

# ***INDIAN RELAY*** *Essential Understandings*



Indian Relay is a contemporary documentary with traditional roots. The Montana Office of Public Instruction developed unique core content standards that help teachers incorporate Indian Education into contemporary curriculum.

We have consulted the Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians and, where possible, have designed suggestions for classroom use (see below). While designed for teachers, these suggestions could also be used in community conversations or screenings of Indian Relay...and we have included possible answers.

We strongly suggest that you view the Department of Tourism video, Department of Tourism Video: [Sacred Lands from Peaks to Plain](#), for its excellent overview of Montana Tribal Nations.

# ***Essential Understanding 1***

There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

Indian Relay features three teams – one from Crow, one from Blackfeet and one from Shoshone-Bannock. All participants are from sovereign Nations. After viewing the video, answer the following questions:

## ***What differences do you see in the way each team approaches their participation in Indian Relay?***

### **Proposed examples**

**M&M from Crow is intense**, training horses, rider, muggers, and holders. The whole team is involved – they practice the organized transfer of horses one night when the transfer was not too smooth during one race; Kendall states that Zack is “here every day”; Zack continues riding even when hurt and his only concession is wearing a “safety jacket”.

**Kendall:** “I’d like to see this sport grow, especially here on this rez, but there’s not that many really good riders. They don’t know the techniques; they don’t know the training, the dedication that comes with it. A lot of these guys just think they got to show up race day and jump on a horse and go. And that isn’t the case.”

**Kendall:** “When it isn’t happening we gotta figure out some other way and do it to make it happen. So by the time we get out there we know exactly what we’re doing and what each person is going to have to do throughout the race. I mean you want every exchange to be picture perfect you know and it’s tough, but that’s the way we roll. So, tomorrow will be a lot better set up with the way we’re going now”

**Murray from Blackfeet** is a more laid-back training. Myles rides 5 times a week, he doesn’t have a team set at start of season, he is starting from nothing.

**Carol Murray:** “We bought a couple of horses last fall. But he was basically starting from nothing, you know. The one-man team.”

**Myles:** “Been pretty much just me. My mom kinda helps with this one because it got sick.”

**Carol:** “This kid doesn’t know how to train horses or training a team of four men and five horses.”

**Myles:** “I don’t really got nobody right now, but I’ll probably find holders by the time relay starts.”

**Tissidimit** is buying horses, training is coordinated, ongoing, looking at how they lost races to see their weaknesses.

**Lance:** “ [We have to] go back to the drawing board. Find out what happened. Try the horses over: Things like this make me want to try harder.” Little tiny things are happening out here today that’s just hurting us? Little tiny things cause us big problems.”

# ***Essential Understanding 1***

***Do you think you can look at these differences and find correlating attitudes in the individual Nations?***

**Caution to teachers:** Students will want to find how each team represents their Tribal Nation, but there is no universal Indian character nor do all individuals in a Nation behave the same way. This lesson helps students focus on each of the three teams – but as individuals, not as the ultimate example of their Nation...and leads into Essential Understanding 2.

***How does M&M show their Apsaalooke heritage?***

This team is intense, organized, experienced. Are these traits that most Crow exhibit or is this just the team?

What evidence can you find to support your answer?

***How does the Murray team show their Niitsitapi heritage?***

Myles' team is somewhat laid-back. The team hasn't even been assembled during the early part of training the horses. When they had such a bad start, was that inexperience or was it a result of a laid-back attitude? Also, at the end of the season, Myles is considering having two teams – is this Myles himself or is this Niitsitapi?

What evidence can you find to support your answer?

***How does Tissidimit show their Shoshone-Bannock heritage?***

Lance is very soft-spoken, positive, and analytical. He talks about having to “brush something off”. At the end he says “winning feels good, but that’s not the main thing. It’s just being out there. And if you lose, you still walk off the track and laugh at each other.” Is this Lance himself or is it the Shoshone-Bannock?

What evidence can you find to support your answer?

## ***Essential Understanding 2***

There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by entities, organizations and people. A continuum of Indian identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional. There is no generic American Indian.

***Fill out the following chart with examples of traditional and modern ways that each team exhibits. There is also a place for you to look at the announcers or audience and see if they exhibit traditional or modern ways***

<b>Team</b>	<b>Nation</b>	<b>Traditional Ways</b>	<b>Modern Ways</b>
<b>M&amp;M Express</b>	<b>Apsaalooke Crow</b>	Horses leg wraps reflect family and Nation, dress patterns, yelling at horses at trade, smudging, substitute rider	Using a flame thrower to light sweetgrass! Luke dedicating ride to Zack.
<b>Murray</b>	<b>Niitsitapi Blackfeet</b>	Painting horses, barechested, Inimskin	Using trailers to get horses to relay
<b>Tissidimit</b>	<b>Shoshone-Bannock</b>	Singing, substitute rider, let it go - holding in anger will make you sick	The McDonalds sticker in the pickup right next to the sweetgrass braid
<b>Other examples from the video</b>		Drummers in background	Announcers do not use the Tribal Nation name when announcing racers

## ***Essential Understanding 3***

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

### ***What are the spiritual or traditional practices that you see in IR?***

#### **Proposed examples**

**Leo Teton:** “We’re horse people, we’re always going to have that in our blood, you know, it’s...they’re our 4-legged brother. We got to pray with them, talk with them. Give them a good blessing. They treat you well, you treat them well. And when they run that horse around that track, you’re...you’re one, you’re not two.”

**Zack:** “Well I think what I thought I was thinking...Stop. I was gonna die, and I just started praying.”

**Myles:** “This is my Inimskin. It’s uh, it’s like a rock. I don’t know. It’s kinda good luck thing. I believe in. I don’t know if it works, but I believe in it. I was missing it for 2 years, and then I found it. It was my old basket of dirty clothes. So I start wearing it again.”

**Lance:** “Before the race, he was in bad shape. He was hurting. He was hurting pretty bad. And he said, “Oh I’ll be fine once we get going. Once we go, I’ll be alright.” In that first exchange it was good. He looked good. And then came around next one. Then he came in, jump, he wasn’t quite on, and the horse stepped, and he just kinda fell off so easy. After that he just couldn’t get on. Couldn’t get on the horse. And then he just flipped off the other side. Landed right on his back again, and stepped on him. Bumped him on the head. And he was in bad, bad shape then. He’s hurting. Can’t walk. Can’t bend down. Can’t stand up straight.” I said, “I’ll pray for you. For you to heal up.” He goes, “I’ll be alright.”

M&M Express prayers as a group before final

Sweetgrasses with M&M Express

Feather in truck

Using colors on horses and shirts – yellow for name (Yellowknife), green for clan

Smudging with M&M Express

### ***Find video from one other sporting event in the US – what are the traditions that you see by participants or the event host?***

#### **Proposed examples**

Singing the National Anthem

Opening Prayer

Participants wearing crosses

Often football players point to the heavens, cross themselves or kneel to pray after a touchdown

## ***Essential Understanding 3***

***What are the commonalities, what are the unique elements?***

<b>Commonalities</b>	<b>Uniqueness</b>
praying	smudging
Good luck pieces like inimskin, crosses, feathers	

## ***Essential Understanding 4***

Reservations are lands that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties, statutes, and executive orders and were not “given” to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

- I. Both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.
- II. Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.
- III. Acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.

***Each of the three teams live on Reservation lands. It what ways does the availability of Reservation lands help the teams train?***

**Proposed examples**

There are wide open spaces to ride, hills to climb with the horses.

There may be a grandstand for practice – getting the horses used to that setting

There may be common grazing lands.

***In what ways do you see the larger community contributing to the training?***

**Proposed examples**

Cheering them on

Experience

Others may be willing to share equipment as well as advice

Pride of community is inspiring, personal pride may keep a rider practicing

## ***Essential Understanding 6***

History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

One common theme throughout Indian Country is the oral tradition – passing down the history through story and song. In the Department of Tourism Video: [Sacred Lands from Peaks to Plain video](#) we suggested, **Earl Old Person** said “It’s good that we have two ways of life, we have our traditional way and then we enter into the life today. And it’s important for our young people to learn that that’s the life we have to look toward.”

**Kendall Old Horn of M&M Express** said, “It’s our competitive nature that puts us into this sport, and then it’s our pride that keeps us in it and keeps us going. And the number one thing over everything is the pride of our tribes, the pride of our nations, why teams work so hard to do so good.”

***How participants in Indian Relay honor their pasts while looking toward the future? We have provided the following chart as an example:***

Participant	How do they talk about their ancestors	Evidence of carrying on traditions	How do they talk about their children?	What are they doing to pass on IR to their kids
<p><b>M&amp;M Express</b></p>	<p><b>KENDALL:</b> I think that this is one sport where you get to prove yourself against other tribes. This is a good way to show your horsemanship. Show what you can or can't do out there. And I think that's what...that's what makes a lot of these teams stay in the game. To see who can stay on top the longest, or who can outrun and out-train everybody else.</p>	<p>Giveaway at win Smudging Picking colors that represent family</p>	<p><b>KENDALL:</b> Good rider's the heart and soul of a team. And Zack's a big part of it. Big part of our team, our family, he's like a son to us.</p> <p><b>KENDALL:</b> I used to be pretty bad. I used to go out and party. I mean I was just kinda rowdy kinda dude you know, and that was just my lifestyle. When he was born I said, you know, I gotta stop it. When it comes to it, I always look for things that are going to help him out, 10, 15, 20 years down the line. You know, my grandkids and everybody, you know. How's it going to affect them?</p>	<p>Riding with protective vest Little boy closes the trailer door</p> <p><b>KENDALL:</b> I'd like to see this sport grow, especially here on this rez, but there's not that many really good riders. They don't know the techniques; they don't know the training, the dedication that comes with it.</p>
<p><b>Murray</b></p>	<p><b>CAROL:</b> When things are going good, you know everybody is all happy and seeming like they're pulling together, but when they're not winning, you know, they still have to have the character to get up and, and take care of the horses, and take care of themselves.</p> <p><b>CAROL :</b> when the horse came to the Indians, we got very prosperous</p>	<p>Inimskin—holding it for good luck Riding bare chested Decorating horses</p>	<p><b>CAROL:</b> I got a bunch of little grandsons coming up, and they need a hero. I'd like it to be their oldest cousin.</p> <p><b>MYLES:</b> Indian Relay, I want to do it cuz my uncle, LP, did it.</p>	<p><b>CAROL:</b> I want people to overcome their fears they've had in life—it is constructive for young people to have something like this to do</p> <p><b>CAROL :</b> If you can't keep your self-worth together, you'll fail. And, um, your team will dissolve. That's really what the stakes are of Indian Relay.</p>

Participant	How do they talk about their ancestors	Evidence of carrying on traditions	How do they talk about their children?	What are they doing to pass on IR to their kids
Tissidimit	Horses make families come together – they make me feel good, energized inside	Dream catcher in truck Team shirts have symbols incorporated	<b>PUNKIN:</b> Lance has high expectations and I have high expectations. What I want, after hearing what my little boy said to me last year, I think it gives me a drive. He wants me to quit cuz of the accidents and stuff. If I could just take him out on the track and say, “See, this is what Dad accomplished by all the hard work and dedication. Because if I can do it at my age, you’re only 8 years old now, if you put your mind to it, you can do anything you want to do.”	<b>LANCE:</b> I wanna help Keenan and Braylee. I want to help Braylee get started with hers and get Keenan going, riding better. I want to focus on them.
Others	<b>LEO TETON:</b> We’re horse people, we’re always going to have that in our blood, you know, it’s... they’re our 4-legged brother. We got to pray with them, talk with them.			

## ***Additional Information***

Here are the Essential Understandings for Montana Indians which we developed no pertinent lessons.

### ***Essential Understanding 5***

Federal policies, put into place throughout American history, have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods:

Colonization Period 1492 -

Treaty Period 1789 - 1871

Allotment Period 1887 - 1934

Boarding School Period 1879 - - -

Tribal Reorganization Period 1934 - 1958

Termination Period 1953 - 1988

Self-determination 1975 – current

### ***Essential Understanding 7***

Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.

## ***Contact Information***

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