

MONTANA NATIVE HISTORY LESSON PLAN

For Instructor Use Only



**PRICKLY PEAR
LAND TRUST**

Native History

Location: Private Landowner Property

Aim: What are some of the untold stories of Native American history and current Native American people in Montana?

Time: 2 hours

Learning Objectives: Meets Indian Education for All Objectives

Guiding Questions:

What do we know about the historic tribal use of the Helena area?

What origin stories did you hear growing up?

Can you think about ways in which the language we speak growing up influences our cultural heritage and how we think?

Learning Objectives:

Have a basic understanding of the historic use of the Helena valley
Address some of the misconceptions that surround Native American culture

Discuss the importance of language in cultural heritage

Discuss the importance of spiritual connections with the environment

Lesson Timeline

Note: Should the land owner not be available, this lesson will take place in the classroom. It will look the same just without the landowner's contribution. In that event the education volunteers will lead the students in multiple games to make up the time. If the lesson does take place on the property, and the owner needs more time, you can cut out the origin story

Students arrive, greet them and introduce yourself

05
MIN

Try to be as engaging as possible. The introduction with the students is what sets the tone for the rest of the lesson. This does not require you to have any special skills, just be friendly and be yourself. It would be great if you included some information about what you do, or did, for work. It is a good opportunity to introduce the students to different careers and does not need to be related to the lesson you are leading.

Ask the students to introduce themselves. Up to you how you want to do this.

05
MIN

Give a brief introduction on what the lesson is about. Then have the students pick a spot to sit and have them sit (stand if it's cold and wet) in silence for 10min. No phones

15
MIN

After the 10 min is up, ask the students if it was hard. Discuss that many tribes have a tradition where young men embark on a spiritual journey that in some tribes, including the Blackfeet, traditionally last 4 days. The tradition is different for each tribe and each tribe has their own word for it. The Blackfeet word translates to Seeking Something Holy, or Seeking Something Holy Through a Dream. Some young men have a mentor who prepares them, while some tribes do not include that as part of the tradition.

Discuss the spiritual connection American Indians have with the land

20
MIN

Give a brief history on Montana's American Indian tribes and the Blackfeet history. I would like you to emphasize how recent the colonization history is.

10
MIN

Tell a shortened version of the Blackfeet origin story. Ask the students to tell you about origin stories they grew up hearing. Origin stories are often very connected to the land where they were first told

Lesson Timeline Cont.

**50
MIN**

Landowner will discuss the historic sites on his property.

**30
MIN**

End by leading the students in one or more traditional games

Background Info

Introduction

There are twelve tribes in Montana that are recognized as sovereign nations, eleven of which are recognized federally. In Montana alone there are seven reservations that tribes share the rights to. However, many tribal members live outside of their reservations, and many people from other tribes live on reservations that do not belong to their tribe. The Little Shell Chippewa tribe is not recognized federally and therefore does not have a designated reservation. Movies, TV shows, and even history classes tend to group all Native Americans into one identity. However, while indigenous peoples in North America may share a continent, they all have their own unique history, language and culture. Think of the European Union, many countries that exist in a relatively similar area, with similar physical appearance but have very different languages and cultural heritages. This information is specifically about the Plains Indians and is not representative of all Native Americans. Before European colonizers arrived in North America, the Plains Tribes were relatively peaceful and had few conflicts. The introduction of horses, firearms, diseases, and starvation due to displacement and disappearing food sources would later change tribal relations among the Plains Indians. This is not to say that there were no conflicts, but without the use of firearms and horses the conflicts were much less damaging and most were about tests of bravery rather than actual deaths. Counting Coup, which involved embarrassing your enemy with acts of bravery, was the most important act of warfare. This “served to reaffirm longstanding boundaries between tribal territories and to establish the honor and bravery of men in their willingness to risk their lives in defense of their people”. This would reestablish a tribe’s dominance and also meant that conflicts were resolved with few deaths.

In fact, the Plains Indians created a universal sign language that was used to communicate between tribes in order to communicate and trade more effectively. This language was used across large areas of North America, from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada. Also, it was and is used for storytelling purposes among tribal members.

As colonizers moved into Montana and fur traders started wiping out prey populations, conflicts between Tribes, as well as between Tribes and European settlers, increased. This combined with the introduction of firearms and diseases caused conflicts between Tribes to become more deadly.

Essential Understanding

Note: this is only one essential understanding. It was requested that this particular one be included but there are 6 more. If you would like to do more extensive research, they can be found online:

<http://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Education%20101/essentialunderstandings.pdf?ver=2019-03-08-090932-123>

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages and are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America.

Key Concepts

- The term spirituality within a cultural context can be limiting and misconstrued. Spirituality to Indigenous peoples generally refers to one aspect of their worldview in which all things are connected. Spirituality in this context does not necessarily equivocate nor denote religion.
- A complex history of pre-Columbian tribal migrations and intertribal interactions, European colonization and Christianization efforts, and federal assimilation policies have contributed to the broad range of spiritual beliefs held by American Indians today.
- Despite this history, Native people have retained their spiritual beliefs and traditions – tribal languages are still spoken, sacred songs are still sung, and rituals and ceremonies are still performed.
- It is not important for educators to understand all the complexities of modern day American Indian cultures; however, they should be aware of their existence and the fact that they can influence much of the thinking and practice of American Indians today.
- Humor plays an important role in American Indian cultures, there was no “stoic” Indian.
- Tribal oral traditions, ideologies, worldviews, and the principles and values associated with them, are as valid as other such traditions from around the world and should be accorded the same respect and standing.
- Educators should be aware that portions of these principles and values are private and are to be used and understood by certain individuals, groups, or the entire tribe. Tribal culture bearers, experts, and others can assist educators in navigating these situations.

Essential Understanding

Contemporary tribal beliefs and spirituality span the continuum as a result of a complex history which includes tribal migrations and intertribal interactions, colonization and Christianization efforts, and centuries of federal Indian policies targeted at the elimination of tribal spiritual beliefs and the assimilation of American Indians into mainstream society. Today, tribal beliefs and spirituality range from what is considered “traditional,” or specific to the history and beliefs of a particular tribe, to pan-Indian beliefs like the Native American Church, to agnostic or even secular. What is amazing is the degree to which tribal people have retained their traditions. Indigenous languages are still spoken. Sacred songs are still sung. Rituals and ceremonies are still performed. It is not important for educators to understand all of the complexities of modern day American Indian cultures; however, educators should be aware of their existence. They should also understand the ways these cultures might influence much of the thinking and practice of American Indians today.

Tribal spiritual beliefs and practices are deeply embedded in place. They are “autochthonous” traditions in that they formed or originated where they are found; they were not imported to this continent. In terms of how American Indian spiritual beliefs and ideologies compare to religions, it is profound to note that no American Indian language has a word for “religion,” at least as it is conceived of by Westerners, as institutionalized spirituality. In general, tribal sacred ways “do not try to explain or control all phenomena in the universe. They do not, as organizations, seek to dominate peoples’ thoughts or ways of personal worship. This is what makes these sacred ways distinct – from ‘schools’ of philosophy in the history of ideas or ‘denominations’ in the history of religion”.

Thus, American Indians’ spiritual beliefs and traditions were and are a way of living life that imparts a particular worldview, or a “distinctive vision of reality [that] provides people with a distinctive set of values, and identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and a place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition that transcends the experience of a single lifetime.”

Like other groups of people around the world, American Indian tribes each have their own histories and ways of recording and passing on the important events, values, and principles of the tribe. These ways included markers like winter counts, usually drawings on an animal hide that tracked important events, and oral traditions such as storytelling and songs. In general, tribal oral traditions explain the creation and functioning of the world, teach abstract notions and behavior, cosmology, and ways of seeing or thinking about things (or culture and worldview), communicate morals or lessons, and offer entertainment to listeners. They are one of the primary keys to the survival of the tribe. In addition, because they are place-based, they reflect the unique landscapes on which they have developed; thus, they also work to demonstrate how deeply tribal groups are tied to a particular place.

Essential Understanding

These tribal oral histories are as valid as written histories and predate the “discovery” of North America. Because they are as valid as other such traditions from around the world, Native ideologies, worldviews and the principles and values associated with them should be accorded the same respect and standing.

Many of these principles and values persist into contemporary times, including ongoing spiritual practices, other cultural activities, and even how tribes govern themselves and their territories. These values include respect, humility, generosity, honesty, courage, collaboration, responsibility, community, cooperation, selflessness, humor, and reciprocity, among many others.

Additionally, it was and remains common that portions of these principles and values are private and are to be used and understood by certain individuals, groups, or the entire tribe. Educators should be aware of this issue when asking students about their histories, ceremonies, and stories. Tribal education departments, found on each reservation, can assist educators in navigating these situations so that private information remains protected. At times, it is also important to be sensitive about norms and practices associated with sharing written and oral information at certain times of the year.

Blackfeet

In the given time for this lesson we cannot cover the history of every Tribal Nation in Montana. Because of Helena’s location we will focus on the history of the Blackfeet Nation. Looking at historic uses of what is now Montana, Helena sits right on the edge of what was Blackfeet territory and common hunting grounds.

The present day Blackfeet are descended from tribes known as the Blackfeet (Siksika), Kainah or Bloods, and Piegans. These three tribes shared a common culture, spoke the same language, and held a common territory. Members of these tribes lived in the present Province of Saskatchewan until 1730, when they started to move southwestward where the buffalo and other game were more abundant.

Prior to the 1800s the Blackfeet had little opportunity to engage in conflicts with either white settlers or other Indians. The location of their territory was such that the Blackfeet were relatively isolated and, thus, they encountered European settlers later than most tribes. During the first half of the 19th century, white settlers began entering Blackfeet territory bringing with them items for trade.

With the introduction of firearms and the introduction of horses, the competition for better hunting territory and the desire to acquire horses led to intertribal warfare. The Blackfeet quickly established their reputation as warriors and demanded the respect of other Indian tribes and European colonizers alike.

Although they were not officially represented or even consulted, a vast area was set-aside for the Blackfeet Tribes by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. In 1855, the government made a treaty with the Blackfeet and several of their neighboring tribes, which provided for use of a large portion of the original reservation as a common hunting territory.

In 1865 and 1868, treaties were negotiated for their lands south of the Missouri, but were not ratified by Congress. In 1873 and 1874, the Blackfeet southern boundary was moved 200 miles north by Presidential orders and Congressional Acts. The land to the south was opened to settlement. During the winters of 1883 and 1884, the Blackfeet experienced unsuccessful buffalo hunts. After the disappearance of the buffalo, the Blackfeet faced starvation and were forced to accept reservation living and dependence upon rationing for survival.

In 1888, additional lands were ceded and separate boundaries established for the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Fort Peck Reservations. In 1896 an agreement was once again made between the United States government and the Blackfeet Tribe. This time the United States government was asking for the sale of the Rocky Mountains, which bordered the reservation to the west.

It was believed that there were valuable minerals there. A commission was sent out to negotiate and heated disagreements ensued with tribal members over how much land and money this agreement would involve. The end result was a cession of land that now makes up Glacier National Park and the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Today this agreement is still in dispute over how much land and money was agreed upon. The Blackfeet Tribe still holds some rights in Glacier National Park and in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. As long as the people continue to appreciate what the Creator gave them, there will continue to be disagreement over stewardship of the land once occupied by this great nation.

Blackfeet Origin Story

Chewing Black Bones, a respected Blackfeet elder, told Ella E. Clark the following creation myth in 1953. Clark later published the account in her book, *Indian Legends from the Northern Rockies*.

Old Man came from the south, making the mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals also. He traveled northward making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there-arranging the world as we see it today. He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today; they show shape of his body, legs, arms and hair. Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. He said aloud, "you are a bad thing to make me stumble so." Then he raised up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on farther north, and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills. Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it made all kinds of roots and berries to grow; camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, serviceberries, bull-berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground.

When he created the bighorn sheep with its big head and horns, he made it out on the prairie. But it did not travel easily on the prairie; it was awkward and could not go fast. So Old Man took it by its horns, led it up into the mountain, and turned it loose. There the bighorn skipped about among the rocks and went up fearful places with ease. So Old Man said to it, "This is the kind of place that suits you; this is what you are fitted for, the rocks, and the mountains."

While he was in the mountains, he made the antelope out of dirt and turned it loose to see how it would do. It ran so fast that it fell over some rocks and hurt itself. Seeing that the mountains were not the place for it, Old Man took the antelope down to the prairie and turned it loose. When he saw it running away fast and gracefully, he said, "This is what you are suited to, the broad prairie."

One day Old man decided that he would make a woman and a child. So he formed them both of clay, the woman and the child, her son.

After he had molded the clay in human shape, he said to it, "You must be people." And then he covered it up and went away. The next morning he went to the place, took off the covering, looked at the images, and said "Arise and walk," They did so. They walked down to the river with their Maker, and then he told them that his name was Napi, Old Man.

This is how we came to be people. It is he who made us.

The first people were poor and naked, and they did not know how to do anything for themselves. Old Man showed them the roots and berries and said, "You can eat these." Then he pointed to certain trees, "When the bark of these trees is young and tender, it is good. Then you can peel it off and eat it."

He told the people that the animals also should be their food. "These are herds," he said. "All these little animals that live on the ground—squirrels, rabbits, skunks, beavers, are good to eat. You need not fear to eat their flesh. All the birds that fly, these too, I have made for you, so that you can eat of their flesh.

Old man took the first people over the prairies and through the forests, then the swamps to show them the different plants he had created. He told them what herbs were good for sicknesses, saying often, "The root of this herb or the leaf if gathered in a certain month of the year, is good for certain sickness." In that way the people learned the power of all the herbs. Then he showed them how to make weapons with which to kill the animals for their food. First, he went out and cut some serviceberry shoots, brought them in, and peeled the bark off them. He took one of the larger shoots, flattened it, tied a string to it, and thus made a bow. Then he caught one of the birds he had made, took feathers from its wing, split them, and tied them to a shaft of wood. At first he tied four feathers along the shaft, and with this bow sent the arrow toward its mark. But he found that it did not fly well. When he used only three feathers, it went straight to the mark. Then he went out and began to break sharp pieces off the stones. When he tied them at the ends of his arrows, he found that the black flint stones, and some white flint, made the best arrow points.

When the people had learned to make bow and arrows, Old Man taught them how to shoot animals and birds. Because it is not healthful to eat animals' flesh raw, he showed the first people how to make fire. He gathered soft, dry rotten driftwood and made a punk of it. Then he found a piece of hardwood and drilled a hole in it with an arrow point. He gave the first man a pointed piece of hardwood and showed him how to roll it between his hands until sparks came out and the punk caught fire. Then he showed the people how to cook the meat of the animals they had killed and how to eat it. He told them to get a certain kind of stone that was on the land, while he found a harder stone. With the hard stone he had them hollow out the softer one and so make a kettle. Thus, they made their dishes.

Old Man told the first people how to get spirit power: "Go away by yourself and go to sleep. Something will come to you in your dream that will help you. It may be some animal. Whatever this animal tells you in your sleep you must do. Obey it. Be guided by it. If later you want help, if you are traveling alone and cry aloud for help, your prayer will be answered. It may be by an eagle, perhaps by a buffalo, perhaps by a bear. Whatever animal hears your prayer you must listen to it."

That was how the first people got along in the world by the power given to them in their dreams. After this, Old Man kept on traveling north. Many of the animals that he had created followed him. They understood when he spoke to them, and they were his servants. When he got to the north point of the Porcupine Mountains, he made some more mud images of people, blew his breath upon them, and they became people, men and women. They asked him, "What do we eat?"

By way of answer, Old Man made many images of clay in the form of buffalo. Then he blew breath upon them and they stood up. When he made signs to them, they started to run. Then he said to the people,

“Those animals-buffalo-are your food.”

“But how can we kill them?” the people asked.

“I will show you.” He answered.

He took them to a cliff and told them to build rock piles: “Now hide behind these piles of rocks,” he said. “I will lead the buffalo this way. When they are opposite you, rise up.” After telling them what to do, he started toward the herd of buffalo. When he called the animals, they started to run toward him, and they followed him until they were inside the piles of rock. Then Old Man dropped back. As the people rose up, the buffalo ran in a straight line and jumped over the cliff.

“Go down and take the flesh of those animals.” said Old Man. The people tried to tear the limbs apart, but they could not. Old Man went to the edge of the cliff, broke off some pieces with sharp edges, and told the people to cut the flesh with these rocks. They obeyed him. When they had skinned the buffalo, they set up some poles and put the hides on them. Thus they made a shelter to sleep under.

After Old Man taught the people all these things, he started off again, traveling north until he came to where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet. There he made some more people and taught them the same things. From there he went farther north. When he had gone almost to the Red Deer River, he was so tired that he lay down on a hill. The form of his body can be seen there yet, on the top of the hill where he rested. When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled farther north until he came to a high hill. He climbed to the top of it and there he sat down to rest. As he gazed over the country, he was greatly pleased by it. Looking at the steep hill below him, he said to himself, “This is a fine place for sliding. I will have some fun.” And he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all the Blackfoot Tribes as ‘Old Man’s Sliding Ground.’”

Old Man can never die. Long ago he left the Blackfeet and went away toward the west, disappearing in the mountains. Before he started, he said to the people, “I will always take care of you, and someday I will return.”

Even today some people think that he spoke the truth and that when he comes back he will bring with him the buffalo, which they believe the white men have hidden. Others remember that before he left them he said that when he returned he would find them a different people. They would be living in a different world, he said, from that which he had created for them and had taught them to live in.”

Native Games Instructions

A trained native game instructor will lead the students in one of the games from the “Traditional Native Games Unit”

Information on the games can be found [HERE](#)

Contact the Montana Office of Public Instruction’s for more information on Indian Education for All Curriculum

Non-Classroom Activities

In addition to the information presented in this lesson plan, consider these resources for at-home learning use.

K-12 Native Education Materials

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/equity-education/native-education/native-education-curriculum-support-materials>

Montana Office of Indian Education Resources

<http://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All/Indian-Education-Featured-Resources>

Native News 2019 (For information on current victories and challenges in local native communities)

<https://nativenews.jour.umt.edu/2019/>

HAPPY.

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TRAILS.

PRICKLYPEARLT.ORG