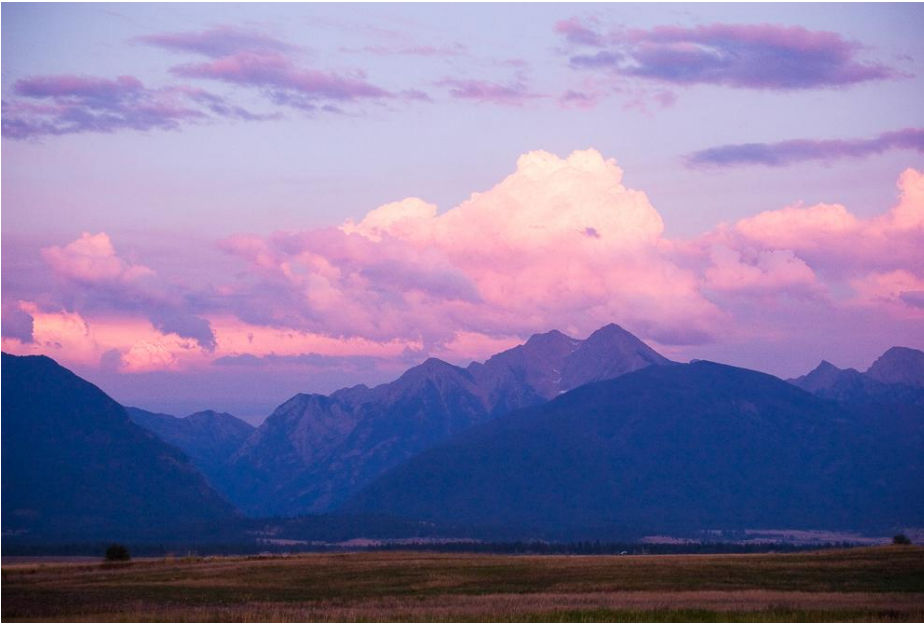


Finding Spirit



Mission Mountains Sunset, Flathead Reservation,
2007 by Sue Reynolds

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. What does living in reciprocity with the land mean to you?
2. Is there a place that is important to you or your family?
3. What would you see, hear, smell and feel there?
4. Is there a particular time of day when you especially like being there? If so, why?

No single view of nature existed or exists among the hundreds of Native American tribes in the United States, but common beliefs and practices regarding nature's land and animals included appreciation, respect and reverence. To many American Indians, religion is found and practiced in nature. The understanding that a Creator made the earth and exists in living things and throughout the natural world is widespread and has guided Native Americans to live in and with nature responsibly and to take from Mother Earth only what was needed.

Today, American Indian people continue to live in reciprocity with their homelands. Yet the complexities of contemporary life, including opportunities for much-needed revenue from natural resources, as well as conflicting tribal and non-Indian interests complicate this issue.

Photographer Sue Reynolds respects that Native Americans are rooted in the land and believes that Spirit is everywhere. She experiences strong connections to reservation lands and feels they are sacred, much like the Episcopal church where she worships. See the [Artist's Statement](#) page.

Elicit students' responses to Reynolds' landscape photograph using one or more of the [Interpretation Strategies](#).

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Note: This material is most appropriate for older grades.

Lakota People's Reverence for the Land and their Creation Story



Wind Cave National Park, South Dakota, 2009 by Sue Reynolds

This reverence for the land is explained in the introduction to *He Sapa Woihanble: Black Hills Dream*, by Lakota authors Craig Howe and Lydia Whirlwind Soldier. He Sapa is the Lakota name for the Black Hills.

“He Sapa holds memories and stories of Lakota history from the time of creation...and at the center of He Sapa is its foundation – Inyan, the Rock. Lakotas believe that countless generations later, our ancestors left the underworld and emerged onto this earth through a hole, or connecting cave, in Inyan.

...He Sapa is a precious resource that Lakotas have held in trust for the coming generations. He Sapa to Lakotas is a wiziyan, a repository from which we can draw physical and spiritual sustenance...We cannot look upon it without thinking about the power that created it. We are part of it, as it is part of us.”

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American Indian traditional beliefs consider nature to be a place where Spirit lives. A Yupiaq from Alaska, Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, writes, “The Yupiaq people live in an aware world. Wherever they go they are amongst spirits of their ancestors, as well as those of the animals, plants, hills, winds, lakes and rivers.”

Native American tribes have designated certain places in their homelands such as mountains, rivers, and other natural things important to their beliefs as sacred, just as you might a church, synagogue, temple, holy book, or religious object such as a Christian cross or sculpture. What makes a place sacred? How does the Native American practice of living with and in nature with reverence relate to your behavior and practices when you and your family are in your place of worship?

Victor Charlo’s poem “Dixon August Sky” expresses what he sees and loves in nature.

Dixon August Sky

Rainbow fills the sky with those light pastels
I love so much, red, gray, orange hues so soft
Over Red Sleep Mountain waiting
To find their place on the horizon.

Red Sleep Mountain within the boundaries
Of the National Bison Range, good for a name,
But then there are the Salish Mountains
North of the Bison Range. How is that for a name
All in one place, right from my back room?
I see Red Sleep Mountain.
I am the Salish Mountains.

Dirty Corner Poems and Other Stories, by Victor A. Charlo.

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Just as photographers do, poets construct their poems to communicate their ideas. They choose words, flow and pauses carefully to help convey their thoughts. These excerpts from the **Poet's Statement** give insights into the way Victor Charlo writes and what he chooses to write about:

"I was born and raised on the Flathead Reservation and write poems about reservation life, family and friends I love, loss, nature..."

"These early experiences are why I write the way I do—with as few words as possible. I cut to the quick. When I write I try to conjure up the old sayings, those words I grew up with that come out every now and then."

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. What kind of setting has Victor Charlo created to set the scene for his poem?
2. What nouns does he include to describe nature?
3. What adjectives has he selected to describe nature?
4. What do you think his feelings are about nature? Explain.
5. What do you think he means by "I am the Salish Mountains"?
6. How do Charlo's poem and Reynolds' photograph relate?

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Quinton White Quills at Tom Crawford's Youth Program, Blackfeet Reservation, Montana, 2015 by Sue Reynolds

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. Why do Blackfeet and many other American Indian people feel a strong connection to horses?
2. What do you think Quinton feels about horses and why?
3. If you have a pet and/or a strong connection to an animal describe your feelings about this.

American Indians believe there is Spirit in living things. In this photograph we can see Quinton's deep connection to this horse. Horses have played an important part in many American Indian cultures and histories, including those of the Blackfeet, Crow and Lakota, having transformed their hunting, defense and transportation. The adoption of horses into Native American life included skill, discipline, concern and care and represented an important aspect of individual and tribal pride and wealth. The role of horses in Blackfeet religion and healing was and continues to be an important "medicine" for this tribe.

Elicit students' responses to this photograph using one or more of the **Interpretation Strategies**.

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Emmett Martin Holding a Rock with a Story, Mobridge, South Dakota, 2015 by Sue Reynolds

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. Many Lakota people believe there is Spirit in the land, plants, animals and even rocks. What kinds of narratives could this rock have witnessed throughout history?
2. Create a story this rock could contain.

The man holding the rock is Emmett Martin from Mobridge, South Dakota, across the Missouri River from the Standing Rock Reservation where he grew up. Like many Lakota, he was raised speaking their indigenous language and understanding that all of the elements in the land contain Spirit and hold stories of who travelled and what happened there.

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Other Sections Inside this Chapter:

Mother Earth Introduction
Lands of Conflict and History
Artist's Statement
Poet's Statement
Interpretation Strategies

Additional Chapters:

Reclaiming Culture Introduction
Reservation Life Introduction

Other Resources

Lakota Origin Story by Elder Duane Hollow Horn Bear, by The WoLakota Project. *YouTube*.

I Will Be Meat for My Salish, by The Montana Writers Project and the Buffalo of the Flathead Indian Reservation.