

# Waniyetu Wowapi (winter count)

A winter count is a pictographic record of historical/memorable events for a *tiospaye* (community). The winter count, used by many Plains Indians, was a method of preserving history. Important events were recorded for future generations.



The Lone Dog Winter Count  
[Smithsonian Institution](#)

The pictures, which were used as mnemonic devices, are arranged in chronological order. Originally, the memorable events were recorded on rock (many paintings found on cave walls, canyons and mountains throughout the Great Plains), on buffalo hide, deer hide, cow hide, and then ledger paper and muslin (cotton fabric). Natural dyes were used by the keeper to draw the images. The dyes used to record the images also changed over time.

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Berries, clay, plants, roots, and buffalo gall (liver bile), blood and stomach contents were a few of the materials used to draw the images.

Each tiospaye designated a winter count



The Swan Winter Count  
Smithsonian Institution

keeper. (Victor Douville, Sinte Gleska University, [explains how the Keeper of the winter count was selected.](#))

The keeper (traditionally a

man) of the winter count was the historian for the community. Elders would gather and consult with the keeper to select the most important event of the year (first snow to first snow.) Victor Douville, Sinte Gleska University, [explains how an event is/was selected for a winter count.](#)

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The keeper would then draw an image on the winter count to represent the event. The images on the winter count were used as a reminder/aid to help the keeper remember the events. The keeper (oral historian for the tiospaye) could then explain the events in detail. The keeper was responsible for providing an oral account of the images drawn.

➤ Additional Background Information

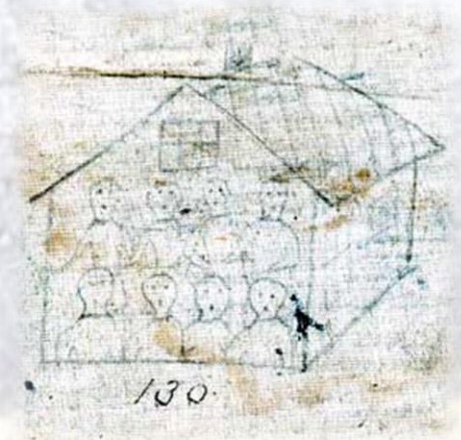
- The Smithsonian:

- [Lone Dogs Winter Count Guide](#)

- [Teacher Guide](#)

- [Lakota Winter Count: Online Exhibit](#) (Interactive)

- [Lakota Winter Count: Online Exhibit](#) (html)



Winter Count: Rosebud (1880 - 1881)  
Children sent to school.  
Image: [Smithsonian Institution](#)

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- Power Point Presentations and Comments: Victor Douville, Sinte Gleska University
  - [Waniyetu Wowapi: Winter Count](#) (PP)
  - [Evolution of Wajaje-Cokatowela Shirts](#) (PP)
  - [The importance of the winter counts](#)
  - [The different types of winter counts](#)
  - [How an event is/was selected for a winter count](#)
  - [How the Keeper of the winter count was selected](#)
- St. Francis Mission: [Waniyetu Yawapi \(Lakota Winter Counts\)](#)
- UNL: [Winter Counts as Possible Precursors to Writing](#)
- UC Irvine: [Anderson Winter Count](#)
- State Historical Society South Dakota
  - [Buffalo and the Plains Indians](#) (South Dakota State Historical Society [Educational Kit](#))
  - State Historical Society North Dakota - [High Dog's Winter Count](#)

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## ➤ Lessons, Units and Standards

- Lessons:

- [Recording the Past and the Future](#)
- [Winter Counts \(a closer look\)](#)
- [The “Keeper” of the Count](#)
- [Class Winter Count](#)
- [Winter Count Dyes](#)

- Units:

- [Waniyetu Wowapi \(winter count\) Units: K-12](#)

- Standards:

- [Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards](#)

