

*Circle of the Sun (1960)*  
*Standing Alone (1982)*  
*Round Up (2011)*  
An Integrated Educator's Guide

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(See end of guide for bio)

### Pre-Screening Backgrounder for Educators

This study guide is intended to provide support to educators who wish to guide their students through an inquiry into the ideas and insights shared in *Round Up (2011)*. However, it is important to understand that *Round Up* is intimately connected to two films also produced and released by the National Film Board: *Circle of the Sun (1960)* and *Standing Alone (1982)*. If possible, the three films should be shown to students as part of the same inquiry. Together, the three films are an integrated trilogy that focuses on the experiences of the Kainai (Blood) community of southern Alberta over a fifty-one-year period as they struggle to maintain a sense of their place in the world amidst tremendous, and at times coercive, change. As with many other Indigenous communities in the world, the Kainai (Blood) people have endured concerted and sustained attacks on their language, families, spiritual practices, and traditional ways. What is unique about this integrated film trilogy is that the struggles of the Kainai people in this regard are told largely through the ongoing life story of one man: Pete Standing Alone. Yet, the story told is not solely of Pete Standing Alone as an individual; rather, the story of Pete Standing Alone is presented in parallel with the communitarian concerns and struggles of other members of his community. Through the telling of the life story of Pete Standing Alone across these three films, it becomes clear that the Kainai people will be able to maintain a strong sense of who they are in relation to where they live as long as they, individually and collectively, take on the sacred responsibility to maintain their language, spiritual practices, and traditional ways. This is the legacy of Pete Standing Alone that is shared in these films. It is a responsibility passed on to him by Elders that he hopes will be taken on by younger members of his community.

A critical aspect of comprehending the focus of this trilogy concerns Pete Standing Alone as a young man and “outsider” to the Sundance ceremonies as depicted in the NFB film *Circle of the Sun (1960)*. At the time of the filming, Pete was in his mid twenties and became the main character and narrator of the film as a result of a chance encounter with NFB film director Colin Low. Low, following the insistence of authorities from Indian Affairs Canada, needed a young, modern “Indian” who had apparently left the old ways behind and was adjusting well to a new way of living. Pete appeared to fulfill this role quite well and so *Circle of the Sun* became a film focused on the death of old Blood ways—the Sundance in particular—and the evolution of a new kind of Blood man exemplified by Pete Standing Alone.

## Historical Background of the Kainai (Blood) Community

However, the filmmakers neglected to mention that at the time the film was made (the late 1950s), the people of the Kainai community already had a lengthy history of resisting attempts to put an end to their spiritual practices. As early as 1889, North-West Mounted Police Superintendent Sam Steele wrote to his superiors in Ottawa with the suggestion that the Sundance ceremonies must be discouraged if the people were to be brought under control.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, a determined Indian Agent named James Wilson began active efforts to suppress the Sundance and the spiritual practices associated with it. These actions were supported by a revision of the Indian Act in 1895, which announced the prohibition of "any festival, dance or other ceremony."<sup>2</sup> Through the combined efforts of Agent Wilson, various missionaries at work on the Kainai (Blood) Reserve at the time, and officers of the North-West Mounted Police, the Kainai Sundance was not held for three years. During this period of repression, when the Sundance was held severe restrictions were imposed that made it very difficult for people to participate as they wished, undermining the integrity of the gathering as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Chief Red Crow and other leaders persevered and the Sundance was celebrated again in its fullness in 1900.

Despite this important victory that came from the resistance and perseverance of dedicated community leaders like Red Crow, the people of the Kainai community continued to suffer various forms of oppression and violence stemming from Canadian government policies of forced assimilation. Perhaps most insidious was the imposition of residential schools and the passing of legislation in 1920 making school attendance mandatory for all children in the community between the ages of six and sixteen. This legislation resulted in the forced removal and separation of children from adults for extended periods of time and this policy devastated families. Adults lost the ability to communicate with their children and many of the vulnerable children were subjected to forms of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, spiritual) that severely damaged their understandings of who they were and where they came from. Parents, grandparents, and extended family lost control of the right to tell the children stories that would ground them and nurture healthy awareness of themselves, their community, and the place where they lived. These were replaced by stories of the newcomers, which were predicated on colonial frontier logics<sup>4</sup> that seemingly justified the elimination of "*Indians*" and their ways.

In light of all of this, should we be surprised that Pete Standing Alone felt like an "outsider" at the Kainai Sundance in 1956 and predicted that the Sundance would soon be forgotten by his people? Based on what we know about the violence and oppression of this era, it would be surprising if he *did not* make this prediction. Yet, the irony of this prediction is that it was Pete Standing Alone's involvement in the creation of ***Circle of the Sun*** that provoked him to learn more about the spiritual traditions of his people. Through his active participation in sacred societies and ceremonies, Pete changed his life and way of thinking, and thus completely changed his mind regarding the survival of the Sundance. This shift in awareness is what motivated Pete to contact National Film Board director Colin Low and ask that a second film

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<sup>1</sup> Bastien, B. (2004). *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitip*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Dempsey, H. (1995). *Red Crow: Warrior chief*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> Consult the chapter titled 'The Sun Dance War' in Dempsey, H. (1995) for more details on this era.

<sup>4</sup> Colonial frontier logics are those epistemological assumptions and presuppositions, derived from the colonial project of dividing the world according to racial and cultural categorizations, which serve to naturalize assumed divides and thus contribute to their social and institutional perpetuation.

be made so that his misguided prediction could be addressed. This is how ***Standing Alone*** came to be created.

The making of ***Round Up*** also occurred at the request of Pete Standing Alone. This time, though, the film director is Pete's friend and fellow Kainai Tribe community member and spiritual leader Narcisse Blood. Narcisse shares Pete's passion for the continuation of the spiritual practices and traditional ways of their people. This passion is prominent in the film and guides the spirit and intent of the call made in the film for young people of the Kainai community to take on the sacred responsibility of continuing the spiritual practices and traditional ways of their people. This is the message that Pete Standing Alone wants to leave his people as he nears the end of his life. It is a poignant conclusion to the film trilogy.

## **Curriculum and Programs of Study Considerations**

This study guide can be connected to specified study requirements of the core, secondary curriculum areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, and Aboriginal (First Nations) Studies, as outlined by various educational jurisdictions across Canada. There are various thematics integral to the three films that could be addressed in meaningful ways across curriculum subject areas.

**For English Language Arts**, the students could be asked to analyze the films as complex texts that exemplify significant cultural and societal influences. Such analyses could be used as a provocation for creative writing or the creation of images that tell the story of the film in a pictorial mode. These activities could bridge into character sketches and the creation of a script for a drama production. Another possibility could involve a focus on the life story of Pete Standing Alone as an example of the literary genre of biography and the role of conflict in such stories.

**For Social Studies and Aboriginal (First Nations) Studies**, these films provide multiple opportunities to explore impacts of and responses to colonialism and historical globalization in the Canadian context and in comparison to other contexts. Perhaps most significant are the opportunities these films provide to educators to explore notions of Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood in relation to the historical complexities of notions of nation and nationalism in both Canadian and international contexts. In societies like Canada today, where Indigenous peoples have growing influence on the character of the country, there is significant misrecognition and miscomprehension of the meaning and implications of Indigenous sovereignty and nation as *performed* during sacred gatherings like the Sundance. This misrecognition and miscomprehension occurs because the philosophies that undergird the very idea of Canadian nation and nationality descend from liberal democratic traditions developed in Europe during the colonial era. Thus, these films present an opportunity for educators to guide their students through an exploration of notions of nation and sovereignty that descend from Blackfoot philosophical and spiritual traditions that are distinctly different from those that descend from European-based philosophical traditions.

## **Pre-Screening Backgrounder for Students**

The three films that are the focus of this study guide are very context specific. In order to better comprehend the meaning and significance of the films, and thus honour the context

that they represent, students should engage in a brief inquiry activity that guides them to consider the questions that follow. Students can work in small groups to explore and discuss these questions and consult various forms of text (books, films, photos, websites) while doing so. The emphasis should be on considering and exploring the questions rather than uncovering definitive answers to them.

- Who are the Blackfoot people? What is known of their history and experiences as a people?
- Who are the Kainai people? What is known of their history and experiences as a people?
- What constitutes the traditional territory of the Blackfoot people? Where is the Kainai Reserve located?
- What is the significance of the Sundance ceremonies to the Kainai people?
- Identify three or four key symbols of Blackfoot culture and attempt to find an explanation of the meaning of each.

## Discussion Guides for Educators

### ***Round Up* (2011) – NFB Film Synopsis**

At age 81, Pete Standing Alone has come full-circle in his dedication to preserving the traditional ways of his people. The third film in a trilogy, ***Round Up*** traces Pete's personal journey from cultural alienation to pride and belonging. As a spiritual elder, teacher, and community leader of the Blood Indians of Southern Alberta, Pete's efforts to rebuild the cultural and spiritual decimation wrought by residential schools have focused on teaching youth the traditional ways. In his own words: "It is our duty and responsibility as Blood Indians to keep our ways going."

### Inquiry Questions for Students:

1. What were the motives that guided the making of this film? What is the main message that it provides viewers? Provide examples to support your answers.
2. In what ways is the significance of land, place, and spirituality to the Kainai people portrayed in this film? Identify key symbols and images shown in the film and discuss how each contributes to this portrayal.
3. In what ways can this film be interpreted as a statement on Kainai survival and sovereignty? Make the case for the power of this statement by creating a detailed record of quotes and scenes provided in the film that could be interpreted in this way.
4. Compare notions of sovereignty in the Kainai context with notions of sovereignty in the liberal democratic tradition. What tensions and conflicts exist between these? How have these tensions manifested themselves historically? How do they manifest themselves in current contexts?
5. Characterize and analyze the relationships between the young and the old in the Kainai community as depicted in this film. What insights help us understand intergenerational tensions concerning tradition and change that have troubled Indigenous communities in past decades? What have been the consequences of these tensions?

6. As shown in this film, in ***Circle of the Sun*** Pete Standing Alone was a young man who was an “outsider” to the spiritual ways of his people. Reflecting on this time, Pete recalled that in those days he did not care whether those traditions survived or not. In fact, Pete Standing Alone went so far as to voice the following prediction in ***Circle of the Sun***:

*But the old Indians say in a few more years there won't be any more Sundance. The Peigans and the Stoney Indians don't have a Sundance anymore and the same thing will happen to us. Ten years, maybe twenty. In time, the old way of life will all be forgotten.*

Pete Standing Alone made this prediction in the late 1950s. What was happening in Indigenous communities during this era that would cause him to make this prediction? Why did this dire prediction not come true?

7. How and in what ways has involvement with ***Circle of the Sun*** provoked Pete Standing Alone to live a better life? What evidence for this can be seen and heard in ***Round Up?***
8. Interpret the metaphorical significance of the film title in relation to the actual horse herd shown in the film. What is being lamented? What is being celebrated?
9. While standing in front of the building that was St. Paul's Residential School on the Kainai Reserve, Pete Standing Alone commented that he did not learn very much as a student at the school for eight years. Based on what you know about residential schools and what it was like to be there as a student, comment on what you think he *did* learn while there and how these teachings influenced him once he left the school. How can this film be used to support your comments?
10. Summarize the main message that Pete Standing Alone voices to the students while visiting their classroom. What is unique about this message?
11. Read the letter written by Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott and circulated on December 15, 1921. What are the connections between this letter and the comments made by Pete Standing Alone in this film?
12. Imagine that you have the opportunity to interview Pete Standing Alone about this film. What questions would you ask? How do you imagine him responding? Create an imaginary script for the interview based on these questions and your imagined responses.

### ***Standing Alone* (1982) – Original NFB Film Synopsis**

Pete Standing Alone is a Blood Indian who, as a young man, was more at home in the White man's culture than his own. However, confronted with the realization that his children knew very little about their origins, he became determined to pass down to them the customs and traditions of his ancestors. This hour-long film is the powerful biographical study of a twenty-five-year span in Pete's life, from his early days as an oil-rig roughneck, rodeo rider and cowboy, to the present as an Indian concerned with preserving his tribe's spiritual heritage in the face of an energy-oriented industrial age.

### **Inquiry Questions for Students:**

1. This film was made at the request of Pete Standing Alone. What motivated him to make this film? What are the main messages he wanted to provide through the film? Provide specific examples and quotes from the film to support your answer.
2. In one scene from the film, Pete Standing Alone is in a field visiting his horse herd on a cold winter day. He is shown approaching a wild stallion that he has never touched. His comments suggest that he and the stallion understand each other because they are both “survivors against the odds.” What does he mean by this?
3. Near the conclusion of this film, Pete Standing Alone makes the following statement:

*Our songs are passed down for generations. Some are ancient. A spirit searching for an offering. A gift to the next generation for all living creatures.*

In what ways can this film be considered a “gift to the next generation for all living creatures?”

### ***Circle of the Sun (1960) – Original NFB Film Synopsis***

At the 1956 gathering of the Blood Indians of Alberta, the camera captured the spectacle of the Sundance on film for the first time. This documentary shows how the theme of the circle reflects the bands’ connection to wildlife and also addresses the predicament of the young generation, those who have relinquished their ties with their own culture but have not yet found a firm place in a changing world.

#### **Inquiry Questions for Students:**

1. What story does the filmmaker, Colin Low, try to tell in this film? What might be his main motivation in making a film like this in 1960?
2. Pay attention to the repeated juxtaposition of contrasting images and ideas. What is being juxtaposed and why? What effect do these have on the character and main messages of the film?
3. Characterize and analyze the relationships between the young and the old in the Kainai community as depicted in this film. What insights help us understand intergenerational tensions concerning tradition and change that have troubled Indigenous communities in past decades?
4. Why would the Kainai Elders permit the filming of ceremonies? What might motivate them to agree to this?
5. Beginning at 2 minutes and 12 seconds in the film, the narrator makes the following statement:

*The Bloods are fast taking over the ways of the white man. Yet something remains of the ancient times. The Bloods have come to the Sundance camp for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. But the old life is dying and most of the Bloods don't even go to the camp now. The children don't know what it's about and when they are grown up they will forget that once at the camp they heard the dying echoes of their people's history and saw things that soon would be no more.*

Imagine yourself as a student on the Blood Reserve who was shown this film when it was first released: How might you react when hearing this statement? What impact might it have on you as you get older? What assumptions can be made on the impacts

this statement might have had on actual students on the Blood Reserve who were shown this film when it was first released?

6. Beginning at 16 minutes and 14 seconds in the film, the narrator makes the following statement:

*Some observers say a key to the old religion is to be found in the circle. The power of the world works in circles. The sky is round. The stars and the earth are round. The seasons form a great circle. The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood. And so it is in everything where power moves.*

This statement seems to confirm the power, wisdom, and importance of the “old religion.” But this film is predicated on the idea that this “old religion” is outdated and dying. How do you explain this contradiction? What is it about the so-called “modern way of living” that goes against the power of the circle? Provide some examples to detail your response.

7. Beginning at 26 minutes and 35 seconds in the film, Pete Standing Alone makes the following statement:

*But the old Indians say in a few more years there won't be any more Sundance. The Peigans and the Stoney Indians don't have a Sundance anymore and the same thing will happen to us. Ten years, maybe twenty. In time, the old way of life will all be forgotten.*

Pete Standing Alone made this prediction in the late 1950s. What was happening in Indigenous communities during this era that would cause him to make this prediction?

### Throughline Inquiry Questions Connecting the Three Films

1. In what ways is the significance of land, place, and spirituality to the Kainai people portrayed in the three films? Identify key symbols and images from each film and discuss how each contributes to this portrayal.
2. In what ways can these films be understood as a unified statement on Kainai sovereignty? Make the case for this sovereignty statement by creating a detailed record of quotes and events in the films that could be interpreted in this way.
3. Compare notions of sovereignty in the Kainai context with notions of sovereignty in the liberal democratic tradition. What tensions and conflicts exist between these? How have these tensions manifested themselves historically? How do they manifest themselves in current contexts?
4. Characterize and analyze the relationships between the young and the old in the Kainai community as depicted in each film. What insights help us understand intergenerational tensions concerning tradition and change that have troubled Indigenous communities in past decades? What have been the consequences of these tensions?
5. “*The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood. And so it is in everything where power moves.*” Based on this quote and the information shared in the three films, tell the life story of Pete Standing Alone. What can be learned from studying the lives of Indigenous Elders like Pete Standing Alone?

6. How and in what ways has involvement with ***Circle of the Sun*** provoked Pete Standing Alone to live a better life? What evidence for this can be seen and heard in ***Standing Alone*** and ***Round Up***?
7. Like many Indigenous communities in Canada, the people of the Kainai community have suffered many negative consequences stemming from colonial processes of forced assimilation, political, economic, and social marginalization, and multiple forms of oppression. Document examples of negative consequences of colonial processes as shown in the three films. How have the Kainai people responded to these?
8. In both ***Circle of the Sun*** and ***Standing Alone***, there is significant attention given to changing times, the struggle to adapt to changing life circumstances, and the need for economic development. Yet, in ***Round Up***, there is little attention to these and a concerted focus on the continuation of spiritual traditions and responsibilities. How might this shift in attention be interpreted?
9. In all three films, there is significant attention given to horses and rodeo scenes. Why? What do these have to do with the stories being told in each film and the overall interconnected story told when the three films are held together?
10. Near the conclusion of ***Standing Alone***, Pete Standing Alone makes the following statement:

*Our songs are passed down for generations. Some are ancient. A spirit searching for an offering. A gift to the next generation for all living creatures.*

In what ways can this film trilogy be considered a “gift to the next generation for all living creatures?”

11. Imagine that you have the opportunity to interview Pete Standing Alone about these three films. What questions would you ask? How do you imagine him responding? Create an imaginary script for the interview based on these questions and your imagined responses.

### About the Author of this Guide – Dr. Dwayne Donald

Dwayne Donald is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. He was born and raised in Edmonton and is a descendent of the Papaschase Cree. His Blackfoot name is Aipoomahkaa (Long Distance Runner).

Dwayne has earned the following academic degrees: Bachelor of Arts (Alberta), Bachelor of Education (Calgary), Master of Education (Lethbridge), and PhD (Alberta).

Dwayne’s career as an educator began in the Mathare Valley slums of Nairobi, Kenya. He had the privilege to work alongside Kenyans with the Mathare Youth Sports Association while living in Nairobi. After returning to Canada in 1993, Dwayne began teaching social studies and English at Kainai High School on the Kainai Reserve in southern Alberta. This experience changed his life. The opportunity to learn from Kainai Elders and community leaders has had a tremendous influence on Dwayne’s interests and commitments as a curriculum thinker. In 2003, Dwayne and family moved back home to Edmonton to begin doctoral studies at the University of Alberta. He accepted an academic position in the Faculty of Education in 2007.