

Title

Oko Iyawapi – Week Count

Grade Level

This lesson plan was designed for middle school students in grades sixth through eighth.

Theme

The use of weekly reflection to build relationships and a learning community.

Duration

A 45 minute introduction to winter counts. 20 minutes every week to allow groups to add to their count.

Goal

Students will work in small groups to develop a count of their weeks in our learning community (classroom). Students will rotate their roles so that all students have a chance to fill all the roles. Students will develop their ability to communicate orally, artistically, and through writing.

Objectives

Students will be able to understand the cultural significance of winter counts by creating their own community artifacts. Students will be able to express their learning artistically through the creation of representational glyphs in the role of weekly count keeper. Students will express their learning orally in the role of storyteller, by explaining the glyph to the class. Students will be able to express their learning in fully developed paragraphs in the role of recorder.

South Dakota Standards

8.R.2.1 Students can analyze text using comprehension strategies.

8.R.3.2 Students can examine the effects of the author's use of literary devices.

8.R.4.1 Students can compare and contrast literature from different time periods and cultures dealing with similar themes and conflicts.

8.R.5.3 Students can combine new information with existing knowledge to enhance understanding.

8.W.1.3 Students can compose text using information from multiple sources to support a topic.

8.W.2.1 Students can edit text for run-on sentences and fragments.

8.W.2.1 Students can identify and incorporate adverbs in the writing process.

Cultural Concept

The central concept is the building of communities through shared stories and experiences.

Cultural Background

The idea for developing this lesson comes from the Lakota winter count tradition. The title of the lesson is derived from the Lakota words for winter count *waniyetu iyawapi* meaning “they count the winters.” Therefore, *Oko iyawapi* means “they count the weeks.” Winter counts are pictographic calendars in which each picture represents a remarkable event that people experienced in that year. Winter counts could be maintained for longer than one lifetime, so the people viewing and using winter counts as a way to keep track of the years had a visual representation of the long history they have together. Events recorded on a winter count are the direct experience of the people creating the winter count. This is an important difference, in the electronic age where our students can hear about historical events from around the world, it is our personal experiences and shared history with others that makes a community a vibrant place that people want to stay in.

Winter counts as a historical artifact can be found at <http://wintercounts.si.edu/>. This web site is maintained by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. The winter counts are very diverse. The “canvas” can be hide, muslin, butcher paper, or ledger books. The glyphs are applied using pen and ink, paint, and natural dyes. Even the arrangement of the glyphs is left to choice. The Lone Dog winter count has the first five glyphs in the center of the hide. They are read from the right to the left and the other glyphs spiral out in a circular pattern from there. Other counts may spiral from the outside corner in toward the center, while other counts may read from top left to bottom right like a book. The Flame winter count starts at the bottom left continues to the bottom right, and the next line above is read from right to left. This produces a zigzag like pattern of glyphs. This is probably not the limit of designs that winter count keepers have used.

Within communities the winter count was maintained by one person, the winter count keeper. This person was charged with designing the glyph to represent the year and memorizing the story that accompanies that glyph. However, this person was not responsible for choosing the event that he would record. This choice was not left to any one person to decide which event would be most important for the group; a council of elder men would debate the most significant event until an agreement was made. Groups that live close to each other often had similar glyphs reflecting a shared experience among several groups of people.

Often winter counts cover more than one hundred years of history, more than the lifespan of one keeper. Winter count keepers would pass maintenance of the artifact and stories down to a male apprentice. The apprentice may make a copy of the winter count. Also, copies were made for sale to traders and collectors, so using these artifacts in the classroom shouldn't be spiritually offensive to anyone involved.

Winter counts fell out of use as land allotment began to break up the large extended family groups (*tiyospayes*) that traditionally kept them. Some continued as family records of births and deaths. Some began to include writing without pictures. Women also began to take up the record keeping on some of the later counts.

Student Activities

1. Introduce the cultural background of winter counts to students. A group pre-test will help students to activate any prior knowledge they may have and help the teacher to assess what students already know about the topic. Hand out individual copies of the pre-test as a note taking device that students can fill out during your presentation.
2. All students will need to develop glyphs as they take on the role of week count keeper. Introduce students to name glyphs. The traditional depiction is a side view of a person facing to the left with some naming symbol shown above the person's head. This symbol is connected to the person's mouth with a line. Students should make their name glyphs with attention to style, tradition, and be individual enough not to be confused with another student's glyph.
3. The weekly count: Break students into groups of four. In each group there will be a weekly count keeper to design the glyph, a story teller to explain the glyph to the class, a recorder to write a paragraph about what the glyph represents, and a time keeper to keep the group on task. Jobs should be switched every week, and if not too complicated, group members could be switched out as well. This is to maximize the number of people that students need to work with, as well as to promote the community feeling across the whole class rather than just developing little four people communities. In this way the class can develop multiple counts and still have a hand in the creation of all of them.
4. The weekly count should emphasize important milestones in student learning. For example, an activity in class that the students really responded to, the completion of a major project, or all students in the class passing a test. Students may be tempted to use social events (a dance, etc.), but working to recall the learning events should help students remember that the classroom is a learning community, not just a social community.

Resources

Butcher paper, colored pencils, journals to record the weekly story and glyph

Assessment

Pre-test to activate prior knowledge and assess what students already know about winter counts. Use the same pre-test during presentation of cultural context to assess student understanding of material being presented. Use rubrics weekly to assess the quality of artwork, oration, writing, and teamwork.

References

Burke, Christina E. (2007). Waniyetu Wowapi: An Introduction to the Lakota Winter Count Tradition. In Candace S. Greene and Russel Thornton (Eds.), *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (pp. 1-11). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Developer

Megan Cash
725 E. Wells Ave
Apt 36A

Pierre SD 57501
605 222 8942
megan.cash@k12.sd.us

Date
5 July 2011