

IN THE CURRICULUM

The Lakota Winter Count online resource allows educators to effectively integrate primary resources and multicultural experiences into any curriculum. By including multiple perspectives and culturally diverse interpretations into the study of history, natural sciences and language arts, educators encourage their students to think globally and to respect the beliefs and customs of all people. This section suggests several subject areas in which winter counts can be incorporated. Specific topics and rationales have been included to further describe how winter counts can enhance your students' classroom experience.

U.S. History

In recent years, textbooks have become more inclusive of the multicultural nature of U.S. history. However, texts often still emphasize the political and economic story of the dominant groups in American society, primarily those of Euro-American descent. Much of the history of the Native people of North America that we learn in school is based on written records—observations passed on by literate travelers, traders, missionaries and governmental representatives who came into contact for either brief or lengthy periods of time.

In contrast, Native peoples have a long held tradition of passing on their own histories primarily through a rich oral tradition. Studying the winter counts in conjunction with textbooks and other historical records demonstrates to students that historical research involves digesting several different versions of history using a broad range of sources. They will learn to evaluate historical records within a culturally specific framework and to value the many different methods by which people have documented the human experience through time.

Suggested topics:

Social relationships between the populations of the Great Plains.

What types of interactions do the winter counts record between the Lakota and other Native tribes? the Lakota and Euro-Americans? How did the Lakota interactions with Native tribes and with Euro-Americans differ?

Economic relations between the Lakota and neighboring groups.

What goods did the Lakota trade for with neighboring Native tribes? with the Euro-Americans? How important were these trade relationships to the Lakota?

U.S. Government policy's impact on American Indians.

Trace the appearances of the U.S. military in the winter counts? How did the U.S. government impact the Lakota? Do you recognize any of the events mentioned in the winter counts?

The impact of the Louisiana Purchase (1803), Monroe Doctrine (1822) and Manifest Destiny (1840s).

Trace the expansion of the U.S. frontier using noted geographical and political landmarks. Did the Lakota remain in the same general area?

Lakota culture in the 18th and 19th centuries.

What types of ceremonies are recorded in the winter counts? How did the ceremonies relate to other aspects of Lakota life? What gender roles existed within Lakota society? How are they represented in the winter counts?



Cloud Shield 1807-08

Many people camped together and had many flags flying.

This may have been a meeting with the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Natural Sciences

The Lakota culture is strongly tied to the natural world. In many cases, the winter counts refer to unusual or extreme environmental occurrences, geographical landmarks, local plants and animals or other aspects of the natural environment. Locating and analyzing the instances in which these references occur provide a unique opportunity for students to see first-hand how important a role natural sciences play in the survival of humans and their historical record.



Long Soldier 1837-38

Small pox year.

Several epidemics of smallpox and other diseases are noted in the winter counts.

Suggested topics:

Astronomy

What astronomical phenomena are mentioned in the winter counts? What astronomical events are mentioned in only some of the counts? What events are excluded from the records completely?

The geographical landscape of the Great Plains during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Locate the places mentioned in the winter counts on a map. Have their names changed over time?

Human interaction with their environment.

What is the basic environment like? What unusual environmental conditions are mentioned in the winter counts? How did they affect people's lives?

Natural plant and animal resources used by the Lakota.

What plants and animals did the Lakota use? Did these change over time?

Disease and famine on the Great Plains.

What factors affecting people's health are mentioned in the winter counts? What were the causes that led to them?

Language Arts

The winter counts were key instruments of communication among the Lakota and can be invaluable to a language arts curriculum. They not only provide glimpses into how the Lakota lived in the past, but also represent a rich tradition of oral history. The counts also present a valuable opportunity to discuss the process of translation, both among keepers and between Lakota and Euro-American collectors.

Suggested topics:

The role of interpretation in the historical record.

All of the information about the years in the winter counts was provided in the Lakota language and translated into English. What effect might the process of translation have on the information we have today? What qualities are lost every time any information is translated from one source to the next?

Evidence of power and voice in historical records.

What are the differences between primary sources and secondary sources? How were they recorded? Why were they recorded? Whose point of view do they represent? What is negative evidence?

Oral history.

Why do different counts have different names for similar events? Would you be able to interpret the history represented in the winter counts without the help of a keeper? How important was the role of the oral historian to the Lakota community in which he lived?