

Learning from Winter Counts - Recording Our Class History

Goals

- The students will learn about the similarities between winter counts and other methods of recording events like timelines, diaries, and calendars.
- The students will understand the passing of oral histories.
- The students will realize the importance of the Keeper who is responsible for providing an oral account of the important events of the community.

Procedure

- 1) Introduce the winter count, tell students general information about Native American Winter Counts. (Information provided on the following pages.)
- 2) Explain that between now and winter break you will create a class "winter count."
Decide if you will record a new event each day or each week. Plan to have at least 7 events by winter break.
- 3) Prepare a big piece of tan paper or fabric for your count.
- 4) Discuss the events to be added to your count. Start with the present day or week. Ask the class what was an important event that happened to almost everyone in this class that day/week.
- 5) Have a student come to the board and draw a simple picture to represent that event.
- 6) Repeat steps 4 and 5 throughout the unit. Help students place the images so that the pictures go in a spiral.
- 7) Throughout the unit, review the similarities/differences between winter counts and modern timelines.

Enrichment Activities

As a different activity, every student can draw their own winter count representing each year of their lives. Remind students they could include events such as the birth of a sibling or cousin, starting a new school, moving, meeting new friends. This could be a homework assignment and volunteers could present in front of class the next day. The students do not have to be artists if they could tell what is happening in each of their pictures. They cannot write words on their winter counts.

Ideas adapted from:

- <https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/winter-count.htm>
- <https://oeta.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/11e492e2-027d-4058-9fc4-5ede11f82460/winter-count-lesson-plans-native-american-studies/>

Waniyetu Wowapi (winter count)

A winter count is a pictographic record of historical/memorable events for a tiospaye (community). Some Native American tribes, such as Lakota and Kiowa, would come together during the winter. An event that was witnessed or had affected most of the tribe would be chosen to represent that year. The winter count was a method of preserving history. Important events were recorded for future generations.

The pictures, which were used as mnemonic devices, are arranged in chronological order. The earliest event is represented in the middle and the later events spiral outward. Originally, the memorable events were recorded on rock (many paintings found on cave walls, canyons and mountains throughout the Great Plains), on buffalo hide, deer hide, cow hide, and then ledger paper and muslin (cotton fabric). Natural dyes were used by the keeper to draw the images. Berries, clay, plants, roots, and buffalo gall (liver bile) were a few of the materials used to draw the images.

Each tiospaye designated a winter count keeper. The keeper (traditionally a man) of the winter count was the historian for the community. Elders would gather and consult with the keeper to select the most important event of the year (first snow to first snow.) The keeper would then draw an image on the winter count to represent the event. The images on the winter count were used as a reminder/aid to help the keeper remember the events. The keeper (oral historian for the tiospaye) could then explain the events in detail. The keeper was responsible for providing an oral account of the images drawn.

Winter Count Representation at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

The Winter Count, hanging in Fitzpatrick's Room at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, (provided on the following page) is a representation of what a winter count could look like. This one has been painted on an elk hide and represents some events that took place in or near Bent's Old Fort. The earliest event is represented in the middle of the elk hide and the later events spiral outward.

- 1820. Medicine Bears Daughter Marries Sioux Man
- 1821. Eight Cheyennes Killed And Decapitated By Crow Indians
- 1822. Cheyennes Drive Antelope Into Pit
- 1823. Old Horn Talks To Wolf
- 1824. Cheyennes Trade Buffalo Hides To Mandans For Corn
- 1825. Cheyennes See Giant Double-Toothed Buffalo
- 1826. Hair Rope Band Moves South To Arkansas River
- 1827. Starving Elk Gets A Dream Shield
- 1828. Chiefs Met William Bent (Little White Man)
- 1829. Blackbeard White Man (Ceran St. Vrain) Gives Chiefs Four Blankets
- 1830. Pawnees Take Medicine Arrows
- 1831. Small Pox Epidemic
- 1832. Utes Take Ten Horses
- 1833. Meteor Shower (Night Stars Fell)
- 1834. Many Magpies (Heads-Of-Birds) Trade 25 Buffalo Robes To William Bent
- 1835. Chiefs Concil With White Soldiers (Col. Henry Dodge) At Bents Fort
- 1836. Trading Post Built Near Mountains (Fort St. Vrain)
- 1837. Owl Woman Marries White Trader (William Bent)
- 1838. Kiowa Shoots Gentle Horse In The Face
- 1839. Howling Water Takes Three Horses From White Men
- 1840. Inter-Tribal Council Held Near Bents Fort. Cheyenne & Arapahoes Make Peace With Kiowa and Comanches; Known As Giving Presents To One Another Across The River
- 1841. Shell's Horse Gored By Buffalo Bull
- 1842. Sioux Recover A Cheyenne Medicine Arrow
- 1843. Another Trading Post Built On The Arkansas (El Pueblo)
- 1844. Starvation Winter (Not Enough Buffalo Meat)
- 1845. Measles Epidemic
- 1846. Whooping Cough Sickness
- 1847. White Hat (Charles Bent) Killed By Pueblos And Mexicans



NATIONAL
MUSEUM
OF THE
AMERICAN
INDIAN

LONE DOG'S WINTER COUNT

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE





