Grade 5
Focus: Canada
Topic B: Early Canada: Exploration and Settlement

Generalization
Contact between people in Canada's early history prior to and during exploration and settlement brought changes to their lives

Rationale
At the time of contact Aboriginal history was not recorded in books. Most of its history was an oral history. European explorers and missionaries recorded only their interpretations of Aboriginal culture, traditions, and heritage unfortunately leaving huge gaps in history. However, over the years, images and diagrams have been found on the side of rocks that reflect Aboriginal history. The images appear to record a significant event in history. Aboriginal history is also told through archeological inspection of traditional sites. It is important that students come to the realization that history can be recorded in a variety of ways.

Objectives

Knowledge

- Become familiar with the various archaeological sites in Alberta that reflect the history of Aboriginal Peoples
- Identify a various methods of recording history
- Recognize the importance of oral history
- Identify how contact with Europeans affected the types of pictographs and petroglyphs that were being recorded by Aboriginal Peoples

Skills

- Identify and label archaeological sites
- Define petroglyph and pictograph
- Recognize the significance of petroglyphs and pictographs to the history of Aboriginal Peoples in Alberta
- Research the significance of sites such as Writing-On-Stone, Sundial Hill, and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump

Attitude

- Develop a positive awareness of the rich history of Aboriginal Peoples
- Appreciate the ways in which Aboriginal People recorded their history

Teacher Information

Most scholars make a distinction between the periods before and after written records are available for an area. Some call this the dividing line between the historic and prehistoric periods. These terms do raise some issues, however, and no one should assume that people have no history before they have written records. In fact oral traditions, winter counts, language, petroglyphs, archaeology and many other types of evidence can be used to reveal the history of Alberta's first inhabitants, long before the first written records about what would become Alberta appear. These documentary sources only begin to appear in the early 18th century and most date from after 1754 and the first clearly recorded visit by a European fur trader to Alberta.

Prior to the arrival of Anthony Henday in Central Alberta in 1754, Aboriginal People from the area were trading with Europeans either directly by visiting posts to the north and east themselves, or indirectly by trading with Cree and Assiniboine groups. These Aboriginal traders exchanged goods they had acquired from fur trade posts for furs, horses, food and other products. In turn, they then traded furs and other goods at posts for more goods that they could trade later. In this way European trade goods reached Alberta in unknown qualities for at least half a century before the first European arrived in person to trade.

Historical archaeology plays a major role in the study of fur trade and mission sites. Extensive digs have been made at many of Alberta's most significant early historic sites including Fort Edmonton, Fort George and Buckingham House, near Elk Point, Rocky Mountain House, and Dunvegan on the Peace River. In addition to these digs at major fur trade and mission sites, historic archaeologists have worked on homesteads, ranches, North West Mounted Police posts, and many industrial sites. The work of historic archaeologists complements information found in archival records as well as giving us direct information about the material goods used by people in the past, the location and layout of buildings, diet, disease and a host of other important subjects.

History is not only apparent by examining artifacts left behind at early settlements but in examining what Aboriginal People left behind to tell their own history.

Introductory Activity

Initiate a discussion with students as to how they think history can be recorded. Does history always have to be written? Discuss the concept of oral history and how that was the primary means of transmitting culture, heritage and traditions for Aboriginal People. What other ways do students think history can be told? For instance, can it be told through information recorded in art or preserved artifacts?

Students will illustrate an event, situation, or story that may have occurred when Aboriginal People and Europeans met for the first time. The drawings are meant to illustrate a story.

Main Activity

Distribute the following information as worksheets to the students. Have them discuss the information in small groups making point form notes of what they feel is the most important information.

Writing-On-Stone

The Siksika, the people of the Blackfoot Nation which dominated Southern Alberta several hundred years ago, named the site along the Milk River *Aisinai'pi* – "it has been written." What they found (and what they themselves augmented) were hundreds of petroglyphs (rock carvings) and pictographs (rock paintings), the largest single concentration of native rock art on the North American plains. While Archaeological evidence suggests that people have camped at Writing-On-Stone for at least 3,000 years, it appears most of the rock art is between 100 and 500 years old with some of the depictions possibly as old as 1,000 years. Earlier works may have simply weathered away.

An important stop on the seasonal round in pre-contact times for the nomadic Shoshone, Kutenai and Atsina peoples as well as for the Siksika who eventually replaced them, the Milk River Valley was attractive for its abundance of game and berries, its available water, and its shelter from the wind. The petroglyphs (incised, using sharpened bone or stone) and the pictographs (painted, using ochre – iron ore mixed with water) vividly record in stylized fashion both the ceremonial and biographical details of native life. Chief among the latter are the accomplishments of successful hunters and warriors, the weapons they used (bows and spears), the animals they hunted (bison, bear, mountain sheep, deer and antelope) and the enemies they slew.

But the spectacular cliffs and otherworldly rock formations of Writing-On-Stone undoubtedly quickened the spiritual pulse of Alberta's first peoples. Many of the details carved into the rock – heraldic devices on shields, headdresses of horns and sunbursts, cryptic lines and shapes – appear to have a ceremonial purpose and may represent the relationship between individuals and the spirit world or commemorate visions. Such art is strongly associated with the vision quest, the rite of passage in which a young person fasted in an isolated sacred location waiting for a guiding vision, even though Writing-On-Stone was not a typical vision quest site.

Since the Blackfoot believed the "writings" were the work of the spirit world in earlier times, Elders often visited Writing-On-Stone to consult the rock art for signs and portents and to create new works based on their own visions of the spirit world. Accounts of the Blackfoot suggest their people maintained a respectful distance from the writings on the steep cliff walls, visiting rather than camping. Until recently, archaeologists believed this to be true of other cultures as well. While arrowheads, stone tools and firepits had been found in Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, no tipi rings were evident. More recently, however, such rings, as well as a medicine wheel on the valley rim seem to indicate that the valley was used as more than a temporary camp. Further, near the cliff walls, graves have been found, apparently of men of stature, for with the bodies were grave goods such as tools, clothing and beads, underscoring the status of the deceased and the sacramental nature of the site.

Life changed dramatically for the people of Alberta with the arrival of Europeans on the northwestern plains. That change is readily discernible in the altered style and content of the glyphs, notably by renderings of the horse and the gun, each of which was introduced into the area after about 1730AD. In pre-contact glyphs, human figures are represented by either distinctive V-neck or rectangular body shapes, accompanied by lances, bows or clubs, and, notably, by large shields with heraldic designs. After 1730, the human figures become more stick-like, less precise in execution but more fluid in motion, often engaged riding horses in combat. Lines of dots indicate gun fire and dashes represent flying arrows. The shields, likely too cumbersome for mounted warfare, are gone. One of the most elaborate of the 58 rock art sites at Writing-On-Stone is from this period. Featuring 71 warriors in an attack on an encampment of tipis, it is thought to be the portrayal of a great battle fought in 1866 between the Atsina and Peigan or Piikani, one of the three tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

By the end of the 19th century, with the bison gone and the traditional Blackfoot way of life under severe stress, rendering visions and stories on the sandstone cliffs of Writing-On-Stone virtually ceased. What has endured on the cliffs will one day be lost. Natural erosion cannot be stopped. For now, however, the tantalizing images remain, drawing us nearer to a past that may never be gully illumined.

http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Alberta/archaeology/site_profiles_writingonstone.html

Sundial Hill Medicine Wheel

Southern Alberta has more medicine wheels, and more kinds of medicine wheels, than any other place on earth. Yet these massive and mysterious stone creations earned the name by which we know them not here, but in Wyoming. The term was coined in 1903 in reference to a spoke-and-circle configuration with a central cairn found atop Medicine Mountain near Sheridan, Wyoming. It was dubbed the Bighorn Medicine Wheel and the name soon came to typify many other stone structures found to the north and northeast.

Clearly, in 1903 the Bighorn structure was named for the mountain. Or was the mountain, in some earlier period, named for the structure? The answer might give us a glimpse into the thinking of the people who designed and built these remarkable monuments.

The Oxbow people, generally credited with inventing the medicine wheel, appear to have come west from Saskatchewan about 5,200 years ago. Theirs was an industrious, imaginative society that introduced one new idea after another to the western plains. Archaeologists believe they were first to use bone boiling pits to render marrow, and since they also used mauls and hammerstone to pound dried seeds and berries, it seems likely they invented pemmican, a plains staple for millennia.

With such imaginative approaches to daily living and dying, it's not hard to conceive that they might also have had a complex ceremonial life. Nearly 1,000 years before Stonehenge, the Oxbow culture apparently began to build large circles of stone, often with central cairns. Only a few medicine wheels have been excavated , but the central cairns of the largest are layered with artifacts – trade goods, projectile points and obsidian – the earliest belonging to the Oxbow people.

Over the millennia, other cultures added to their size and importance, adding dart points, stone ornaments and other treasures under each new layer of stone. But not every culture used the stone circles. In at least one case – the Majorville medicine wheel – it seems the monument sat unused for 1,200 years, until about 1,800 years ago. Then there seems to have been a renewal of interest (and additions to the cairn), lasting until Europeans arrived. When the south half of the enormous cairn, (nine metres or 30 feet in diameter and 1.6 metres or just over five feet tall) was excavated, 17,000 artifacts were recovered.

The pattern of use raises questions. Did the cultures who visited Majorville, and other medicine wheels, during the late revivalist period have the same rituals as the creators of the monuments? Or did they develop their own rites and ceremonies?

As at Stonehenge, the rocks hold the secret.

http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Alberta/archaeology/facts_finds_circles_of_stone.html

No one really knows how old the massive stone structure on Sundial Hill is, or what it might have meant to the people who laboured to create it, but labour they did. The huge central cairn is composed of hundreds of large rocks. All had to be carried to the site, along with hundreds of smaller stones to form two huge circles enclosing the cairn.

This double ring, and the two parallel lines of stone that mark a south-facing pathway from the inner sanctum, set the structure at Sundial Hill apart from most of Alberta's many medicine wheels. Archaeologist John Brumley classifies this creation as one of six known Subgroup 2

medicine wheels; four are found in southern Alberta. The other two are in south-central Saskatchewan and north-central Montana.

Alberta has the lion's share of almost every classification of these mysterious circles; a number have been excavated and found to range in age from perhaps 250 to as much as 5,000 years. The edifice at Sundial Hill has been mapped and studied, but never excavated. However the brightly-coloured lichen on the exposed surface of many of the rocks in the central cairn is one indication of considerable age. Is it this antiquity, or perhaps the mystery that surrounds these structures that makes a visit to Sundial Hill such a mystical experience? Like Britain's standing stones, their essence is an enigma. And if we listen hard, it almost seems we can hear whispers of a mysterious secret.

That's how it was for one first-time visitor to Sundial Hill. He found the place captivating but disconcerting. On several occasions as the autumn afternoon turned to evening, he heard snatches of conversation, voices on the wind. But he was completely alone. The only other person in sight was a farmer, harvesting, perhaps five kilometres (three miles) away. It was, he says, an experience he will never forget.

http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Alberta/archaeology/facts_finds_sundial_hill_med_wheel.html

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump

The bison, which once roamed the North American plains in countless numbers, were central to the native way of life. Its flesh was food, its hide clothing and tipi covers, its dung fuel. But each buffalo weighed more than 800 kilograms (1,760 pounds), could run at 50 kilometres (or 30 miles) and hour, and upwind could easily detect one of those untrustworthy human beings. Killing bison required ingenuity. In the days before the introduction of the horse, buffalo jumps – of which more than 100 have been found in North America – were the most efficient way of harvesting herds.

Except for a lengthy period between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago, for reasons that may be linked to climatic change in Southern Alberta, archaeological evidence suggests Head-Smashed-In was used almost continuously by the Peigan and earlier peoples in the area for at least 6,000 years, and perhaps longer. The situation was ideal. The cliff faced east, away from the prevailing winds; grasslands west of the cliff attracted large bison herds, and the prairie below the cliff contained spring water for campsites and processing the animals. Today this 595 hectare (1, 470 acre) site on the southeastern ridge of the Porcupine Hills is regarded as peerless among buffalo jumps for its age, size and rich archaeological legacy. Head-Smashed-In is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, placing it in the company of the Pyramids at Giza, the Palace of Versailles and Machu Picchu for its importance to global culture.

The buffalo jump seems simple enough in concept: get a bunch of bison to fall off a cliff. But, in execution, the procedure demanded great craft, cunning and patience, requiring an advanced degree of organizational skill. Hunters had to be highly attuned to bison temperament, wind direction and local topography. Spiritual observances always preceded the event. Then runners – athletic young men – would try, using various strategies, to move the skittish animals in the desired direction, toward the V-shaped drive lanes in the gathering basin designed to funnel the bison toward the cliff edge. Stone cairns, placed along the lanes every five or six metres (16 to 20 feet), some fashioned into scarecrow forms with tree branches or brush to rattle in the wind,

others with people twitching buckskin robes or lighting small smoky dung fires, kept the herd pressing relentlessly forward while other men – decoys – disguised in buffalo or coyote robes, lured the near-sighted animals toward the fatal precipice.

And then, when the moment was ripe, shouting and waving hides, the hunters would panic the bison, by now crowded together, into a stampede. The frenzied animals could move in one direction only.

Some buffalo jumps, such as Dry Island northeast of Calgary in the Red Deer River Valley, are high enough for the drop to instantly kill the animal. Not so at Head-Smashed-In. The fall is, on average, less than 18 metres (60 feet), sufficient in most cases to only wound. Hence, stage two: dispatching the animals with lance or club, or, in more recent times, bow and arrow. Ensuring none of the bison escaped alive was vital. People believed that such bison would warn other herds of the trap and thus devalue the jump site.

One can imagine the scene on the flat glacial bench below the cliffs as the bison piled up in grisly mounds. The Blackfoot name for the butchering place, piskun, means "deep blood kettle" and on hot days the smell of slaughter would have been terrible. Nonetheless, waiting woman and children would begin the task of butchering and skinning the bison, drying or smoking much of the meat, making pemmican, extracting marrow from the bones, scraping hides and initiating the dozens of other tasks that turned bison into food, clothing and shelter.

The last recorded use of Head-Smashed-In as a buffalo jump was in the middle of the 19th century. By then, horses and rifles had altered traditional bison-hunting practices, so much so that by the end of the 1800s the species was on the verge of extinction. While many other buffalo jump sites on the North American plains were subsequently disturbed, Head-Smashed-In remained virtually intact, with extensive and well-preserved bone beds layered to a depth of 10 metres (33 feet) in some areas. Found, in addition to countless bones, were arrowheads, dart points and potsherds, stone scrapers, knives and choppers, boiling stones, burial sites, over 1,000 drive lane cairns, pictographs, tipi rings and burial rocks. Head-Smashed-In also features a vision quest site.

You might think Head-Smashed-In was named for the bison that met their demise at the bottom of the cliff. Not so. According to legend, the place is named for an imprudently curious Piikani (Peigan) youth pinned to the cliff wall by the tumbling bison. He was later discovered with his skull crushed. In Blackfoot, the jump is therefore called Estipah-sikikini-kots, "where he got his head smashed in."

Geography and human ingenuity combined to make this ridge near Fort Macleod an extraordinarily productive place for killing bison for thousands of years. Archaeologists have shown that Mummy Cave people, with their signature Bitterroot points, at right, used Head-Smashed-In as early as 5,700 years ago. Further excavations may show that the jump is much older, perhaps nearly as old as the Bonfire Shelter Jump in Texas, which was used more than 10,000 years ago.

The cliffs are quiet now, but close your eyes and you can almost feel the ground shake, smell the rank stench of terror, taste the clouds of dust and dirt, hear the thundering hooves. Below, the people waited with knives, scrapers, and hammerstones ready to turn the doomed beasts into food, clothing and shelter.

http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Alberta/archaeology/site_profiles_headsmashedin.html

Once students are done reviewing the material on Writing-On-Stone, Sundial Hill and the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, discuss the information as a class. Have students share insights into what they felt was important and what they thought was the most interesting.

You can decide if you would like students to work individually or in small groups to further research one of the above mentioned sites.

The report should include

- Where is the site located
- When was it discovered
- What is the story behind the site
- Does the site have an important spiritual significance
- How was the site influenced by contact with European peoples if at all
- What Aboriginal groups were in the area
- What does the information tell us about the culture of those who left their history behind?
- What do you think is the most interesting fact about the site?
- Is the site a registered historical site? Why or why not?
- Make sure to provide pictures of your site

Students will want to create the most interesting and unique research reports possible. They can share their information in a variety of ways, according to the teacher's discretion.

Supplementary Lesson
Distribute the following Glossary of Terms and Information Worksheet to students. Completion of this worksheet will aid them in understanding important terms and information associated with this lesson.

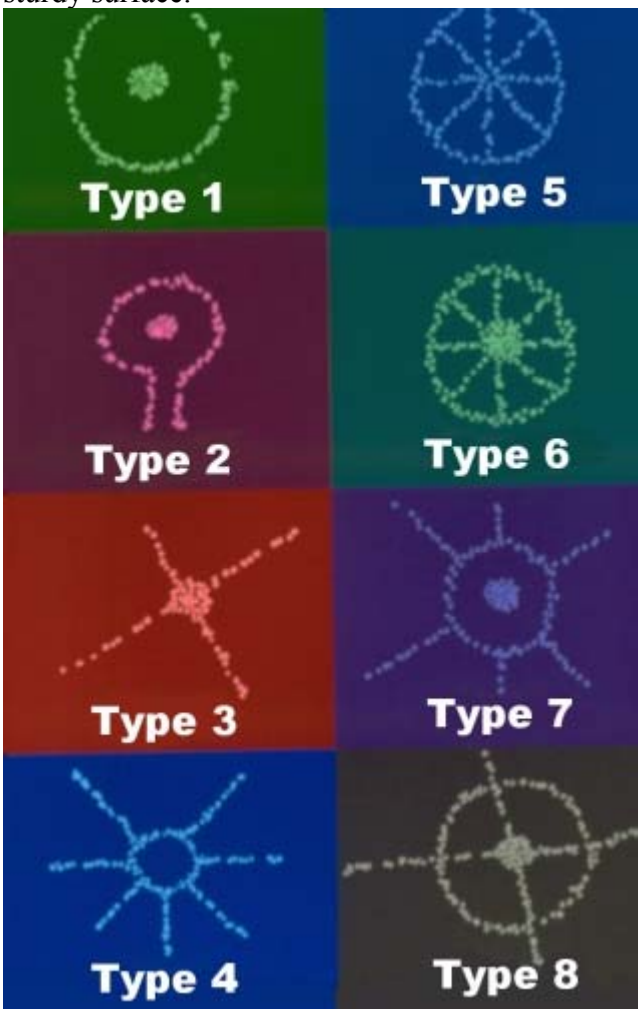
How history can be shared without words
Worksheet and Glossary of Terms

1. What are some alternative ways that history can be preserved and shared without using words? Give three examples.
2. Define oral history.
3. What is an artifact? Why do you think they are important?
4. What is the difference between a petroglyph and a pictograph?
5. How were petroglyphs and pictographs recorded?
6. What is a vision quest?
7. Why do the Blackfoot believe Writing-On-Stone is a significant site?
8. How was rock art influenced by contact with Europeans?
9. What is a natural threat to the existence of petroglyphs and pictorgraphs?
10. Where did the medicine wheel receive its name?
11. Who were the Oxbow people?
12. Give 3 examples of artifacts found in medicine wheel cairns.
13. Has Sundial Hill ever been excavated?
14. Why was Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump so successful?

15. Describe the two stages involved in killing a buffalo at the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump site.
16. How did Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump receive its name?
17. How did contact effect rituals such as the buffalo jump?

Supplementary Lesson

The following diagram depicts eight types of medicine wheel formations. Students will create one of the following types using rocks collected from outside. The students will need a large piece of heavy paper, such as Bristoll board, for this project in order to glue the rocks onto a sturdy surface.



http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Alberta/archaeology/arch_images.html