

Drawing Our Lives: Plains Indian Ledger Art Revisited



Subject and Grade Social Studies, Art
4th (can be adapted to 7th)

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Time duration 1-2 class periods of 45 minutes

Overview Ledger art grew out of the Plains Indian custom of painting artistic images on buffalo hide robes and tipi covers. After western expansion forced Plains Indians onto U.S. government reservations, their traditional way of life began to pass into history. They preserved their culture, however, 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. This lesson illustrates how art can be used to chronicle important aspects of any given culture.

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.

TEKS *Social Studies, Grade 4*

(1B), identify and compare the ways of life of American Indian groups in Texas before European exploration such as the Lipan Apache, Karankawa, Caddo, and Jumano

(1C), describe the cultural regions in which American Indians lived such as Gulf, Plains, Puebloan, and Southeastern

(4D), explain the effects on American Indian life brought about by the Red River War, building of U.S. forts and railroads, and loss of buffalo

(6A), identify, locate, and describe the physical regions of Texas (Mountains and Basins, Great Plains, North Central Plains, Coastal Plains), including their characteristics such as landforms, climate, vegetation, and economic activities

(11A), identify how people in different regions of Texas earn their living, past and present

(19A), differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as technology; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

(19B), analyze information by applying absolute and relative chronology through sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions

(19C), organize and interpret information in outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

(19D), identify different points of view about an issue, topic, historical event, or current event

(21D), create written and visual material such as journal entries, reports, graphic organizers, outlines, and bibliographies

Art, Grade 4

(1A), explore and communicate ideas drawn from life experiences about self, peers, family, school, or community and from the imagination as sources for original works of art;

(2A), integrate ideas drawn from life experiences to create original works of art;

(2B), create compositions using the elements of art and principles of design; and

(2C), produce drawings; paintings; prints; sculpture, including modeled forms; and other art forms such as ceramics, fiber art, constructions, mixed media, installation art, digital art and media, and photographic imagery using a variety of art media and materials.

(3A), compare content in artworks for various purposes such as the role art plays in reflecting life, expressing emotions, telling stories, or documenting history and traditions;

(3B), compare purpose and content in artworks created by historical and contemporary men and women, making connections to various cultures;

(3D), investigate connections of visual art concepts to other disciplines.

(4A), evaluate the elements of art, principles of design, intent, or expressive qualities in artworks of self, peers, and historical and contemporary artists;

(4B), use methods such as written or oral response or artist statements to identify emotions found in collections of artworks created by self, peers, and major historical or

contemporary artists in real or virtual portfolios, galleries, or art museums.

Materials

1. Internet access for the *The Schild Ledger Book: Drawing a Culture in Transition* exhibit:

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/spotlights/ledger-art/ledger-art.html>

2. Image projector
3. Satanta photo and speech-1867 (included)
4. Kiowa tipi covers image (included)
5. Image of the ledger drawing, "The Road to Indian Market is Filled with Potholes" (included)
6. Ledger Page for drawing or pages from documents, used notebook paper, etc.
7. Colored pencils
8. Ledger Art Project Grading Rubric (included)

Activities and procedures

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. (Examples may include dependence on buffalo for many of their critical needs, such as food, skins for clothing; use of tipis for shelter; etc.).

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/ledger-art/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.
- 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 Dolores 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.

**Extension
Activities**

1. 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.
2. Ask students to compare ledger art to urban graffiti. How are the two mediums similar? How are they different?
3. Present the lesson, *Whose Buffalo?* which deals with Texas Plains Indians and their dependence on the buffalo. See it at:
<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/redriver/images/rr-complete.pdf>

Assessment

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

Related Websites Texas Beyond History's *Kiowa* exhibit:
<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/plateaus/peoples/kiowa.html>

Kiowa Chief Satanta (White Bear)



CHIEF SATANTA

"All the land south of the Arkansas River belongs to the Kiowas and Comanches and I don't want to give away any of it. I love the land and the buffalo, and will not part with any.

I have heard that you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle there. I love to roam over the wide prairie, and when I do it I feel free and happy; but, when we settle down we grow pale and die.

A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers, but when I go up the river I see a camp of soldiers, and they are cutting my wood down or killing my buffalo. I don't like that; when I see it my heart feels like bursting with sorrow. I have spoken."

(Exerpts from a speech given by Satanta at the Medicine Lodge Treaty council, October, 1867)

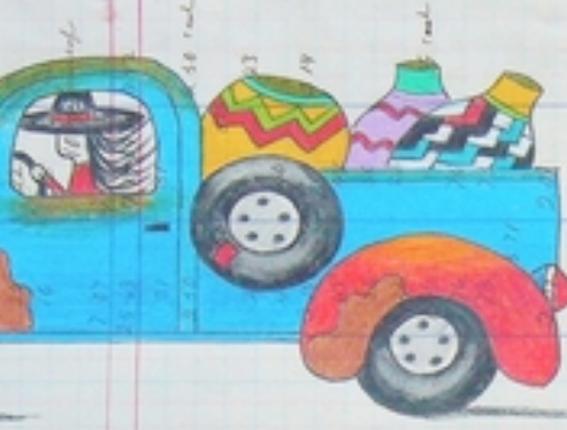
Kiowa Painted Buffalo Skin Tipi Covers



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Ledger Art Project Grading Rubric

Student Name _____

<u>Ledger Drawing</u>	Possible Points	Points Earned
Drawing deals with appropriate subject matter?	20	
Drawing fills the page?	20	
Drawing is colorful?	20	
<u>Paragraph</u>	Possible Points	Points Earned
Explains subject of student drawing?	20	
Contains at least 3 complete sentences?	20	

Total Points Earned: _____

Comments: _____
