

Breaking the Stereotype: The Writings of Chief Joseph

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: American History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Understand the history of the Nez Perce tribe.
- Study and discuss a passage from the writings of Chief Joseph
- Analyze how Chief Joseph attempted to break white people's stereotypes about Native Americans.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: How the West Was Lost*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- A Brief History of the Nez Perce Tribe Before European Settlement
 - The Nez Perce Encounter American Settlers
 - The Nez Perce Relinquish Their Land in the Treaty of 1863: Chief Joseph Resists
 - The Nez Perce Flee Their Land with the US Army in Hot Pursuit
- A copy of an excerpt from the magazine article "An Indian's Views of Indian Affairs" (see Procedures)
 - Additional reference materials about Chief Joseph

Procedures

1. Tell students that you are going to devote a class period to reading the piece of Native American literature included below and analyzing it in a class discussion. Begin by explaining that the piece you will read is from the 19th century but that, unlike so much Native American literature that began orally and later was written down, this piece originated as a written document. Explain that the piece was published in a magazine for a white audience in 1879, two years after the writer had surrendered to the U.S. government; that the piece was written by the Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph, whose father had been converted to Christianity by a missionary; and that the son was educated in a mission school.

2. Read the following excerpt aloud to your students. You may want to read it aloud twice with students taking notes the second time. (The excerpt is reproduced from *Adventures in American Literature* [Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1996].)

from "An Indian's Views of Indian Affairs"

My friends, I have been asked to show you my heart. I am glad to have a chance to do so. I want the white people to understand my people. Some of you think an Indian is like a wild animal. This is a great mistake. I will tell you all about our people, and then you can judge whether an Indian is a man or not. I believe much trouble and blood would be saved if we opened our hearts more. I will tell you in my way how the Indian sees things. The white man has more words to tell you how they look to him, but it does not require many words to speak the truth. What I have to say will come from my heart, and I will speak with a straight tongue. Ah-cum-kin-i-ma-me-hut (the Great Spirit) is looking at me, and will hear me.

My name is In-mut-yah-lat-lat (Thunder traveling over the Mountains). I am chief of the Wal-lam-wat-kin band of Chute-pa-lu, or Nez Perces (nose-pierced Indians). I was born in eastern Oregon, thirty-eight winters ago. My father was chief before me. When a young man, he was called Joseph by Mr. Spaulding, a missionary. He died a few years ago. He left a good name on earth. He advised me well for my people.

Our fathers gave us many laws, which they had learned from their fathers. These laws were good. They told us to treat all men as they treated us; that we should never be the first to break a bargain; that it was a disgrace to tell a lie; that we should speak only the truth; that it was a shame for one man to take from another his wife or [to take] his property without paying for it. We were taught to believe that the Great Spirit sees and hears everything, and that he never forgets; that hereafter he will give every man a spirit-home according to his deserts: if he has been a good man, he will have a good home; if he has been a bad man, he will have a bad home. This I believe, and all my people believe the same.

3. First, ask students to demonstrate their comprehension of Chief Joseph's piece by paraphrasing it based on their notes and memory.
4. Next, initiate a class discussion about how the piece might have surprised listeners because instead of reinforcing stereotypes of Native Americans as wild, uneducated people, it shows a Native American as apparently well educated in the English language and in Christian-like thinking.
5. In continuing to debunk myths about Native Americans, ask students how they imagine Chief Joseph dressed. Then ask students to locate some of the many photographs taken of Chief Joseph, which are widely available in reference books. (Among the photographers whose

images of Joseph have come down to us are William Henry Jackson and John H. Fouch.) How do Joseph's clothes in those photos support or undercut students' initial guesses of what Joseph wore? Draw out from students that Joseph's clothes were appropriate for the climate he lived in and the work he did.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree or disagree with government policy that relocated Native Americans from their homeland reservations?
2. Discuss the similarities and differences between cultures of Native American and American expansionists.
3. Try to place yourself in the shoes of a young American expansionist in the 1800s. Would you venture west to find gold? How do you think your expedition would affect the Native Americans already living there?
4. Discuss the meaning of Chief Joseph's words, "I will fight no more forever." What was he saying and whom was he saying it to?
5. Discuss what you think life was like for the Nez Perce on the reservation. What do you know about their lifestyle, education, local government, religion, etc.?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were active in class discussions; were able to clearly paraphrase Chief Joseph's words; offered several suggestions for how these words debunked common stereotypes about Native Americans; located and discussed images of Chief Joseph from reference materials.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; presented a satisfactory paraphrase of Chief Joseph's words; offered some suggestions for how these words debunked common stereotypes about Native Americans; located and discussed at least one image of Chief Joseph from reference materials.
- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; did not paraphrase Chief Joseph's words; offered few or no suggestions for how these words debunked common stereotypes about Native Americans; did not locate or discuss images of Chief Joseph from reference materials.

Vocabulary

ancestral rights

Definition: Rights to land or other possessions by way of inheritance.

Context: Many settlers ignored Indian ancestral rights to the land.

assimilated

Definition: Absorbed into the prevailing culture.



Context: Other Americans did not want the Indians to be assimilated.

diplomacy

Definition: The practice and art of conducting negotiations with other people or nations.

Context: In the end, the Cherokee's attempt at diplomacy and adaptation failed.

emigration

Definition: The act of leaving a native country or region and settling elsewhere.

Context: He convinced Washington to allow the Cherokee to handle the emigration to the West themselves.

genocide

Definition: The systematic annihilation of a racial, ethnic, national or cultural group.

Context: "We can't sit here and watch our kids die in this manner or our elders die in this manner, this slow death; this genocide that they're doing."

Indian Removal Act

Definition: Legislation passed in 1830 that ordered the removal of all Native Americans to territories west of the Mississippi River.

Context: On May 23rd, Congress passed Jackson's Indian Removal Act and Georgia swiftly passed its own legislation.

Lakota

Definition: An important Native American tribal group of the Plains cultural area, also known as "Sioux."

Context: They called themselves the "Lakota," a word meaning "friend."

relinquish

Definition: To surrender or release control of.

Context: Ramsey presented the Dakota with a treaty that would relinquish their land.

reservation

Definition: Land set apart by the government for settlement by Native Americans.

Context: The Dakota people prepared to depart for the reservation, a narrow strip of land along the upper Minnesota River.

oppressors

Definition: Persecutors or abusers of power and authority.

Context: Seething with rage over the injustices, three young men rode out seeking revenge against their oppressors.

prospectors

Definition: People who search for mineral and ore deposits.



Context: In the 1840s, prospectors began to cross Lakota hunting lands while traveling west in search of gold.

rations

Definition: A fixed share or portion of allotted food.

Context: The government also agreed to provide the Indians with life-sustaining rations until they became self-supporting.

reservation

Definition: Land set apart by the government for settlement by Native Americans.

Context: The treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation, an area that included all of present day South Dakota west of the Missouri River.

Sioux

Definition: An important confederacy of Native American tribes in the Plains cultural region.

Context: "Settlers knew them as "Sioux," a word meaning "enemy."

unceded

Definition: Not yielded or granted by treaty.

Context: As many as 3,000 Lakota had refused to sign the 1868 treaty and continued to live in the Powder River region, designated by the U.S. as unceded Indian territory.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – U.S. History: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.
- History – U.S. History: Understands federal Indian policy and United States foreign policy after the Civil War.
- Civics: Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights.
- Geography: Understands the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources.
- Geography: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment.
- Life Skills: Applies decision-making techniques.



- Behavioral Studies: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
- Language Arts: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected works of enduring quality.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>