

## Primary Source Reading 8-1 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## Plains Indian Life

### ■ About the Selection

Luther Standing Bear was born a hereditary chief of the Oglala Sioux (Lakota) in 1868. He was raised according to the traditions of his people, who hunted the plains of South Dakota. When the government exiled the Sioux to a reservation, he was sent to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Luther Standing Bear learned English and the white culture. After graduation, he moved back to the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. There he married, raised a family, taught school, and wrote books about the Sioux way of life. His two most informative books are

### Reader's Dictionary



**adjudged:** judged

**deportment:** how a person carries himself or herself

**flounce:** to move with exaggerated motions

**stoic:** unfeeling, inexpressive

*My People, the Sioux and Land of the Spotted Eagle*, which is excerpted below.

### GUIDED READING

As you read, compare Lakota customs with contemporary American customs. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Lakota (Sioux) were a social people, loving human companionship and association and admiring the use of manners and deportment that accompanied their social life.

The rules of polite behavior that formed the Lakota etiquette were called *woyuonihan*, meaning "full of respect." Those failing to practice these rules were *waohola sni*, that is, "without respect," therefore rude and ill-bred.

A good deal of time was spent in merrymaking with feasts, songs, dances, and social ceremonies, and anyone coming as a visitor, whether friend or stranger, was welcomed. . . . The tepee door was always open for anyone to enter, and it was not impolite to walk in without knocking and unannounced. The phrase "come in" was never used to bid one to enter, though when the visitor was in he was at once seated as a mark of hospitality. A stranger, however, coming into the village, especially at night, would call out the fact that he was a stranger and would state his business. . . .

Praise, flattery, exaggerated manners, and fine, high-sounding words were no part of Lakota politeness. Excessive manners were put down as insincere, and the constant talker was considered rude and thoughtless. Conversation was never begun at once, nor in a hurried manner. No one was quick with a question, no matter how important, and no one was pressed for an answer. A pause giving time for thought was the truly courteous way of beginning and conducting a conversation. Silence was meaningful with the Lakota . . . [who were] regardful of the rule that "thought comes before speech."

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## Primary Source Reading 8-1 (continued) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Also in the midst of sorrow, sickness, death, or misfortune of any kind, and in the presence of the notable and great, silence was the mark of respect. More powerful than words was silence with the Lakota and his strict observance of this . . . [and] good behavior was the reason, no doubt, for his being given another fallacious (false) characterization of being a stoic. He has been adjudged dumb, stupid, indifferent, and unfeeling. As a matter of truth, [a Lakota] was the most sympathetic of men . . . for the silent man was ever to be trusted, while the man ever ready with speech was never taken seriously.

A woman of correct social manner was modest, low voiced and reserved. She sat quietly on the tepee floor, never flouncing herself about nor talking loudly and harshly. A woman who laughed loudly in order to attract attention was put down as common and immoral and was at once discredited and shunned.

Mothers watched over their boys and girls with equal care, though the girls were subjected to more restraint than the boys. [The girls] were given more attention as to personal appearance and were never allowed to sit in a careless way. Her [a girl's] movements in the tepee must be noiseless and orderly. The well-bred girl, like her mother, was quiet and modest, and very respectful in the presence of elders. [A] woman's sphere was quite distinctly defined and to obtrude [move away] from it was considered bold and improper. . . .

The Lakota was a true . . . lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth, and the attachment grew with age. The old people came literally to love the soil, and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power.

This is why the old Indian still sits upon the earth instead of propping himself up and away from its life-giving forces. For him, to sit or lie upon the ground is to be able to think more deeply and to feel more keenly. He can see more clearly into the mysteries of life and come closer in kinship to other lives about him.

Source: *We Rode the Wind: Recollections of Native American Life*. Minneapolis: Runestone Press, 1995.

**READER RESPONSE**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. According to Chief Luther Standing Bear, what were the basic Lakota categories for judging behavior?
2. What rule did the Lakota follow when speaking?
3. How did the Lakota treat strangers?
4. Why did a Lakota sit on the earth?
5. **Critical Thinking** Why do you think the Lakota were sometimes mistakenly considered dumb or cold and indifferent?