

A Dakota Creation Story

I. Curricular Areas:

Geography,

Social Studies

Minnesota History

II. Learner Goals:

Students will develop and acknowledge 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. Secondly, this lesson will convey to the student that the study of geography is not merely the memorization of State capitals or the location of countries on a map.

III: Learner Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

1. Identify Bdote on a map.
2. Discuss how the Dakota origin story may teach traditional land ethics.

IV. Background Information:

In this lesson, the students will learn one of the origin stories of the Eastern Dakota, the Bdewakantonwan or Mdewakantonwan who lived in Minnesota. They will also look closely at the land ethics usually found within creation stories and how these beliefs relate to the identity of the tribe.

American Indian tribes, like many other peoples, have explanations for how they originated as a distinct, unique people. Many stories tell of powerful beings that created peoples' place in the world. The origin stories relate how the universe and the earth were created and how time and space were established. Inherent in the story is a reverence of place or location in which ancestors of the tribe were created. From these stories, tribes derived laws, values, traditions and ceremonies. Many origin stories stressed kindness, generosity, cooperation and respect for the earth. In these stories, the universe could not be created without these teachings.

Many tribal individuals consider their beliefs important everyday elements that contribute to rich tradition and cultural heritage. These stories are represented in ceremonies and teachings. They are passed on to each new generation. The beliefs and traditions connect people to the land, plant life, all living creatures, and to the mysteries of birth, life, death and the spirit world. Many native people closely compare these

connections to the connections they have with family and relatives.

There are as many different origin stories as there are different cultures and peoples. In this lesson, the students will learn one origin story of the Eastern Dakota who lived in Minnesota. They will also look closely at the land ethics usually found within creation stories and how these beliefs relate to the identity of the tribe.

Materials:

Review the Creation Story with students. It can be found on Page 17 of "What Does Justice Look Like?" The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland, Waziyatawin, PhD.

V. Student Activities:

1. Locate Bdote on a map
2. List one of the land ethics you found within this story. Is this still a value of today's society? Why or why not?
3. Research the area of Fort Snelling and write a paragraph discussing the connection of Bdote to the Dakota people and Fort Snelling to Minnesotans today.

Resources:

The Bdote Memory Map is a beginning resource for giving Minnesotans a deeper understanding of where we live. It is an interactive website.

www.Web.mac.com/alliesms/Memory/BDOTE.html

How Minnesotans Wrested the Land from Dakota People

*The Sioux Indians must be exterminated or driven
forever beyond the borders of the State.*

—GOVERNOR ALEXANDER RAMSEY, 1862

Banishment from the homeland, the diaspora of a nation, the exile of a people, and ongoing colonization—these are the legacies Minnesotans and Americans have left to Dakota people. What do these legacies mean to the hearts and spirits of Dakota people? Most of us do not care to think too deeply about them, because the difficulties of everyday living as colonized peoples would be infinitely more difficult if we dwelt in a place of inconsolable grief. So, we do not contemplate at length that place of pain and grief and we attempt to avert our eyes when it is brought to our attention. Indeed, even non-colonized people prefer not to dwell in this history because it has the potential to fill them with grief, outrage, guilt, and despair.

Today, I am going to ask you, the reader, to join me on a journey into that dreaded place. I want you to contemplate it with me, experience the sense of moral indignation, and, finally, emerge with a strengthened spirit ready to engage in the Dakota struggle for justice. In the end, it is my hope that we might restore the humanity of everyone.

A Story of Dakota Creation

First, however, I want to share with you a story. This is the creation story of the *Badewakantunwan* (Dwellers by Mystic Lake)

What Does Justice Look Like?

The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland

Waziyatawin, Ph.D.



Living Justice Press
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

recounted from memory as I heard respected storyteller Dale Childs tell it on many occasions. Mr. Childs was from the Prairie Island Reservation located in southeastern Minnesota, and though he passed away a number of years ago, his stories remain with us.¹

A very long time ago, *Wakantanka* (The Great Mystery) created many children. As he did so, he placed a part of himself into each being. For instance, he gave the quality of swiftness to the deer, perseverance to the turtle, strength to the buffalo, and majesty to the eagle. Every bird, plant, animal, and tree was created so that each was unique and had a part of *Wakantanka*.

One day, *Wakantanka* was walking in the *Paha Sappa*, or the Black Hills, and he was looking sad. As he was walking he began to shed tears. They would fall from his eye and would splash and dry into nuggets of gold. *Maka*, the Earth, also known as *Ina*, meaning Mother in our language, wondered why her husband was sad. She asked, "Have I offended you in some way? Have I been unfaithful to you? Have I not given you many children?" When he responded negatively to all those questions, she asked, "Why then are you looking so sad? Why do I see tears fall?"

Wakantanka replied, "I have many children and they are all beautiful, but I have another piece of myself to give. When our children are frightened, they nestle in you for safety. When they are thirsty, they turn to your waters. And, when they need sustenance, they receive food from your meadows. I want children who speak to me and call me by name." *Wakantanka* wanted a creature to look to him for help and to need him.

When *Ina Maka* heard this, she wanted to give a piece of herself to help create a being who would look like her husband. She called on the waters to help her. She instructed them to come at her in great magnitude and carve into her flesh. But, the waters did not want to harm her. She reassured them that they would not harm her, that it was a gift she wished to give. So they came at her and began to carve into *Ina's* body, but the first attempt

was unsuccessful. It didn't work. So she then called on the help of the winds from the four directions. They also refused at first, saying they did not want to harm her. She told them, "You will not harm me. Blow into my body." So the winds agreed. They blew a giant gash into her and exposed the red clay of her body. She called to *Wakantanka*, "My body is open to you. Reach into my body and make a body in the image of yourself."

This was the creation of the first human being. *Ina* told *Wakantanka*, "You will recognize your children. They will be as red as the day. They will call to you, give thanks to you, and share with you your voice." *Wakantanka* put everything into his two-legged children. He gave them love, and the ability to communicate that love. They have a special voice that *Wakantanka* wanted to hear. With that voice we can say, "Thank you for all the blessings," or "On this day I give you thanks." When we are scared, we go to our father and we say, "Look down upon me. Have pity on me. Have pity on my relatives. Help us."

This particular story marks what I believe to be the beginning of interaction between human beings, the river the Dakota refer to as *Hahnawakpa* (The River of Falls), and *Minisota Makoce*. In the story I just told, *Ina Maka*, or Mother Earth, instructed the waters to come at her. That first time they were unable to complete their task without the help of the winds. But, in this first attempt, the waters were coming with such force that they created images in rock that could be found along the Mississippi River. Dakota people call the first of those *Caske Tanika* and he is located just south of Red Wing. He was given this name because *Caske* is the name we give to the first-born child in the Dakota family if the child is male, and because *Tanika* means large and this refers to the larger child. Non-Dakota people call this outcropping Barn's Bluff. Dakota people could observe the profile of a Dakota face there until 1954, when settler society dynamited that portion so that they could construct a bridge across the Mississippi River from Minnesota to Wisconsin. Observers can still find another