



# AKTÁ LAKOTA

## Museum & Cultural Center

- an outreach of St. Joseph's Indian School -



**NATIONALLY RENOWNED CENTER OF AMERICAN INDIAN ART**

## DISCOVERING THE CULTURE OF THE LAKOTA PEOPLE

Aktá Lakota translates to "to honor the people." That is the exact mission of the Aktá Lakota Museum. Our museum goes beyond the conventional definition, offering visitors an experience, a living lesson on the past and present of the American Indian way of life. Our unique octagon-shaped building offers 14,000 square feet of exhibition space that features rare art, artifacts, and educational displays. The museum's style gives attention to detail that attracts and amazes visitors worldwide, earning the Aktá Lakota the prestigious TripAdvisor Traveler's Choice Award for five consecutive years. A single visit will reveal why our museum stands out. Plan your visit today at: <https://aktalakota.stjo.org/>



# THE ART OF TEACHING AND STORYTELLING



Teacher to His Takója © 1986  
Daniel Long Solider, Oglala Lakota

The Native American culture is known for its rich oral tradition - instead of using a written language to document their history, these indigenous people simply relied on their verbal language to share their history, customs, rituals, and legends through vivid narratives.

These powerful tales, often told by the tribal elders to the younger generations, not only related their tribal history; these tribal stories also entertained and preserved their culture.

Each time a story was told, it breathed life into the culture, gave meaning to the tribe's history, and also taught life lessons about things like kinship, leadership, and honor, as well as their symbiotic connection to the earth and intimate relationships with the animals they depended on.

As a way to heighten the senses and encourage a deeper feeling of understanding between tribal members and their environment, when these stories were told, they were often told with song, music, spoken word, and dance.

Although this tradition of storytelling is less common today than was many years ago, some authors (both native and non-native) have promised to preserve these stories for future generations. They have listened and learned many of these legendary tales from tribal elders.

## A RECORD OF HISTORY: WINTER COUNTS

A Winter Count is a Native American tradition that visually preserves tribal history and culture, with some even documenting significant natural events.

The Lakota are particularly respected for their Winter Counts, which can cover hundreds of years. Each year is meticulously represented by a pictograph that illustrates the most important moment experienced by the tribe during that period.

During the harsh winter months, the Plains Indians would often come together to reflect on the past and capture the spirit of the year in their annual calendar. Since this practice typically occurred in winter, it came to be known as "counting by winters." This annual interpretation often highlighted an important event, a memorable achievement, or a notable occurrence within the tribal community, serving as the name for



Yellow Robe Winter Count (1814-1896)  
Kent B. Wintersteen Collection

## A RECORD OF HISTORY: WINTER COUNTS, CONTINUED...

that specific year.

The tribe appointed a community historian, or "keeper," to document all significant events and experiences. The council of elders would then select one pictograph from the annual collection to represent the entire year on the Winter Count.

As a new image was added each year, these records became an extraordinary archive of the tribe's history. Beautifully painted by the tribe's historian, they resonated with artistic expression.

Originally, these histories were painted on buffalo hides; however, after the late 19th century, when buffalo became scarce, other materials like ledger paper were often used.

The pictographs were arranged chronologically on the buffalo hide, often in a form, starting from either the left or right side of the design.

When combined with the rich oral traditions of the Lakota people, a Winter Count evolved into a powerful document for recounting the tribe's legacy.

## DOLLS: THE EVOLUTION OF A TEACHING TOOL

Rich in history, steeped in tradition, and embellished with tribal customs, Native American dolls were once lovingly handcrafted by mothers and grandmothers as gifts for their daughters and granddaughters.

While the term "doll" (hokšikağapila) might suggest a toy or a simple plaything, these meticulously crafted treasures served a significant purpose: they were designed to educate young girls about their heritage and future responsibilities as women. This included lessons on daily chores, childcare, and understanding the roles men held in the tribe as hunters and warriors.

These dolls also convey a narrative about the era and culture from which they originated. Lakota dolls, for instance, often showcased the gifts of the Plains and reflected the attire of the nomadic Indian tribes. They featured soft bodies made from buckskin, stuffed with buffalo wool, and dressed in buffalo hide garments and leggings adorned with abstract symbols, quillwork, or beadwork.



KATIE ROUBIDEAUX, Rosebud Sioux  
(1890-1991) John A Anderson Photo

## DOLLS: THE EVOLUTION OF A TEACHING TOOL, CONTINUED...

Interestingly, the faces of these dolls were often intentionally distorted or skewed. This design choice was made to avoid creating a realistic likeness that a child might associate with a specific person, which could inadvertently offend that individual's spirit.

Though Native American dolls are seldom used today to introduce children to their roles in contemporary society, they still possess the power to educate. Presently, numerous artists skillfully craft these dolls to honor the past, preserve native culture, and narrate historical tales and ancient tribal customs.



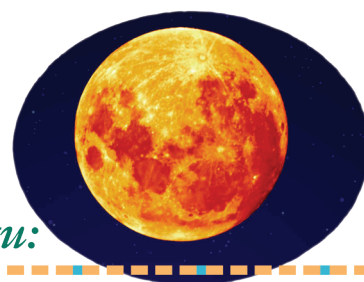
## LAKOTA MOON CALENDAR - *WÍYAWAPI WÓWAPI HANWÍ*

### *Waniyetu — The Cold and Dark Moons (Winter)*

In Lakota culture, Winter marked the start of a calm period where a solitary campsite was utilized for the entire season. As women crafted and repaired clothing, men went on expeditions to safeguard and fortify the camp. Despite the work, Winter was also seen as a time for enjoyment. Children gathered around the fire to hear their grandparents' stories, while elders shared the tribe's history. Additionally, there was plenty of time for games, dancing, and socializing.

- **Wanícokan Wi** — *Moon When the Deer Sheds Their Horns*
- **Wiótehika Wi** — *The Hard Moon*
- **Cannápopa Wi** — *Moon When Trees Crack From The Cold*
- **Istáwicayazan Wi** — *Moon of Sore Eyes (Snow Blindness)*

American Indians treasured nature and earth. The people's close connection to nature is seen in their calendars. Based on the moon cycles, the American Indian year was divided in to 13 moons with each [moon being 28 days long](#).



### *Waniyetu:*

### *The Cold and Dark Moons (Winter)*

- Wanícokan Wi* Moon When the Deer Sheds Their Horns
- Wiótehika Wi* The Hard Moon
- Cannápopa Wi* Moon When Trees Crack From The Cold
- Istáwicayazan Wi* Moon of Sore Eyes (Snow Blindness)

The Lakota year is divided into 13 moons. Each moon is 28 days long, and every day represents something sacred:

- Two days for the Great Spirit
- Two days for the Mother Earth
- Four days for the Four Winds
- One day for the Spotted Eagle
- One day for the Sun
- One day for the Moon
- One day for the Morning Star
- Four days for the Four Ages
- Seven days for the Seven Rites of the Sacred Pipe
- One day for the Buffalo
- One day for the Fire
- One day for the Water
- One day for the Rock
- One day for the Two-legged People

# MUST-SEE EXHIBITS

ON EXHIBIT JANUARY - JULY 2025

**Wóunspe – Education | Creative Collaborations** honors the deep connection between Native American students and their mentors, seen through an artistic perspective.



This exhibition highlights the creative works of students from St. Joseph's Indian School, developed through collaborative projects with visiting artists and the South Dakota Artists in Schools and Communities program. Each artwork embodies the powerful blend of cultural expression, artistic mentorship, and collective creativity. These collaborations allowed students to delve into various mediums and themes, enriching their connections to their artistic identities and heritage. The exhibition underscores the importance of sharing cultural traditions, artistic methods, and storytelling practices. Attendees will encounter a vibrant mix of voices and styles, showcasing the fresh insights of youth alongside the wisdom of experience. The exhibit also features artwork from Oglala Lakota Artists in Residence Micheal Two Bulls, Randall Blaze, Douglas Two Bulls and Wade Patton. Additionally, it includes works by Ariadne Albright, Hector Curriel, Michele David Mechling, Kim Nernberger, Dawn Senior-Trask, and Mark Zimmerman. The exhibit opened in January, and will be on display until July 31, 2025. Exhibit Curated by Assistant Curator David A. Meyer III.

### MISSING WITHOUT A TRACE: A LONG-STANDING ISSUE IN NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES



The problem of missing and murdered Indigenous persons has persisted for years, particularly in the US and South Dakota. In this state, the rate of missing and murdered Indigenous individuals continues to climb, with sixty percent of all missing cases involving Native Americans. Many believe the actual number is even higher.

This issue is often considered overlooked by many Native Americans, as the rates of missing and murdered Indigenous people remain alarmingly high nationwide. The South Dakota Missing Persons Clearinghouse reports that over 130 individuals identified as American Indian are still classified as missing.

Indigenous women are frequently the primary victims in cases of missing and murdered individuals, according to the Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board. Notably, Rapid City ranks among the top ten cities in the country for the highest number of cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls that are not reflected in police records.

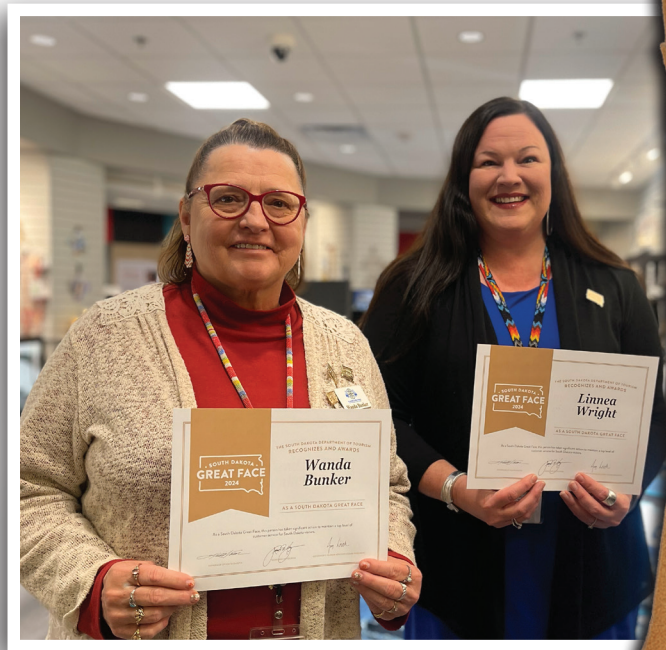
To raise awareness about this pressing issue, the Aktá Lakota Museum chose to honor all victims of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) during the Christmas season. A beautifully decorated tree, created collaboratively by the students of St. Joseph Indian School, reflected their creativity and care in shining a light on this critical matter.

## “GREAT FACE” AND “GREAT PLACE” RECOGNITION

The South Dakota Department of Tourism has recognized two employees and programs of the Aktá Lakota Museum and Cultural Center with the two 2024 Great Face designations, as well as a Great Place designation.



Wanda Bunker, Historical Center Coordinator, has a row of miniature ducks lined up across the frame of her computer. While she certainly has her ducks in a row as Historical Center Coordinator for the museum, the ducks are a whimsical symbol of the extra level of relationship she brings to her role at the front desk of the museum. “They were given to me by Linnea’s daughter,” she explains, “but the students drop by on their way home from school and beg me for one.” Come January, Bunker plans to share them with the eager little ones, just an example of the kindness she shares with all who visit the museum.



Linnea Wright, Store Manager, also was honored with the Great Face designation. In her second year in her role, the Museum’s store has achieved greater polish and warmth, in part because of her ability to build relationships with suppliers of excellent and authentic Native goods and in part because of her hospitable and welcoming demeanor.

“Both of these ladies are truly the face of Aktá Lakota Museum and Cultural Center,” said Dixie Thompson, museum Director. “They exemplify hospitality and knowledge for every guest who visits.” This is the sixth straight year an employee of the museum has been recognized with this award.

The museum itself garnered another South Dakota Great Place Award. The program honors businesses that provide great service and go above and beyond for guests and employees. The recognition makes the Aktá Lakota Museum and Cultural Center eligible for the George S. Mickelson Award to be named at the January 2025 Governor’s Conference on Tourism.

# NATIVE INSPIRED GIFTS

For American Indian people, hand-beaded crafts have been a form of artistic expression and storytelling for centuries. As a result of the introduction of glass beads by European colonizers, this rich and colorful tradition has been able to continue to thrive. Today, many talented artists invest their time and share their experiences through this medium.

At the Aktá Lakota Museum, we take pride in supporting these artisans by showcasing their pieces in our [gift store](#) and museum. We welcome anyone who wants to learn more about this beautiful art form to visit us and see these stunning works of art for themselves.





# CAMPUS TOURS

## STOP BY AND SEE US!

Experience the rich Lakota culture by visiting the Aktá Lakota Museum and St. Joseph's Indian School! Our winter hours are from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday. We are closed on weekends and national holidays. Admission is free of charge and donations are greatly appreciated.

Explore our exhibits at your own pace or request a guided tour of the campus by speaking with the receptionist. For more information, please call us at 800.798.3452 or email us at [aktalakota@stjo.org](mailto:aktalakota@stjo.org). >> [Need more information!](#) <<

Plan your visit today and discover the timeless lessons that our museum has to offer. For more information about Lakota traditions and activities, visit us at <https://aktalakota.stjo.org/>



## GENERAL MUSEUM INFORMATION

### Aktá Lakota Museum & Cultural Center

St. Joseph's Indian School

1301 North Main Street

Chamberlain, SD 57325

Phone: 1-605-234-3452

Toll Free: 1-800-798-3452

E-Mail: [aktalakota@stjo.org](mailto:aktalakota@stjo.org)

Online: <http://www.aktalakota.stjo.org/>

### Memberships and Affiliations

ABA – American Bus Association

NTA – National Tour Association

ASDM – Association of South Dakota Museums

SDSHS – South Dakota State Historical Society

AAM – American Association of Museums

IACA – Indian Arts & Crafts Association

MPMA – Mountain Plains Museum Association

AASLH – American Assoc. for State &  
Local History

### Summer Hours

May – October

8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.; Monday - Saturday

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; Sunday

### Winter Hours

November – April

8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.; Monday - Friday

*Closed weekends and National Holidays*

- Interactive Displays
- Medicine Wheel Garden
- After Hours Tours by Appointment
- Bus/RV Parking
- Handicap-Accessible
- Guided Tours Available Upon Request

**FREE ADMISSION**

Donations Welcome



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