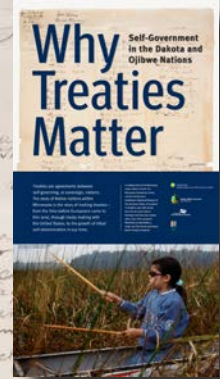


# Why Treaties Matter

Self-Government  
in the Dakota and  
Ojibwe Nations



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NOTHING CAN PARALYZE GOOD TEACHING ABOUT THE FIRST PEOPLE OF THE LAND MORE THAN A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE ABOUT WHAT TO CALL THEM. THIS SEGMENT IS DESIGNED TO HELP TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND THE PUBLIC NAVIGATE THAT TERRAIN AND BE AS RESPECTFUL AND EFFECTIVE AS POSSIBLE.

## QUESTION 1: What term is most appropriate for teaching about Native Americans?

**ANSWER 1:** This is an area of confusion for many people. Christopher Columbus thought for a long time that he landed in Asia when he first arrived here—China, Japan, India. And from there the term Indian was applied to the peoples of the Americas. It is a misnomer, even if it wasn't intended to offend. Some native people object to the word because it was applied in error. But some really do prefer the term, including some official organizations like the National Congress of American Indians and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. Native American is broadly considered a little more politically correct, even if it isn't universally embraced. But it can cause confusion in certain circumstances. Is a St. Paul native a Native American from St. Paul or just someone "born and bred," so to speak? Indigenous is increasingly taking the place of Native American, and some scholars really like the way it draws connections to other groups, but again there is an issue of ambiguity. There are people indigenous to every continent except Antarctica and they are all different. It gets a little long to always say "indigenous people of North America." Aboriginal was preferred for a while in Canada, although it got confused with Australian aborigine. I tend to use all of these terms fairly interchangeably, aware of their shortcomings. I think it is really important that we make "safe space" so everyone doesn't have to walk around on eggshells. If you know the story behind the words, all you really need is respect in your heart and an open mind.

## QUESTION 2: Is it Ojibwe or Chippewa?

**ANSWER 2:** It is Ojibwe. The word Chippewa is actually derived from the word Ojibwe. Early French explorers and traders had trouble spelling words for which there were no written languages, so many versions and spellings were recorded over time. The word went from Ojibwe to Jibwe, to Chipwe, Chippeway, Chippewa. It's not hurtful or offensive, just a moderate corruption. That corrupted spelling was formally incorporated into many treaties, U.S. government documents, and the constitutions of all seven Minnesota Ojibwe tribes, so the word Chippewa is far from dead. Ojibwe is winning out, and as the tribes successfully reform their constitutions, Chippewa will likely slowly be on its way out. Many Ojibwe people also use the term Anishinaabe. Ojibwe is considered a tribal-specific term, meaning just a reference to Ojibwe people. "Anishinaabe" is an Ojibwe word that refers to all native people of all tribes.



## QUESTION 3: Is it Dakota or Sioux?

**ANSWER 3:** It is Dakota, usually. The word Dakota, meaning friend or ally is the term the tribe uses for self-reference most commonly. Use of the name Sioux is relegated to the past. The word Sioux is a derivation of the Ojibwe word Naadowesiwag, which is a species of snake, and reference to the Dakota as enemies. That does offend some Dakota people. But the Dakota are part of a much larger linguistic and cultural family. The Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota are all dialects and branches of the same tribal family tree. They formed a political confederacy as well—the Seven Council Fires. Four of those seven groups were Dakota, two were Nakota, and one was Lakota. The Lakota further diversified into other bands. Sometimes, it's hard to find one word that easily encompasses them all, so you will hear Dakota people sometimes use the word Sioux in self-reference, but the tribal-specific words are usually preferred—Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota.

The Dakota Nation comprises tribes that share a common language, history, social organization, and culture. Tribes within the Dakota Nation are the Santee Dakota, Yankton Dakota, and Teton Dakota, labels representing three dialectic divisions of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires):

1. Wahpetonwan - Santee Dialect
2. Mdewakantonwan - Santee Dialect
3. Sisonwan - Santee Dialect
4. Wahpekute - Santee Dialect
5. Ihanktonwan - Nakota Dialect
6. Ihanktonwana - Nakota Dialect
7. Tetonwan - Lakota Dialect (Please note that Lakota is a dialect, not a tribe name)