They told us to hurry up as several of us had now got together and [a] lot more warriors were coming behind us. We were all singing our different society songs, some singing death songs, as this is the custom among all Indians in going into battles. They also sing these songs when they are attacked and [are] in tight places. I heard lots of singing at Sand Creek when Chivington attacked the village.

-Indian Views of the Custer Fight: A Source Book. Edited by Richard G. Hardorff (2004)

Facilitate another class discussion and ask how do these quotes differ from the textbook statements?

Discuss how history can be viewed from many different points of view, that history changes depending on whose filters the story goes through. When history is only told from the dominant culture's viewpoint, a tribe's perspective is left out, or omitted. This results in an error of omission; readers should be aware of possible omissions whenever they study and read history. Share the following two examples of point of view regarding terminology to reaffirm perspective. Display or read aloud the following phrases: "nation of immigrants" and "new world." Ask students to share how these are biased. They are not necessarily wrong, but they are from a non-Indian perspective.

Independent textbook analysis

Teacher will ask students to utilize their grade level history (suggest using textbooks from various grade levels as part of the review – Middle School text vs High School) for reviewing information about the *Battle of the Little Big Horn* and explain the purpose of the lesson (see Established Goals and Understandings).

Ask students to silently read the passages about the *Battle of the Little Bighorn* from their history textbook(s). Have students refer to the Essential Question starters to formulate key questions most pertinent to the work being read. Students will do a close analytical reading to identify possible stereotypes, prejudices, and bias issues occurring in the material.

For example:

- What is missing in the selection?
- What wording and terminology is used in the history book?
- Is the history book a *primary source* or a *secondary source*? Why does this matter?
- What points of view/perspectives are not told?
- Does the author provide a balanced perspective?
- What does this brief passage say about the embedded values of the author?

Teacher will have the students perform group rewrites of misconceptions, omissions, and perceptions so students can learn to evaluate the writer's perspective.

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To provide more historical perspectives, transition to an activity where students do guided research on the internet regarding the battle. Ask students to conduct a search using “Custer’s Last Stand” and the “Battle of Little Big Horn” as their query. Have students do their own research in the computer lab, or if your students have their own assigned laptops, they can utilize them. Teacher will have students take notes with their research. This research activity could be done individually or in pairs. Have students report their findings and facilitate a class discussion.

Perform group rewrites of misconceptions, omissions, and bias so students can learn to evaluate the writer’s ideas.

In an oral presentation, make the following points to your students (from the Office of Public Instruction publication *Bringing the Story of the Cheyenne People to the Children of Today*) Northern Cheyenne Social Studies Core Understanding 5 (p. 13). “Cheyenne history, during the 1700-1800’s was characterized by intense change including the westward movement, acquisition of the horse, disease, invasion, massacres and battles. Living during this time was heroic.”

Talking Points (learning objectives in the above Northern Cheyenne teaching guide, p. 13).

- a. The westward movement of settlers compacted tribes, causing intense inter-tribal wars during the 1700- 1800’s. The Cheyenne endured displacement and forced relocation.
- b. Introduction of the horse created a significant Cheyenne horse culture.
- c. Cholera and smallpox decimated Cheyenne bands.
- d. The primary food supply (bison) of the Cheyenne was intentionally wiped out.
- e. The Gold Rush invasion of the Cheyenne lands impacted the tribe’s ability to move within their own territory.
- f. The Sand Creek Massacre took place in 1864.
- g. The Black Hills invasion in 1874.
- h. The Battle of the Little Big Horn [1876 resulted in intense change for the Cheyenne people].

Facilitate a class discussion using the following questions:

1. What is a massacre?
2. Students should be able to describe the difference between a “battle” and a “massacre,” after your discussion of the *Battle of the Little Big Horn*.
3. Whose viewpoint is expressed when the gold rush is described as an “invasion?” Why was this regarded as an invasion?

These videos provide further background information and historical context. Consider having students do a compare/contrast of the two video clips.

[The Battle of Little Bighorn \(PBS, from the Ken Burns Series, The West\)](#)

[The Battle \(National Park Service\)](#)

Lesson Extensions

Have students read the section called “A Young Mother at the Rosebud and Little Bighorn Battles” pages 25-26 from the publication [Resilience: Stories of Twenty Indian Women](#).

Research how US newspapers covered the battle. Was it called a battle or a massacre? [Chronicling America, from the Library of Congress](#)

A search on the Chronicling America website using the word “Custer” and limiting the search date from 1876 – 1877 revealed numerous articles about the battle and one example was from the Helena Weekly Herald, July 20, 1876. Page 5 refers to the battle as a massacre.

To view an American Indian artistic perspective of the battle display ledger art from pages 12-13 of this lesson on the screen/Smart Board and explain that ledger art grew out of artistic images originally painted by Plains Indians on buffalo hide robes and tipi covers. The majority of what we most commonly perceive of as classic “ledger art” was produced during the second half of the nineteenth century, a time of great upheaval for Plains peoples. The tradition of portraying narrative scenes of heroic deeds continued to evolve as American Indian artists transitioned from traditional Plains life to reservation living and embraced the use of paper, pens, pencils, inks, and watercolors. To create their drawings, these artists used whatever paper was available to them: lined paper, foolscap, newsprint, books, or even old letters. However, the most readily obtainable paper throughout the 1800s was ledger paper—lined paper from account books. Eventually, the term “ledger art” was applied to the broader style of painting, whether or not the artist used ledger paper.

They documented their cultures and histories by drawing pictures of their past battles, heroic deeds, ceremonies, and everyday customs in ledger books. Today, ledger art is still a popular form of artistic expression for many American Indians. The ledger artwork featured in this lesson was from a Lakota leader named Red Horse and he provided pictographic account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and it is housed at the Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives. Additional details can be found at [Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives](#). Now the teacher will facilitate a discussion with the students about what they see and how it relates to everything they learned about the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

[The Battle of Little Bighorn An Eyewitness Account by the Lakota Chief Red Horse recorded in pictographs and text at the Cheyenne River Reservation, 1881](#)

Share the recent establishment for the Indian Memorial at Little Bighorn Battlefield. The teacher will then lead a discussion of what they have learned about its establishment.

[An Indian Memorial Helps to Re-Image Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument](#)

[Little Bighorn Reborn](#)

[The Story of the Indian Memorial](#)

Background Resources

Grade level examples United States History textbooks (Use your current edition. It might also be interesting for them to look at an older textbook. Check with the school library for copies of older textbooks).

Cheyenne Memories, 2nd Edition, by Margot Liberty and John Stands-In-Timber.

◊ Read especially Chapters 12-14, concerning The Custer Fight, After the Custer Fight, and After Surrender.

Cheyenne Memories of the Custer Fight: A Source Book, edited by Richard G. Hardorff

◊ This text includes interviews and statements from many at the battle, including Little Wolf, Brave Wolf, American Horse, Tall Bull, and Hump.

Indian Views of the Custer Fight: A Source Book, edited by Richard G. Hardorff.

◊ Hardorff has 35 interviews and statements, including Crazy Horse, Crow King, Two Moons, and Turning Hawk.

[*Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians by James Welch Model Teaching Unit*](#) by Dorothea Susag

Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources of Indian-Military History, edited by Richard G. Hardorff.

◊ This text Includes testimony from 15 Lakota Sioux and one Cheyenne.

[*Resilience: Stories of Montana Indian Women*](#) by Laura K. Ferguson.

Definitions

Bias A highly personal and unreasoned distortion of judgment; prejudice [*Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*].

Embedded Values The visible and invisible values of the author, as shown in published work. For example, an author who writes about American Indians using own traditional values to make judgments and assertions about American Indians.

Error of Omission Are there other perspectives which have been left out or omitted?

Massacre The unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a large number of human beings or animals, as in barbarous warfare or persecution or for revenge or plunder. a general slaughter, as of persons or animals: the massacre of millions during the war.

Point of View The standpoint from which something is considered or valued. An author might write in the *first-person point of view* or in the *third-person point of view*. **Synonyms include** angle, attitude, frame of reference, opinion, orientation, outlook, perspective, position, private opinion slant, standpoint, two cents worth, viewpoint, way of thinking [*Roget's Thesaurus of Phrases*, 2001].

Primary Source Resources that provide firsthand evidence of historical events. They are, generally, unpublished materials such as manuscripts, photographs, maps, artifacts, audio and video recordings, oral histories, postcards, and the like. For example, a treaty made between the U.S. government and a tribe is a primary resource [UCLA Institute on Primary Sources, available on Internet].

Secondary Source Secondary materials, such as textbooks, synthesize and interpret primary materials. A grade 8 textbook in history is an example of a secondary source [UCLA Institute on Primary Sources, available on Internet].

Stereotype Something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially, a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment [*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*].

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Whose Point of View Does My History Textbook Present?

Name _____

Summarize what you have learned below.

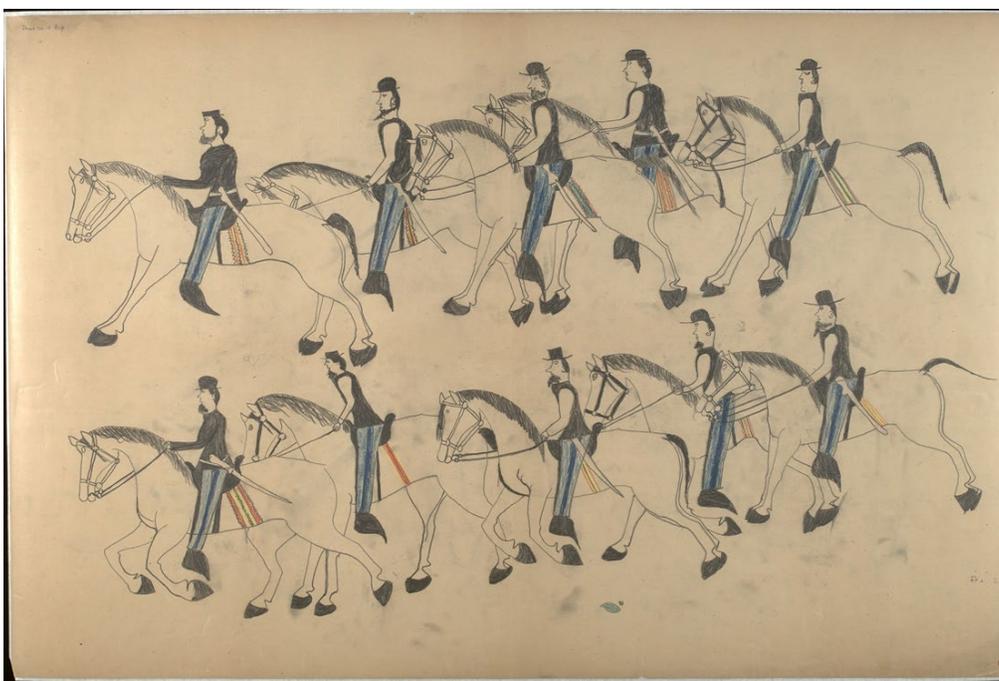
1. What were the causes of the Battle of the Little Big Horn from the U.S. army point of view?

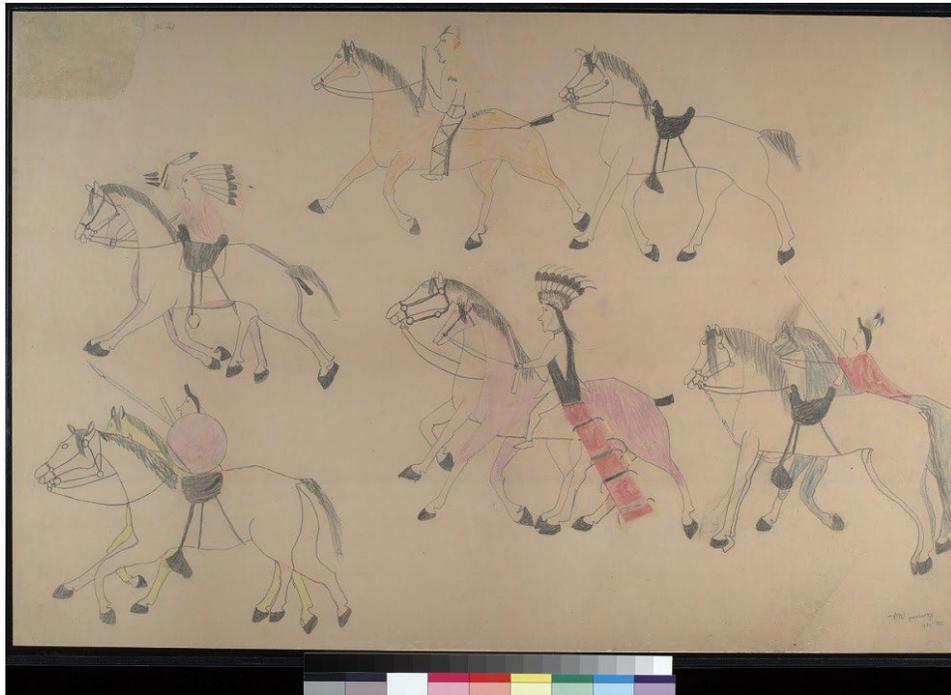
2. What were the causes of the Battle of the Little Big Horn from the American Indian points of view?

3. In your history book, how does the account about the Battle of the Little Big Horn differ from what you have learned about some American Indian perspectives?

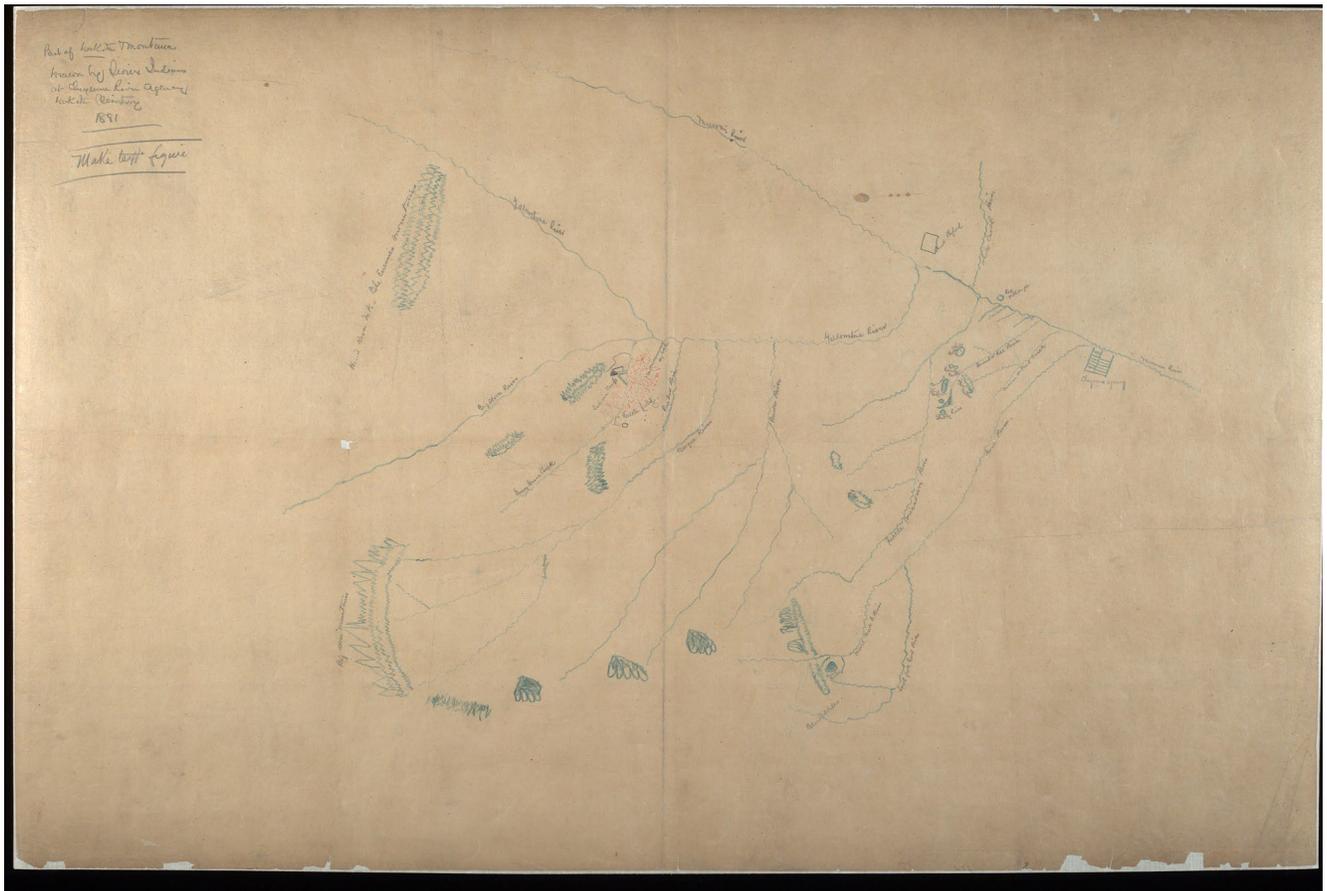
4. What facts were omitted in your history book, according to American Indian accounts?

Little Big Horn ledger art from Red Horse (Lakota) Source: [National Museum of Natural History, National Anthropological](#)





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