HOW HORSES CAME TO THE
GROS VENTRE/RED BIRD'S DEATH

Developed by the Gros Ventre Elders Board from the Fort
Belknap Reservation

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA: Plains Region
STORY TYPE(S): Indian Values/ideas of Spiritual Beliefs

Summary:

This story is about a young warrior's struggle to obtain the skin of the
red otter for his sacred medicine. Many along his journey warned him
of the difficulties which lay ahead but his determination sent him on-
ward. He came to a lodge where he fasted 30 days, almost to the point
of total exhaustion. An old man revived him and sent him to a lake to
catch a bird, but warned him to stay away from a red bird.

Out of frustration he caught the red bird which carried him to an island
where he was unable to escape. Because of the boy's kindness to a
small water snake he was given special powers which he lost when he
opened his eyes prematurely. Eventually, an eagle rescued the young
warrior and returned him to the old man. Not only did the warrior
receive his red otter medicine but left horses with each tribe which had
aided him.

This story again teaches us that our goals are not achieved without ef-
fort and much determination on our part. Often we must also rely on
the aid of others. If we do not listen carefully and follow directions ex-
actly, we are not likely to succeed.

By listening to the elders on his journey, the warrior was told how to
find what he needed in order to proceed further. Each elder played a
part in preparing him to be truly worthy of receiving his medicine.

This procedure is comparable to the type of preparation of one who is
going on a vision quest. By preparing physically and mentally and by
learning to listen carefully, good things will usually follow. This story
shows how one person sought to be a better person and by seeking to
be his best, he brought good fortune to his people as well.

Red Bird's Death is a story sequel to How Horse’s came to the Gros
Ventre. In this story the young Gros Ventre warrior returned to the
lake where he had obtained his red otter medicine bundle. He returned
to challenge the powerful Red Bird who had ignored the warrior’s plea
for help.

With the help of his medicine rope the warrior taught Red Bird a little
humility and left the bird helpless against the natural elements of
winter. The story also described how the songs of the flat pipe
ceremony came to be.
Teacher Guided Activities:

1. Though criticism often hurts one’s feelings it is usually offered because there is a behavior which needs to be changed. Question the students on the older brothers’s motives in coming down so hard on the younger brother for borrowing the red otter medicine.

Did the older brother receive his just reward in the end? Why or why not? Most people cringe at criticism, but others are taught that this only comes from people that care. If his brother had not said what he did, would the young warrior have gone on his journey?

2. On the blackboard write: What happened four times? Ask students to reread the use of the number four. Have volunteers go to the blackboard and write these things down. They need not be complete sentences.

Review the significance of the number four and ask students to see if they can remember why four is used in some Indian cultures.

3. Discuss all the sets of instructions which were given the young warrior. Note which ones were followed exactly and which ones were not. What happened in each case?

Pass out this list of directions entitled FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS to the whole class. Tell them that they are to pretend they are the young Gros Ventre warrior out to earn the red otter medicine. Each must show how well he or she can follow directions.

When all have finished (allow only a couple minutes to complete) Discuss how well directions were followed.

4. Discuss the value of helping people in danger and cases where strangers in need of help are ignored. What is brotherhood? Can we survive without it? Discuss the difference between a humble act of kindness versus the personal qualities of performing a courageous act.
5. The young warrior used hoof bells to lure the horse which he led to the camps. What musical instruments were commonly used by tribes in your area? An introduction to Indian music would be appropriate. Following is a bibliography of commercial products that could assist such an effort.

Bulletin board displays might include bold letter words of songs of various tribes. Use the following resources as a place to start your music unit:


Information on record jackets and enclosures distributed by the following record manufacturers will also be useful.

- Canyon Records, Phoenix, AZ
- Ethnic Folkways, New York, NY
- Everest Records, Los Angeles, CA

**Student Activity Cards(s):**
See How Horses Came to the Gros Ventre Activity Cards (21A-21B, 21C-21D, 21E-21F).
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

To start on a journey to earn the red otter medicine, you must be able to follow all the directions exactly. You will have only three minutes to complete the list.

1. Read all the directions carefully before doing anything.
2. Write your name at the top left hand corner of your paper.
3. Put your pencil down and clap your hands together twice.
4. Number from 1 to 10 on the right hand side of your paper.
5. Draw a circle around all even numbers starting with 4.
6. Stand up and turn a complete circle before sitting down again.
7. Put a large X at the bottom of your paper.
8. Tear the lower left hand corner off your paper.
9. Jump up and down three times then sit down.
10. Now that you have read all the directions do just number 2.