



# “The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives” PowerPoint — Grade Level: K-6th grades

**Subject(s):** Art, Social Studies/Montana State History, IEFA

**Duration:** One fifty-minute class period

**Description:** This PowerPoint will introduce students to Plains Indian ledger art and other forms of pictographic art produced on the Plains.

**Goals:** Students will learn about the role of pictographic art in Plains Indian society; how pictographic art evolved; how it inspires artists today; and this art form’s great power and beauty.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Communicate an understanding of ledger art and its history.
- Understand that studying art can provide insight into another culture.
- Understand that federal Indian policy affected Montana Indians, including their art.
- Recognize that Plains Indian pictographic art reflects both the style and experiences of individual artists and an artist’s tribal affiliation.
- Understand that culture is not static.

**Content Standards Addressed:**

- Arts Content Standard 5: Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods.
- Arts Content Standard 6: Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work.
- Essential Understanding 1: There is great diversity among the twelve tribal nations of Montana
- Essential Understanding 5: Federal policies, put into place throughout American history,

have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today.

**Materials:**

- PowerPoint (<http://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/IEFA/GradesK-6TheArtofStorytelling.pptx>) and script, below.
- Laser pointer (optional)
- Laptop projector
- PowerPoint and script for 7-12th grades (<http://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/IEFA/Grades7-12TheArtofStorytelling.pptx>)—optional

**Procedure:**

- For background information, review the PowerPoint and script created for grades 7-12.
- Print either this script or the script with accompanying slides. For the script only, print pages 2 through 6 of this document. To print the script with accompanying slides, open the PowerPoint. Select “Print,” making sure that “Notes Pages” is selected in the “Print What” dialogue box.
- Review the script and PowerPoint before presenting and adapt as needed to your students’ interest, attention span, and grade level. You may wish to show only part of the PowerPoint or show different slides on different days.

**Assessment: Informal**

**Teaching Note:** This PowerPoint lesson may be used as part of the lesson plan “Personal Storytelling, Oral Traditions, and Narrative Art” (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>) or as a stand-alone presentation.

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## Script for PowerPoint

### **[SLIDE 1]**

What is pictographic art? It is a kind of art that uses pictures as symbols to represent ideas and stories. Long ago, Indian men living in Montana made pictographic art on many different types of surfaces, including rocks, cliffs, hides, clothing, tipi liners, and paper. This type of art was meant to tell stories about a particular person or group of people. The pictographic art used in this slideshow all comes from the collections of our state historical society in Helena.

### **[SLIDE 2]**

Humans have told stories to each other ever since the beginning of time. Eventually, however, people began to record their stories, and cliff walls offered large spaces for early people to draw, paint, or carve their stories or religious symbols. Long ago, someone from a Montana tribe carved this petroglyph on a rock in Rosebud County. **[ADVANCE POWERPOINT]** Paintings on rocks like this one from Madison County are called pictographs. They are found all across Montana. They are so ancient that it is nearly impossible for us to really know their meanings. Both this petroglyph and pictograph are at least 350 years old.

**Ask:** What is the difference between a petroglyph and a pictograph?

**Answer:** Petroglyphs are carved into the stone; pictographs are painted on the surface of the stone.

**Ask and discuss:** How can you tell if the design is painted or scratched into the rock? What kind of lines do you see? What shapes do you see?

**Ask and discuss:** Do we know by looking at this art what story the artist was telling? Do you think people who lived when the pictures were created knew what they meant?

**Possible answer:** We can guess what these pictures represent, but it is hard to know for sure just by looking at the pictures. However, people who lived at the time they were created probably did know what they meant. That is because they talked about the pictures with each other and passed down stories about them to their children and grandchildren (this is called an oral tradition). The pictures helped people remember the stories. In turn, the stories helped people understand the pictures.

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**[SLIDE 3]**

Here is a much more recent type of pictographic art (art that uses symbols), but it is still over 130 years old.

**Ask:** What materials do you think were used to make this robe?

**Answer:** This robe was made from buffalo hide, natural paints, dyes, ink, and glass beads. A long time ago (and sometimes still today), Montana Indian people used materials gathered from nature to make things. For paints, they used materials made from animals, minerals, and plants. Brushes were often made from willow sticks, animal leg bones, and animal hair. When fur traders brought manufactured ink, pens, paper, and beads to Montana, Indians traded for these new materials and began to use them in their artwork.

White Swan, a member of the Crow tribe in Montana, painted the bottom half of this robe. He made this storytelling painting on a buffalo hide a long time ago—but not as long ago as the pictographs and petroglyphs we just looked at.

**Ask and discuss:** What do you think is happening in this painting? What specific things do you see that makes you say that? *[Teaching suggestion: Repeat these two questions as many times as needed to get students to notice details in the painting.]*

White Swan's painting documents actual people and events. We don't know exactly what story these pictures are telling, but people who know how to read these paintings recognize the stories they tell of victories, battles, and other important events.

**[SLIDE 4]**

We know that White Swan painted the lower half of the robe because it has been documented through other kinds of records. Although those records don't say who painted the top half of the robe, **[ADVANCE POWERPOINT]** we know that it was someone other than White Swan because the drawings look different. Individual artists have their own style—even though they are all creating pictographic art. And, there is another style of artwork on this robe as well: beadwork.

**[SLIDE 5]**

A long time ago, Crow men and women each had different kinds of jobs they were expected to perform. Generally, the men hunted the animals—like buffalo, deer, elk, and moose—and then the women would prepare the hides and get them ready for the men to paint on. Crow women usually did not make storytelling pictures like the ones drawn by White Swan, but they did bead beautiful designs like the one you see here. They would put the designs on many things that they used in daily life, including robes, clothing, bags, moccasins, belts, and horse gear. Sometimes they used special symbols that had special meaning, but most often beaded designs featured geometric patterns of straight and curved lines, rectangles, and diamonds.

**Ask and discuss:** Describe the geometric designs you see. How many circles? How many triangles?

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**[SLIDE 6]**

Before there were stores and shopping malls, Montana’s Indian people had to make the things they needed—like clothes and tipis—out of the materials they had available to them. Often, the things they made were “utilitarian” (useful, but not necessarily pretty). Other times, however, they made things that were not only useful but also beautiful. White Swan’s robe is a good example of this: While it provided warmth on cold winter days, the painted robe was also used to help remember and share important stories, and was also very beautiful to look at. This man is Curley, a Crow Indian. He is wearing White Swan’s robe.

**[SLIDE 7]**

This picture shows a tipi liner (along with backrests, buffalo robes, parfleches, and a basket). Tipi liners are made out of hide or fabric to hang on the inside of a tipi. They provide an air space that helped insulate the lodge against winter cold and summer heat. They also provide a large canvas that can be decorated. Often, men decorated their tipi liners with pictographic images that showed their brave deeds, just like they painted their brave deeds on robes.

**Ask:** When have you done something brave? How do we let people know about things we are proud of today?

**Possible answers:** [ADVANCE POWERPOINT] Sometimes people put diplomas and certificates on the wall to show what they have accomplished. We display trophies and medals. Some people put good report cards on their refrigerators or bumper stickers on their cars celebrating student achievement. Middle school and high school honor rolls are often published in the newspaper.

**[SLIDE 8]**

As new people (Euro-Americans) moved west, life for Montana Indians changed dramatically, in many ways becoming much harder. Here you see a map of early tribal homelands. Let’s name a few of the tribes that were in Montana before the settlers came. [ADVANCE POWERPOINT]

Now let’s look at a map that shows Montana reservations in 1870 and 1890, after settlers and railroads arrived. What did you notice about the land areas that used to belong to the Indians and what belonged to them in 1890? How do you think this change in land changed their way of life?

**[SLIDE 9]**

Because life was changing, many Indian people wanted to remember the old ways of living, so they drew them from memory. They used materials that were available to them, including new materials brought to Montana by traders. These included pencils and paper of different kinds. The most common type of paper came from bound journals called ledger books that traders used to keep track of sales. That is why this type of art is often called “ledger art.” The storytelling picture shown here is by Elk Head, a Hidatsa Indian. There are several things happening in this one picture.

**Ask:** What do you see? [ADVANCE POWERPOINT] There is a woman paddling a Hidatsa boat made of wood and buffalo hide, known as a “bull boat.” There are painted lodges. And, there is also a hunting scene with wild animals. [ADVANCE POWERPOINT] Notice how the shapes are spread out all over the paper. (Use of Space). When Elk Head drew this, he was far away from his family and tribe.

**Questions/Discussion:** Remember a time when you were away from home or your family. What did it feel like? Did you have memories of your home and family while you were away? What did you do to remember them?

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**[SLIDE 10]**

This ledger drawing is also by Elk Head.

**Ask:** What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? *[Teaching suggestion: Repeat these two questions as many times as needed to get students to notice details in the painting.]*

**Answer:** This picture shows a Hidatsa social dance. Can you find the drum? Dances like this were, and are, very important to many Montana Indians. Today these dances are often called powwows. People dress in special clothes (regalia) and perform traditional dances. This helps them remember and preserve their culture.

**Ask:** Can you make some of these movements and poses? What kind of dancing do you do today?

**[SLIDE 11]**

This ledger art is drawn by White Bear, a Cheyenne Indian, who was also far away from his family, tribe, and way of life that he loved when he drew this picture. White Bear used colored pencil in his drawing.

**Ask and discuss:** What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? *[Teaching suggestion: Repeat these two questions as many times as needed to get students to notice details in the painting.]*

**Answer:** This is how the Cheyenne men dressed long ago when they were going somewhere important. This picture shows the men going to an important meeting. Notice how the figures cover the whole painting (space) and are all facing the same way.

**Ask:** What special occasion have you dressed up for? *[Teaching note: You may wish to note that Indians today wear the same clothes other Montanans wear, although powwow dancers wear special clothes (regalia). Powwow has its roots in these traditional outfits. Wearing regalia is very different than putting on a Halloween costume. It is more like wearing a military uniform or a tuxedo to a wedding.]*

**[SLIDE 12]**

Curley, the Crow man you saw earlier wearing White Swan's robe, made this drawing.

**Ask and discuss:** What primary colors (yellow, red, and blue) were used? There are many geometric shapes and patterns in this image. Which ones do you think might represent beadwork done by women to decorate the men's clothing and weapons?

**Answer:** The triangular pattern on the leggings of the man on the right, the rectangles on the coup stick in the center, and the triangular pattern on the green breechcloth likely represent beaded designs. Other geometric components most likely represent objects that are that shape (i.e. the various feather tips, which are triangular).

**Ask and discuss:** What else do you notice about this picture?

**Answer:** Possible topics of discussion include the men's hairstyle and clothing; perspective (the fact that the figures' heads and legs are drawn more in silhouette while their upper bodies are turned more toward the viewer); the very small feet, etc.

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**[SLIDE 13]**

Today, some Montana Indian artists continue to tell stories through ledger art. Here you see a ledger drawing made in 2009 by a Montana Blackfeet artist named Terrance Guardipee. He colors with pencils on paper to explore what has changed and what has not changed from historic times. He says: “My art tells people that we’re still here. We still have our culture . . .”

There are many symbols in this drawing. According to Guardipee: “The Sun represents Creator as giver of light, warmth and light for the plants, animals, and people of the earth. The green rolling hills symbol is a Blackfeet symbol for the high plains, the circles for the stars.” Not all Indian artists use the same symbols. Symbols can have different meanings for different people and tribes.

**Ask and discuss:** Can you find the symbols Guardipee mentions?

**Ask and discuss:** How is this horse and human figure similar to and different from ones earlier ledger artists drew? [*Teaching note: You may want to go back one slide to look again at Curley’s horse and rider for this comparison.*]

**Ask and discuss:** Look at the paper Guardipee chose for his canvas. Was it originally designed to be used this way? Why do you think he chose this type of paper?

**Possible answers:** This type of paper provides a direct link to historical ledger art. While earlier generations used this ledger paper out of necessity, today’s artists are using it to pay homage to—or make a statement about—the past.

**[SLIDE 14]**

There are many ways to tell a story today. This painting is by Montana Salish artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. She painted it in 1988 with paint on paper. Quick-To-See-Smith uses many of her own symbols to tell about her life. Her art style is not like traditional ledger art, but her paintings do tell us about what her life is like and what it is like to be an Indian in today’s world.

**Ask and discuss:** Describe the symbols in this painting.

**Possible answer:** Truck, snowman, chair, tipi, horse, turtle, and many more.

**Ask:** Which symbols are modern (for example, the truck). Which are historical?

**Ask:** What symbols of your own would you use to tell a story about your life?

**[Slide 15]**

This production is provided through a partnership between the Montana Historical Society and Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Division. All objects depicted are from the collections of the Montana Historical Society.