

Social Studies Lesson Plan  
Grade 4

Standard 2 – First Nebraskans and European Encounters Open the West

Objective 2.2 – Native peoples established nations with distinct histories and cultures.

Students will learn about the Lakota history and culture by examining winter counts and creating their own winter count of their 4<sup>th</sup> grade year thus far.

Big Question – Who were the people who settled in Nebraska?

Approximate Length of Time - Two forty-five minute periods (for presentation purposes)

Materials - 8 x 11 white paper

Crayons

Markers

Colored Pencils

Winter count pictures from <http://wintercounts.si.edu/index.html>

Hook: Show a picture of a winter count (Battiste Good 1786-1787). Without telling students what it is, see if they can guess what the picture represents. Document the guesses. Ask students what they think the winter count might have been used for. Document these predictions.

Background Knowledge/Direct Instruction: Many different groups of people settled throughout Nebraska over time. One of the first large groups of people were the native peoples. Among these native peoples, there were various tribes that lived throughout Nebraska before Europeans began to move west. These tribes included the Pawnee, Ponca, Lakota, Omaha, Otoe-Missouri, Arapahoe, and Cheyenne. As Europeans slowly moved west, it was very important for native peoples to maintain their culture as they knew it. One of the key aspects of native culture for the Lakota tribe is their storytelling tradition. The Lakota would use winter counts to document annual events. These winter counts were histories or calendars in which events are recorded by pictures, with one picture for each year. These winter counts were physical documentation used in combination with oral storytelling to accurately document Lakota history. Explain that each separate person may remember each particular year differently, therefore, their documentations of each year may not be the same or even similar. Just like students in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade have different memories of the beginning of their year and what it meant to them. Go back to student predictions about what the winter count represented. See if students were accurate or close in their interpretations.

Guided Practice: Explain the winter count representation shown at the beginning of the lesson by sharing with students what happened that year in the lives of the native peoples and how the picture represents what took place that particular year. This particular year is titled “Iron Head Band killed on warpath winter.” In this picture, we see certain details that stand out that give us clues as to what the picture represents. For instance, his headband, his own bow and arrow, and the arrow at his side colored in red representing bloodshed. If we look at someone else's winter count from the same year, we will see that they are different. For example, Rose Bud's winter count for 1786-1787 depicts Red Fox being shot with an arrow. The reason they are so different is because each person experiences each year in a different way. Show another part of the winter count (Battiste Good 1830-1831). Have students make guesses about what they think may have happened during this particular period based on the picture. Explain that this particular representation is called “Shot many white buffalo cows winter.” Clearly, this was a winter where many buffalo cows were shot and killed. Do this with multiple pictures as students become more familiar with how to interpret the pictures. Allow students to come up and choose pictures from different winter counts to look at. (If you have access to a mobile lab, students

could also have individual laptops to examine winter counts and choose a few to share with the class.)

Independent Practice: Now it is the student's turn to create their own winter count depicting their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year(or previous year in school.) Even though we will already be in quarter 2 of their 4<sup>th</sup> grade year, students should be able to think back about their year in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Students will be given the following guidelines:

- Drawing/representation must be done on a 8 x 11 inch piece of white paper
- Student must be able to interpret each part of the drawing/representation to an audience
- Drawings/representations must be appropriate and respectful
- Students may use markers, colored pencils, or crayons to complete their winter count

If students struggle to get started, the teacher may want to draw his/her own winter count as a model for students. However, if this is not necessary for all students, it is suggested to let students create their own with no help. This will help students to stay original in their own winter counts instead of trying to copy/take ideas from the teacher or others. Emphasize that, as we saw in the Lakota winter counts, individual student winter counts of their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year should have many differences. Each individual experienced their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year differently and may remember different things about it.

Students will present their finished winter count to the class. They should be able to talk about what their winter count means and why that represents their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year.

Content Explanation  
Winter Counts Lesson Plan  
Grade 4

As a fourth grade teacher in Nebraska, this lesson ties directly to our social studies standards. As stated in the lesson plan, the objective chosen deals directly with Nebraska tribal cultures and traditions. The winter counts made by the Lakota are a key aspect of their culture, in addition to their efforts to keep their culture alive as Europeans began to move west into their lands. Studying and understanding these winter counts will help students to more deeply comprehend Lakota traditions in documenting their histories.

Furthermore, students actually creating their own winter counts will allow them to experience part of Lakota tradition in their own lives. The idea of native oral storytelling traditions seems to be emphasized a lot in classrooms. However, the addition of the Lakota winter counts will further enrich student knowledge with a new perspective of how history was documented in a society where computers and paper were not used.

The concept of having students create their own winter counts also serves another purpose. As emphasized in the lesson, each student can and even should have different pictures to represent their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year. This is a great spring board for a conversation about how everyone comes to school with a different perspective on what is going on in the classroom. Maybe one student especially likes science and remembers a cool experiment that they did in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Another student may really enjoy reading and remember a fun book project they did. Each of their winter counts would, therefore, depict something different or their own personal perspective on the year.

In addition to learning about Lakota culture through interpreting winter counts, students will gain a greater understanding of how everyone interprets situations differently, depending on their perspective of the situation. Especially in a school where many diverse groups of people come together and learn in the same environment, it is absolutely essential for students to begin to develop an understanding of individual differences. These individual differences should be considered and respected in all situations. Not only would this idea of multiple perspectives throughout history and the classroom help students to become more open-minded learners, but it would also prepare them to be respectful, considerate and open-minded citizens in a world endlessly increasing with multiple perspectives.