

Why Treaties Matter

Self-Government
in the Dakota and
Ojibwe Nations



Educator Guide for Grades 6-12

Ways of Learning: An Ojibwe Childhood

A partnership of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
and the Minnesota Humanities Center

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Why Treaties Matter educator guides are intended as supplementary resources for your curriculum or stand-alone as lessons. This guide contains estimates of preparation and instructional time, a materials list, background information, preview strategies, assessment options, extension activities, a vocabulary list, web resources, bibliography, and related reading.

PREPARATION TIME

One or two hours depending on previous familiarity with the subject

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

One or two class periods depending on the number of activities selected

MATERIALS

- Student Reading: “The Origin of the Robin: An Ojibwe Story” ([Appendix A](#))
- Study Questions ([Appendix B](#)) and Suggested Answers([Appendix C](#))
- Student Reading: excerpt from *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood* ([Appendix D](#))
- Study Questions ([Appendix E](#)) and Suggested Answers ([Appendix F](#))
- Vocabulary list ([Appendix G](#))
- Internet (to access district website; for research on traditional Native toys and games)
- Sample of objects in Nature such as rocks, blades of grass, shells, sticks

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The Dakota and Ojibwe people have always welcomed the birth of children – sacred (innocent) beings called *wakhân* in Dakota and *manitou* in Ojibwe. Prior to the treaties with the U.S. government, discipline did not include corporal punishment, and child rearing methods were more gentle and showed respect for the child's will. The behavior of children was corrected through other less intrusive methods. There were no formal schools, but children learned as they were ready. They often participated in whatever activity the family was engaged in, such as fishing, plant gathering, or harvesting. Even babies participated. Strapped in a cradleboard, the board was propped up so the baby could see what the family was doing. While engaged in these activities, children were encouraged to observe, classify, infer, and use other processes in what is now called the “scientific method.” Children also learned from hearing traditional stories that included a moral or explained how things got to be the way they are. They also learned adult roles by modeling adult behavior with handmade toys and games. These toys and games taught hand-eye coordination, social skills, and math skills. Children were sometimes told to go into the woods and invent their own toy or game. In so doing, parents were encouraging critical thinking skills.



In treaties that took place in the 1850s and 1860s between the federal government and Indian tribes, one provision that applied to children was the government's promise to “educate” Dakota and Ojibwe children. Schools were established to instruct Native children in the knowledge and values of American society. Children were often taken from their parents against their will. In other cases, the parents willingly let their children be educated in formal schools because they believed the children needed new skills in a rapidly changing world. Boarding schools, government or mission run, proved to be disastrous to Indian families. The schools forced the children to speak English, abandon their Indian names, and leave behind everything that pertained to traditional life. Many children were kept in school for years before they were allowed to come home. Many never did come home – they died of disease and neglect. At the site of the old Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, the graves of a great many children dot the landscape. Those that came home did not know how to make a living in the forest and prairie country of their homeland. And their parents did not have the opportunity to model gentle parenting methods. Instead, boarding school personnel modeled harsh military-style discipline. The full consequences of the boarding school experience became known by Congress in 1934.



Throughout the 20th century, Congress heard evidence that the treaty obligations to educate Indian youth had been an absolute failure. In the early 1970's, Congress set up funding to help tribal and public schools do a better job of educating Indian children. Public schools that have ten or more American Indian students must have an American Indian advisory committee. The school districts, with the consent of the advisory committee, can apply for federal and state (in Minnesota) funds to create educational programs that meet the “unique cultural needs” of Indian students. After decades of neglect, treaty obligations are beginning to be addressed.

For additional teacher background on the boarding school experience, view the videos on the Minnesota Humanities Center's Absent Narratives Resource Collection: http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=0&CatID=0&SearchText=boarding_school&SortBy=1&mediatype=0&lurl=1

LESSON

Preview Strategies: Use the KWL model – ask students what they already know (K) about how American Indian children were educated prior to the advent of formal schools. Ask if they know what a government or mission-run boarding school was like. Ask if they know what obligations the government has toward American Indian children as a result of treaty agreements. Ask what they would like to know (W), and then at the end of the lesson ask what they have learned (L) from teacher/student discussion, student readings/study questions, vocabulary, internet research and through making a toy or game from nature.

Activities:

- Students read the story, “Origin of the Robin” ([Appendix A](#)) and excerpts from *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood* ([Appendix D](#)) and answer study questions ([Appendix B](#) and [Appendix E](#)) related to the reading.
- Based on the readings, students summarize different ways Ojibwe children were educated before formal schooling took place.
- Students explore the internet to find out if their school district has an American Indian Advisory Committee and/or an Indian Education program. They may want to ask the student enrollment office for the number of American Indian students in their district to see if their district complies with the U.S. law, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the legal obligation to educate American Indian students as promised through treaties.
- Students watch the video on Ojibwe toys (<http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/resourceDetails.cfm?id=1483>), and then are given the assignment of creating a new toy or game out of something in the natural environment (e.g., rocks, leaves, cattails, grass, sticks, and shells).

Assessment: Students demonstrate they have a deeper understanding about Dakota and Ojibwe parenting, learning, the effect of boarding schools, and current U.S. laws regarding Indian Education through teacher/student discussion, student readings/study questions, using words from the vocabulary list, internet research, and creation of a new toy.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students conduct research on a boarding school that operates or operated in the Upper Midwest region. Examples include Flandreau Indian School, Pipestone Indian School, mission run schools at White Earth and Red Lake, and Wahpeton Indian School.
- Students talk with each other and compare parenting styles used in their families.
- Students explore the relationship between toys and games and the education of children. They compare toys and games with which they are familiar with Dakota and Ojibwe toys and games.

Vocabulary: See the vocabulary list included in this guide ([Appendix G](#)). You may wish to modify the list based on your knowledge of your student’s needs or the subject you are teaching. Pretesting vocabulary individually, or in small groups, or with your entire class can be an effective preview strategy.

Websites:

Minnesota Humanities Center’s Absent Narratives Resource Collection – video interviews about the boarding school experience [http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=o&CatID=o&SearchText=boarding school&SortBy=1&mediatype=o&lurl=1](http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=o&CatID=o&SearchText=boarding%20school&SortBy=1&mediatype=o&lurl=1)

Four Seasons of the Ojibwe: American Indian Toys – video
<http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/resourceDetails.cfm?id=1483>

Heard Museum – Remembering Our Indian School Days: The Boarding School Experience
<http://www.heard.org/currentexhibits/hmm/BoardingSchoolExperience.html>

Indian Education Act of 1972 Congressional Act
<http://jaie.asu.edu/v14/V14S3ind.html>

An Update on Indian Education in Minnesota – Dennis W. Olson, Director Office of Indian Education, Minnesota Department of Education, 2013 <http://www.mn-indianed.org/docs/Olson%20Am%20Indian%20Ed%20in%20MN%20Presentation.pdf>

State of Minnesota Education Programs – see 124D.71 to 124D.85
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=124D>

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RELATED READING

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Deloria, Ella Cara. *Waterlily*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1988.

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STUDENT READING:***The Origin of the Robin: An Ojibwe Story***

As a part of their education and training, adolescent boys and girls among the Ojibwe went into the woods and fasted. Drinking only water for four days, and in an altered mental state, they often received sacred dreams that gave them a guardian spirit who would be there for them throughout their lives. Sometimes these sacred dreams also pointed them to a special career such as becoming a medicine person or a great leader. The Ojibwe respected dreams and the life choices made by adolescents in fasting. Although the Anishinaabe had already been in increasing contact with Europeans by the time Noodinens was growing up, one thing stayed consistent—dependency on the forests, rivers, and lakes that provided them with everything they needed to survive. Noodinens' personal account describes the activities that her family would engage in each season. Let's follow Noodinens as she describes traditional Anishinaabe life, and what each season provided to her and her people.

Long ago, there was an old man who had a very handsome son. The old man had great ambitions for his son, and so, according to the custom of the day, he urged his son to go out into the woods and fast. Guardian spirits took pity on young people who fasted and sometimes granted them special abilities. Filled with ambition for his son, the old man asked the boy to try and fast longer than anyone else had ever done.

When the time of the fast arrived, the two proceeded into the woods where they built a small lodge. The old man directed his son to lie down on a mat at the center of the lodge. Here he was to fast for twelve days. The young man listened to his father and began his fast.

The old man came every morning to the little lodge to encourage his son. On one of his visits the son pleaded with his father, "My father, my dreams suggest I should not continue now. May I break the fast and make a new fast another time?" But the father did not listen. Instead the old man said, "Wait patiently a little longer. In three days you will accomplish what you set out to do. I want you to continue. It is for your own good." And so the handsome young man lay down once again. But on the eleventh day he repeated his request. Again the old man told him to continue, saying he would bring food the next day. On the last morning, the old man joyfully prepared a meal to take to his son. When he arrived at the fasting lodge, he peeped through the door. He found his son painted with red color all over his breast. And his son was saying, "My father would not listen to my request. He will be the loser. I will always be happy in my new form. My guardian spirit has shown pity and given me a new appearance. Now I will go."

Upon hearing these words, the old man rushed into the lodge. "My son," he begged, "Please don't go." But the son flew to the top of the lodge, for he had been changed into a robin. Upon leaving he said to his father, "Don't worry about me, I am happy now. I am sorry I could not be a great warrior as you wanted. Instead I will be a sign of peace and joy to our people. I will cheer you up with my songs." Then he stretched his wings and flew up to the treetops.

STUDY QUESTIONS:***The Origin of the Robin: An Ojibwe Story***

1. Whose idea was it for the son to fast?
2. What did the old man want his son to become?
3. How did the son warn his father? How many times did the old man not listen?
4. What price did the old man pay for not listening?
5. What would you consider to be the moral of this story?
6. Does this story have any relevance today?
7. Was this story meant for children or parents or both? Why?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS:

The Origin of the Robin: An Ojibwe Story

1. Whose idea was it for the son to fast?

The idea came from the old man.

2. What did the old man want his son to become?

The old man wanted his son to become a great warrior.

3. How did the son warn his father? How many times did the old man not listen?

The son told his father he dreamed it was not time for him to fast. He warned the old man twice.

4. What price did the old man pay for not listening?

Because the old man did not listen to his son, he ended up losing him altogether.

5. What would you consider to be the moral of this story?

One moral is that parents should not force their dreams on their children, as the children have their own dreams and ambitions.

6. Does this story have any relevance today?

This story is very relevant in modern society because many parents still push their ambitions on their children.

7. Was this story meant for children or parents or both? Why?

This story is probably more for parents to hear than the children.

STUDENT READING:**from *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood***

John Rogers grew up on the White Earth Reservation in the latter years of the 19th century. His Ojibwe name was *Way-quah-gezhig* or “Dawn of the Day.” His English name was John. He and his sisters went to the Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota when John was only six years old. This school was operated by officials from the federal government. The children did not return home until six years later when *Way-quah-gezhig*, was twelve. He was so excited to be home. His mother was even more excited. During his absence his little brother, *Amik* (beaver) was born. His mother immediately went about the task of teaching her children.

“Mother promised to teach me the ways of the forest, rivers, and lakes—how to set rabbit snares and dead falls, how to trap for wolves and other wild animals that roamed this land of the Chippewas.”

“Now the time of the melting snows had come and gone. Soft gentle winds warmed the Earth. Summer was well along. We gathered birch bark for mother, and with this she made containers and dishes for our winter supplies. To remove this bark from the trees required skill in order not to harm the bark. If we cut too deeply it would leave a scar, for the new bark would not again grow out smooth. Mother was careful to teach us just how it was done. With a sharp knife we would cut through the inner bark only. Indeed, it seemed that the Great Spirit had placed it there to let us know just how deeply to cut. It was our code never to destroy anything that Nature had given us. If we took care stripping the bark, more would be provided on the same tree. At the coming of the robin was the best season for getting the bark, but since Mother had time now, in the fall, to teach us, she felt there was no need to wait.”

When the late spring arrived, families camped deep in the woods to dig for snakeroot. This root could be sold commercially as medicine. With the money they received in payment, the family could buy supplies at the trading store. A neighbor, who owned a horse and wagon, drove *Way-quah-gezhig* and his family to a special spot in the woods where they set up camp.

“It was still early spring so that the snakeroot was not yet in blossom. But at least we stopped at a place where Mother said the gathering would be best. Here we took our hoes and sacks from the wagon and waited for further instructions. ‘Here, said mother,’ ‘is one of the roots. Look at it. See how it grows. Notice the shape of its leaves. They are long and pointed, something like the grass that grows by the lakes. To dig for them you hit down with your hoe, then give a little jerk. Next, grab the grass and pull. You will find that it is much like an octopus. Now hit the roots against the hoe and the dirt will fall away. Break off the green tops and put the roots in your sack.’ Soon my brother and I were bragging over our speed in pulling the snakeroot. It was a contest as to who would get the biggest root for his sack.”

After the snakeroot had been collected, the adults went to town to exchange snakeroot for groceries.

“We were very anxious to see what they had brought. Like children we were sure they brought something nice. We didn’t crave candies or sweets because we always had maple candy. So if it were only a loaf of bread, that would be a wonderful treat. And they did bring us some! After that we dug snakeroot every day, making several trips to town with it.”

Excerpts from *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood*, University of Oklahoma Press 1957, pp 11-12, 50-52

Note: See [Terminology Primer](#) for an explanation of the terms Ojibwe, Chippewa, and Anishinaabe.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

from *Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood*

1. What skills did Way-quah-gezhig's mother promise to teach him?
2. How did Way-quah-gezhig's mother go about teaching the children how to cut bark from the birch tree?
3. For what purpose was the birch bark cut?
4. Why was the bark removed carefully? What code was followed?
5. Why did Way-quah-gezhig's family gather snakeroot?
6. How did Way-quah-gezhig's mother go about teaching the children to gather this root?
7. Why do you think the family always had "maple candy?"
8. What treat did the children get for gathering the snakeroot?

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS:
from Red World and White: Memories of a Chippewa Boyhood

1. What skills did Way-quah-gezhig's mother promise to teach him?
She promised to teach him trapping skills to snare rabbits and trap wild fur-bearing animals.
2. How did Way-quah-gezhig's mother go about teaching the children how to cut bark from the birch tree?
Way-quah-gezhig's mother taught the children how to cut bark from the birch tree through direct instruction and by example.
3. For what purpose was the birch bark cut?
The cut birch bark was shaped into bark containers and dishes.
4. Why was the bark removed carefully? What code was followed?
The children removed the bark carefully because they did not want to damage or kill the tree. Their code was never to waste or destroy what Nature had provided.
5. Why did Way-quah-gezhig's family gather snakeroot?
The family gathered snakeroot because they could sell it commercially as a medicine root. They could exchange the root for money they could use to buy groceries.
6. How did Way-quah-gezhig's mother go about teaching the children to gather this root?
Way-quah-gezhig's mother taught them how to gather snakeroot by taking them to the place it grew, describing characteristics of the plant, and demonstrating how to shake off the dirt to place the root into their bag.
7. Why do you think the family always had "maple candy?"
They family always had maple candy because they gathered maple sap in the spring and made maple sugar and candy for use throughout the year.
8. What treat did the children get for gathering the snakeroot?
The children got a loaf of bread.

English Words

treaty	an agreement between sovereign nations
boarding school	a school where students actually live at the school
sacred	worthy of spiritual respect
fasting	to live without food for a specified period of time
guardian spirit	a teacher, often in animal form, who guides a person to make good decisions.
snakeroot	a perennial herb that has medicinal qualities for a wide variety of ailments.
cradleboard	a baby carrier used by many American Indian tribes that consists of a flat board, a covering, a foot rest and a protective wooden arch.
scientific method	a body of techniques to ask questions and acquire new knowledge

Ojibwe Words

manitou/manidou	sacred power sometimes translated as a great mystery
amik	beaver, a nickname
Way-quah-gezhig	dawn of the day, a name

Dakota Words

wakhán	sacred power
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