

Drawing Our Lives: Plains Indian Ledger Art Revisited

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Subjects: Social Studies and Art

Grade level: 7th (can easily be adapted to 4th)

Rationale or Purpose: This lesson illustrates how art can be used to chronicle important aspects of any given culture.

Introduction: Ledger art grew out of artistic images originally painted by Plains Indians on buffalo hide robes and tipi covers. After western expansion forced Plains Indians onto U.S. government reservations and their way of life passed into history, they preserved their culture by drawing pictures of their past battles, heroic deeds, ceremonies, and everyday customs in ledger books. Today, ledger art is still a popular form of artistic expression for many American Indians.

Materials:

- Internet access to <http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/spotlights/ledgerart/ledger-art.html>
- Image projector
- *Satanta photo and speech -1867* (included)
- *Kiowa tipi covers image* (included)
- Image of the ledger drawing, "*The Road to Indian Market is Filled with Potholes*" (included)
- *Ledger Page* for drawing (included) or pages from documents, used notebook paper, etc.
- Colored pencils
- *Ledger Art Project Grading Rubric* (included)

Lesson Duration: 1-2 class periods of 45 minutes

Objectives: Students will view examples of Plains Indian ledger art from different eras, then create an example of ledger art that documents some aspect of their own culture. They will then write a paragraph explaining their choice of subject.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):

7th Grade Social Studies

History

1A - Identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, including Natural Texas and its People and Contemporary Texas.

2A - Compare the cultures of American Indians in Texas prior to European colonization such as Plains Indians.

6A - Identify significant events and issues from Reconstruction through the beginning of the 20th century, including the factors leading to the expansion of the Texas frontier, and the effects of westward expansion on American Indians.

Geography

10A - Identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and analyze the positive and negative consequences of the modifications.

Culture

19B - Describe how people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to the larger Texas culture.

Social Studies Skills

21C - Organize and interpret information from visuals.

22D - Create written and visual presentations of social studies information.

Middle School Art 1

1A - Identify and illustrate concepts from direct observation, original sources, personal experiences, and communities such as family, school, cultural, local, regional, national, and international.

1B - Understand and apply the elements of art in personal artworks.

1C - Understand and apply the principles of design in personal artworks.

2A - Create original artworks based on direct observations, original sources, personal experiences, and the community.

2C - Produce artworks, including drawings and digital art and media, using a variety of materials.

3A - Identify the influence of historical and political events in artworks.

3B - Identify examples of art that convey universal themes such as beliefs, cultural narrative, life cycles, the passage of time, identity, conflict, and cooperation.

3C - Explain the relationships that exist between societies and their art.

Activity

Step 1: Review with students the elements of Plains Indian culture by having them name elements of that culture aloud while you record them on the board.

Step 2: Explain that before Plains Indians were forced onto reservations by frontier expansion westward, they recorded elements of their culture by drawing pictures of their battles, heroic deeds, ceremonies, and everyday customs on their tipis and buffalo robes. Display images of *Kiowa Tipi Covers*. Explain that with westward expansion, the U.S. government tried to force Plains Indians onto reservations where they would no longer be able to hunt buffalo.

Step 3: Explain that students are going to view two primary source documents related to the Plains Indians. Display the image of Satanta and his speech (given at the Medicine Lodge Treaty council in 1867) and read aloud to students Satanta's account of being driven off his land by white Americans. Point out that once on reservations and unable to hunt buffalo any longer, Plains Indians began recording aspects of their culture by drawing in ledger books given to them by traders, government agents, missionaries, and military officers.

Step 4: Display the webpage

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/spotlights/ledgerart/ledger-art.html> to view examples of Plains Indian ledger drawings. Ask students the following:

- Is any particular subject matter common to most of these drawings?
- What time period would you guess these drawings are from? Explain your answer.
- What do you notice about the paper these pictures are drawn on and the materials they're drawn with?
- Are the figures in these pictures drawn realistically? Explain.

Step 5: Point out that these Plains Indian artists had no formal artistic training and many of their figures seem simplistic and out of proportion, almost like stick figures. These artists had as their goal to

record elements of their culture before it changed forever as a result of being forced onto government reservations.

Step 6: Display the ledger drawing, "*The Road to Indian Market is Filled with Potholes*" by Delores Purdy Corcoran (2012). Ask students if this drawing could have been created during the same time period as the other drawings they viewed. Explain that it was obviously created much later, as it contains trucks, which did not exist in the late 1800s when most early ledger art was created. Ask students to volunteer explanations of what's going on in this picture and what aspects of Indian culture are represented. Inform them that today, many Indians sell their crafts at various Indian markets to earn income. Point out that ledger art is a very popular form of Indian art today and illustrates aspects of Indian culture both past and present.

Step 7: Explain that students are going to create a ledger drawing, but it won't include images of the Plains Indians. Instead, they will illustrate part of **their own** culture that is important to them **today**. Give students the following prompts:

- Imagine you are moving to a different part of the world, or even a different planet, where everything will be new and different. Your homes, schools, transportation, and technology will all be left behind. What element(s) of your culture would you want to record in a drawing to remember after you move?
- What is one important event in your life you would like to portray in a drawing?
- Have students brainstorm aloud some examples to answer these questions.

Step 8: Distribute copies of the *Ledger Page* (or used paper documents) and colored pencils to students. Explain that ledger art is always created on paper that has been printed on and modern ledger art is sometimes drawn on newspapers, concert tickets, etc.

Step 9: Display the *Ledger Art Project Grading Rubric* and go over the assignment expectations with students. Suggest students make a practice drawing before creating their final ledger drawing. Reassure students that very little drawing ability is necessary for this project - stick figures are just fine, but they should include as much detail as possible. Instruct students to fill the page with their drawings and make them very colorful.

Step 10: After completing their drawings, have students write a paragraph explaining why they chose their ledger art subjects.

Step 11: Collect drawings and explanatory paragraphs.

Closure: Ask students what they think is more important in studying history - historical drawings or historical photographs. Have them explain their answers.

Assessment: Use the *Ledger Art Project Grading Rubric* to evaluate the ledger drawings and explanatory paragraphs.

Modification for special learning needs:

- Learning Disabled - Have students write only 2 sentences explaining their drawings.
- Gifted and Talented - Have students research the life and art of American Indian artist, Delores Purdy Corcoran.

Extension Activities:

- Have students create a bulletin board display of their ledger art and essays. Have the class observe the display carefully and discuss any themes that emerge in it.
- Ask students to compare ledger art to urban graffiti. How are the two mediums similar? How are they different?
- Present the lesson, *Whose Buffalo?* which deals with Texas Plains Indians and their dependence on the buffalo. See it at: www.texasbeyondhistory.net/

Related Websites

Smithsonian Institution's Plains Indian Ledger Drawings
http://americanhistory.si.edu/documentsgallery/exhibitions/ledger_drawing_2.html

Texas Beyond History's "Kiowa"
<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/plateaus/peoples/kiowa.html>