

Lesson Plans

The Pow-Wow

William Gilbert Gaul

c. 1890

Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 X 24 1/8"

CONCEPT

Students will use critical thinking skills to discover how an artist creates a painting that is both documentary as well as expressive.

TEKS

The SRM Educator Guide lessons support inquiry-based discussion and align with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for art, history and English language arts. To select correlations for your grade level visit the [Texas Education Agency TEKS website](#).

VOCABULARY

- **Census** - an official count of the population.
- **Metaphor** - an image that refers to or is symbolic of an idea.

The lesson was designed for use with *The First Americans: An Educator's Guide* and was written by Melissa Barry, Sid Richardson Museum post-graduate research intern.



DESCRIBE

Take time to study the painting. What do you see? Describe the figures, objects, landscape, and the sky. What are the figures in the foreground doing? How are they dressed? What do you see in the background? Describe the colors and the brushstrokes. Does it look as if the paint was applied quickly or slowly and deliberately?

INQUIRE

What colors did the artist use in the sky along the horizon line to imply the time of day? How do the colors and brushstrokes contribute to the mood of the painting?

SUPPOSE

Imagine you are in the painting. Is this a desirable setting? Why or why not? What would you hear? What aromas would you smell? How would you feel? Artists sometimes use the time of day and weather to create a metaphor.





Think about the rising and setting of the sun. What are the connotations? Birth and renewal? Concluding and vanishing?

INFORM

William Gilbert Gaul was part of a team that documented Native Americans in a special report for the census, *Report on the Indians Taxed and Not Taxed in the United States (except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census, 1890*. The report was an extensive undertaking by artists who recorded the Native American lifestyle in texts, sketches, photographs and paintings.

Previously, there had only been rough estimates of the Native population. The 638-page report enumerated the population and described their land, cookery, beliefs, language, customs, and dress. To prevent duplication in counting, Indigenous Americans living off the reservations as part of the larger U.S. society who were self-supporting were counted in the general census, and taxed. Those living on reservations were counted by Special Agents, and were not taxed. The 1890 *Report* is important because it provides insight to the Native way of life at the end of the nineteenth century.

Gaul was appointed to travel to North Dakota to report on the Standing Rock Reservation in August 1890. He noted the Westernization of the Native Americans indicated by the change in their dress:

“The appearance of the Indian is fast changing. The day of the buffalo robes and buckskins is passing away. With the Sioux breechcloths are no more. The Indian is no longer a gaily bedecked individual. Most of his furs and feathers have disappeared simultaneously with the deerskin. Now many are putting on canvas clothes altogether...”

How does the painting reflect what the census concluded? Compare *The Pow-Wow* to *The Thunderfighters*... (pg. 50-51).

EXTEND p. 64

Use the outline to write a story that expresses the mood of this painting. Consider the dress of the figures, the juxtaposition of the teepee and wagon and the time of day.

Look at the photograph *Sioux and Wife, Semi-Civilized*. Gaul included it in his report on the Native American life. Consider the title of the photograph and the dress of the man and woman. What does this photograph say about the changing lifestyle of the Native Americans? Use the Venn diagram to compare and contrast *The Pow-Wow* with the photograph.



Credit: *Report on the Indians Taxed and Not Taxed in the United States (except Alaska) at the Eleventh Census, 1890*, Department of the Interior, Census Office (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 519. http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v10-22.pdf

