

## THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE DAKOTA

### I. Curricular Area:

Social Studies/History

Language Arts

Geography

Science

### II. Learner Goals:

The students will –

1. develop an understanding of traditional American Indian land-related values and special relationships to land that formed the foundation for Indian cultural identity and sense of place on earth; and
2. understand the purpose of the seasonal movement of the Dakota people. They will connect those movements to the resources Dakota people needed for survival.

### III. Learner Outcomes:

The student will be able to –

1. identify the Dakota people as an American Indian Tribe and know the general parameters of their traditional homeland; and
2. discuss the relationship that existed between natural resources, food resources and the seasonal round of the Dakota life in the historic past.

### IV. Student Activities:

1. Locate the Dakota on a Minnesota map
2. Fill out the chart in which seasons, foods, dwellings and tasks done by men and women are compared
3. Compare similarities and differences between the Dakota and Ojibwe seasonal life
  - i. Why do these two groups do the same things?
  - ii. Fill out the chart comparing the two Minnesota tribes

### V. Evaluation

1. Have the students correctly complete the chart included
2. Students discuss the questions listed at the bottom of the chart and identify historic reality vs. stereotypes.
3. Students actively participate in the above discussion and their resource map

## VI. Background

In order to understand and relate to the Dakota (Sioux) people, one must first understand the differences in cultural values. One important question we must first know the answer to is "what is this man's relationship to the material world?" The driving force behind Dakota society was the embodiment of the concept of *harmony with nature*: Taking time to look at all that was meaningful to the Dakota, the unity of man and nature emerged as the original idea. This idea is in sharp contrast to the individualized viewpoint exemplified by Western man's beliefs that he was set apart from nature and that nature should be shaped to his "will."

This lesson breaks down stereotypes made by the media in Hollywood versions of the buffalo plains warrior.

The Dakota's (Eastern or Woodland Sioux) way of life revolved around an annual cycle of activities that were later adopted by the Ojibwe who migrated into the northern part of Minnesota. They travelled to major food sites at different seasons and utilized the natural world clock (hence the term *Indian time*) to tell them when it was time to move. Although the Dakota lived on the natural resources that Maka Ina (mother earth) provided, there was a pattern of variation in their subsistence strategies which reflect the ecological diversity of Minnesota.

### A. FALL: PTANYETU (TAH-NEE-YET-TOO)

- **September:** Psihnaketu wi (pss-eeen-ha-knocket-too-ween)  
*Moon When the Rice is Laid up to Dry*
- **October:** Wazupi wi (Wah-zhoo-pee-ween)  
*Moon for Drying Rice*
- **November:** Takiyuha wi (dock-ee-yoo-hah-ween)  
*Moon When the Deer Rut*

Maka Ina (Mother Earth) gives a sign to the Dakota that change is coming. When the nights become cool (*Indian time*) and the women are finished harvesting the corn, the families pack up and move to the wild rice camps. Here, they put up their tipis on high ground near the shallow rice lakes, and prepare to harvest and process the wild rice.

When the time had come to harvest, several steps were taken to complete the process. The growing rice in the lakes would be bundled; and after the bundles stood for a few days, workers would direct a canoe through the grasses while others tapped the heads of the rice bundles with sticks to knock the rice into the canoe. The rice was either dried in the sun or placed on scaffolds above fire in order to remove any water. The next step was "parching," a process that dried the rice to allow the hulls to fall off. The rice would be heated in a kettle over a fire and placed into circular pits that were two feet wide and two feet deep. In order to help the process along, the young men would wash their feet, put on new moccasins, and step on the rice. The final process separated chaff from kernels of rice by women placing the rice on a robe and shaking it.

Wild rice harvesting was the main activity, but there were still other things going on. Waterfowl was attracted to the ripe grain which made it easy to shoot them. This was also a time when the blueberries and huckleberries were ready to pick; tipsinna (bread root) was ready to harvest from the shallow lakes, and men would fish and hunt deer. Food was plentiful during this time of year, and the people were comfortable. It was a time to feast, and also a time to honor the "Water Chief" in order to have a safe harvest with no accidents.

By late October, the Dakota would divide up to hunt deer in areas most accessible to their summer camps. They travelled light in hopes of being burdened with a heavy load of meat to bring back to winter camps in January. Specific protocol for the hunt was followed to ensure everyone had equal opportunity to receive deer meat and no one starved. The deer killed was divided among of the hunters, allowing those less

skilled to also bring meat home. Each deer could be divided up among four families, and the one who killed it would take the hide. The hunters shared the burden of dividing the meat and carrying their portions home. For several months, the hunting parties set up temporary camps and hunted until the deer supply in the area was exhausted

#### **B. WINTER: WANIYETU (WAH-NEE-YET-OO)**

- **December:** Tahecapsun wi (Tah-hay-chap-shoon-ween)  
*Moon When The Deer Shed Their Horns*
- **January:** Witehi wi (Wee-teh-hee-ween)  
*Hard or Severe Moon*
- **February:** Wicata wi (Wee-cha-tah ween)  
*Raccoon Moon*

The Dakota describe January as the “severe moon,” or the coldest, hardest time of the year. It is also the time when snow is hard and crusted on the earth. By this time, the small deer hunting parties have returned to the area near their summer camps and set up tipis in sheltered wooded areas. The people relied upon buried corn, dried berries, rice reserves, dried meat, and fish to feed them throughout this season.

During the winter months, women were busy dressing deer skins, making moccasins, and doing other beadwork. (One of the significant background colors for the plains beadwork is white, the color of the season when most of the beadwork is done.) Winter was also the time when men speared fish and traded furs and skins. For all, this season signified a time to rest. This was a great time to “ball play on the ice,” similar to La Crosse but played on ice.

#### **C. SPRING: WETU (WET-OO)**

- **March:** Istawicayazan wi (ease-tah-wee-ch-eye-yah-zan ween)  
*Moon Of The Sore Eyes*
- **April:** Magaokata wi (mah-gah-owo-kah-tah-ween)  
*Moon When The Geese Lay Eggs*
- **May:** Wozupi wi (woe-zhoo-pee-ween)  
*Moon For Planting*

The cackling crows returning to their roosts was one of nature’s announcements that wetu (spring) had arrived. Seth Eastman describes this as “firecrackers” in *Painting the Dakota. (Indian Time)*. As the snow melted and signs of new life on the earth became apparent, the Dakota people once again separated into working communities.

The women, children, and elder men would move to the maple sugaring camps in the maple groves. Troughs were made of birch bark or basswood to collect sap from the tree trunks. Hollowed-out log canoes were used to gather the sap which was boiled down into syrup, sugar, and hard candies. The syrup was poured into molds made with geese or duck bills, or other natural items, and stored for the upcoming summer village feasts where it was served with rice, corn, or dried meat. When the sap quit flowing, it was time to move to the summer villages.

Some of the Dakota men would use the April moon to collect furs for trading, because furs were still thick and most valuable at this time. The prey was muskrats, otters, beavers, minks and martens. Muskrat meat was used to feed the hunters during this time.

This was the leanest time of year, because winter supplies were usually depleted; but it was a great time for

the boys to bring home the food. The syruping activity attracted small birds, rabbits, chipmunks, and other pests that the young boys would hunt with bows and arrows. This was not a gender specific activity and girls also learned to trap and hunt; but they didn't have as much time to devote to it. Hunting and trapping was also a time for children to study animal life as part of their daily lessons.

#### D. SUMMER: BDOKETU (BUH-DOUGH-KEH-TOO)

- **June** Wazustecasa wi (wah-zhoo-stay-cha-sha ween)  
*Moon when Strawberries are Red and when Corn is Hoed*
- **July** Canpasa wi (chon-pah-shaw-ween)  
*Moon When Chokecherries are Ripe*
- **August** Wasuton wi (wah-soo-tone-ween)  
*Moon When the Corn is Gathered or the Harvest Moon*

By late spring, the Dakota were returning to their summer planting villages, the largest encampment of them all. When the earth was warmed (Indian time) women planted corn, potatoes, squash, and pumpkins. The Dakota were returning to their summer planting villages, the largest encampment of them all. These encampments had been named "permanent villages" because of their sizes, but this is misleading.

Bark houses, built and owned by the women, were long, multi-family lodges used in the planting village. Women's main work was tilling the fields, planting, tending and harvesting corn, beans and squash.

This was the time of year when the berries ripened and were pounded, dried, and mixed with dried deer or buffalo meat to make wasna, an energy food.

Many of the herbs and medicines that Maka Ina (Mother Earth) provides were being collected during Wajustecasa-wi or *Moon when the Strawberries are Red*.

At sunrise and again at dusk, the men and women would spear fish together. The women would steer the canoe and the men would wait for an opportunity to spear. This was a major activity for the Dakota in the summertime and a supplemental one throughout other seasons.

Men hunted buffalo on the prairie in the summertime while the women were busy cutting and drying meat, and tanning hides. Buffalo were integral for the sustenance of the people, because they made the shelter, clothing, utensils, tools, and meat to feed the community. Because of this dependence, the buffalo was one of the most important animals to the Dakota. The eastern Dakota's reliance on the buffalo changed by the 1840's when the big game species disappeared from this area. This activity was done throughout the seasons but the large buffalo hunts happened in the summer.

This was a time of year to play sports and hold feasts and celebrations.

Much of the food that was gathered dried or parched was stored in birch or parfleche containers and buried for retrieval in the food sparse winter months.

Resources

***Painting the Dakota***. Seth Eastman at Fort Snelling. Marybeth Lorbiecki. Afton Historical Society Press. 2000.

Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest, Samuel Pond

Handbook of North American Indians. Volume 13, part 2, "Santee". Patricia Albers.

# The Dakota

Students will work in small groups to fill in the chart below. Each student will make their own chart but information should be supplied by all members of the group.

SEASON	MAIN FOODS	TYPE OF DWELLING	CAMP AREA	MEN'S TASKS	WOMEN'S TASKS
	Dakota	Dakota	Dakota	Dakota	Dakota
Winter					
Spring					
Summer					
Fall					

1. Can you name one of the stereotypes that this lesson breaks down about the Dakota?

## Dakota and Ojibwe Similarities and Differences

Students will work in small groups to fill in the chart below. Each student will make their own chart but information should be supplied by all members of the group.

SEASON	MAIN FOODS		TYPE OF DWELLING		CAMP AREA		MEN'S TASKS		WOMEN'S TASKS	
	Dakota	Ojibwe	Dakota	Ojibwe	Dakota	Ojibwe	Dakota	Ojibwe	Dakota	Ojibwe
Winter										
Spring										
Summer										
Fall										

1. Why do these two groups of Native Americans do the same things?