

#### Stereotypical Images

Your students will participate in an activity in which they will contemplate stereotypical images and preconceived notions. Then your students will learn about Potato Creek Johnny and a life changing gold nugget he found on May 27, 1929. The nugget he discovered was over four inches long, resembling the shape of a woman's leg. The stereotypical images and preconceived notions activity should be completed before you show the students any images of Potato Creek Johnny.



Courtesy: Deadwood History Inc.

For many Americans, the year 1929 symbolizes the closing of a decade of change and the onset of the Great Depression, the longest economic downturn in the history of the United States. However, for Black Hills legend Potato Creek Johnny, 1929 signified fortune, fame, and an improved life status due to a magnificent find—a gold nugget weighing approximately 7.43 troy ounces.

Despite an aura of disbelief that surrounded both Perrett and his gold nugget, he became an instant celebrity in Deadwood. Quickly dubbed "Potato Creek Johnny" due to the claim where he located the nugget, the 63 year old Perrett became a featured member of the local community.

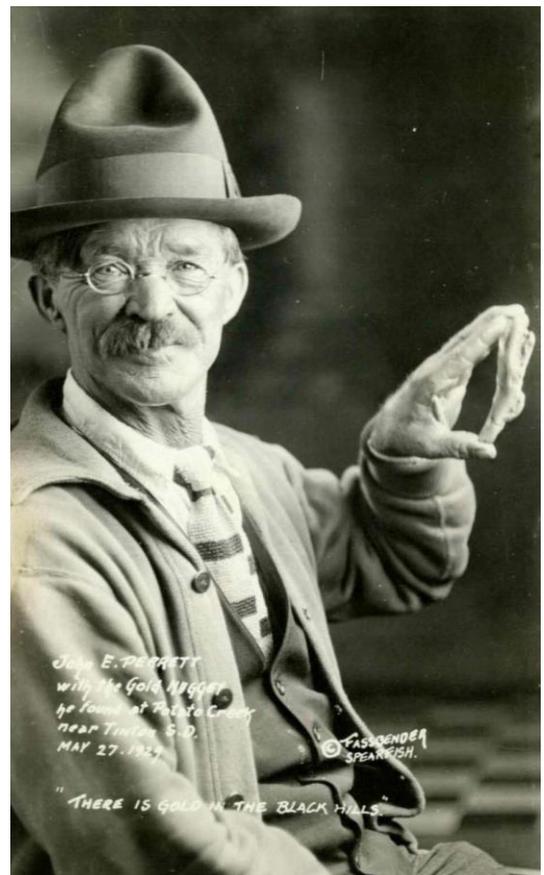
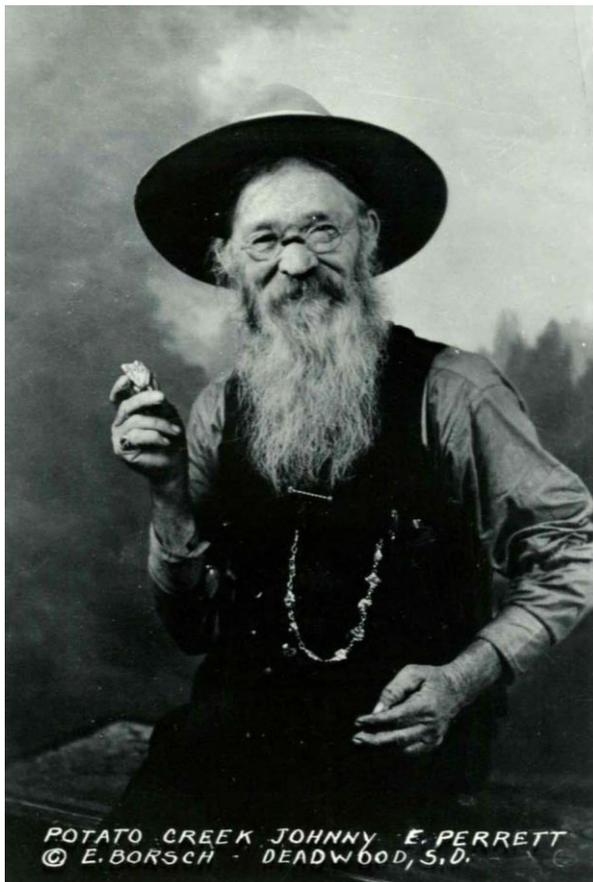
Perrett had a large personality, which at times seemed to overwhelm his 4'3" frame. After the discovery of the gold nugget, the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce quickly recognized that Perrett would fit in well with their plan to attract new tourists to the area and began utilizing him whenever possible. Johnny's physical appearance also fit with the stereotypical image of a pioneer prospector and he played into this image by keeping his hair and beard long and dressing similar to early day placer miners.

He was often featured in the Days of '76 Parade and Celebration in the 1930s and '40s, where he would sign autographs and demonstrate gold panning for tourists. Visitors were welcome at his cabin, where he regaled them with tales of Deadwood as a mining camp while he panned for gold. When asked about his incredible find, he often responded that he had been looking for the rest of the leg ever since. He traveled across the U.S., representing Deadwood, and was featured in Life magazine. ([More about Potato Creek Johnny](#))

#### Activity:

- The following activity will help young students understand what stereotypical images and preconceived notions are. The activity will also teach your students that preconceived notions and images are not always correct (and can be harmful) because they could be based on incorrect or incomplete information. Misconceptions can arise from images on a movie, video game, biased talk from a relative or friend, personal experiences, etc.

- From memory, the students should draw a picture of a placer gold miner (miner that pans for gold). They should also describe characteristics of the miner.
- Place the two photos below of Potato Creek Johnny on the projector. Have the students compare their drawing to the two photos. There is a drastic difference in the appearance of Potato Creek Johnny in the two photos.
- Share the story of Potato Creek Johnny with your students. Explain that after the discovery of the gold nugget, the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce quickly recognized that Perrett would fit in well with their plan to attract new tourists to the area and began utilizing him whenever possible. It was noted Johnny's physical appearance also fit with the stereotypical image of a pioneer prospector and he played into this image by keeping his hair and beard long and dressing similar to early day placer miners. This is Marketing 101- The Deadwood Chamber of Commerce and Potato Creek Johnny portrayed an image the public wanted to see. Below is the same man; who would you have rather taken a photo with for your scrapbook?



Images Courtesy: Deadwood History Inc.

- Continue with the activity by providing additional examples. Below are a few suggestions that tend to have stereotypical images associated with them.
  - Farmer (usually overhauls, etc.)
  - Veteran (usually drawn in a uniform)
  - Doctor (usually a male)
  - Student (usually glasses, smiling or holding books)
  - Teacher (you may want to skip this one)
  - Bulley (usually shown as a mean male)
  - Etc.
- Make sure to dispel hurtful/misguided stereotypical characteristics by providing photos or specific examples of people you know that are contrary to the stereotypes. Certain characteristics tend to surface that do not cause harm. A doctor is many times drawn with a stethoscope and a white coat, which is fine and expected. On the other hand, many children draw doctors as males which would be an example of a characteristic that should be discussed. The students should learn that everyone is an individual and they should not fit into a specific mold.
- In most cases, Google Images provides a variety of examples, many of which are stereotypically over the top and others that are not. Note: Preview Google Images search, because many times inappropriate images might surface.
- Consider the age of your students; some examples that deal with race, religion, geographic regions, politics, etc. would not be appropriate for younger students. They would require additional explanation and time allotment for an in-depth conversation.