

LESSON SIXTEEN: Symbolism: Making Sense Out of Design

Time 45 minutes

Trunk Resources

Graphics

#4 Unidentified group of tipis

#35 Painted tipis

Worksheets

#5 Matching Symbols

Powwow supplement (located in the back of the manual)

Book

Quillworker: A Cheyenne Legend, by Terri Cohlene

Teacher Resources

Photocopy worksheet #5 for each student. Face paints, brushes, paper, pencils, crayons and/or markers

Review symbol information near the end of the Historical Background information on page 17 of the Tipi lesson.

Objectives

1. Students will recognize the importance of symbolism to Native Americans.
2. Students will interpret the meaning of symbols and designs.

Historical background

Symbols are very important in many cultures. Symbols in the Native American culture are often found on clothing, shields, arrows, horses, tipis, and on the face and body. Symbols are used to remind Indians where their power came from and to serve as a type of protection.

In earlier times, tipis were often painted with pictures of animals, birds, and designs. The pictures told an entire story of great bravery or a great buffalo hunt. Tipis of leaders or great warriors were the most decorated in the village.

Many Native Americans painted their faces and bodies for protection from the elements (wind, sun, snow, and insects) and for mental conditioning. A warrior would first rub grease made from bear or buffalo onto his face. Then he would dip his greasy fingers into a bag of powdered paint and rub the paint evenly over his face. He would use his fingertips or pointed sticks to paint cheek stripes running from his nose to his ears. Sometimes he would paint his face with spots. He might even paint his entire body and then run his fingernails through the paint to create a striped, textured look. Indian

warriors liked to paint both their faces and their bodies with their personal protective designs. Other designs signified special ceremonies and marks of achievement.

A warrior often painted his favorite horse with the same design and colors he used for himself. In fact, he usually painted his horse at the same time he painted himself. Usually a painted horse carried a message about its owner. Horses used for war would have their tails tied up so an enemy couldn't grab hold and throw off a rider during battle. Hunting horses were painted differently than war horses. Hunting symbols were designed to help the Indians find the buffalo herds and to bring favor from the Great Spirit.

Some Indian tribes practiced tattooing. The Wichita was one such tribe. Tattoos were created by the skillful use of needles which pierced the skin. Charcoal could be rubbed in or natural dyes applied to the broken skin. Tattoos were usually made on the face, hands, arms, or chest. If an individual was successful in a war party, for example, he would receive a tattoo in the form of a small cross. A cross symbolized a star. Heavenly bodies are very important in many Native American religions.

For women tattoos were considered a mark of beauty. The tattoos were also supposed to give women a more perfect life.

Source: Donna Greenlee, *The Plains Indian Book*

Vocabulary

Designs – Decorative patterns which sometimes have special meanings.

Symbol – A visible sign with a particular meaning.

Tattoo – To mark or color the skin.

Tipi – A portable house made of tanned hides sewn together and stretched over a framework of poles.

Activities

1. Show students the Indians wearing face paint in the Powwow supplement (located in the back of the manual) and the Indians wearing face and body paint on page 44 of Quillworker by Terri Cohlene. Ask students why these Indians might be wearing such paint or have tattoos. (Personal protection, mark of achievement, win favor from spirits.) Have students compare these photographs with people who wear makeup and people who have tattoos today.
 - a. Why do people wear makeup?
 - b. Why do people wear tattoos?
 - c. Compare the reasons for wearing face paint with the reasons for wearing makeup. List the similarities and differences.

- d. Compare the reasons for having tattoos in today's society with those of the Wichita culture. List the similarities and differences.
2. Hand out a copy of worksheet #5 to each student. Have students see if they can match the symbols and designs to their proper meanings. After students have attempted this activity go through the answers with them to make sure they know the correct answers.
3. Try a face-painting exercise. Explain that many Native Americans painted their faces and bodies for protection from the elements (wind, sun, snow, and insects) and for mental conditioning. A warrior would first rub grease made from the bear or buffalo onto his face. Then he would dip his greasy fingers into a bag of powdered paint and rub the paint evenly over his face. He might use his fingertips or pointed sticks to paint cheek stripes running from his nose to his ears. Sometimes he would paint his face with spots. He might even paint his entire body and then run his fingernails through the paint to create a striped, textured look. Indian warriors liked to paint both their faces and their bodies with their personal protective designs. Other designs signified special ceremonies and marks of achievement.
4. Arrange students in pairs. Have them work out a design on paper first. They could use Native American symbols and designs they have already learned about, or they could use symbols and designs of things that are important to them. The students should be encouraged to use graphics #4 Unidentified group of tipis and #35 Painted tipis, the Powwow supplement, and page 44 of the *Quillworker* for ideas.
5. Each student should paint the face of his or her partner.
6. Have students look at graphic #35 Painted tipis. Discuss the reasons why Indians may have decorated their homes in this way. (Power, protection, ownership, to show whether the horse was a warrior or hunter.)
7. See if any students can figure out the meaning of the symbols and designs on the tipis in graphic #35. Using the captions on the back of the photograph, explain what these symbols and designs actually represent.

Extended Activity: Painted Tipis and Horse

Trunk Resources

Worksheets: #17 Painted horses; #18 Painted tipis

Teacher Resources

Photocopy worksheets #17 and #18 for each student, crayons, colored pencils and/or markers

Activity

- a. Have students color either worksheet #17 Painted horses or #18 Painted tipis.

- b. Remind students of the importance of the designs on the tipi and horses shown on the sheets. (Power, protection, ownership, whether the horse was a hunter or warrior.)

Cross reference

1. Have students decorate a tipi. Directions can be found in the Tipi lesson on page 15.