

Sacred Images - The Circle and Native American Culture

Summary

Students will understand the importance of the circle in Native American Indian culture. Students will learn about seasons and ceremonies, the medicine wheel, the cycle of life and the cycle of song.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility

Materials

- *Keepers of the Animals*
 , Caduto and Bruchac, 1991 p. 5
- *Sacred Images A Vision of Native American Rock Art*
- *A History of Utah's American Indians*
edited by Forrest S. Cuch
- *Seasons of the Circle*
by Joseph Bruchac
- *The Sacred Tree*
by Lane, Bopp, Brown and elders
- *Thirteen Moons on a Turtle's Back*
by Joseph Bruchac
- *Black Elk Speaks*
by John G. Neihardt
- *Lone Dog's Winter Count: Keeping History Alive*
(National Museum of the American Indian) www.nmai.si.edu

Background for Teachers

Teachers need to read and understand the power of the circle in Native American culture. As stated by Black Elk, a holy man of the Oglala Lakota Sioux: "Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the Earth the round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind in its greatest powers whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves." P. 5 (Keepers of the Animals)

Student Prior Knowledge

Students will deepen and expand their knowledge about the significance of the circle in relation to Native American culture. Prior knowledge from the core curriculum lessons include: the four seasons, the solar system, life cycles of birth through death, and holiday cycles.

Instructional Procedures

Setting the Stage

Show the students a picture of the earth. Ask them what shape it is? Ask students to name anything else that is a circle? Write them on the board.

Encourage students to think of things other than objects such as the moon, sun, etc. that are circles. These examples can include the seasons, life cycle and growth.

Ask the students to describe the various Native American symbols that are circular. These include: the drum, hogan, kiva, teepee, dream catcher, medicine wheel, and sweat lodge.

Read the poem by Hank LaRose, Bear Boy called, *The Rock and the Eagle Speaks*. What does the poem say about the circle of life?

The Rock and The Eagle Speaks

All is a circle and a hoop within me.

If I speak in the language you taught me

I am all but one.

Look inside the circle and the hoop

You will see your relation and nations.

Your relation to the four legged

And the two legged

And the winged ones

And to the mother earth

The grandfather sun

The grandmother moon

The direction and the sacred seasons.

And the universe

You will find love for your relation.

Look further inside the sacred circle

And the sacred hoop

In the center of the circle and the hoop

You will feel the spirit

Of the great creator

He is in the center of everything

Learn about what you are

By observing what you are not.

A Circle and Hoop Within Me

Bear Boy Ute Spiritual Leader

Read this quote by Clifford Duncan. "One common ingredient in many ceremonies was stones laid upon the ground in a circle. Past ritual sites with stone circles can be found throughout original Ute homelands. These stone circles are individual ritual sites and are still considered sacred today." (p.218 History of Utah's American Indians). Ask the students why they think the stones were laid in a circle

Examine the rock art images from Sacred Images on pages 74-75 and page 95. What circle images do you see? What do they represent?

Activity: Seasons and Ceremonies

Read *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back* and *Seasons of the Circle*. What do the stories tell us about the seasons in relation to the various ceremonies?

Read *Lone Dog's Winter Count*. Ask the students to look at the images on the buffalo hide and describe the stories the images are telling.

Students will be given a circle which is divided into four quadrants. On the outside of each quadrant will have a season. Students will be asked to draw or write which holidays and

activities/ceremonies would be in the appropriate quadrant. For example in which quadrant would crop harvesting go?

Ask students to think about various Native American Indian ceremonies and place them in the quadrant where they think they would go.

Students would need to do some research in order to get this information. They can work in groups or individually.

Students would then be asked to describe which of the ceremonies are done at only one time during the year and which are done throughout the seasons.

Activity: The Circle of Life

Read *The Sacred Tree* and *Seasons of the Circle*. What do these stories tell us about the cycle of life and death?

Read the students these quotes from Native Americans that talk about the circle of life. Clifford Duncan states "Traditionally, the Utes believe that each person is connected to the spirit of all living things. This connection makes humans responsible to the earth and all of its creations." (p.218, History of Utah's American Indians)

Read this quote by Vine Deloria, Jr. from the Foreword Keepers of the Animals. "Native Americans saw themselves as participants in a great natural order of life, related in some fundamental manner to every other living species. It was said that each species had a particular knowledge of the universe and specific skills for living in it. Human beings had a little bit of knowledge and some basic skills, but we could not compare with any other animals as far as speed, strength, cunning and intelligence. Therefore it was incumbent on us to respect every other form of life, to learn from them as best we could the proper behavior in this world and the specific technical skills necessary to survive and prosper."

What does this tell us about the interconnectedness between animals and people?

Ask students to draw circles and compare them to other shapes.

Students sit in a circle and compare what it is like to talk and relate while in a circle rather than in rows or a square or u-shape.

Movement in circles - Have students make shapes using their bodies. What body shapes can they make? What about a spiral? How is that like a circle?

Activity: The Medicine Wheel and the Cycle of Life

Read *The Sacred Tree*. What did the authors mean when they said "Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g. behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects."?

Follow the steps in the story to have the students each create their own medicine wheels.

The story describes the Medicine Wheel. Ask students to research other tribes and their description of medicine wheels. Do they use different colors? They are also said to represent the four nations of the world. What are they? Compare and contrast the similarities and differences amongst the various tribes in Utah.

Activity: The Cycle of Song

People often claim that music is a universal language. Ask students what they think that means? Where do songs and music come from?

How is the song like a living being? Songs have a beginning, middle and end. Can this be seen as a cycle? Sing songs with the class and demonstrate the beginning, middle and end like a cycle. Also pick a few songs that can be sung in rounds to demonstrate. This is when one group starts the song and the next group comes in later. Use Native American Indian tunes or Row Row Your Boat can be used to compare the Native American songs with one that the students already know.

Read AlDean "Lightning Hawk" Ketchum's story in *Sacred Images*, P. 56 when he tells of the

courtship cycle and the flute. How is the flute used in ceremonies and in courting?
What are round dances? What is their connection to the circle?

Extensions

Examples of other cycles that are part of the core curriculum that can be taught to students include:

The Water Cycle

The Weather Cycle and Weathering Cycle of Erosion

The Plant Cycle

Authors

[JOYCE KELEN](#)