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**Plains Indian Museum  
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# HIDATSA EARTH LODGE "Wisdom of the Elders"

Final Script

HIDATSA EARTH LODGE  
 "Wisdom of the Elders"

Setting: A full-size replica Earth Lodge. Eleven video screens are hidden behind scrims.

**SCENE 1.**

**LIGHTS DIM. NO IMAGES ON SCREENS. LODGE POSTS AND OTHER INTERIORS ARE HIGHLIGHTED.**

**SFX:** Crackling of fire  
 Tinkling of buffalo hoof rattles

**OLD WOMAN'S VOICE:**  
 (words of Buffalo Bird Woman)

"We thought an earth lodge was alive and had a spirit like a human body, and that its front was like a face, with the door for a mouth.

"We said the four posts were alive and prayed always and made offerings."

**SCENE 2.**

**THE ALTAR** (one screen)

One screen comes to life, with scene of Curtis's photo, *The Altar-Arikara*. It shows an Indian in a Lodge seated behind an altar with sacred objects.

"We thought the house to be sacred."

**SCENE 3.**

**CONTEMPORARY EARTH LODGE IMAGES** (multiple screens)

Very stylized and symbolic-looking images from the Earth Lodge at the Knife River Museum. These may include the dome shape of the top of the Lodge, with skulls, and the tops of tipi poles protruding. Smoke suggests the fire within, and poles with votive shapes signify that there is a medicine person in the house.

**CALVIN GRINNELL:**

(voiceover)

"We didn't just pray on Sunday or anything like that.

"We prayed every day for everything. There's rituals for building a house, for planting a garden, for going on a hunt, going on a war party ..."

**SCENE 4.****PAINTINGS THAT DEPICT THE CREATION STORY** (multiple screens)

One large painting by a Native American will be commissioned, and closeups of various elements of it will appear on the different screens. It will depict the Hidatsa people living under the water in Earth Lodges, the grapevine descending, the hunters followed by the others in climbing up onto land. Then the large woman breaks the vine and the rest of the people remain under the lake. The Hidatsa on land built Earth Lodges there.

**OLD WOMAN'S VOICE:**

(words of Buffalo Bird Woman)

"In the beginning, our Hidatsa people lived under the waters of Devil's Lake. They had earth lodges and lived as we do now.

"One days some hunters found the root of a grapevine growing down from the lake overhead.

"They climbed the vine and found themselves on earth. Others found the vine until half the tribe escaped.

"But when a fat woman tried to climb it, the vine broke, leaving the rest of the tribe under the lake.

"Those who safely climbed the vine built villages of earth lodges.

## SCENE 5.

### **THE PAINTING TRANSITIONS INTO THE ACTUAL EARTH LODGE** (multiple screens)

Some of the images on the painting "match" shots from the actual Earth Lodge, and then eventually all the images are of the contemporary Earth Lodge. Some of these might include the entranceway, with its wooden posts and poles; the drying rack outside; inside, looking up through the smoke hole to the sky.

"They lived by hunting; and some very old men say that they also planted beans and wild potatoes."

## SCENE 6.

### **TRANSITION: LYLE GWIN'S HOUSE WITH MATCHING IMAGES FROM THE EARTH LODGE** (multiple screens)

The images from Lyle's contemporary house are intertwined with those from the Earth Lodge, such as a wide shot of his house, the antlers on the roof juxtaposed with the Lodge's skulls, and tipi poles stored on the roof.

## SCENE 7.

### **LYLE GWIN AT HOME AT COMPUTER WITH BABY** (multiple screens)

Images of Lyle with his baby -- talking to him, feeding him, holding him -- are interspersed with Lyle working on his computer and drinking coffee. Other shots include closeups of Lyle and the baby, Lyle's hands as he types, and the computer screen.

**LYLE GWIN:**  
(voiceover)

(Lyle speaking Hidatsa to baby)

"With my children, I talk Hidatsa to them as best I can and then I tell them the stories. Even though they are babies now, as

they grow older they'll remember those stories."

## SCENE 8.

### **BODMER IMAGES** (multiple screens)

This include scenes from Bodmer's aquatint, *Idols of the Mandans*.

"I was told that a long time ago each medicine bundle had a ceremony they had to do -- so all the people would feed this bundle, even if they didn't follow that way, they would feed the bundle, and that's how the ceremonies were preserved."

## SCENE 9.

### **BODMER'S MANDAN PAINTING** (360 degrees -- all screens)

A panorama of Bodmer's *Scalp Dance of the Minnatarre* painting.

dissolves to:

## SCENE 10.

### **PRAIRIE PANORAMA** (360 degrees -- all screens)

A composite of images illustrates the prairie at dawn: Grasses softly swaying. Soft hills, with the river in the distance. Grasses tinged tangerine from the sun, with rolling prairie in the background. A wide shot with green trees and the flowing river.

### **CALVIN GRINNELL:**

(voiceover)

"Our people lived in close harmony with nature, of course. I mean, we realized the value of everything."

## SCENE 11.

### **THE WEATHER** (multiple screens)

Historical photographs of Plains Indians in winter are interwoven with scenes that portray the harshness of the landscape -- ice, the frozen river surface, ice-coated branches, trees and branches bending with the wind, a sky of scudding clouds.

"It was a matter of survival. It was a matter of live and death because that's what it was. You have a harsh winter, 20 to 40 degrees below sometimes, you know, wind chills and snow could get up to four to six feet sometimes in areas, maybe deeper. This could last anywhere from October to May in the real length of time. So, you had to have sort of a friendship with nature."

## SCENE 12.

**TRANSITION. THE LODGE IS DARK. NO IMAGES ON SCREENS.  
FOCUS ON STARS ABOVE.**

Attention is drawn to the overhead sky. It is intended to be a Spring (possibly March 15) sky with the Pleiades, Mars and Mercury.

**SFX:** Fire crackles  
Whistle of wind  
Birdsong

## SCENE 13.

**MODERN PICKUP TRUCK.** (360 degrees -- all screens)

A modern pickup drives across the screens.

## SCENE 14.

**OLD MANDAN VILLAGE PANORAMA** (360 degrees -- all screens)

Various images from a Catlin painting of a Mandan village surround the Lodge.

