

Fort Robinson: Shifting Power on the Plains

NEH Landmark June 2010

The Winter Counts as Cultural Historical Accounts

Lisa Kowynia

11th Grade English

***Addressing Illinois State Goals**

- State Goal #1-Read with understanding and fluency
- State Goal #2-Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas
- State Goal #3-Write to communicate for a variety of purposes
- State Goal #5-Use language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information

***Essential Questions**

- Why should Winter Counts be considered primary sources?
- How do different perspectives affect modern interpretations of history?

***Objectives**

- Students will research and analyze specific primary source historic Winter Count documents.
- Students will discuss and interpret multiple perspectives of Lakota Winter Counts.
- Students will identify how tone and bias contribute to, and perhaps alter, historical perspectives.
- Students will create their own Winter Counts and journal about the significance of each entry.

***Introduction**

• This lesson is useful in starting a Native American Tradition unit following oral history creation accounts. Ask students how history is altered when it is written history versus oral tradition. Pictograph creation story accounts can lead into the significance of the Winter Counts as tribal history. Posters and photos of the Winter Count obtained at Agate Fossil Beds are introductory visuals as well as references throughout the lesson.

***Research/Learning Activities**

- Discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources in historical research. Discuss the concept of Winter Counts as history of the Lakota Peoples. Introduce the class to the Smithsonian online exhibit of Lakota Winter Counts from the National Anthropological Archives available at

<http://wintercounts.si.edu/index.html> using the computer projector.

- Divide class into small groups for computer lab work. Groups will further explore the Smithsonian online exhibit as investigative historians, paying particular attention to one of the eight Lakota Winter Count documents available, as assigned to each group.

- Students will work in groups to respond to the *Historical Habits of Mind* worksheets. Groups should pay particular attention to assigned authors, perspectives, audiences, and tones.

- Using the assigned Winter Counts, groups should identify and analyze pictographic evidence of cultural identity, geographic identity, human interaction, climate conditions, celebrations and tragedies.

- As a class, discuss key observations and images, paying particular attention to differing perspectives of similar incidents. Have students determine the validity of considering Winter Counts as primary source documents.

***Culminating Project**

- This is a long-term assignment requiring quarterly monitoring of group progress and continued class discussions and work sessions. Have each group create a Winter Count of their own, assessing and tracking the major “event” of each unit throughout the course of the school year. Each group should create a corresponding journal to explain each pictograph and its significance to their Winter Count. Provide each group with a 20” square of muslin or art paper to “record” their history. Allow time at the end of the school year for groups to present their historical perspectives to the class and for the class to analyze how differing perspectives and biases altered their understanding of their own class histories. Allow students to debate the usefulness of oral and pictographic accounts of history as primary source documents.

***Assessments**

- Class and group discussions and oral presentations
- Completed Historical Habits of Mind worksheets
- Group Winter Counts and corresponding journaling