



Montana  
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**Indian Education for All**  
**Montana State Parks Lesson Plan**  
**Chief Plenty Coups State Park**  
January 2010 (revised)

**Title**

Plenty Coups, Leadership and the Vision Quest

**Content Areas**

Social Studies

**Grade Level**

9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>

**Duration**

2 55-minute class periods and 1 homework assignment

**Overview and Objectives**

As an important American Indian leader whose strategies of diplomacy, trust and genuine humanitarian concern affected the lives of Native and non-Native people in Montana, Plenty Coups is among the American Indian individuals who deserve greater study. During his lifetime, 1848-1932, Plenty Coups witnessed more than eight decades of change to his homeland, his tribe and his culture. In his interactions with white settlers, the U.S. government and its officials, Crow tribal members, and Montana's state officials, as well as with individuals from other tribes, Plenty Coups advocated for the well-being of all peoples—this, in spite of the federal government's oppressive policies and retraction of agreements, and white America's greed for more tribal lands, and the resulting impoverishment of his tribe. Plenty Coups provides an example of how American Indian leaders have helped their tribes adjust to rapid changes and severe adversity brought about by American colonialist expansion.

In this lesson, students will learn about the life and statesmanship of Plenty Coups. They will be introduced to the vision quest in the context of Apsáalooke culture and tradition in order to understand Plenty Coups' reasons for his political positions and the influential role of his visions on the tribes' actions. Through this examination of the life and times of one extraordinary tribal leader, students will gain insights into how a different culture defines and understands leadership itself, while examining the dramatic and often tragic impacts of American colonization on the Crow tribe. Students will discover that traditional tribal values and cultural practices assisted and informed indigenous peoples in the early reservation years as they advocated for their tribes and navigated their new relationship to the United States and to the changing political structures within their own tribes. These values and practices, including the vision quest, are still integral to the cultural identity of many tribal individuals as well as to tribes as a whole.

## Montana Education Standards and Benchmarks

### **Indian Education for All**

**Essential Understanding 1:** There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**Essential Understanding 2:** There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and re-defined by entities, organizations and people. A continuum of Indian identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional. There is no generic American Indian.

**Essential Understanding 3:** The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

**Essential Understanding 6:** History is a story and most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. Histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective conflicts with what most of mainstream history tells us.

### **Montana Content Standards**

**Social Studies Content Standard 2:** Students analyze how people create and change structures of power, authority and governance to understand the operation of government and to demonstrate civic responsibility. *Rationale: The vitality and continuation of a democratic republic depends upon the education and participation of informed citizens.*

**Benchmark 2.3.** Students will identify representative political leaders and philosophies from selected historical and contemporary settings.

**Benchmark 2.6.** Students will analyze and evaluate conditions, actions and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among groups and nations.

**Social Studies Content Standard 4:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships. *Rationale: Students need to understand their historical roots and how events shape the past, present and future of the world. In developing these insights, students must know what life was like in the past and how things change and develop over time. Students gain historical understanding through inquiry of history by researching and interpreting historical events affecting personal, local, tribal, Montana, United States, and world history.*

**Benchmark 4.2.** Students will interpret how selected cultures, historical events, periods, and patterns of change influence each other.

**Benchmark 4.4a.** Students analyze the significance of important people, events, and ideas in the major eras/civilizations in the history of Montana, American Indian tribes, the United States and the world.

**Benchmark 4.6.** Students will investigate, interpret and analyze the impact(s) of multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints concerning events within and across cultures, major world religions, and political systems (e.g., assimilation, values, beliefs, conflicts).

**Benchmark 4.7.** Students will analyze and illustrate major issues concerning the history, culture, tribal sovereignty and current status of American Indian tribes and bands in Montana and the United States.

**Social Studies Content Standard 6:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies. Rationale: Culture helps us to understand ourselves both as individuals and members of various groups. In a multicultural society, students need to understand multiple perspectives that derive from different cultural vantage points. As citizens, students need to know how institutions are maintained or changed and how they influence individual, cultures and societies. This understanding allows students to relate to people in Montana, American Indian tribes, the United States and throughout the world.

**Benchmark 6.1.** Students will analyze and evaluate the ways various groups (social, political, cultural) meet human needs and concerns and contribute to personal identity.

**Benchmark 6.4.** Students will evaluate how the unique characteristics of American Indian tribes and other cultural groups have contributed to Montana’s history and contemporary life (e.g., legal and political relationships between and among tribal, state and federal governments).

**Benchmark 6.5.** Students will analyze the impact(s) of ethnic, national and global influences on specific situations or events.

## Materials or Resources Needed

- ✓ *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows* by Frank B. Linderman, Second Edition (Bison Books) 2002. ISBN-10: 0803280181. This edition contains several supplementary materials that will be used in this lesson. Each student will need a copy, and this edition is readily available from online book and textbook sellers.
- ✓ “The Vision Quest” by Thomas Yellowtail (attached)
- ✓ Internet access—either individual computers or a computer with projector.
- ✓ Entry for “Plenty Coups” by Mardell Plainfeather in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, Frederick E. Hoxie, ed. Pages 489-490. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996. ISBN 0-395-66921-9. Some libraries may have online access. Readily available to order.
- ✓ <http://www.nezperce.com/pcmain.html> This is the main Plenty Coups page which contains the two links below (and others). Notice that it is posted by the Nez Perce. The Nez Perce and Crow were strong allies and hunted bison together in the Missouri Headwaters region. It is strongly recommended that you upload this site to your computer in advance so you can show the photo collections below to your entire class and promote discussion.
- ✓ <http://www.nezperce.com/pcphotoi.html> This site/link has a series of historical photographs of Plenty Coups with brief, informative descriptions. These can be used like a slide show.
- ✓ <http://www.nezperce.com/pctrac.html> This site/link has several pages of photos and descriptions of Plenty Coups State Park and memorial. Use it like a slide show for a virtual tour of Plenty Coups State Park.

## Introduction

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**Chief Plenty Coups State Park Montana: The Magazine of Western History, Spring 2000**  
by Molly Holz

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When Plenty Coups, the last traditional chief of the Crow Indians, recounted his life story to the writer Frank Bird Linderman in 1928, he told of a vision. Conferring with Linderman at his home on the Crow Indian Reservation thirty-five miles south of Billings, Plenty Coups explained how the vision had set the course of his life. Though Plenty Coups was then eighty years old, his memory of it had not dimmed. When he [was] about twenty, he said, he had visited a traditional Crow site in the Crazy Mountains and seen himself as an old man. "I saw the spring down by those trees," he told Linderman, "this very house just as it is, these trees which comfort us today,

and a very old man sitting in the shade, alone." And so it had come to pass, along with the profound changes the vision implied and with which his people would have to contend.

Plenty Coups was revered in his lifetime for his wisdom and diplomatic skill in helping his people make the transition from traditional life ways to reservation life as settled agriculturalists. Remembered for those qualities today, he is also commemorated with Chief Plenty Coups State Park, a park that includes the homestead where he sat beneath cottonwood trees and related the story of his vision to Linderman in 1928. That same year, on August 8, Plenty Coups presented his homestead for use as a park. "This park is not a memorial to me," he declared during the dedication ceremony, "but to the Crow nation. It is a token of my friendship for all people, red and white."

## Activities and Procedures

**Teacher Preparation:** Teacher should become familiar with the following resources:

- ✓ *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows*, Second Edition, 2002. (See citation reference above.)
- ✓ "The Vision Quest" by Thomas Yellowtail (included in the lesson plan)
- ✓ A general knowledge of the changes taking place for the Apsáalooke tribe (and throughout Indian Country) between 1825 and the 1930s, including the establishment of the reservations and subsequent diminishment of them, extermination of the bison and consequences, tribes' impoverishment, impacts of white settlement, deculturation efforts (e.g., boarding schools, English language, religious oppression and conversion, fragmentation of families, farming/ranching, and destruction of tribal social and political structures, etc.) and profound cultural, economic and social changes brought about by the reservation system and U.S. usurpation of tribal lands and assertion of authority over tribes. For a very brief overview, please see: entry for "Reservations" in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, pages 546-549.
- ✓ Read the short Introduction, above, to Plenty Coups State Park.

## Class Period 1: Introduction to the Apsáalooke and Chief Plenty Coups

For the final part of this period, you will need to access the websites listed above—either on individual computers or on a computer with a projector. The second of these options might be easier to facilitate and make the lesson less cumbersome and more interactive, as students can focus on the material and offer comments/ask questions. Students will need Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows and you will also need to print copies of the vision quest reading (Yellowtail) included in this lesson plan for students' homework after this class and before period 2.

**1.** Introduce Plenty Coups State Park, using the Introduction above if you choose. Introduce Plenty Coups (who he was, when he lived, etc.) and mention to your class that he was a traditional chief of the Crow tribe, who was told in a vision at age 9 that he would be a leader and that their lives and world were changing. You might also mention that he met with the federal and state governments as well as foreign dignitaries and leaders and to this day is considered a very respected diplomat and statesman. You do not have to go into great detail, as students will be reading more about him. (5 minutes)

**2.** To set the context for this lesson, you will need to outline as briefly as possible for your students what was going on between 1825 and the 1930s with regards to American Indian tribes, the Apsáalooke tribe in particular, and the expansion of the United States westward. This lecture does not have to be lengthy, but it does need to provide students with a good overview of the magnitude of changes going on for Indian tribes between the 1830s and 1930s. If your class has already covered this history, you may skip this portion of the lesson. In

your lecture, you will want to mention the following topics which frame Plenty Coups' lifespan: (15-20 minutes)

**Crow Treaties of 1825, 1851, 1868 and subsequent acts, Crow Act of 1920**—Treaties establish reserved lands, then U.S. reneges on agreements and diminishes greatly the Crow Reservation in successive treaties and policies. Plenty Coups fought hard against allotment and fragmentation of the remaining reservation from the late 1870s through 1920, but also supported some land cessions to the U.S. for its “white children” (so that settlers could also live).

**Reservation Era**—Confinement of tribes to reserved lands which are then further diminished as whites encroach and U.S. government fails to protect tribal lands from U.S. citizens. On Crow reservation, whites illegally run cattle on best of Crow lands, provoking conflicts and anti-Crow aggression.

**Extermination of Bison (1860s-1882)**—Wholesale strategic slaughter of bison radically changes economies and lifestyles of Plains tribes and upsets gender roles and social customs, leaves tribes impoverished and malnourished and demoralized.

**Indian Wars**—Era of Indian wars had passed in the East by mid-1800s, but in the West the U.S. military continued (in disregard of treaties) to expand its military presence and wage aggressive attacks against tribes into the 1870s, mainly in or near Montana, including the Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Lakota, Nez Perce and their allies. The Crow tribe, following Plenty Coups vision, sides against their traditional foes (Lakota and Cheyenne) and fights with U.S. in the Battles of the Rosebud and Little Big Horn in the summer of 1876. Plenty Coups takes part in these.

**Assimilation and Deculturation efforts (1870s-1920s)**—Boarding schools, often run by churches and paid for by the federal government, are the primary cause, as the objective of the U.S. is to separate youth from parents and grandparents in an attempt to ‘whiten’ American Indian children. Results in language loss and cultural discontinuity, and the fragmentation of families. Girls are taught to be domestic servants, primarily, while boys are trained for industrial and agricultural labor. Elders have little say and harder time passing down cultural heritage, language and history.

**Religious and Cultural oppression (1870s-1920s)**—Ceremonies outlawed, some persecution by Indian Agents overseeing the reservations, cultural persecution. For over six decades, Crow sun dance does not happen.

**Land loss and allotment (1880s-1920)**—Fragmentation of tribal reserved lands and loss of millions of acres of tribally owned lands to white settlers and profiteers. U.S. government largely permits this encroachment then encourages Crows to cede even more lands, despite Crow opposition and complaint from Indian Agents (not all) regarding the whites' actions.

**Power-shifts (reservation era)**—As extensions of the U.S. government, Indian Agents usurp political and economic authority, undermining the power and authority of traditional tribal leaders.

**World War I (1915-1918)**—American Indians are not yet citizens but sign up to fight for US. As before, Crows volunteer to fight for the U.S. Plenty Coups is chosen to represent all tribes at a dedication at the grave/tomb of the unknown soldier.

**Indian Citizenship Act 1924**—Remaining “non-citizen” Indians are made U.S. citizens. Citizenship is a double-edged sword, as many tribal members who were already citizens lost their land due to taxes owed to the federal government, even while they could not vote or were prevented from doing so and in truth had little to no political representation.

3. Use the websites to provide your class with the images of Plenty Coups as well as those of Chief Plenty Coups State Park. (Note, the stone dedication marker and plaque at the state park, which you will see in the final photograph, were commissioned by the Billings chapter of the Kiwanis club, members of which were

friends and admirers of Plenty Coups.) (10-12 minutes to view both sets of images online and read accompanying text.)

4. Introduce the concept of leadership to your class. Ask them to brainstorm aloud on the following topics and write responses on the board: (10+ minutes)

What is leadership?

What is a leader?

What qualities does a leader have?

How does a leader acquire leadership traits, qualities, abilities, etc.?

What are some examples of how leadership is determined or obtained?

How does culture determine or affect what it means to be a leader?

5. Homework: Assign for homework the attached description of the vision quest by Thomas Yellowtail AND Chapters 2 and 3 in *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows*. (Homework will take about 1 hour to complete). Encourage your students to take notes on what they read.

### **Class Period 2: Plenty Coups' Visions and Lasting Leadership**

For this period, students should have their homework materials from the first class period. You will also need the Worksheet (included) for use at the end of class and the three essays in *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows* (by Old Coyote, Bauerle, and McCleary) for students to read in class.

1. Begin the class by asking students what they think about the vision quest process and purpose as described by Yellowtail. (The purpose of this discussion is to get students to engage with the materials in preparation for thinking more critically and analytically about the role of culture in leadership development.) (5 minutes)

2. Have your students read (silently) the three brief commentaries in *Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crow* (introductions by Barney Old Coyote and Phenocia Bauerle and the Afterward by Tim McCleary). (10 minutes, total)

3. Pass out the worksheet and have students complete it in class. They will need an extra piece of paper for room to respond to each question. Because this is not a test, students can use the reading materials and notes, but if they have done the reading, they probably will not need to. (25-30 minutes)

4. Wrap up the class by facilitating a discussion of leadership qualities and methods of leadership development—compare traditional Apsaalooke to American definitions, qualities and methods. Be sure to tie in the role of the vision quest and its interpretation by tribal leaders, as these are a key element from Plenty Coups' own life as a leader. (5-10 minutes)

### **Evaluation**

Written work, meaningful and substantive participation in class discussion

### **Related Curricula**

See the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Rosebud Battlefield State Park lesson plan. These are compatible lessons and can be used consecutively, in either order.

## Vision Quest by Thomas Yellowtail

**Medicine man and Sun Dance chief, Thomas Yellowtail is a pivotal figure in Crow tribal life. In this chapter from *Yellowtail, Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief, An autobiography as told to Michael Oren Fitzgerald* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1991), Yellowtail exposes the path of spiritual realization according to the Plain Indians:**

One of the main rites of the Sun Dance religion is the vision quest. It is a period set for solitary prayer at a remote place. A person will usually spend three or four days of fasting on the vision quest, saying his prayers during all that time. He goes away up in the hills, gets away from people, and goes off by himself, and there fast and prays for either the three- or four-day period he selected before he began his quest.

There are many intentions that a person may have when he prepares to make a vision quest. He may want medicine, some kind of power to help him in battle or in all of his life. Strong medicine powers would protect the man so that he would not be wounded and could not be hit by an enemy's arrow. That kind of medicine would make a man successful in battle with the enemy. A lot of men seek those kinds of powers, and that is what they have in mind when they start out on the vision quest.

Some men might seek different kinds of medicine power or understanding. They may to be able to heal or doctor people. They may seek the answer to a question or a problem that is bothering them or the family or tribe. And above all, a man may want to pray in this way because this is a way to come closer to Acbadadea.\* In this rite each man may awaken in his heart the knowledge of the Maker of All Things Above. A man may pray for any of those things because they would be helpful to him, his family, and his tribe, but a man also must pray for virtue and the correct understanding with which to face life.

In olden days, all young men had those kinds of feelings, and that was only why they would go on the vision quests. Sometimes a few of them would go out together. Maybe four or five of them would take a sweat bath together and start out together. When they go out to the hills, each one would go on his solitary way. Each one had to face the medicine powers alone. One would take that pointed hill over there; another one would take the next hill. They would scatter, each by himself, putting in his days. Some would stay four days, some less. Some of them might have received something by the time they came back; some may have come back without anything. Some of them would have been successful and might have had a vision, have been visited by an animal, or have had a dream or something to bring back, and that is good – that meant something. Another would come back and say that he did not receive anything. It means that he would have to try again later, and usually he would. He would try again later on and try again and again.

Many of them ended their days by saying, "I tried not once, but a number of times, and finally I was visited by a bird or animal that gave me medicine, and I finally have some medicine, some kind of power or understanding." And that was the way in those days. They would have kept trying until they got something. Some of the most sincere ones would probably receive something the first time they went on a vision quest. It depended on the sincerity of the person.

If they have a good, strong intention, then they may have been the ones who were successful in their dream or vision right away. They would have been told afterwards what to do to preserve the medicine power given by the bird or the animal, and they would have done what they were told.

Perhaps they might have been told to make a medicine bundle or carry part of the animal with them when they went on their raiding party against the enemy or when they needed to make the medicine.

Before a man would go on a vision quest, he would first consult with a medicine man. It was the duty of the people who asked for instruction to bring a pipe or a smoke to the instructor. If the medicine man accepted the responsibility to instruct the younger man, then they would first offer the smoke with a prayer. Then the medicine man would tell the young man what to do to prepare – how to go through purification before going up and all the other necessary information. He would explain to the young man how to seek war medicine. Some would have had a different purpose. The instructions for the prayer depended on the young man's intention.

In those days when people wanted to go fasting, they first prepared themselves by taking a sweat bath to purify themselves. This is still my practice because it is very important to undergo a purification before and after every major undertaking. Right after he was through with the sweat bath, the vision seeker would get up to where he wanted to spend three or four days upon the hill and high mountains. According to his own choosing, he would select a place where he wanted to fast.

Many would sacrifice a finger when they got up there. They would chop off the top of their finger and offer it to the Great Spirit or to an animal. If a bird came and took that piece of finger, then the bird would probably come back after a while and adopt that person, give him medicine, and tell him to go home. This could happen in one or two days' time, although the person's intention may have been to spend four days. If he was visited by an animal of some kind who felt sorry for him sitting there torturing himself, then the medicine power would say, "I have come to see you; you are torturing yourself; you had better stop that and go back home, and I will give you some kind of power and tell you what to do." After the man would get home, that bird or animal – it might be a hawk, or a crow, or a meadowlark, or any kind of bird or animal – would come to visit that person and tell him what to do. The person would end the fast right then and there and go home; he would have received something already. People on the Crow reservation today still use the vision quest.

*[\* The Creator]*



## Discussion and Short Answer Questions for Plenty Coups Lesson

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please respond to each of these questions with a short paragraph, using the back of this page or another paper if necessary.**

1. What are the purposes of the vision quest (specifically, the Apsáalooke or Absarokee vision quest) and who would seek a vision?
2. What first prompted Plenty Coups to seek a vision and how old was he at the time? What is significant about these factors and about how tribal members responded?
3. What qualities was Plenty Coups told in his vision to develop? What animal was the bearer of these qualities? Why were these qualities and not others important for him and for his leadership at this time?
4. What are some of the major changes that took place for the Crow tribe (as well as for other tribes) during Plenty Coups' lifetime?
5. How did Plenty Coups' vision influence actions of the Crow tribe?
6. What are some of the legacies of Plenty Coups? How do his actions and personal leadership abilities continue to influence Apsáalooke people today?
7. Comment on the role of culture in defining and determining leaders, leadership and leadership qualities and for determining how leadership is achieved.
8. Thought question: In your opinion, are wisdom, humility and diplomacy valuable qualities in/of leaders? Why or why not?
9. What is one thing you learned in this lesson about the Crow tribe or culture that you did not know before?