
ORIGINAL
SITTING BULL
EDUCATION GUIDE
HISTORY
HISTORY HONORS 250



SITTING BULL

About the Series

As American settlers relentlessly move west during the mid-19th century, they increasingly encroach on Native American lands, until a legendary Lakota leader emerges, one determined to fight back. *Sitting Bull* is a four-hour documentary that charts the extraordinary life of the renowned leader of the Lakota people. Refusing to back down, Sitting Bull gathers an unprecedented alliance of Native nations, battles General Custer at Little Bighorn, becomes an international celebrity with Buffalo Bill Cody, and fights against seemingly impossible odds to save his people and their culture.

Curriculum Links

Sitting Bull is relevant for U.S. History, Social Studies, American Studies and Native American and Indigenous Studies courses. The content is appropriate for 8th grade through college students.

To The Educator

Sitting Bull tells the story of the Lakota leader's life and leadership against the backdrop of westward expansion in the United States. This series can help deepen student understanding of 19th century U.S. history and foster meaningful dialogue about leadership; westward expansion; environmental history and the buffalo; U.S. policy toward Native Americans and the reservation system; and the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Sioux Wars. We encourage educators to use this guide as a resource as they develop lesson plans and activities that best suit the needs and interests of their students.

Thought Starter

What does it mean to be a leader? What traits or personal qualities make someone a good leader? Who do you think is an example of a good leader?

Did You Know?

In addition to leading his people, Sitting Bull was a "wicasa wakan," a type of holy man believed to have the gift of spiritual insight and prophecy. In early June 1876, he had a premonition of a great military victory for the Lakota. Just a few weeks later, on June 25, that prophecy was fulfilled at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

People to Know

James K. Polk
Red Cloud
Crazy Horse
William T. Sherman
Ulysses S. Grant
Gall
George Armstrong Custer
James McLaughlin
Buffalo Bill

Terms to Know

Great Plains
Manifest Destiny
Homestead Act
Great Sioux Reservation
Black Hills
Battle of the Little Bighorn
Assimilation
Dawes Act
Ghost Dance Movement
Wounded Knee Massacre



Discussion Questions

- How would you describe Sitting Bull's childhood and upbringing? Why does his name change as he gets older? What traits does he display as a child?
- Who are the Lakota? How would you describe them and their way of life?
- What changes are happening in the United States during Sitting Bull's lifetime? How do these changes affect the Lakota people and how does he respond to these changes?
- How does the decline of the buffalo population affect Native Americans on the Great Plains?
- Why does Sitting Bull refuse to be confined to the Great Sioux Reservation? Why do many Lakota people decide to follow him?
- What is the significance of the Black Hills to the Sioux people? Why does the U.S. government want to take the Black Hills?
- What happens at the Battle of the Little Bighorn? What was George Armstrong Custer's mission? Did he ultimately achieve it?
- Why does Sitting Bull decide to move his people to Canada? Do you think this was a wise decision? Why does Sitting Bull ultimately decide to surrender?
- What is the Ghost Dance Movement? How did the U.S. government respond to the movement?
- How would you describe Sitting Bull as a leader? How would you describe his legacy?

Primary Source



Sitting Bull's speech at the Powder River Council, 1877

The following excerpt is from a speech made by Sitting Bull as Native American leaders were deciding how to respond to the U.S. governments intention to take control of the Black Hills in violation of a previous treaty.

Behold, my brothers, the spring has come; the earth has received the embraces of the sun and we shall soon see the results of that love! Every seed has awakened and so has all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being and we therefore yield to our neighbors, even our animal neighbors, the same right as ourselves, to inhabit this land. Yet hear me, my people, we have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers first met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possessions is a disease with them … They claim this mother of ours, the earth, for their own, and fence their neighbors away; they deface her with their buildings and their refuse. They threaten to take [the land] away from us. My brothers, shall we submit, or shall we say to them: "First kill me before you take possession of my Fatherland."
Source: Facing History and Ourselves

Discussion: Read the speech excerpt as a class or individually. Then, discuss: Who is the other race Sitting Bull references? How does Sitting Bull describe their beliefs? How does he think these beliefs differ from his own? What complaints does he have about their behavior? How might the U.S. government or a Black Hills settler have responded to Sitting Bull's words?

Suggested activities:

Conflict Resolution on the Great Plains
Ask students to make two lists, one noting the priorities and goals of Sitting Bull and the Lakota people and a second noting the priorities of the U.S. government. What was most important to each group? Then, consider: How might the conflict between Native Americans on the Great Plains and the U.S. government over the Black Hills been resolved differently? Might it have been possible to find a peaceful resolution?

Sitting Bull's Legacy
Individually or in groups, ask students to consider Sitting Bull's legacy. First, discuss: What is the meaning of legacy? What beliefs, values, or ideas did Sitting Bull leave behind? What was his lasting impact? Then, ask students to design a memorial they believe is appropriate for Sitting Bull. This could take any form including music, poetry, writing, an event, monument, etc. Ask students to create an image (digitally created or drawn) and write a paragraph or two describing their idea and why it is an appropriate memorial.

Related Content from History.com

Article: Sitting Bull
https://www.history.com/articles/sitting-bull

Article: 10 Things You May Not Know About Sitting Bull
https://www.history.com/articles/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-sitting-bull

Article: What Really Happened at the Battle of the Little Bighorn
https://www.history.com/articles/little-bighorn-battle-facts-causes

Article: The Unlikely Alliance Between Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull
https://www.history.com/articles/the-unlikely-alliance-between-buffalo-bill-and-sitting-bull

Video: The Sioux
https://www.history.com/videos?watch=the-last-of-the-sioux



More Related Resources

Sitting Bull Biography, from American Battlefield Trust
https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/sitting-bull

Sitting Bull from Aktá Lakota Museum and Cultural Center
https://aktalakota.stjo.org/american-indian-leaders/sitting-bull/

Reimagining Sitting Bull, An Interview with Sitting Bull's Grandson Ernie LaPointe
https://edsitement.neh.gov/media-resources/reimagining-sitting-bull-tatanka-iyotake

Battle of the Little Bighorn, from the National Park Service
https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/battle-story.htm

Wounded Knee Massacre Primary Source Set, from Digital Public Library of America
https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-wounded-knee-massacre