



Essential Question for this lesson:

How do Iktomi stories teach us about thinking critically?

The Oscar Howe Project at The Performing Arts Center of Rapid City houses and preserves two original paintings by Oscar Howe, the important Yanktonai Dakota artist. Howe shows his Dakota culture through his art.

One of the paintings exhibited at the Performing Arts Center of Rapid City is called “Iktomi” (eek-dó-mee). This piece of art is a watercolor painting on paper, created in 1959 by Oscar Howe. The painting shows the sacred being Iktomi, known as a spider-trickster, suspended in a “web” of pink lines. Sometimes Iktomi appears as a spider, and sometimes he appears as a man.

Iktomi continually plots to make people look foolish by tricking them and causing others to laugh at their folly. People are warned about Iktomi’s tricks and cautioned against listening to him. Because of his desire to create trouble for others, he is friendless. Iktomi tries to make himself feel better by bringing others down, but in many Iktomi stories, he ends up hurt or being laughed at himself. In this way, stories about Iktomi teach us to behave honorably and help us avoid trouble by thinking critically about situations. Iktomi is always teaching us about the consequences of our actions.

How do people learn to think about consequences? Sometimes stories teach people how to think clearly about what is happening in order to avoid being tricked. Here is a Lakota story that has been used for hundreds of years to teach children and adults how to think critically about situations. In it, Iktomi tricks some pheasants. You will see how the pheasants could have avoided being tricked.

Ella Deloria, a scientist, studied Lakota stories and carefully wrote down what Lakota elders said. She checked the stories with many elders so her book, Dakota Texts, would be right. We have taken this story from her book and made it easier to share with young readers.



Iktomi Tricks the Pheasants

Iktomi was walking at random along a creek and he heard dancing, so he stopped to listen. He finally found the source of the sound; so he went towards it and stood within sight of the place; and saw that those were all pheasants who were dancing and having a jolly time. Immediately he withdrew into the wood and wrapped some red grass around a piece of wood; this he put on his back, and then walked past without paying the slightest attention to the dancers. "Hey, there goes Ikto. Let's call him over," they said. "Ikto!" they called but he continued as if he hadn't heard; so they called again and again until he stopped; and then they asked, "What's that you carry on your back?" "These? Why they are just some silly little songs. There is to be a dance farther up, and I've been sent for. That's why I am in a rush," he added. "O, elder brother, come over here and sing us one tiny little song; just one," they said and again he said, "Indeed not! I've just told you I'm in a hurry. What's the idea?" and he walked on. But they were very insistent, so he gave in. "Very well, then," he said, undoing his package and bringing out a single song. "Now, this song has its special rule; will you follow it?" "Surely," they said. "All right, then. While I am singing it, nobody is to open his eyes," Ikto told them; and they said that would be all right with them. So he got out his drum and began beating it as he sang; so the birds danced, making a rhythmic noise with their feet. It was a good sight to watch them dancing; females included. This is what he said:

"Dance with your eyes closed.
Whoever opens his eye shall get a stye.
Dance with your eyes closed."

They danced with their eyes closed and meantime Ikto was selecting those with the fattest breasts, and killing them in turn. One happened to look, after a while, and seeing many dead, called out, "Fly for your lives! Ikto will kill you all off!" and with that, he flew out of the place; so the rest followed him. Iktomi laughed as he picked up his prey, and, tying the birds into a bunch, he said to himself, "On those rare times when I am hungry, that's the trick I work!..."¹

-adapted from Dakota Texts by Ella Deloria

¹ Deloria, Ella. *Dakota Texts*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. 19-25.



Thinking About the Iktomi Story

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. How does Iktomi trick the pheasants in the story? Please show 2 steps from his trick.

2. Write your ideas about **why** Iktomi tricks the animals in the story. Please use examples from the story to support your thinking.

3. Why do you think it is wrong to trick others? Please give reasons to support your thinking.



Notes for Teachers

The lessons connected with *The Oscar Howe Project* are designed to be used with students in several 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.

- Yanktonai Dakota
- exhibited
- Iktomi
- sacred being
- continually
- folly
- cautioned
- thinking critically

- consequences
- Lakota
- elders
- source
- immediately
- withdrew
- elder brother
- insistent

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, and 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 and persuasively.
- L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting reference materials as appropriate.
- L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge.

South Dakota Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards Addressed:

- EU 4.2: Analyze Oceti Sakowin social etiquette, proper behavior, and values.
- EU 5.1: Analyze Oceti Sakowin culture through oral tradition and unbiased information.

Note: Deloria's scholarly work and her stature in the American scientific community underpin [Dakota Texts](#) and lend to it the highest credibility. Both her extensive fieldwork and her personal cultural experience show that this volume contains unbiased information; it is a well-researched and highly respected scientific text.

More Notes on the Standards and Student Work

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>

While this lesson was built for students in grades K-5, teachers will provide different levels of scaffolding for their students. Many K-2 teachers will project this text on a smart board and read it aloud while students follow the text with their eyes. The questions included can be discussed by the class and answered collaboratively, or teams of K-2 students could each discuss and answer one of the questions before sharing out to the larger group. This lesson's graphic organizer is fully accessible to individual thinkers in grades K-2.

Students in grades 3-5 engage with this lesson's questions as individual thinkers; we would rightly expect their thinking to be deeper and their examples from the text to be more specific. This lesson has been field tested with K-5 students in South Dakota with success. Below are suggested performance level descriptors that show three levels of performance. Over time, students show growth in inferential thinking and in using textual evidence to support their thinking.

The text of this article and the accompanying critical thinking questions are considered informational texts. The first part of the reading is a real-world text about a current local project; the excerpt from Dakota Texts is an ethnographic text. 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 and engaging in peer discussions addresses the CCSS Speaking and Listening Standard SL.1!

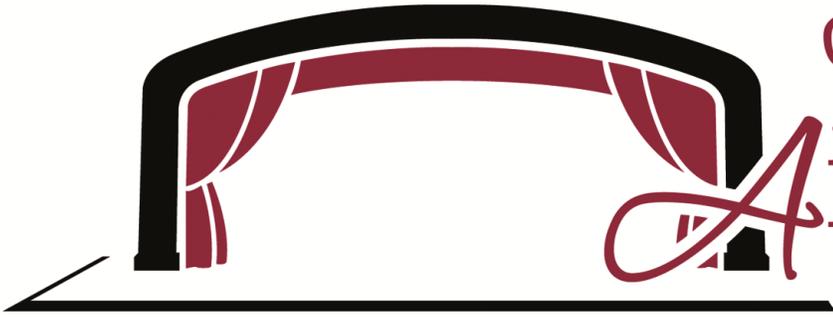
Performance Level Descriptors (two learning targets from CCSS R1):

R1: I can make logical inferences from a text.

3	2	1
Students can combine their own background knowledge with specific text clues in order to make inferences. They can show their thinking in writing.	Students can combine background knowledge with text clues to make inferences, but the inference may be faulty *or* they cannot show how they arrived at their inference in writing.	Students cannot yet combine background knowledge with text clues to make an inference about a text. They may be lacking background knowledge *or* they may not be able to understand the text they are reading.

R1: I can use evidence to support my conclusions about a text.

3	2	1
Students can identify 2 specific text clues that support the conclusions they make about a text. They can show in writing how the text clues led them to their conclusion.	Students can identify 1 text clue that supports the conclusions they make about a text, but they cannot show how the text clues led them to their conclusions. They may have formed a conclusion that reveals a misreading of the text.	Students cannot yet identify any text clues that support the conclusions they make about a text. They cannot explain clearly how they arrived at their conclusions. Their conclusions may reveal a misreading of the text.



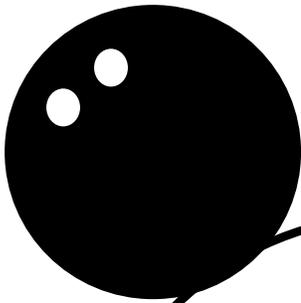
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Iktomi



I will trick...

You will get ready to discuss the Iktomi story by thinking and filling in the shapes drawn here!



Bad actions of Iktomi:

What is this story teaching us about how we should behave?