

History Mystery I: Sacrifice Cliff

A new educational partnership is bringing brand new educational kits to Billings, Montana, area schools and the general public in the form of edgy investigation activities called "History Mysteries." The Billings Heritage Education Partnership is a multi-year agreement between the Western Heritage Center and the Bureau of Land Management and its Billings Curation Center that will produce one "History Mystery" kit per year for the next five years.



For 2007, the topic is History Mystery: Sacrifice Cliff. The students become investigators who examine source files and look for evidence to learn the "who, where, when, why and how" of the local legend. As investigators, the students record their findings on

evidence sheets and ultimately learn that history and research is interesting.

The educational kit provides students with more than a re-telling of one version of the story or another. The kit includes the resources and tools needed to understand the history, peoples and geographical landmarks that make up the story and allows students to learn through their own investigations.

"We've pulled together sources from the media, the internet, local historians, the library, local museums and government agencies," says Billings Curation Center Director David K. Wade, "The goal is to teach kids that learning about any topic requires more than a simple Google search."

"My favorite thing about this project is that kids not only learn about the Sacrifice Cliff legend, they learn a little geography of the area, a little history of the Crow tribe, and a little about the kinds of resources they can access when doing their own research – without realizing they're learning it," laughs Susan Austin, Western Heritage Center Marketing and Outreach Director.

Wade and Austin have spent months pulling together the resources, designing the activity and outfitting the 12 identical kits that will now go out to local schools. One kit will remain at the Western Heritage Center and one kit will be housed at the Billings Curation Center; both available for reservation and check out by teachers and organizations.



"Billings Public Schools Middle Schools are excited to be the recipients of great cross curricular teaching materials. The 7th grade Geography and English teachers will work collaboratively and teach using the History Mystery: Sacrifice Cliff educational kit. We are grateful for the work and expertise of the Western Heritage Center, the Bureau of Land Management, Montana Office, and its Billings Curation Center. Billings Public

Schools 7th graders are the winners in this partnership," says Gail Surwill, K-12 Director of Curriculum and Instruction

The History Mystery: Sacrifice Cliff kit educational kit does not advance one version of the story as the 'correct' version. The solution of the project is to engage local youth in an interactive research exercise where they'll be introduced to:

The rich history and cultural history of our area;

Many of the state and local resources we have to draw from;

The importance of thorough research and analytical thinking when forming independent conclusions; and

The concepts of heritage preservation, where each generation protects resources for the next generation.

Julie Dial, Executive Director of the Western Heritage Center, says, "It's a very exciting partnership. We found that although each of our organizations does many different things and serves several different publics, we have intersecting missions of providing public education about our heritage and the preservation of resources."

The Billings Curation Center (BCC) is the main repository for archaeological and ethnographical collections recovered from public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management in Montana and the Dakotas. The BCC is part of the Bureau of Land Management building at 5001 Southgate Drive in Billings. The BLM information contact regarding History Mystery educational kits is David K. Wade, Director of the Billings Curation Center, 406-896-5213.

The Western Heritage Center information contact is Susan Austin, Marketing and Outreach Manager at 256-6809, ext. 130.