

## THE MINNESOTA DAKOTA, A CULTURAL PROFILE

### **I. Curricular Area:**

Social Studies/History

Language Arts

Geography

Science

### **II. Learner Goals:**

The students will:

1. Gain and understanding of and appreciation for the fact that Minnesota is and has been the homeland of the Dakota people for centuries.
2. Gain an understanding and appreciation for the cultural traditions of the Dakota people.

### **III. Learner Outcomes:**

Students will be able to:

1. Locate the Dakota on a map of Native America
2. Locate the four Dakota communities on a Minnesota map
3. Name the original seven divisions of the Oceti Sakowin
4. Select one aspect of Dakota culture and report on that aspect as a written or oral report.

### **IV. Student Activities:**

1. Locate the Dakota on a Minnesota map and describe their location
2. Locate and write the names of the four Dakota communities in the proper location on a blank Minnesota map.
3. Create a list of the Seven Dakota divisions and explain what their names represent.
4. Create a timeline illustrating how long the Dakota have lived in Minnesota vs. immigrants to the state.
5. Conduct research and discuss one aspect of Dakota culture i.e. economy, political organization, language, housing, games or family life. As an oral or written report.

## V. Background:

The Dakota are a part of a larger group known to outsiders as the "Sioux". The larger group also includes the Dakota and Lakota. All three are language dialects within the same Nation. The Dakota are also related to a large group of Siouan speaking Indian nations who live primarily around the Upper Mississippi Valley. Siouan speaking tribes include, among others, the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Iowa, Omaha, Osage, Ponce, Quapaw, Kansa (Kaw), Missouriia, and Otoe.

A note on terminology: Most Dakota prefer to be called Dakota. It means "we are allies". The term Sioux is a contraction of Nadouessioux, a word given to them by the Ojibwe meaning snakelike enemy and is a negative and offensive word to the Dakota. The word Sioux is still used however because when tribes established themselves with the Federal government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they were known as the Sioux. That word is also entrenched in the treaty terminology and cannot be easily changed.

The Dakota first appear in the accounts of European explorers in the early 1600's. At that time, their neighbors, the Ojibwe, had not yet entered Minnesota. The Dakota lived in several villages along lakes such as Mille Lacs, Leech Lake, Sandy Lake, and along other lakes and rivers in the Eastern Woodlands. Dakota oral tradition states that when all the divisions were living in Minnesota, they were known as Oceti Sakowin (oh-che-tee-Sha-ko-ween). This phrase means the Seven Fire Places of the Nation and the Dakota words show the interconnectedness they had with the land. It them to a physical location. The seven divisions include:

Bdewakantonwan or Mdewakantonwan-Spirit Lake People

Wahpekute-Shooters Among the Leaves

Wahpetonwan-Dwellers Among the Leaves

Sissetonwan-People of the Fish Village

Tintonwan – Prairie Dwellers

Ihanktonwan-(Yankton) Dwellers at the End

Ihanktonwana – (Yanktonai) Little Dwellers at the End

### *Dakota Political Organization*

These seven divisions were probably village states, each politically independent but capable of collective action during times of crisis. Inter-marriage between these village states helped to unite the people because individuals would have close kin ties to several villages. In each village, there was a Head Soldier or Akicita (ah-kee-chee-tah). Like a police chief, he kept order in the village. During emergencies, more akicita were appointed. The akicita, along with the war chief, made up the tiotipi (tee-oh-tee-pee) or soldier's lodge. The soldier's lodge also helped to maintain order during the annual buffalo hunt. Four hunt chiefs were selected. They and other members of the tiotipi could destroy anyone's lodge who moved ahead of the group and frightened off the herd. Their authority, however, only lasted for the duration of the hunt.

Around 1640, French explorers and missionaries began to establish themselves among the Indian nations of the Great lakes region. They began to hear of a great nation of warriors who lived to the west of the Great Lakes. The Dakota were said to live in large fortified villages (they built a log palisade around their villages). Their houses were “cabins of deerskin” (probably tipis). French initial contact with the Dakota appears to have taken place around Lac Courte Oreilles in Wisconsin. Eight Dakota ambassadors arrived, accompanied by two women each. The women carried wild rice, corn, and other grains as gifts from their own villages.

### *Migration to the Prairies*

Sometime between 1700 and 1750, the four eastern divisions of the Dakota began to live for longer periods of time on the prairies south and west of their old woodland homes. By the mid-1700's, they were living in villages along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. Some historians believe the Dakota migrated to new homelands because the Ojibwe began a westward migration and invaded the old Dakota communities. Other historians argue that while the Ojibwe and Dakota were frequently at war, the Dakota had already begun to leave their northern lake homelands before the Ojibwe arrived. By 1726, a permanent French trading fort had been built at Lake Pepin to the south. That winter, 600 Dakota camped at the fort. In the spring, they left to attend an annual trade fair held further south at Prairie du Chien. It is possible that Dakota participation in the fur trade precipitated their moving to the south and west.

### *Leadership in the 1800's*

By the early 1800's, the political leaders in Dakota villages included a chief, chief soldier, and a principal man. The chief soldier was often the brother-in-law of the chief. However, the *tiptipi* or soldier's lodge also continued to be a political influence in Dakota villages. Fur traders and government officials who dealt with the Dakota viewed a chief as one who held complete authority over his people. The Dakota, however, operated in a more democratic fashion. The opinions of all villagers were given equal weight in the process of decision making.

### *New Items Replace Old Items*

In their new location in the prairies along the river valleys of southern Minnesota, the Dakota continued to participate in the fur trade. By supplying processed furs to the traders, the Dakota could obtain steel tools and weapons, processed cloth and blankets, glass beads and other new materials. These items gradually replaced stone and bone tools, pottery, and fur or hide robes.

*Dakota Housing and the Seasonal Round (Seth Eastman's drawings of the Dakota in "Painting the Dakota" are a good visual tool to use here-page numbers are listed accordingly.)*

In other respects, the Dakota lived much as their ancestors had lived. For a part of the year, they built and lived in bark house villages. Called *tipi tanka* or big lodges (p.20) these houses were rectangular in shape and covered with elm bark. Each lodge had an upper platform for drying plants and vegetables. In these villages, the women planted, harvested, and stored their corn. The people also fished, hunted deer, and gathered prairie vegetal foods, including different kinds of berries and a nourishing bulbous root called *tipsina* (*tip-see-nah*).

In the fall, the men went muskrat hunting and the women gathered a supply of wild rice (p.69). During the winter months, families broke into smaller groups and the men hunted deer. In the spring, many families went to a favorite sugar bush where they processed sap into maple sugar (p.54). The season completed, they returned to their bark house villages, and after planting, planned for the annual bison hunt on the prairies to the west.

By the time Euro-American immigrants arrived in the lands the Dakota called Mnisota, the Dakota had lived in the area for a very long time. They knew how to use the natural resources for food, clothing, and homes. They knew how to grow crops such as corn, beans, squash. They knew how to dry and preserve foods for later use. They knew how to create large villages, how to fortify their villages, and how to govern themselves in a democratic manner. They knew where plant medicines could be found. They could show others how to navigate the rivers and lakes and where worn trails led. They knew how to keep the land, the air and the water clean. The immigrants had great deal to learn from the Dakota.

Additional Resources:

Priscilla Buffalohead – Archeologist and linguist

Indian Boyhood. Charles Alexander Eastman. Dover Publications. New York. 1971.

Games of the North American Indians. Stewart Culin. Dover Publications. New York. 1971.

Ohiyesa. Charles Alexander Eastman. Raymond Wilson. University of Illinois Press, 1983.

Dakota Language and Culture. Joanne Zacharias. Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. 2006.

Dakota Indians Coloring Book. Chet Kozlack. Minnesota Historical Society, 1979.

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