

## **Lesson 3: The Case of the Vanishing Landscape and Micqaela Jones-Crouch's *Granddaughter's Ride of Futility***

### **Teacher Handout**

This lesson uses Micqaela Jones-Crouch's art work *Granddaughter's Ride of Futility* as the background for a mystery case they must solve, to understand the full scope of Jones- Crouch's work. Students will learn how to decode an artwork by role-playing as detectives and building a case file based on visual clues found within the piece. Decoding art is the process of analyzing and interpreting a work of art to understand its underlying meaning, symbolism, and the artist's intention, especially when dealing with complex, abstract, or culturally coded elements.

Grades levels: 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>

#### **About Micqaela Jones-Crouch:**

Micqaela Jones-Crouch is a contemporary Western Shoshone artist from the Te-Moak Tribe, raised on the Duck Valley Reservation in northeastern Nevada. Surrounded by a family of artists and the high desert landscape, she grew up immersed in storytelling. Largely self-taught, she began painting seriously in her twenties and has since exhibited nationally, including at the Santa Fe Indian Market and the Nevada Museum of Art. Her work blends traditional Indigenous symbolism with vibrant contemporary styles to create glowing images of animals, totems, and nature. Her art reflects both her cultural heritage and her deep personal connection to place, with the goal of creating work that speaks to identity, memory, and the land.

This Teacher Handout provides background information on one of Jones-Crouch artworks titled *Granddaughter's Ride of Futility* (2012). Supplemental information can be found here:

BLM Plan to Convert Nevada's Pinyon Forests to Biomass Threatens Ancient Rituals:

<https://energyjustice.net/blm-plan-convert-nevadas-pinyon-forests-biomass-threatens-ancient-rituals/>

The Treaty of Ruby Valley (1863):

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Ruby\\_Valley\\_\(1863\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Ruby_Valley_(1863))



## About Granddaughter's Ride of Futility (2012):



Micqaela Jones-Crouch intertwines traditions of her Native American culture with the realities and challenges of contemporary life.

This artwork is done in a Ledger style art form that is a Plains Native American narrative drawing tradition that uses discarded ledger books and other papers as a canvas to depict historical events, personal experiences, and cultural traditions. Emerging around the 1860s when the buffalo hide painting tradition became unsustainable, ledger art continued Plains Indian storytelling and historical documentation in a new format using available materials like paper, crayons, ink, and watercolor. Historically, men often created these pictographic drawings, focusing on themes like battle and hunting, while contemporary artists use the form for social commentary, cultural continuity, and to share modern stories of resilience.

Pinyon pine nuts are an important traditional food source for Great Basin native people, and many families make annual journeys each fall to gather them. In 2011, a consortium of government agencies proposed thinning 30,000 acres of Nevada pinyon and juniper for conversion to an energy source known as biomass. Jones-Crouch incorporated published articles, maps, and historical documents into her drawings to ask “How can this tradition continue without the trees?”

### About the lesson:

To introduce the activity, explain that they'll be investigating a “crime” depicted in the artwork. Their job is to gather evidence from a series of clues and solve the “case” through observation and analysis.

The first three clues help students connect with familiar imagery and establish the setting in Nevada. After reviewing their initial findings, regroup to clarify any missed details, such as identifying a cradleboard or recognizing the red triangles as the Ruby Mountains. You can share that these mountains were named by early explorers who mistook garnets for rubies. The document behind the central figure is a general obligation bond tied to the state of Nevada, further grounding the setting. Supplementing with maps or visuals may help students visualize these references more clearly.

The final two clues reveal the “crime” at the heart of the work. Students will identify two bulldozers drawn over land sale documents, land that once belonged to the Western Shoshone people, referencing the construction of the Getchell Mine. Other elements, such as tree stumps and an article about the pinyon pine, point to deforestation and the loss of a key cultural resource. A final newspaper clipping titled *Remember the Old Ways* encourages students to reflect on how traditional practices depend on access to land and natural resources, and what is lost when those are taken away.

### **Additional Information:**

**Nevada General obligation bond (clue 1):** A general obligation bond is a type of municipal bond used by local governments or school districts to finance public projects such as new facilities or infrastructure improvements. These bonds are backed by the issuer’s full faith and credit, meaning they are repaid through property taxes or other general revenue. Because they are supported by the taxing power of the government entity, they are considered a secure investment for bondholders.

**The Getchell Mine:** located in Humboldt County, Nevada, sits on lands traditionally inhabited by the Western Shoshone people. Although the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley recognized Western Shoshone territory, it did not cede the land to the United States—only allowing certain rights of passage. Despite this, the U.S. government and private developers began extracting resources from the area without the full consent of Indigenous communities. The Getchell Mine was established in the late 1930s and became one of Nevada’s major gold producers, operating on land that Western Shoshone people continue to assert legal and spiritual ties to. Over time, the mine became part of broader legal battles over Indigenous land rights, including activism from the Dann sisters and others who challenged the government’s authority to authorize mining and other industrial uses without honoring treaty obligations. The mine’s legacy reflects the long-standing tension between resource development and the sovereignty of Native nations in the Great Basin.

**Pinyon Pine Tree:** The pinyon pine tree is a vital part of life and culture for many Indigenous peoples of the Great Basin, including the Western Shoshone and Northern Paiute. Its seeds—pine nuts—are a highly nutritious traditional food, harvested in the fall and often stored for winter. The gathering of pine nuts is more than just sustenance; it is a cultural practice passed down through generations, involving family, ceremony, and respect for the land. The tree also provides materials for tools, fuel, and medicine. Today, pinyon harvesting remains an important expression of Indigenous identity and sovereignty, especially as mining and development threaten access to ancestral gathering areas.

