

Title

Devils Tower and the Struggle Over the Protection of Sacred Lakota Sites in Nature.

Grade Level

Non-Native American undergraduate college students.

Theme

Teaching religious diversity and a respect for sacred Lakota sites in an effort to spread knowledge and increase tolerance for Lakota culture.

Duration

One 2-hour seminar.

Goal

Students will learn the history of Devils Tower (*Mato Tipila* in Lakota) from the Native perspective, focusing on its place in Lakota tradition and mythology. Students will study the point of contention between the Lakota people, the National Parks System, and other residents of the Black Hills and tourists over the treatment of Devils Tower. Students will explore the idea of freedom of religious expression as it relates to Lakota culture in the context of sacred sites in public lands and national parks. Students will discuss the reality of the idea of “co-inhabitation” of the Earth and the Black Hills, taking into account Lakota beliefs and values of respect for the environment and their sacred sites.

Objectives

Students will be able to identify and give a detailed history of Devils Tower from the perspective of Lakotas. Students will gain an understanding of the complexity of the long battle over the right to religious expression and protection of Devils Tower as a sacred site for Lakotas. This introduction session will initiate a dialogue among non-native people in an effort to gain a greater understanding and tolerance of Lakota culture and religion.

South Dakota Standards

N/A.

Cultural Concept

Devils Tower and other sacred sites in and around the Black Hills are central to Lakota culture and religion. Is the protection of these sites crucial to the perpetuation of Lakota culture? If so, what measures can be taken to ensure the rights Lakotas to their sacred places and the protection of these locations. What are some possible means of reconciling the fact that Devils Tower remains both a National Park meant for enjoyment and a sacred site for many different Native American tribes?

Cultural Background

Devils Tower is a monolith geographical feature located in northeastern Wyoming. It was declared the first United States National Monument in 1906, and is currently operated by the National Parks Service (NPS). Devils Tower is a sacred site to many Native American tribes in the Great Plains. For the Lakota people of South Dakota, Devils Tower, or *Mato Tipila* in Lakota, is a crucial part of their cultural mythology and plays a large role in their religious ceremonies. The Park is currently shared by Native Americans, tourists, and outdoor enthusiasts, including rock climbers who pound bolts into the rock walls and others who refuse to follow marked hiking trails. Many Lakotas

see the actions of tourists and climbers at Devils Tower as the desecration of a sacred site. The NPS has asked climbers to voluntarily refrain from their activities during the month of June to allow for sacred Lakota ceremonies to proceed without interruption. Such regulations have been met with intense opposition, as they are viewed by many climbers as an unjust endorsement of Native American religions.

Student Activities

- Group discussion following video screening.
- Group Debate: Divide the class into 2 groups, one representing the interests of the Lakota people and one defending the rights of the climbers. Debate the issue utilizing facts and evidence to support your point and gain an understanding of the complexity of the issue.
- Question and answer session with a Lakota spiritual leader or scholar on the cultural and religious significance of Devils Tower.*
- Field trip to Devils Tower.*

*=Both depend on the location of the college and time restraints of the class.

Resources

- Lectures, along with Powerpoint images.
- Video: *In the Light of Reverence*.

The following readings should be assigned and completed prior to class:

- Dussias, Allison, M. "Cultural Conflicts Regarding Land Use: The Conflict Between Recreational Users at Devils Tower and Native American Ceremonial Users."
- LaPointe, J. "Devils Tower," in *Legends of the Lakota* (pp. 65-67).

Assessment

Group discussion following presentation of the material.

References

- Dussias, A. M. (n. d.). Cultural conflicts regarding land use: The conflict between recreational users at Devils Tower and Native American ceremonial users. *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law*, 2, (pp. 13-40). Retrieved April 20, 2008 from <<http://www.vjel.org/journal/pdf/VJEL10005.pdf>>.
- In the Light of Reverence: Protecting America's Sacred Lands*. (2002). Produced and directed by Christopher McLeod. DVD. Bullfrog Films.
- LaPointe, J. (1976). Devils Tower. *Legends of the Lakota* (pp. 65-67). San Francisco: Indian Historian Press.
- One Bull (1982). Sioux legend: About Bears Tipi. In D. Stone (Comp.) *First encounters: Indian Legends of Devils Tower* (p. 23). WY: O/K.
- Rogow, F. and McLeod, C. (n. d.). Teacher's guide to *In the light of reverence*. Retrieved June 4, 2009 from the Sacred Land Film Project website at <www.sacredland.org>.
- White Bull, (1982). Sioux: More about Bears Tipi. In D. Stone (Comp.) *First encounters: Indian Legends of Devils Tower* (p. 25). WY: O/K.

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Date

5 June 2009