

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Essential Question for this lesson:

How can we all connect with nature respectfully and responsibly, as Lakota people have done?

The Sculpture Project: Passage of Wind and Water at Main Street Square is a public art project that invites visitors to think about their connections with nature. Many of the shapes and lines in the designs remind people of forms in nature. For example, this photograph of a carved model of stone number 9 in the Badlands Garden shows several shapes and lines that are found in nature.



THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Project artist Masayuki Nagase has said, "My goal is to connect people with nature." This makes sense, because he is a stone sculptor. Stone is a natural material, and people have been making art from natural materials for thousands of years.

Lakota people have been using natural materials in sophisticated ways for many centuries. Researchers have shown that the entire Western Hemisphere was occupied by people 11,500 years before the present time; some scholars put that date at 40,000 years before the present time!¹ Lakota author Luther Standing Bear, in his 1931 book My Indian Boyhood, writes an excellent description of the ways in which Lakota people have used a familiar tree of our region: the cottonwood tree.

The Indian overlooked nothing that might be of service to him. He went deep into the possibilities of all plant life...Some provided a wholesome food, while others were brewed into health-restoring medicines....

Now, one of the most useful of trees to the [Lakota people] was the cottonwood. This tree was used from its top to its roots and from its bark to its heart. The bark was used for all fires where coals were needed. This bark was, in fact, as good as the coal we now use in our stoves. The flame burned without sparks and sputtering, so there was no danger of the tipi catching fire, though in the winter the fire burned all night while the family slept. When the flames had gone down, the coals burned with a steady, penetrating glow that kept the tipi well warmed. Only cottonwood bark was used for heating our paints and for tanning our hides.

Next to the outer bark of the tree was a thin juicy layer of bark, and this we children chewed, as it was sweet and tasty. For all ceremonial purposes the cottonwood was favored. Out of it were made the tripods for sacred articles to hang on, and the cross in the sun dance was made of a cottonwood tree. In the winter, when the snow had covered the grass, a

¹ Howe, Craig. "Approaches to Teaching American Indian History & Culture ." Rapid City Area Schools. Rapid City, SD. 20 Apr. 2013. Lecture.

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

cottonwood tree was cut down and our ponies driven over to feed on its bark. All night these little ponies chewed busily and by morning the branches of the tree would be stripped of bark. Then the tree was ready to be cut up into firewood. The ponies grew fat on this bark, and it was a change of diet for them, although they were industrious and could always find plenty of grass by digging through the snow with their feet.

Cottonwood does not split easily, and when dry is very light in weight. For this reason we made saddles of it lined with buffalo hide. Neither does the wood bend easily, so we generally used a soft wood like elm for the stirrups. Our spinning-tops we made of the cottonwood, for we spun them on the hard ground or even on the ice in the wintertime and they never chipped nor cracked. It seems rather strange, but the roots of this tree are very light and spongy and will float on water. We boys often used a piece of the root to keep us afloat if we were crossing a wide stream. The girls made dolls of this part of the tree also. Many times they found pieces just right in size and already shaped with arms and legs so that they needed little forming to make a good doll. The girls made dresses of buckskin for their dolls, then painted the face and hair. When completed and dressed up in a painted and beaded buckskin dress, some of these dolls were very pretty.²

-from My Indian Boyhood, by Luther Standing Bear

This passage about the uses of the cottonwood tree gives us a strong example of people being connected to nature. The Lakota people knew how to use each part of the tree for its best purpose. No part of the tree was wasted or overlooked.

When people use natural materials respectfully and responsibly, as the Lakota people have done, they are showing their connections to nature. As you think about this article and work with it, consider the ways in which you are connected with nature.

² Standing Bear, Luther. *My Indian Boyhood*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Thinking About the Project

Please write your thoughts about the questions below. We are looking for your **original thinking**: what actually comes into your mind as you carefully read the questions. Your answers may be clear bullet points or clear, complete sentences.

1. Look at the photograph of the carved model of stone number 9 in the Badlands Garden. What do you see in this design that reminds you of nature?
2. *The Sculpture Project: Passage of Wind and Water* is an outdoor piece of public art. In what ways do you think that its placement outdoors will cause visitors to think about their own connections to nature?
3. How do you think the Lakota people's uses of the cottonwood tree show a responsible attitude toward nature?
4. Write down at least three examples you found from the text showing how the Lakota people used cottonwood trees to make **art** or **toys**.
5. Write down at least three reasons you found from the text that the author uses to show that cottonwood was the best wood to use for fires.
6. Write about the ways in which you feel connected with nature. Think about how you feel and think when you are in nature.

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Notes for Teachers

The lessons connected with *The Sculpture Project: Passage of Wind and Water* are designed to be used with students in many grade levels. You may need to provide scaffolding in order to help your students access the text. To help with this, we have included this vocabulary bank. This bank can be easily used with the existing word study procedures you use with students.

- sculptor
- natural material
- sophisticated
- centuries
- hemisphere
- scholars
- wholesome
- health-restoring
- penetrating
- tanning

- ceremonial
- tripods
- sacred
- industrious
- spongy
- buckskin
- purpose
- respectfully
- responsibly

CCSS Language Arts Anchor Standards Addressed:

R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

R10: Read and comprehend complex informational texts independently and proficiently.

W9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, & research.

SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly & persuasively.

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown & multiple-meaning words & phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, & consulting reference materials as appropriate.

L6: Acquire & use accurately a range of general academic & domain-specific words & phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, & listening at the college & career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge.

South Dakota Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings & Standards Addressed:

EU 1.2: Analyze interrelationships of Oceti Sakowin people, places, and environments.

EU 5.1: Analyze Oceti Sakowin culture through oral tradition and unbiased information.

Note: The text excerpted here is from a primary source document; Luther Standing Bear's book is an account of his own experiences living on the plains before the reservation era. Standing Bear's written account of his boyhood training and family life is unbiased information.

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Notes for Teachers, continued

The South Dakota Department of Education adopted the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards in 2011. The document is available on the SD DOE website under "Oceti Sakowin Project." All South Dakota teachers should be employing these standards across the curriculum. These standards represent essential learning for all South Dakotans.

We have included here the reference numbers and a basic description of each Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding and Standard that this lesson addresses. For full articulations of all of these cultural standards, please consult the official state document:

<http://indianeducation.sd.gov/documents/OcetiSakowinEUS.pdf>

This text and the accompanying critical thinking questions are considered informational texts. They are real-world texts about a current local project. The questions are designed to elicit high-level thinking and need no answer key. If students are showing their original thinking, engaging with the topic and the ways in which they perceive the project, then they are doing good work.

Teachers will have success when they encourage students to show and explain their thinking. Great student discussions can follow! The next page contains a graphic organizer that can help thinkers prepare for their discussions. This process of preparing for & engaging in peer discussions addresses the CCSS Speaking and Listening Standard SL.1!

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THE SCULPTURE PROJECT

PASSAGE OF WIND & WATER

Discussion: Uses for Natural Materials (Brainstorm for five minutes, then discuss!)

Brainstorm ten uses for wood:

Brainstorm ten uses for water:

Brainstorm ten uses for wind:

Brainstorm ten uses for stone:

Name:

Date of discussion: