

Blackfoot Warrior Shirts

Lesson Plan: Creative Writing and Drama

**Ramona L. Big Head (Blackfoot) PhD Student
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada**

Background:

My teaching career spans 14 years in an all-Indigenous high school on a Blackfoot reserve in southern Alberta. I taught English Language Arts and Drama in grades nine through 12 at Kainai High School on the Blood Reserve from 1996 to 2010. In addition, I spent one year (2008 – 2009) working on the new program of studies for Arts Education in the Curriculum Branch at Alberta Learning. Based on my teaching expertise, this lesson plan will focus primarily on Language Arts and Drama. I have utilized the 2003 Alberta Learning English Language Arts (High School) Program of Studies as a guide for general learning outcomes and goals. However, this lesson plan can easily be adapted to meet the needs of other curricular guidelines and various grade levels.

Pitt Rivers Museum Blackfoot Warrior Shirts Homepage

The primary aim of this lesson plan is to provide ideas on how teachers and students can work with the Pitt Rivers Museum website on the Blackfoot shirts (*'Kaahsinnooniksi Ao'toksisawooyawa - Our ancestors have come to visit: Reconnections with historic Blackfoot shirts,'* at: <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/blackfootshirts/index.html>.) The challenge is ensuring that all curricular requirements are met while working with this site. Most importantly, educators need to keep in mind that *we teach students not subjects*, therefore every aspect of teaching needs to keep the students' educational growth and well being at the forefront as we plan our lessons.

General Outcomes

According to the 2003 Alberta Learning English Language Arts (Senior High) Program of Studies, “the senior high school English language arts program highlights six language arts—listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing” (p. 2). Therefore, the general outcomes of this lesson plan will incorporate these six language arts as we work towards meeting the goals.

General Outcome 1

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences.

General Outcome 2

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend literature and other texts in oral, print, visual and multimedia forms, and respond personally, critically and creatively.

General Outcome 3

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to manage ideas and information.

General Outcome 4

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to create oral, print, visual and multimedia texts, and enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.

General Outcome 5

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to respect, support and collaborate with others.

Lesson Plan

Learner Objectives and Goals:

Students will examine the photographs and read and discuss the downloadable documents in the section: ***About The Shirts:*** 1. *Some Historical Context: Relations between the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and fur trade companies.* 2. *What are the Blackfoot shirts in the Pitt Rivers Museum made of?* 3. *What the shirts tell us - Looking closely at the Blackfoot shirts with a museum conservator and a curator.* 4. *How did the shirts get to Pitt Rivers Museum?* 5. *The Process of restoring and conserving the Blackfoot shirts.*

Based on the information provided in the downloadable documents and the photographs, the students will compose a collaborative creative writing piece based on the inspiration from the Blackfoot warrior shirts. The creative writing piece *must* include at least one reference from each of the five downloadable documents.

The creative writing piece can either be a **short story or a one-act script** for a drama production.

The students will give an oral presentation of their creative writing pieces in one of the following ways: a Choral Reading, Readers' Theatre or a dramatic reading of the script.

Ideas for implementation of lesson:

A *Jigsaw* method can be employed for this lesson. Students can be put into groups of five. Each student will become an expert in one of the downloadable documents. Time will be allocated for each student to read the article and present his or her findings to the rest of the group. The following questions could be answered and discussed by each student:

1. Summarize the article in one minute or less.

2. What was the most fascinating aspect of your reading?
3. How did this article clarify your questions about the Blackfoot warrior shirts?
4. What questions did your reading of this article raise?
5. Why is this particular article important for your understanding of the Blackfoot warrior shirts and the Blackfoot in general?
6. What are your thoughts and feelings about the Blackfoot warrior shirts now that you've had a chance to examine this particular article?

Students will come to a consensus on how they want to present their creative writing piece. However, it is important to stress that each student must take part in the oral presentation.

Criteria for a short story:

The short story must follow all the guidelines for a good story. Emphasis must be placed on the various elements of fiction including setting, plot and conflict, characterization, mood and atmosphere, point of view and theme.

The short story must include at least one reference from each of the five downloadable documents found in the *About The Shirts* section.

Criteria for a dramatic script:

The dramatic script must include stage directions in order to set the stage for the audience. Students are encouraged to develop their characters through voice and tone.

Students may wish to listen to some sample radio plays in order to get a good idea on how to present the reading of their play. The script must also include at least one reference from each of the five downloadable documents found in the *About The Shirts* section.

Assessment:

Each story and/or script will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Thought and Detail:

How well the details support the setting, plot and conflict, characterization, mood and atmosphere.

Organization:

A coherent and shaped story, including an opening that engages the audiences' attention and sustains their focus throughout the entire performance.

Matters of Choice:

Varied vocabulary that is used with precision; syntax is varied for effect.

Matters of Correctness:

Correctness of sentence construction, usage, grammar and mechanics.

Performance Criteria:

Oral storytelling is a crucial component of Blackfoot pedagogy and it is a primary tool for cultural teachings and continuity. Readers' theatre consists of a dramatic reading of the story or play. Choral reading consists of the entire groups reading at the same time.

Students can be as creative as they wish in their presentations. Special effects and emphasis can be incorporated throughout the story as the group sees fit. Remind students that *all* students in the group must take part in the oral presentation.

Self-Evaluation:

It is important to stress that the Blackfoot people were traditionally a communal society.

It was imperative that everyone work together to ensure the survival of the entire tribe.

This exercise in collaborative or teamwork is an opportunity for the students to engage in some lifelong learning. Therefore, the students are encouraged to self-evaluate

themselves at the end of this project. They can rate their own performance and set goals for how they can improve in future collaborative work.

Extension activities:

Students can take their stories and/or scripts and work on either getting them published for the school library or a drama production can be performed for other classes within the school.

References

Alberta Learning. Senior High School English Language Arts. (2003). *Guide to Implementation*. Retrieved from

<http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/english/resources/ela-guide.aspx>

Alberta Learning. Senior High School Language Arts. (2003). *Program of Studies*.

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