

Picturing the Past

Understanding Cultural Change and Continuity among Montana's Indians through Historic Photographs

Grade level

7th–12th grade

Time needed

One to two days

Standards correlation

The activity that follows reflects the Essential Understandings regarding Montana Indians and the Montana Social Studies Content Standards as developed by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The exercise will align with Essential Understandings 1, 2, and 5 and with Social Studies Content Standards 4.1, 4.3, 4.7, 6.1, and 6.4.

Approach and purpose

This activity is especially intended for the visual learner as a supplement to topics addressed in Chapter 11 of the Montana Historical Society's middle school Montana history textbook, *Montana: Stories of the Land*. It has been designed to be adapted to a variety of lengths and approaches in order to maximize its usefulness for the classroom teacher. If you do not have copies of the textbook, you can download a pdf version of Chapter 11 from the *Montana: Stories of the Land* website: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/Textbook/Chapter11/chapter11.pdf>.

The activity relies heavily on historic photographs to help students form a mental picture of the past. The activity challenges students to consider and appreciate cultural change and continuity over time. Through this activity, students can gain a greater appreciation for daily life on Montana's reservations during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, students can develop a deeper understanding of some of the ways Montana's Indians defined their culture on

their own terms during the period considered. In this activity, students will:

- ▶ hone their powers of observation
- ▶ apply previous knowledge to questions, discussion, and a brief in-class presentation with a partner
- ▶ make inferences and draw conclusions from historical photographs
- ▶ work effectively with other students
- ▶ demonstrate effective oral presentation skills
- ▶ analyze the quality of information used to support an argument.

Activity description

In this two-day activity, students will work with a partner to develop their powers of observation and higher-level thinking skills by making inferences from a number of interesting and little known photographs from archival collections at the Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman; Montana State University, Bozeman; Montana State University-Northern, Havre; Little Big Horn College, Hardin; and the Montana Historical Society, Helena. The photographs have been organized into ten tribally specific groupings. Each grouping focuses on a particular theme, such as structures, clothing, transportation, music, art, boarding schools, work, and holiday occasions. None of the groupings is intended to be a comprehensive expression of its organizing categories. Rather, each offers merely a snapshot of everyday life for a select group of people at a given place and time. When coupled with the textbook and other reading on the Dawes Act and the assimilation process on Montana's reservations, it is hoped that a more complete picture will emerge.

During this activity, students will compare and contrast photographs from the same reservation but, in most cases, different time periods, in order to assess how Montana's native peoples adapted to changing circumstances and defined their own culture on their own terms over time. Some comparisons are more obvious than others. Students will be challenged to raise questions and draw meaningful conclusions about the assimilation process or lack thereof on various Montana reservations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Questions will help to focus student reading and set the stage for an active learning exercise and a meaningful wrap-up discussion. Each photo grouping contains a paragraph description for teachers that briefly describes the photographs, highlights some key details and necessary background information, and provides related questions for further consideration and discussion.

■ Setup—Prior to day one

Teachers will print out the images and grouping descriptions [**Groupings 1–10 and Teacher Information**]. When available, dates, tribal groups, and captions will be recorded from the database and placed with the photographs to provide students with relevant background information. The photographs will be displayed in various stations around the room prior to the arrival of students on the day of the activity.

■ Day One—Observation

Students will be paired with a partner. Each team will be asked to circulate to a minimum of five stations around the room, but more should be allowed if time permits. [**Note: To minimize chaos, teachers may wish to have teams move clockwise. Teachers may also wish to time each observation interval at three to five minutes before allowing students to move again.**] At each station, students will be asked to carefully observe the images, discuss what they see, and

answer the questions on the **Student Instruction Sheet**.

■ Day Two—Drawing Conclusions

The instructor will reassemble the class as a whole. The instructor will project each image via an overhead projector or a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate class discussion.

Note: Instructors can download the PowerPoint here: <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/textbook/Chapter11/PicturingthePast.ppt>. Additional information about each image is included in the PowerPoint notes as well as in the “Teacher Information” below. Print out the notes with accompanying slides by opening the PowerPoint, selecting “Print,” and making sure that “Notes Pages” is selected in the “Print What” dialogue box.

As each image is projected, the instructor will ask the same questions that students considered with their partners, pointing out key details missed by students, and raising clarification questions as needed.

After the class has discussed each individual image, the instructor will lead a discussion focused on the grouping. Background information and possible discussion questions for each grouping are below (**See Teacher Information**).

Once each image in the grouping has been examined and discussed by the entire class, the instructor will facilitate a wrap-up discussion to better ensure student comprehension. Possible wrap-up questions include the following:

1. How do these photographs confirm or conflict with what you have read in your textbook regarding assimilation and life on Montana's reservations during the early twentieth century?
2. How do these photographs validate or challenge your preconceived ideas regarding Montana's Indians?

3. Using these photographs as evidence, what general conclusions can be drawn about Montana’s Indians during the early twentieth century?

Assessments

Assessments for this activity can be formal or informal. If desired, the written questions and/or the discussion can be graded based on the thoroughness and accuracy of the responses.

Extension ideas

- ▶ Access the online image database of Museum of the Rockies Web site “Indian Peoples of the Northern Great Plains” (<https://arc.lib.montana.edu/indian-great-plains/index.php>), find an image that you especially like, and analyze it during a short presentation to the class.
- ▶ Use the web site’s subject database to consider a particular topic (for example, housing) over time and/or on various reservations.
- ▶ Use the web site’s photographs to create an illustrated journal with written entries from the perspective of someone who lived on, or visited, the reservation during the early 1900s.

Further information

Horse Capture, Joseph, et. al. *Sacred Legacy: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Hoxie, Frederick E. *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Katakis, Michael, ed. *Excavating Voices: Listening to the Photographs of Native Americans*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, 1998.

About this activity

Derek Strahn, a high school teacher in Bozeman, Montana, developed this activity with assistance and review by White Clay (Gros Ventre) tribal member Joe Horse Capture, Associate Curator of Native American Art at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Funding for this project was provided by the Indian Education Division of the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Picturing the Past

Teacher information and possible questions

■ Photo grouping 1

Photo grouping 1 features a collection of structures found on the Rocky Boy's Reservation during the early twentieth century. **Photo #1** dates from around the 1940s and features Cree elder Baptiste Samatt aka Dressed in White, who was committed to the ways and philosophies of the Painted Lodge Society. **Photo #2** features three Rocky Boy residents in the tipi of Left Hand Boy. Although the photo dates from about the 1920s, the tipi design—including its distinctive painted decorations—is traditional. The subjects in the photograph wear braids, although one also appears to be wearing sunglasses. **Photo #3** features a Chippewa-Cree family in front of their log and frame cabin. The poverty of the family is clearly evident. **Photo #4** also depicts a Chippewa-Cree family in front of their house, although in this case the house is the most modern of those in the grouping.

Possible Questions:

- ▶ In what ways are all four dwellings pictured similar? How are they different?
- ▶ Why do you suppose that the more traditional dwellings are also more decorated?
- ▶ Which homes appear handmade? What materials are used in their construction?
- ▶ In what other ways are the tipis different from the more Euro-American style of dwellings?
- ▶ What conclusions can be drawn from this grouping of photos?

■ Photo grouping 2

Photo grouping 2 focuses on Chippewa-Cree clothing and the ways it changed over time. Both photos are posed in a studio and likely date from

about the same time. In **Photo #1**, the male subject wears the traditional clothing of the late 1800s and holds a bow and arrow. Notice the beadwork and overall sense of style exhibited in the fashion. Notice also the painted backdrop, evidence that this is a formal studio portrait. **Photo #2** also clearly exhibits an obvious sense of decorative style. In this photo, however, the young subject has incorporated several Euro-American elements into his dress, including a cowboy hat, boots, scarf, a tailored suit coat, and very unusual chaps. Interestingly, however, the subject is still obviously native. He wears braids and exhibits elaborate beadwork on his chaps. A small feather even adorns his hat. In combination, these photos help to illustrate the shift from Indian to Indian cowboy that occurred on many Montana reservations during the early twentieth century. In a sense, different clothing indicated a different—albeit not entirely different—way of life.

Possible Questions:

- ▶ In what ways are each subject's clothes different? In what ways are they similar?
- ▶ What do the clothes of each subject reveal about his way of life?
- ▶ In what ways does the Indian cowboy still express his native culture?
- ▶ Which subject has been exposed to and/or embraced Euro-American influences more? How can you be sure? [Teachers may wish to note that photographers sometimes had great influence over what the subjects of their photographs wore. Many photographers kept regalia in their studios, which they asked Indians to wear. The photographers then frequently sold the images to tourists.]

■ Photo grouping 3

The theme of photo grouping 3 is transportation among the Crow Indians. A character-defining feature of the traditional life of all Northern Plains Indians was that they were nomadic. As they came in contact with and adopted Euro-American modes of transportation, their ways of life were modified. **Photo #1** depicts a mounted Crow warrior, as was commonly seen in the nineteenth century. His status is clearly displayed by his posture and finery. In **Photo #2**, early-day Crow farmers are driving a team of horses that pull an early threshing machine. The image contrasts nicely with Photo #1 and testifies to the shift from a nomadic hunting culture to a more sedentary lifestyle, for both human and animal. **Photo #3** shows turn-of-the-twentieth-century Crow children riding bicycles and offers clear evidence that the younger generation has adopted a new mode of transportation and entertainment. The most recent image, **Photo #4**, depicts Crow Indians in 1942 sitting near their automobiles, which they seem to be both proud of as well as completely at ease with. In addition to comparing and contrasting changing modes of transportation among the Crow Indians, several other issues can be considered in this grouping, including clothing and general ways of life.

Possible Questions

- ▶ Compare the horse in Photo #1 with the other modes of transportation depicted in Photos #2, #3, and #4. Why might horses have been valued more than more modern modes of transportation? What evidence is provided in the photos that this was indeed the case?
- ▶ How might the shift from a horse culture to a predominantly automobile culture have transformed the daily life of Crow Indians?
- ▶ What evidence do these photos provide that the Crow people willingly incorporated new technology into their daily lives?

■ Photo grouping 4

Photo grouping 4 looks at another aspect of Crow culture: music and the ways in which the art of creating music changed over time. **Photo #1** dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and depicts Crow children from the Saint Xavier Mission School Band. The photo speaks to the fact that the mission schools were agents of cultural assimilation, especially for the younger generations. **Photo #2** is a more recent image, dating from the 1930s or later. The subjects are participating in a traditional drum circle, and dancers in traditional outfits are nearby. An automobile can clearly be seen in the background, helping to date the photo. Together, this grouping helps to throw into question the stereotypical view that assimilation was an absolute process of change. More traditional modes of performance and dress continued to be practiced, even decades after the boarding school experience. In fact, they continue to this day.

Possible Questions

- ▶ Compare the subjects in Photo #1 with the subjects in Photo #2. How are they similar? How are they different?
- ▶ Notice the children in Photo #1. What do their expressions reveal about their mood?
- ▶ Why might Photo #1 have been taken? What is it attempting to document?
- ▶ How is the type of music performed by the band in Photo #1 different from the type of music performed by the singers in Photo #2?
- ▶ What events are typically associated with more traditional forms of Crow music? How do these events differ from the types of events typically associated with the type of music performed by the band in Photo #1?

■ Photo grouping 5

Photo grouping 5 examines the impact of Catholic missionaries on Crow children. **Photo #1**

depicts a Crow family with a Catholic priest. The Crow parents are most likely visiting their children at the Saint Xavier Mission School. The photo illustrates a striking contrast between the parents, who are wearing more traditional clothing, and the children, who are dressed in boarding school uniforms. One son, obviously a member of the Saint Xavier band, proudly displays his baritone. **Photo #2** shows Crow children in a Saint Xavier classroom. School uniforms and the strict formality of the setting are clearly evident. In **Photo #3**, Crow boys from the Saint Xavier baseball team are posing for a team photo. The hairstyles, uniforms, clothing in the background, and association with “America’s Pastime” help illuminate the ongoing process of cultural change. **Photo #4** shows Crow boys being boys outside of a reservation church.

Possible Questions

- ▶ How could Photo #1 be considered evidence of cultural change on the Crow Reservation?
- ▶ What conclusions can be drawn from the type of schooling that Crow children experienced at Saint Xavier’s?
- ▶ Based on the evidence found in the photographs, what values were likely promoted by the missionaries?
- ▶ Why did Catholic missionaries focus a great deal of effort on Crow children instead of Crow adults?

■ Photo grouping 6

Photo grouping 6 looks at a variety of Salish celebrations, some more influenced by Catholicism and some less so. Since Catholicism came to the Salish in the 1840s, its presence in their lives has been profound. Still, as these photos demonstrate, traditional native ways continue to be celebrated up to the present day, and in some instances they have been combined with Christian celebratory events. **Photo #1** shows tribal members with a visiting Catholic bishop. The similarities and contrasts in the “traditional”

clothing worn by natives and non-natives is apparent. **Photo #2** depicts a traditional Salish ceremony and dance conducted about 1925. Notice the drum and singers near the center of the photograph. **Photo #3**, which dates from 1945, offers evidence of how Christianity and native cultural traditions have been combined over time.

Possible Questions

- ▶ Using these photos as evidence, to what extent have the Salish people incorporated Christianity into their culture?
- ▶ Has the introduction of Christianity eliminated the practice of native traditions?
- ▶ Based on these photos, what conclusions can be made about how the Salish adapted non-native ways into their culture?

■ Photo grouping 7

Photo grouping 7 focuses on tourism and the art of Blackfeet Indians. Photo #1, taken by a Great Northern Railway photographer circa 1950, shows tourists taking part in a round dance with tribal members in ceremonial regalia. The original caption on the photograph, reads “Tricky and lots of fun are the Blackfeet Indian dances in which palefaces join while visiting Glacier National Park in Montana.” Native peoples from Montana were frequently used by both railroads and the national parks to promote tourism. They in turn benefited from the access to employment and the opportunity to sell traditional crafts to non-natives. One Blackfeet man who worked in Glacier National Park reflected, “Our people were paid to camp at the lodges and dress in our traditional buckskin clothes. ... The authorities who had tried to eradicate our culture were now using us to promote their tourist destinations.” Another park employee remembered: “Once in a while, park visitors acted rudely toward us because we were Indians, but most of the time it was a good experience meeting all those visitors from around the world.” **Photo #2** shows

a Blackfeet craft shop in Browning, Montana, while **Photo # 3** depicts Blackfeet elders Curly Bear and Fish Wolf Robe hanging traditional crafts that they have manufactured for a reservation craft show. Traditional objects, such as hide paintings, that were once utilitarian or even sacred are being sold as commodities to white tourists. **Photo #4** depicts Blackfeet elder Medicine Boss Ribs selling toy tipis to tourists at a Glacier Park lodge.

Possible Questions

- ▶ What does the caption “Tricky and lots of fun are the Blackfeet Indian dances ...” reveal about the Photo #1’s intended audience?
- ▶ Why would Blackfeet Indians agree to work on behalf of the Great Northern Railway?
- ▶ What might have motivated the Blackfeet to become interested in making traditional crafts for sale to non-native tourists?
- ▶ Collectively, what do these photographs say about the ways in which Blackfeet culture was (and was not) changing during the early 1900s?

■ Photo grouping 8

Photo grouping 8 examines cultural change among Assiniboine women and girls living during the early twentieth century. **Photo #1** shows an older Assiniboine woman seated outside a tipi and working on and/or displaying her beadwork. Her age indicates that she likely lived prior to the reservation era. **Photo #2** depicts Assiniboine women carrying water on the Fort Belknap Reservation. It clearly indicates that hard work was a part of daily life for native women, whether on the reservation or prior to its establishment. **Photo #3** shows young Assiniboine women receiving vocational training in a Fort Belknap schoolhouse. **Photo #4** depicts Assiniboine women and children outside of their cabin on the Fort Belknap Reservation. While the hairstyle and clothing of the

younger women differ from those of the elder, their essential role as homemakers and providers of child care have remained constant.

Possible Questions

- ▶ Using these photos as evidence, what were the typical jobs associated with Assiniboine women?
- ▶ How did women’s work change for Assiniboine women over time?
- ▶ In what ways did it likely remain the same?

■ Photo grouping 9

Photo grouping 9 focuses on the development of farming and ranching on the Fort Peck Reservation in the wake of the Dawes Act of 1887. **Photo #1** shows Sioux Indians working on an irrigation ditch on the Fort Peck Reservation with teams of horses and hand plows. The difficulty (and futility) of their work in the reservation’s arid landscape is apparent. **Photo #2** illustrates some of the victorious exhibitors at the Fort Peck Indian Fair in July 1913. The reservation agent, Major Lohmiller, is shaking hands at the center of the photo with another non-native, presumably the judge at the fair. A native wearing a headdress and a police badge is looking on. **Photo #3**, labeled “The Development of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation,” shows natives in traditional outfits with American flags. Behind them is an agricultural implement dealership.

Possible Questions

- ▶ Why did residents of the Fort Peck Reservation and elsewhere attempt to pursue farming and ranching after the late 1800s?
- ▶ How did the transition to agriculture transform the lives of native peoples living on Fort Peck and elsewhere?
- ▶ Why was achieving success as a farmer or a rancher likely difficult for Indians living on Fort Peck?

■ Photo grouping 10

The images in Photo grouping 10 are related to a variety of holiday celebrations on the Crow Reservation. **Photo #1** shows a group of Crow Dancers at a powwow, possibly the Crow Fair. In sharp contrast, **Photo #2** depicts a Columbus Day flag drill from the late 1800s, with the patriotic participants marching in circular procession. **Photo #3** shows a Christmas nativity scene set before what appears to be a Christmas tree. Interestingly, this nativity scene uses tipis and other native imagery to convey the biblical message, and it demonstrates one of the various attempts by the missionaries to express to Crow children and others the story of the gospel in native terms.

Possible Questions

- ▶ In what ways did Northern Plains Indians, such as the Crow, celebrate special occasions prior to the reservation days?
- ▶ To what extent did these cultural traditions continue after the establishment of the reservation? How and to what extent do they still continue today?
- ▶ Compare and contrast Photos #1 and #2. In what respects are the celebrations depicted similar to each other? In what respects are they different?
- ▶ Why might some Native Americans view a Columbus Day celebration with American flags skeptically? [Teachers may wish to note that the Crow and other tribes often used patriotic American holidays as a cover for performing traditional ceremonies that the Indian agents would not allow them to perform at other times of the year.]
- ▶ Why might the missionaries who created the nativity scene have used Native American imagery? Who was most targeted by this display?

Student Instruction Sheet

On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions for each photograph.

1. What is the grouping and photo number?
2. If the information is available, note the location and date of the photo.
3. What appears to be going on in this photograph?
4. What interesting details are important in this photograph? Why?
5. Based on your observations about this photograph (and, possibly, its companion photograph(s)), what inferences can you make about the subjects shown? Why?
6. What questions does this photograph raise for you?

For each grouping, answer the following questions:

1. The pictures in this grouping were of which reservation or tribe?
2. To what larger category or theme (shelter, clothing, transportation, etc.) do you think all of the photographs in this grouping relate?