



## Lesson Plan – Sovereignty

Written by Nicole Bihr Menard  
(Lakota) Lincoln (NE) Public Schools

### Overview

This lesson will ask students to review sections of *A Seat at the Drum* and *Spiral of Fire* where the many issues of tribal sovereignty are evident. Students will be asked to research the sovereignty issues facing a tribe that resides within their state border. Then, they will develop their own sovereign nation. Students will concentrate on how the concept of sovereignty is special for Indian tribes and is often central to casino issues, and the complex relationships between the U.S. government, the states and Indian tribes. Students will be asked to write a research paper complete with an example of what type of sovereign government the student feels is most effective.

### Grade Level 9 - 12

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Define sovereignty as it relates to Native American tribes
- Explain how the federal government is a component of sovereignty for Native American tribes
- Apply knowledge of sovereignty towards creating a mock sovereign nation

My name is Nicole Menard. I was born in Gordon, Nebraska and I am Oglala Lakota. It is with honor that I speak of my family who are from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Most of my immediate family now live in Denver, Colorado.

I recently received a Master of Arts degree in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. I am an English teacher who is currently working with high school expelled students in the Lincoln Public Schools District. It is my life's passion to share my experiences and assist at-risk youth in achieving the gift of life long learning.

An Anglo family adopted me at birth, so I personally relate to many of the topics presented in *Indian Country Diaries*. I have used the following activities and lessons with my students over the years. I hope they will help other educators and students explore and understand Native American culture.

# INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



**National Standards** All standards are from McREL's compendium of national standards, <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/index.asp>.

Understand the impact of territorial expansion on Native American tribes (e.g., the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole removals, the significance of the Trail of Tears, the original lands held by various tribes of the Southeast and those held in the Old Northwest Territory) (Standard 9, Level 2, 4)

Understand how early state and federal policy influenced various Native American tribes (e.g., survival strategies of Native Americans, environmental differences between Native American homelands and resettlement areas, the Black Hawk War and removal policies in the Old Northwest) (Standard 9, Level 3, 2)

Understand the shifts in federal and state policy toward Native Americans in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., arguments for and against removal policy, changing policies from assimilation to removal and isolation after 1825) (Standard 9 Level IV, 3I)

Understand influences on economic conditions in various regions of the country (i.e., affects of the federal government's land, water and Indian policy) (Standard 16, IV, 3)

Understand the interactions between Native Americans and white society (e.g., the attitudes and policies of government officials, the U.S. Army, missionaries and settlers toward Native Americans; the provision and effects of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 on tribal identity, land ownership and assimilation; the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century federal Indian policy; Native Americans responses to increased white settlement, mining activities, and railroad construction) (Standard 19, Level III, 1I)

Understands influences on and perspectives of Native American life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., how the admission of new western states affected relations between the United States and Native American societies; leadership and values of Native American leaders; depiction of Native Americans and whites by 19<sup>th</sup> century artists) (Standard 19, IV, 3)

## **Estimated Time**

Four days, depending on time allotted for research, organization and construction



## Necessary Materials

- Computers with Internet Access
- Printers
- Scanners
- DVD copies of *Indian Country Diaries* or pages on this web site outlined below
- Selections of books and web sites listed in Recommended Resources below
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Colored Pencils
- Poster Board
- Student notebooks

## Teaching Procedure

1. Students will view sections of *Indian Country Diaries* either on DVD or this web site. Students will write down in their notebooks their initial reaction and thoughts about the ideas in *A Seat at the Drum* and *Spiral of Fire*. Next, students will write what they believe sovereignty means and give two to three specific examples of each concept. Have a class discussion about their questions or concerns. If students do not have any topics to discuss, items three and four have questions that will get them thinking about sovereignty.
2. Have students review pertinent vocabulary:
  - Sovereign: independent of all others, an independent nation.
  - Tribe: a group of people who have a common ancestry which includes a common language, history and culture.
  - Nation: a stable, historically developed community of people with a territory, economic life and distinctive culture.
  - Treaty: a formal agreement between two or more nations.
  - Blood quantum: blood is a metaphor to describe descent, quantum refers to the degree of descent of an individual.
  - Descent: lineage, ancestry, from one generation to the next.
  - Casino: a public building which offers various types of gambling entertainment such as bingo, blackjack, keno, and slot machines.

# INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



3. *A Seat at the Drum*: Choose one or more segments to watch from *A Seat at the Drum*. Below are questions and ideas that students should watch for when they view the program or view the video segments on this web site. Students will need to take notes.

What to watch for:	On the DVD	On this web site
<p><b>Background for Teachers:</b> Mark Macarro is Chairman of the Pechanga Band in California. He says, "In 1995 is that our enrollment spiked to 60. The following year it spiked to, I think, 160. And then the year after that, which I believe was 1997, over 430 submitted applications. What is significant there is that in July 1995, our tribe opened a casino." One of powers of a sovereign nation is the power to decide who belongs and who doesn't.</p> <p><b>Questions for Students:</b> What are the other powers that the Pechanga have been able to exercise? How important is a strong tribal economy to sovereignty? Should the few tribes that have successful casinos help out members of the other tribes that may not?</p>	<p>Chapter Nine "Economic Development"</p>	<p><u>Economic Development</u> + <u>Casinos</u></p>
<p><b>Background for Teachers:</b> Tribes are supposed to be sovereign nations, yet they are also dependant on the federal government for various social programs. The number of members on tribal rolls can increase the amount of support the tribe gets from the government. Yet many tribes are resisting the influx of people who want to join.</p> <p><b>Questions for Students:</b> What do you think should be the process of defining membership?</p>	<p>Chapter Five "Politics of Identity"</p>	<p><u>Voting Rights</u></p>



4. *Spiral of Fire*: Choose one or more segments to watch from *Spiral of Fire*. Below are questions and ideas that students should watch for when they view the program or view the video segments on this web site. Students will need to take notes.

What to watch for:	On the DVD	On this web site
<p><b>Background for Teachers:</b> In <i>Spiral of Fire</i>, former Principal Chief Joyce Duggan is frustrated with the limitations of sovereignty. "We're not sovereign in this nation. If we were sovereign in this nation we would not have to depend on federal government dollars. We would not have to go to the state for gaming approvals. We would be able to live independently in our own nation, which is what we were doing in 1838 at the time of the removal."</p> <p><b>Questions for Students:</b> What are the limitations on sovereignty? Are tribes really separate nations? What powers <i>do</i> they have?</p>	<p>Chapter Five "Casinos &amp; Sovereignty"</p>	<p><u>Sovereignty</u></p>
<p><b>Background for Teachers:</b> In order to build their new school, the Cherokee had to go before Congress. Corey Blankenship was a high school student testifying for the tribe.</p> <p><b>Questions for Students:</b> Why did the tribe have to do that? The tribe's casino was paying for much of the school; why did they still have to go to Congress? Do you think you could testify before Congress?</p>	<p>Chapter Four "Education"</p>	<p><u>Education</u></p>
<p><b>Background for Teachers:</b> Casino profits have swelled the tribal budget, and now there are more people wanting to join.</p> <p><b>Questions for Students:</b> What were the issues that the Cherokee were facing in the program? How would you decide who should be an enrolled</p>	<p>Chapter Six "Politics of Identity"</p>	<p><u>Identity &amp; Assimilation</u></p>

# INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES



<p>tribal member or who should be thrown out? Bo Taylor, from the Cherokee Museum, says, "The minute you say that you're Cherokee, I'm going to expect something out of you." What is it he expects?</p>		
--	--	--

5. After students have finished viewing the segment(s) and/or the web pages, and have examined their notes, have them brainstorm what they NOW know about sovereignty. Display those ideas on a board.
  - A. What is sovereignty?
  - B. What exactly encompasses tribal sovereignty according to the Native people in *Indian Country Diaries*?
  - C. Are Indian tribes sovereign nations? Why or why not?
  - D. What role does the federal government take in relation to tribal sovereignty?
  - E. What role do states take in relation to tribal sovereignty?
  - F. Why is blood quantum important to tribal sovereignty?
  - G. How are casinos related to sovereignty?
  
6. Students will need access to computers, the Internet and library resources. It would be great if they actually interviewed a member of a federally recognized tribe or someone who sits on a tribal council, but it is understandable that access to those individuals is limited in some areas of the country. Students will research a tribe's sovereignty that is located within the borders of the student's specific state or a tribe mentioned in *Indian Country Diaries*. The purpose of this exercise is to show that all tribes have different forms of government. Also, some tribes have casinos; others do not. It is important to explore why tribes have chosen their forms of government. Students will compile their research into a presentation to share with the class.
  
7. Next, based on their research and their views of *Indian Country Diaries*, students will divide into groups of four to five students. Each group will declare themselves to be a sovereign nation. Students will need to discuss what form of government their sovereign nation might choose. Students can discuss their research and their notes on the film as to why they believe their choice of a government is ideal. Some choices of government might be:
  - A. A representative democracy model with three branches.
  - B. A direct consensus model of democracy where the participants debate issues until they reach a consensus.



- C. An authoritarian system where they select one or more leaders to make all the decisions.
8. Students should also declare what rights and responsibilities their sovereign nation should have and what symbols they might adopt. Some examples might be: flags, logos, basic needs such as food, health care, education, laws, how those laws will be enforced and a constitution. Students will also need to show how their sovereign nation will be supported financially.
  9. Students will create a poster board showing exactly how their form of government will look and operate. All groups will present to the class, making sure that they discuss their research on other tribes and *Indian Country Diaries*.

## Assessment Recommendations

Students will be assessed on the following:

1. The final document on tribal sovereignty that they individually research. This will be assessed using the Six Traits Writing Rubric. Information about the rubric can be found on this site: <http://www.webenglishteacher.com/6traits.html>
2. Their group presentation to the class. See sample grading rubric.
3. Class participation and appropriate behavior towards other cultures.

## Recommended Resources

The *Indian Country Diaries* DVD chapters and web pages listed above.

Canby, Jr., William C. *American Indian Law Third Edition* West Group, St. Paul, Minn., 1998.

Getches, David H., Wilkinson, Charles F., Williams, Jr., Robert A. *Cases and Materials on Federal Indian Law* West Group, St. Paul, Minn., 1998

Oyate is a source for Native American education and culture resources at <http://www.oyate.org>.