

Why Treaties Matter

Self-Government
in the Dakota and
Ojibwe Nations



Educator Guide for Grades 6-12

**We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations
and Continue to Practice Our Sovereignty**

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 topics

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Two class periods

MATERIALS

- Blank map of this place once called Mnísota ([Appendix A](#))
- Map showing Dakota and Ojibwe Tribal Nations ([Appendix B](#))
- Student Reading: “We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations and Continue to Practice Our Sovereignty” ([Appendix C](#))
- Study Questions ([Appendix D](#)) and Suggested Answers ([Appendix E](#))
- Vocabulary list ([Appendix F](#))
- Internet access
- Felt or paper in a variety of colors, scissors, glue, poster board

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Before Europeans came to North America, Native people governed themselves and maintained diplomatic relations with one another. They were members of independent, or sovereign, nations that negotiated government-to-government agreements—like treaties—with one another over trade, hunting, and other issues of mutual concern.

The Dakota nation, according to oral tradition, originally consisted of seven divisions. These divisions were referred to as [Dčhéŋi Šakówin](#) the “seven council fires.” Fire is a metaphor for those who live together in one place. The seven divisions, discussed in the reading, largely refer to locations. Each division, or village, decided upon their own internal affairs, but for issues affecting the whole, they operated as one.

The Ojibwe people organized themselves through their clans. There are twenty or more Ojibwe clans and, for the most part, each clan was represented throughout the wide territory of the Ojibwe people. The clan, called [doodem](#) in the Ojibwe language, is a descent group. Clan members are considered to have descended from a common ancestor. For the Ojibwe, this ancestor is reckoned through the male line, so the children always belonged to the clan group of their father*. Ojibwe clans have fish, bird, or animal names. In the original organization, each clan had a special purpose.

This lesson teaches students about the eleven sovereign nations in this place now called Minnesota. As sovereign nations today, America’s native people have a nation-to-nation relationship with the United States. Federally recognized tribes have the right to form their own government with tribal officials, courts and judges, police, and other administrative positions. They have the right to create services for tribal members, and if they cannot do this with their own resources, they contract with the federal government for these services, such as operating a tribal clinic. Tribal nations also have the right to create and run business enterprises.

American Indian nations possess an inherent and unique political status based on sovereignty. This legal political status conveys dual citizenship along with specific rights and responsibilities. This inherent political status sets American Indian nations apart from all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Tribal sovereignty supersedes state law, which is outlined in the U.S. Constitution. For example, if state law forbids high stakes gaming, that law does not apply to tribal nations.

Tribal members are dual citizens. They are citizens of their tribal nation and citizens of the United States (since 1924).

Treaties, affirmed in courts, have not given, but retained for native people the right to hunt, fish, and gather as they have for hundreds of years.

Dakota Nations

- Lower Sioux Indian Community
- Prairie Island Indian Community
- Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
- Upper Sioux Community

Ojibwe Nations

- Bois Forte Reservation
- Fond du Lac Reservation
- Grant Portage Reservation
- Leech Lake Reservation
- Mille Lacs Reservation
- Red Lake Reservation
- White Earth Reservation



Note: These are the U.S. federally recognized names, and many of the 11 nations assert their own identity, which is why we often see these sovereign nations referred to in a variety of ways. See [Terminology Primer](#) for additional information.

Note: Dakota words in this lesson are written using Standard Dakota Orthography. This is the writing system used by over 10,000 Dakota and Lakota children

LESSON

Preview Strategies: KWL – Ask students what they already know (K) about Indian nations in Minnesota, how long the Dakota and Ojibwe have lived in Minnesota, what kind of governments they had long ago, and if they still have their own governments today. Ask what they would like to know (W), and then at the end of the lesson ask students what they have learned (L) through the reading, study questions, vocabulary, map activity, and web research.

Activities:

- Start the lesson by asking students to complete the questions on the blank map ([Appendix A](#)). Have students do this activity again at the end of the lesson.
- Students then refer to the map which shows the lands that were ceded and retained and complete the accompanying questions. ([Appendix B](#)).
- Students read “We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations” and complete the study questions.
- In the next session, students divide into small groups and are assigned to conduct research on one or two nations using internet resources. Divide tasks among group members to create a poster about that nation(s).



Assessment: Through the student reading and activities that accompany this lesson, students demonstrate understanding that Dakota and Ojibwe are and have always been sovereign nations. As nations they have a right to have their own government and can engage in economic enterprises on behalf of tribal members. Students understand that formal agreements were made among tribal nations long before there was a United States. Students are able to identify and locate the eleven Dakota and Ojibwe nations in Minnesota and have deeper understanding of what was retained and lost through treaties with the United States.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students construct their own definition of sovereignty and present it to the class.
- Students conduct research on a treaty that was made 1800-1830 and present the information in a writing assignment.
- Students conduct research on the tribal governments of the Dakota or Ojibwe prior to European settlement and report on their findings in a writing assignment.
- Students do research on how a direct democracy differs from a majority rule democracy.

Vocabulary: See the vocabulary list included in this guide ([Appendix F](#)). 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.

Web Resources (all links were active at time of publication):

Tribal Nations

Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe millelacsband.com

Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe www.fdlrez.com

Red Lake Nation www.redlakenation.org

White Earth Band of Ojibwe www.whiteearth.com

Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe www.boisforte.com

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe www.llojibwe.com
Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe www.grandportage.com
Prairie Island Sioux Community www.prairieisland.org/
Upper Sioux Community www.uppersiouxcommunity-nsn.gov/
Lower Sioux Community www.lowersioux.com
Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community shakopeedakota.org

Additional Sites

Companion website to Why Treaties Matter exhibit www.treatiesmatter.org
Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior www.bia.gov/
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights & The Leadership Conference Education Fund www.civilrights.org
Minnesota Department of Education <http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html>
Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) www.glifwc.org
Bemidji State University American Indian Resource Center www.bemidjistate.edu/airc/

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RELATED READING

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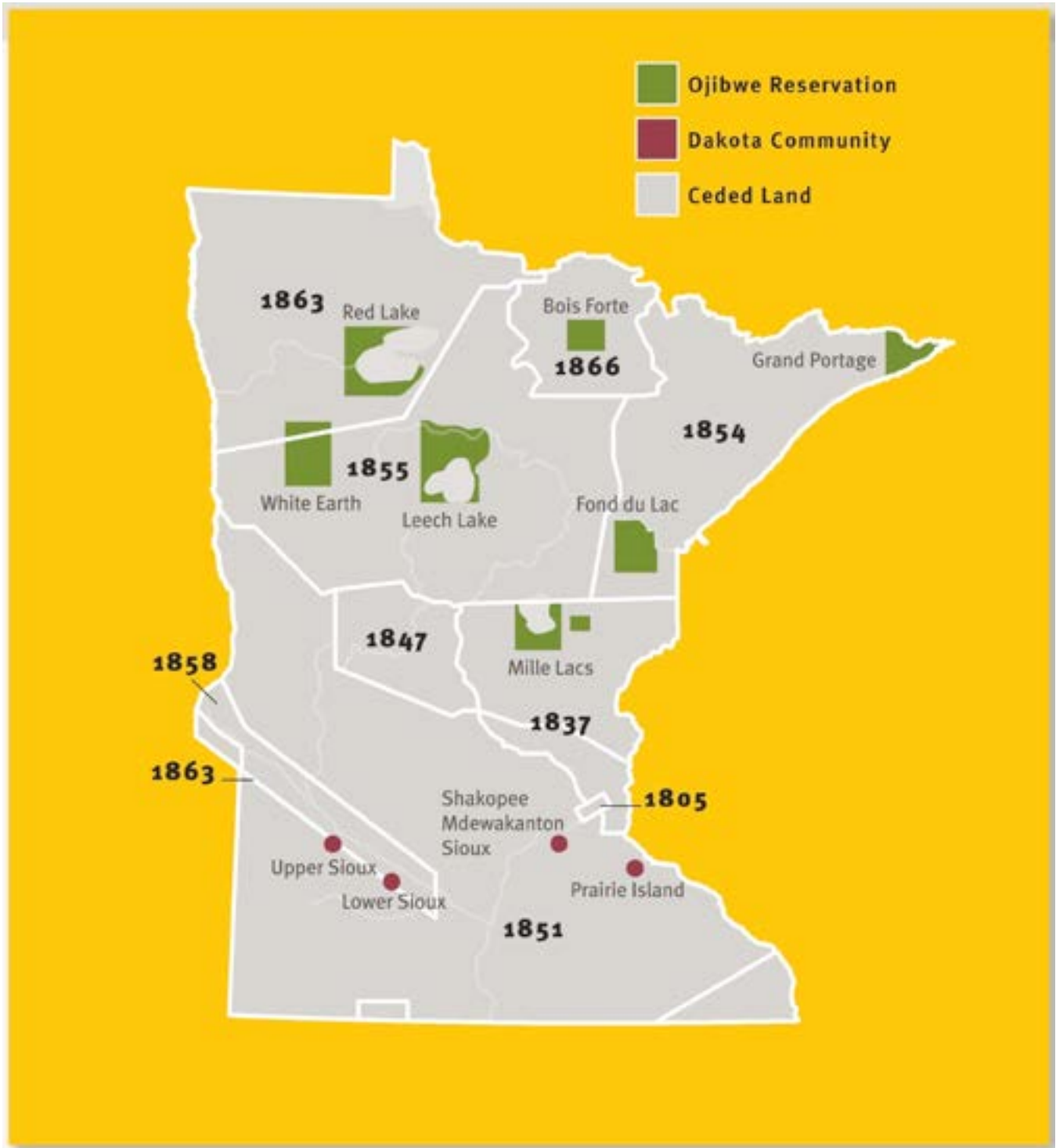
Van Kirk, Sylvia. *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983.

APPENDIX A

Place your present location on this map. Identify and label any other locations that have significance to you. If able, identify the seven Ojibwe reservations and the four Dakota communities on this map.



Compare this map to the one you created. Where and how expansive are the current locations of the Ojibwe reservations and Dakota communities? How much of this place we now call Minnesota is currently comprised of ceded land? Which Ojibwe reservations and Dakota communities are neighbors with you?



The Dakota and Ojibwe relinquished millions of acres through treaties with the United States. This map shows the dates of the principal land cession treaties, the extent of the land loss, and the location of present-day Ojibwe reservations and Dakota communities.

STUDENT READING: We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations

At the time of contact with Europeans, the indigenous people of North America had governed themselves for countless centuries. These tribal nations were sovereign and most functioned as direct democracies. A direct democracy is one in which consensus of all the people is needed for an action to take place. Consensus meant that all had to agree. This form of democracy was more direct because, unlike the American system of majority rule, everyone's voice was heard. Some tribal nations were small, perhaps consisting of a village, and others formed confederacies of individual tribal nations.

The Dakota nation, according to oral tradition, originally consisted of seven divisions. These divisions were referred to as the “seven council fires.” Fire is a metaphor for a group of people living together in one place, just as a family might sit at a common fire. The number seven also has sacred significance and may stand for seven directions or the seven stars of the Big Dipper. The seven divisions consisted of the [Mdewakantonwan](#) or Spirit Lake people, the Dakota name for Lake Mille Lacs; [Wahpéthunwan](#), Dwellers Among the Leaves; [Wapetkute](#), Shooters Among the Leaves; [Ihánkthunwan](#) (Yankton), Dwellers at the End (village); [Ihánkthunwana](#), Little Dwellers at the End (village), [Sisíthunwa](#), People of the Fish Village; and the [Thíthunwa](#), Dwellers of the Plains. These divisions largely refer to locations in Minnesota, and the Thíthu wa refers to the people who began to live on the Plains to the west. European Americans called these seven divisions the “Sioux,” a name their Algonkian speaking neighbors may have given them. In each Dakota village there was a “head soldier” who helped to keep order in daily life, and a council of adult males who formed the “soldier’s lodge.” This lodge was called “[thiyóthipi](#)” in Dakota and the head soldier was called “[akčhita](#).” Each village conducted their own affairs, but villagers came together as one to defend each other against enemies. The Dakota divisions also came together, often during the summer months, to feast and visit, conduct ceremonies, and play games such as lacrosse.

The Ojibwe people, according to oral tradition, once lived on the east coast of North America. They gradually moved west into the Great Lakes area to find a food that “grows on the water” (wild rice). At the time of contact, the Ojibwe lived over a widespread area in the Great Lakes region. In their summer villages, the people appointed a civil chief who helped keep order in daily life. The clan organization helped to unite this widespread nation because every individual belonged to a particular clan. The Ojibwe call these clans doodem. The clan is a named descent group and, among the Ojibwe, children always belonged to the clan of their father. Each of over twenty clans was represented in each camp or village throughout this widespread territory. Every clan name reflected the kinship the Ojibwe people felt for the living beings around them. According to oral tradition, the original clan ancestor came out of the water and gave the Ojibwe the original five clans. According to William Warren, an Ojibwe historian, these five were [Owaazisii](#) (Bullhead), [Ajijaak](#) (Crane), [Maang](#) (Loon), [Makwa](#) (Bear) and [Waabizheshi](#) (Marten). Others have said there were seven original clans, including [Binesi](#) (Bird) and [Waawaashkeshi](#) (Deer).

Each clan served a special purpose in community life. For example, the clans of the air, especially the Crane, served as village chiefs. The Bear clan served as community police, and soldiers who were first to defend their people against common enemies. The catfish clan was known as teachers. Long ago, women as well as men could become village leaders. Women had a lot of power in historic Ojibwe communities, including say over marriage and divorce, as well ownership of the wigwam or house. In the 1800's, there were three women chiefs in the Leech Lake area. Today, Ojibwe women still serve as leaders, and there are women tribal chairs on four of the seven Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota.

STUDENT READING STUDY QUESTIONS:**We Have Always Been Sovereign Nations and Continue to Practice Our Sovereignty**

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What significance does the number seven hold for Dakota political organization?
2. Who kept order in a traditional Dakota village?
3. What did European Americans call the Dakota? Why do you think they used that term?
4. When and why did the seven Dakota divisions come together?
5. According to oral tradition, where did Ojibwe people originate?
6. What is a clan? How did Ojibwe clans serve to unite the people?
7. How are Ojibwe clans related to their traditional political organization?
8. Describe what leadership looked like for Ojibwe women.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What significance does the number seven hold for Dakota political organization?
Seven is a sacred number for Dakota people and may reflect seven directions or the seven stars of the Big Dipper.
2. Who kept order in a traditional Dakota village?
The akíčhita (head soldier) and the members of the thiyóthipi (soldiers lodge).
3. What did European Americans call Dakota? Why do you think they used that term?
They called them the “Sioux.” They probably used this term because they first met the Algonkian speaking tribes who referred to the Dakota as Sioux.
4. When and why did the seven Dakota divisions come together?
The separate divisions of the Dakota came together in the summer months to feast, visit, conduct ceremonies, and play lacrosse. They also came together to defend themselves from enemies.
5. According to oral tradition, where did Ojibwe people originate?
The Ojibwe say they came from the great salt water in the East and gradually migrated to the Great Lakes Region.
6. What is a clan? How did Ojibwe clans serve to unite the people?
A clan is a named descent group. Some clan names may have included: Owaazisii (Bullhead), Ajijaak (Crane), Maang (Loon), Makwa (Bear), Waabizheshi (Marten), Binesi (Bird), and Waawaashkeshi (Deer). The clan organization united the Ojibwe because the clans were represented in each Ojibwe community.
7. How are Ojibwe clans related to their traditional political organization?
Each clan of the Ojibwe had a special task to do. For example, the clans of the air, especially the Crane, served as village chiefs. The Bear clan served as community police, and soldiers who were first to defend their people against common enemies. The catfish clan was known as teachers.
8. Describe what leadership looked like for Ojibwe women.
Ojibwe women could serve as chiefs and three women did in the 1800’s in the Leech Lake area.

STUDENT READING STUDY QUESTIONS

English words:

treaty	a formal agreement between separate nations
sovereignty	independent of all others, and in the case of government, self-governing nations

Dakota words/phrases:

Očhéti Šakówin	the seven original divisions of the Dakota people
Bdewakantonwan	Spirit Lake People
Waǰpéthuwan	Dwellers Among the Leaves
Waǰpékhute	Shooters Among the Leaves
Iháŋkthuwan (Yankton)	Dwellers at the End (Village)
Iháŋkthuwanna	Little Dwellers at the End
Sisíthuwan	People of the Fish Village
Thíthuwan	Dwellers of the Plains
akíčhita	head solider
thiyóthipi	soldier's lodge

Ojibwe words/phrases:

Doodem	clans of the Ojibwe people
Anishinaabe(g)	what the Ojibwe call themselves
Owaazisii*	Bullhead clan
Ajijaak*	Crane clan
Maang*	Loon clan
Makwa (or Noka)*	Bear clan
Waabizheshi*	Marten clan
Binesi	Bird clan
Waawaashkeshi	Deer clan

*original clans from William Warren, *A History of the Ojibwe People*



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