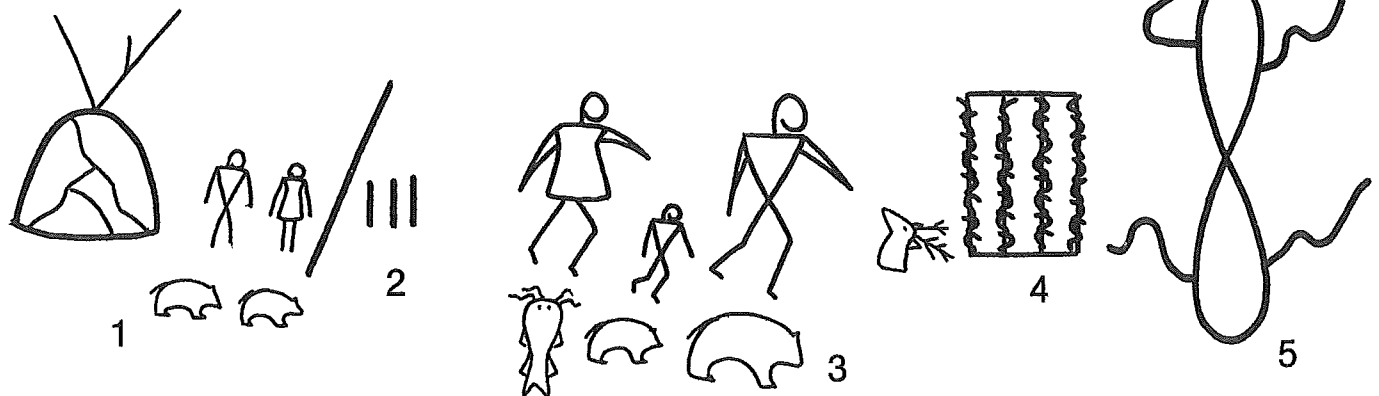


OJIBWAY PICTURE WRITING EXERCISE

Exercise:

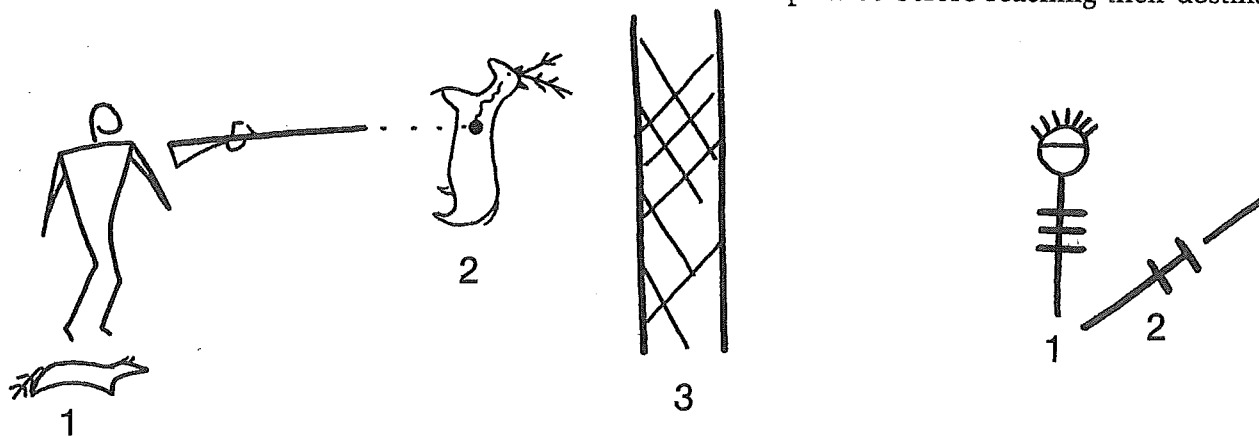
Explain the three pictures below. Then have students draw their own message using some of the same symbols.



1. This is a wigwam. The daughter and son stand outside. They are members of the bear clan as bear figures appear below them.
2. Three marks stand for three nights. The Chippewa counted days by nights.
3. The mother belongs to the catfish clan. Her husband and son are members of the bear clan. Their arms point to the direction of travel.
4. This is a meat drying rack. The deer head shows the kind of meat they are drying.
5. This is a representation of the twin lakes.

The drawing below is read as: He that is of the Marten Clan has killed a male deer. The hunter traveled by water.

The drawing below should be read as: The party camped three nights. They left at dawn and plan to camp twice before reaching their destination.



1. This is the hunter. To his lower left is the marten.
2. The gun indicates hunting and the deer is the animal shot.
3. This sign indicates travel by water.
1. The stick standing straight up indicates the present. The three notches stand for three nights they have already been traveling. The symbol at the top indicates dawn.
2. The diagonal stick stands for the direction of travel. Two notches at the top of the diagonal stick means the party plans to camp two more nights.

*Drawings from *The Journals of Joseph Nicollet: A Scientist on the Mississippi Headwaters with Notes on Indian Life*. Martha C. Bray, ed. Copyright 1970 by the Minnesota Historical Society.

One by one, each of the tribal elders makes his way to the chief's tipi. Included among them is the tribal historian, for this is to be a night of decision. The tribe's history is very important to these men. They believe that a people without history is like wind on the buffalo grass. A thick blanket of snow covers the ground and by the last rays of the setting sun clouds heavy with snow are visible as they move over the Sioux camp. It is the winter of 1801, and the Sioux people have settled down from their nomadic summer life into the more restful days at the winter camping grounds. Many thoughts and memories of the past year are passing through the minds of these wise men as they gather inside the tipi. They sit around the brightly burning campfire and smoke for a while on their pipes. Gradually the discussion begins and soon passers-by see their animated and excited shadows projected by the glow of the fire on to the walls of the tipi as the discussion becomes more lively. Each elder feels one particular event to be the most outstanding in its overall effect on the tribe as a whole. Some speak of the hunts, others of going to the salt lake for salt, and others of going to the hills for lodge poles. Finally, after much discussion, the chief stands up and reminds them of the great cold of last winter. So cold, in fact, that the crows, very hardy birds, were freezing to death and falling on the tipis. Once again the pipes are lit up, and after a few minutes of meditation each wise man in turn nods his head in approval and speaks "Ha!"—"Yes."

The Sioux, being a history-conscious people, developed the Winter Count as a calendric chronological recorded history. The term Winter Count was used because of the Indian custom of keeping time by the winters rather than using the European years. Also, the Indians led an active nomadic summer life. The snow and cold of the winter, however, kept the people in one place with time to meet and work on the count. The Sioux Winter Count is more extensive than any other kind of North American historical record known. It deals with past events and is prepared after the events have occurred. Its main purpose is representation and biographical data, mainly historic episodes with the emphasis on chronology. In the old days, when game was wild and plentiful, and the large herds of buffalo roamed freely over the great plains, the buffalo skins were used as the medium on which to transcribe the events. In later years, when the buffalo became scarce, the Indians began using cloth and paper. The buffalo robe was tanned, and on the fleshy side a glyph or pictograph was drawn or painted. This glyph is a small drawing or representation of a single important or unusual event. Each year was represented by one glyph. These drawings are crude and drawn in flat planes using only the profiles. There was no attempt at perspective, inclusion of backgrounds, shading of colors, or scale. The figures which were primarily used were the human and the horse, although some exceptions included beavers, shoes, diseases such as small pox (a human figure with dots of red) or wounds (human figures with obvious splotches of red). Each figure was outlined in ink. The inks were special paints which would permeate the hide. The inks were made in a minimum of seven colors which were obtained from various sources. The sources most commonly used included charcoal, clays, gypsum, berries, ochres, verdigris, and other plant and mineral sources.

The symbols themselves are not self-evident. They are instead crude representations of the people, places, and events of the years. There is a text accompanying each glyph which explains it. This text was memorized by the tribal historian and transmitted orally from one generation to the next. It was only after the arrival of the white man that the Indians began to write out the texts. The white men would acquire the counts, and then ask the Indians to write out the explanations for the glyphs. The symbols were used as mnemonic aides—clues to remind the tribal historian of a particular event. The historian was a very important man in the tribe. He was held in esteem with the great warriors, holy men, and medicine men. He met with the elders to determine the event to be recorded and then recorded it and memorized the explaining text. There was only one official tribal historian at a time, and he was expected to develop a successor. This was usually either a son or a nephew. A man, interested in the history of his tribe, however, could keep a separate count by his own volition. There were two main requirements of a tribal historian. One was objectivity. That is to say, the ability to see it beyond the personal involvement hunt and able to see the battle as a whole. The second requirement—to be able to see the battle as a whole. The second requirement was the artistic ability to depict the event so others will be able to grasp the action and the meaning, and also, to be able to transmit through the drawings something more than the facts—sentiment and emotion. The historian reviewed and explained the notions regularly for his fellow tribesmen. The primary purpose was to keep the symbols and their meanings clear in the minds of the historian and the tribal council. Secondly, it impressed the tribal history upon the youth. This developed pride in them as a race as well as a sense of the importance of history.

The pictograph form in general enabled the Dakota people to count time forward and backward. One could determine ages or years in which friends or relatives had died by merely finding the year in which one was born and counting the symbols between that one and the symbol for the present year.

Sioux Winter Counts are very valuable to all American people of today, the 20th century, and to the generations of Americans to come. Their existence enables us to study and get to know an intricate and beautiful culture, to catch glimpses of the Indian way of life and of the Indian people—the first Americans, and to profit from the many wonderful things that characterize this way of life for our personal lives and for our nation.

What is a Winter Count?

