

Title

Introduction to the Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin*, or all my relations.

Grade Level

Community college survey course.

Theme

Everything is related.

Goal

Students will learn the significance of the Lakota concept *mitakuye oyasin* or all things are related.

Lesson Goal

Students will gain an understanding of the relationships between Lakotas and land, animals, plants, stars, and spirits.

Objectives

Students will:

1. Gain an understanding of the nature of the shared metaphysical components (*nagi, niya, sicun, nagila*) of all beings and the concept that all things share a portion of the blood of *Inyan*.
2. Be able to summarize the traditional stories of Lakota emergence, the Great Race and the gift of the sacred pipe and how they help to explain the Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin*.
3. Be able to summarize and explain the significance of the Lakota *hunka* ceremony.

Cultural Concept

The key to understanding Lakota culture is best expressed by the Lakota phrase *mitakuye oyasin* or all my relations. This belief is at the heart of all ceremonial aspects of Lakota culture.

Cultural Background

Vine Deloria says that “In the moral universe all activities, events and entities are related and consequently it does not matter what kind of existence an entity enjoys, for the responsibility is always there for it to participate in the continuing creation of reality.” This idea serves as a touchstone which permeates all ceremonial aspects of Lakota culture. For Lakotas, the universe is thought of as one unified kinship system with all beings having the potential for shared relationships based on the premise that “all activities, events and entities” 1) share the same metaphysical components (*nagi, niya, sicun, nagila*); 2) share a portion of the blood of *Inyan*; and 3) possess the ton (or sacred power) present in this blood.

The sacred Lakota narratives talk of the origin and nature of these relationships. One of the traditional stories recounts how *Inyan* gave of his blood to create all things creating the literal bedrock for the idea that all things are related. There are others that tell how the *Pte oyate* (Buffalo nation) were the ancestors of the Lakota people. The strength of this

relationship is best exemplified in the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman bringing the sacred pipe to Lakotas. The pipe is at the heart of all Lakota ceremonies including the hunka ceremony (or the making of relatives). Other narratives tell us of the importance of plants and that for Lakotas the cottonwood tree at the center of the sun dance is “the people, it also represents the way of the people”.¹

Student Activities

1. Assigned readings: These will provide important background information which will be instrumental in providing knowledge concerning the components of the concept of mitakuye oyasin including, nagi, niya, sicun, nagila, the blood of Inyan and it's ton, White Buffalo Calf Woman, the Great Race, the emergence, the hunka ceremony, the spirits, and the stars.
2. Powerpoint presentation by instructor. This will be approximately 75 minutes long and provide an overview of these components and explain their relationship to one another.
3. Guest speaker: This will be approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes long and will include a Q and A at the end. It will cover in more detail the components already explained in the readings and the instructor's lecture.
4. Group activity. The class will be divided into teams (from 4-7 members each) and will be asked to perform dramatizations of the emergence, the Great Race and White Buffalo Calf Woman narratives.

Evaluation Activities

There will be three evaluation activities.

1. Group evaluation
2. Team self assessment
3. Essay

Upon completion of the group activity there will be a grade assigned to the group as a whole. In addition there will be a team self assessment evaluation in which each team member will be asked to evaluate the participation of the other individuals on their team. The third evaluation activity will be based upon an essay that will cover the first two lesson plan objectives. The final individual grade will be based upon an average of all three evaluation activities with an 80% grade being the equivalent of a B.

Resources

Instructor: Kenneth C. Macpherson

Guest Speaker: TBD

Readings:

Black Elk, N. (1980). Inipi: The rite of purification. In J. E. Brown (Ed.), *The sacred pipe: Black Elk's account of the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux* (pp. 31-43). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

¹ (Black Elk, N. (1980). Wiwanyag Wachipi: The sun dance. In J. E. Brown (Ed.), *The sacred pipe: Black Elk's account of the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux* (pp. 69.). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.)

Black Elk, N. (1980). The gift of the sacred pipe. In J. E. Brown (Ed.), *The sacred pipe: Black Elk's account of the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux* (pp. 3-9). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Deloria, E. (1994). The buffalo people. In J. Rice (Ed & Trans.), *The buffalo people* (pp.94-126).Albuquerque:University of New Mexico Press

Deloria, V. (1999). If you think about it you will see that it is true. In B. Deloria (Ed.) et. al. *Spirit and reason* (pp. 40-60). Golden: Fulcrum Publishing

DeMallie, R. J. (2001). Teton. In W. Sturtevant (series Ed.) & R. J. DeMallie (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians: Vol. 13, Part 2, Plains* (pp. 799-801, 806-810). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press

Finger. (1991). Wohpe and the gift of the pipe. In J. Walker *Lakota belief and ritual* (pp. 109-112). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Lone Man. (1972). The White Buffalo Calf pipe (Ptehin cala Canopa). In F. Densmore *Teton Sioux music* (pp. 63-67). New York : Da Capo Press.

Looking Horse, A. (1987). The sacred pipe in modern life. In R. J. DeMallie and D. Parks (Ed.) *Sioux Indian religion: Tradition and innovation* (pp. 67-73). R. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Walker, J. (1917). Narratives. In *The sun dance and other ceremonies of the Oglala division of the Teton Dakota* (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 16 pt. 2, pp. 164-182). New York: American Museum of Natural History.

Walker, J. (1917). Secret Instructions for a Shaman. In *The sun dance and other ceremonies of the Oglala division of the Teton Dakota* (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 16 pt. 2, pp. 78-92). New York: American Museum of Natural History.

Walker, J. (1917). The sun dance. In *The sun dance and other ceremonies of the Oglala division of the Teton Dakota* (Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 16 pt. 2, pp. 100-112). New York: American Museum of Natural History.

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