

Name of Cultural Connection Authors: Sandy Gipp (SRST), S. Means (CRST), and Allan Linde

Tribal Affiliation Presented: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST), (Lakota)

Introduction:

This cultural lesson will provide an understanding of how traditional Lakota culture recorded life experiences for the purposes of passing along information needed for the survival of the people and their way of life through storytelling. First, we will briefly look at the winter count, a pictographic record of a community's history as an example of stored information. We will also share an example of a personal story of a grandmother who made cradleboards for her family to use and pass down in future generations.

Cultural Objective:

The students will understand how information and life experiences were stored traditionally by the Lakota way of *wniyetu wowapi* (winter count) and how information is stored contemporarily through one family's heirloom cradleboard.

Cultural Information:

Lakota winter counts — pictographic calendars of a community's history—provide a unique look into the history of the Lakota Sioux people during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unlike historical accounts recorded by European settlers and explorers, winter counts represent a rich Lakota tradition of oral history and storytelling. Community historians, known as winter count keepers, maintained and used these pictographic records as *mnemonic devices* to remember the sequence of events that marked each year. By referring to the winter count, members of a Lakota community could mark events in their own lives. (Cunnion, n.d.)



Winter Count

Image: Akta Lakota Museum & Cultural Center

Cradleboard Story as told by Sandy Gipp

Within our family we have five cradleboards. The cradleboard was an item used by Lakota people traditionally to carry their babies. It was a way to keep the baby safe from bugs and snakes, and prevented the child from walking off. One of the advantages to the cradleboard was it could be stood on end allowing the child to watch the mother as she works. Buckskin was used to tie and hold the baby to the board and it was also fringed with

plumes that would move flies from the baby. Small bells were tied into the buckskin as an alert to the baby's movement; when the mother heard the bells, she would know her child was awake and moving. The buckskin was also beaded with traditional colors and patterns.



My grandmother was an artist, everything she did she made from scratch. She made moccasins, dolls, and dance outfits. She started making cradleboards when she was asked by a man who wanted a cradleboard for his only daughter, who was having a child. Once my grandmother made this first cradleboard, she started making more. At some point she decided to make a cradleboard for each of her five children's first born because she wanted to have something of significance that would be passed on to her grandchildren.

These cradleboards have been used by her grandchildren with their children. It has had significance to each of us. It is something our families have. When I give the cradleboard to my daughter, she will use it and if my son needs it, he will use it. It

is meant to be shared amongst our family and it will be known that my Grandmother made this cradleboard. This cradleboard will carry information for my family.

Terms:

Wniyetu Wowapi (winter count): pictographic calendar of a community's history.

Cradleboard: A method Native American mothers used to carry their infants.

Mnemonic device: An object, drawing or symbol used to aid the recollection of a certain memory or thought.

Oral history: A tradition of relaying past events through spoken word; storytelling.

Pictograph: A functional two-dimensional drawing created to represent an idea, person or event.

Questions:

1. What is the significance of the winter count?
2. Does your family hold any significant family heirloom?

Reference

Cunnion, A.-T. (n.d.). *Lakota Winter Counts* [This teachers' guide was developed, written and designed by Anh-Thu Cunnion while completing her M.A.T. in Museum Education at The George Washington University. Under the supervision of Candace Greene, Ms. Cunnion worked with a dedicated group of ethnologists]. Lee and Low Books. Retrieved April 15, 2021, from https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/34/lakotaTG_full.pdf