

**Title**

Appropriation and Misappropriation of Indian Imagery: From Lakota Winter Counts to Indian Mascots.

**Grade Level**

College level for 1 credit hour.

**Theme**

The overall theme of this lesson plan is to demonstrate Lakota imagery through winter counts and their assessment of history and the importance of stories through imagery. This Lakota perspective serves as the backdrop to the stereotypical imagery of American Indians that continues today through mascots.

**Duration**

One 4-hour session, with two 10-minute breaks.

**Goal**

Students will understand how pervasive Lakota Indian imagery is, especially in the form of school and sports-related mascots, and the devastating effects this imagery has both within and outside American Indian communities.

**Objectives**

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the Lakota conceptualize history and time as done through symbolic imagery in winter counts.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the historical nature of Indian mascots.
- Students will understand the psychological effects these images have on American Indians.
- Students will demonstrate an increased cross-cultural perspective and knowledge of American Indian societies.
- Students will express themselves clearly, logically, and respectfully while speaking in class and in writing.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make inferences from oral, written, and visual materials.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of principles of ethics and their employment in the analysis and resolution of moral problems concerning Indian mascots.
- Students will use computer and information technology when appropriate.

**Cultural Concept**

The central cultural concept through this lesson plan is to describe the power of Lakota historical imagery and how such imagery has been misappropriated in the form of Indian mascots.

**Cultural Background**

There are seven Lakota (Oyate) Nations. These include *Hunkpapa*, *Sihasapa*, *Itazipco*, *Oglala*, *Minniconjou*, *Oohenunpa*, and *Sicangu*. The Lakota people have a long history going back thousands of years but they are most often depicted in a very set period of time, typically from 1860's to 1890's, during the Indian Wars. This was a period of time when Lakota land was encroached upon by American settlers leading to many years of conflict that ultimately ended with the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. Like all cultures, Lakotas have evolved over time and one of the most significant tools in the

dominance of the Lakota people was the horse that is often depicted in biographical and winter counts.

Lakotas maintained their history through oral tradition, so it is not clear when they started keeping winter counts (*waniyetu wowapi*) as written records of their history. Most winter counts preserved today are from the nineteenth century and serve as a key for understanding Lakota orientations to time, space, place, and event. Winter counts were event-centered and accounted for which singular event was most important during the time from the beginning of one winter to the beginning of the following winter (lunar calendar). These were sacred histories intended to make community members remember various events. These counts were morally centered narratives critically important to the Lakota people. Winter counts were experientially thematic and not fixed in time; therefore, they were used differently than book accounts premised upon conventional academic perspectives governed by multiple predetermined events. A council of Lakota men decided which event was to mark the year and the winter count keeper would depict that event in the form of a pictoglyph. The glyphs were used as symbols to represent the story associated with that event. If any problem in the tribe existed, one would go to the winter count keeper who would choose from one or more of the glyphs to relate a story that could add moral guidance or a lesson to aid in resolving the problem. Glyphs were drawn in a right-to-left orientation, with images facing to the left. They could be drawn as an outward or inward spiral, or in square form, and were originally drawn on buffalo hides. Once trade cloth and paper were introduced, winter counts were kept on muslin and ledger books. Some of the latter winter counts were done with English wording and symbology.

The Lakota people are a part of a larger community of plains-centered cultural traditions intrinsically connected to the buffalo hunt. Once the horse was reintroduced around 1730, several Plains Indian communities soon became successful riders which aided in transportation, buffalo hunts, and in war time. Their agile expertise in horseback hunting and warring culminated in an image that has since been appropriated by a larger non-Indian audience. The idea of the horseback-riding-Indian donning a large headdress comes from these early histories. The noble Indian image of Lakotas and others became symbolic of consummate strength and pride, and in spite of tragic events such as Wounded Knee (1890 and 1973) and oppressive governmental policies, Lakota pride and persistence continued. This image was appropriated by school administrators at all levels and eventually professional athletics as their school/team mascots. Multiple elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges/universities and professional athletic teams continue to use the noble Indian image who typically puts on a half-time show rife with contrived costuming and dancing. Many American Indians find this disrespectful and have fought against continued usage of such mascots, and while some schools and teams have changed their mascots, many more remain.

Mascots perpetuate the stereotypes or romanticize American Indian people and their culture. These images fix American Indians in a certain place and time and dismiss a culture that has survived for thousands of years and is still alive and strong. In the United States there are over 560 federally recognized tribes and many more that are not federally recognized which are as diverse as the land they occupy. Sports mascots tend to homogenize all American Indian people into one group, typically the Sioux which

consists of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota people. For thirty years, American Indians have fought the use of Indian mascots. Many schools have changed their names and sports teams cannot use mascots in post-season events during NCAA level athletics. Nationally, there is not a standard in elementary and secondary schools on the issue of sports mascots. Although some colleges such as Stanford have changed their mascot, other schools feel the tradition of the mascot outweighs the pleas of Native tribes, people, and non-Native people. Alumnae who make large contributions to universities also play a role in the continuance of Indian mascots as is the case for the University of North Dakota and their mascot, the 'Fighting Sioux.'

### **Student Activities**

After introductions are made, students will be shown the Cleveland Indians mascot from the internet in order to assess the baseline of their ideas and experiences with the mascot issue (<http://www.aistm.org/cartoon.gif>). From there, we will discuss the Lakota method of depicting events through the imagery of Lakota winter counts. Winter counts will be discussed through a power point presentation and examples will be shown from the online Smithsonian collection (<http://wintercounts.si.edu/>). The class will then be introduced to the history of when Indian mascots first came to the forefront of American Indian activism with Chief Illiniwek at the University of Illinois. This will be supported with clips from the documentary "In Whose Honor?" (1997). Video clips from <http://www.youtube.com> will also be shown. Other mascot traditions will be highlighted such as the Atlanta Braves, the Cleveland Indians, Washington Redskins, the Haskell Indians, Pine Ridge Thorpes, Marty Braves, the Crow Creek Chieftains, and others.

These discussions will also include different examples of Indian communities who have worked with other institution/teams to change their mascots such as the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio (<http://www.muredhawks.com/trads/mioh-nickname.html>); and those Indian communities that work in agreement with existing institutions regarding continued usage of the Indian mascot, such as Florida State University and the Seminole Indian Tribe (<http://unirel.fsu.edu/seminoles/pages/timeline.html>). Class will end with an image portraying other marginalized ethnic groups suited as a school/athletic mascot in order to encourage students to see how pervasive stereotypical Indian imagery is, and ways to think about it in relationship to other marginalized ethnic groups in the United States (<http://www.aistm.org/cartoon.gif>).

### **Assessment**

The continued perpetuation of mascots regardless of opposition, collaborative agreement to continue with Indian mascots and the abolition of mascots will constitute three parts of the medicine wheel or sacred hoop (denoting the cardinal directions of North, South and East colored variably in white, red, and yellow)– representing the cycle of life. The Western point of the medicine wheel, which is black, represents the releasing of ignorance and the passing along of knowledge to the next generation so that the wheel-life cycle starts again. This will require students to offer through writing and drawing, an additional perspective for integrating any of the key discussion points from class. It will be completed on their own time and will be turned in for a grade two weeks after conclusion of class. The goal of this assignment is for students to apply knowledge they gained from class, in order to create an instructional method to increase sensitivities

regarding Indian imagery and more specifically Indian mascots, and ways they can address this to a larger audience.

## References

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- In Whose Honor?* A film by J. Rosenstein, New Day Films, 46 mins, 1997.
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- Why Educators Should not Ignore Indian Mascots* by Cornel Pewewardy, *Multicultural Perspectives*, 2(1):3-7, 2000.

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## Date

10 July 2009