

## THE US DAKOTA WAR

### **I. Curricular Areas:**

Social Studies/History

Language Arts

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

The students will understand the events leading up to the Dakota War and the events of the war itself.

### **III Learner Outcomes:**

Students will be able to:

1. Locate the main areas/places of the US Dakota War on a Map of Minnesota
2. Recognize and understand the importance of the terminology surrounding this war.
3. Describe the US Dakota War and its outcomes as well as its legacy in Minnesota.

### **IV. Teacher Background Information:**

All Nations (native or not) have creation stories that tell us where we are from. This is our basic connection as a people, and gives us the foundation of who we are. The Dakota creation stories (there are several) clearly show that we have not emigrated from any other place and although we have traveled to and from other places throughout North America throughout the centuries, we have always lived here. The joining of the two rivers, the Minnesota and the Mississippi is called Bdote, what is currently called Mendota. This sacred junction can be viewed from Fort Snelling. There is no question in Dakota historical accounts and oral history that Minnesota Makoce has always been the homeland of the Dakota.

It is important to use the correct terminology when teaching about the US Dakota war.

The US Dakota war began with the hunger of Europeans and Euro-Americans for land in Minnesota. It is important to note the similarities of the governments' systematic plan that removed Indigenous Nations from their homeland in order to meet the needs of the settlers who were to follow. The strategy used was designed to strip nations of their basic identity. First the traders came in followed by military forts that would provide protection for the missionaries, soldiers and white settlers who were to come. The broken treaties were yet another weapon used to take land and although the US signed over four hundred treaties and agreements with Indian tribes, not one was ever honored. The treaties were an effective way to transfer land ownership peacefully.

The initial 1805 treaty ceded 100,000 acres of land to build a military post. Even though Zebulon Pike was only able to acquire two signatures, the treaty was ratified by congress and those two signatures represented the will and agreement of the entire Sioux nation. At that time the Dakota population was estimated anywhere between 35,000 and 21,675 people. Other treaties followed with the same

undermining tactics until the Dakota Nation's land mass was reduced from a 4 state region to a mile wide strip of land along the south side of the Minnesota River. There was no way Dakota could sustain their traditional way of life which included using resources over a wide area for food, housing, clothing, and tools.

Once the fort was built, Missionaries moved in to civilize the Dakota and educate them. The reactions of the Dakota to these changes varied but all with hopes of surviving. A deep split developed within Dakota villages. Those who wanted to continue living in traditional way resented Dakota who had become Christian and taken up white-style of farming and dress. Christianized farmers stored surplus in "root cellars". This practice was seen by the traditional Dakota faction as "hoarding" when generosity was a principle value. The Dakota believed that to not share was to not be human.

After Treaty of 1851, large influx of whites arrived to take over lands formerly Dakota homelands. German immigrants arrived en-masse to New Ulm. During the first winter they arrived they took over the gabled (tipi tanka) village of Dakota. Also made fun of Dakota and refused to share food.

Finally, the Trust relationship between the Dakota and federal government fell apart by 1860. Food supplies promised by federal government never arrived and the Dakota petitioned traders to extend credit so their people could eat. The Dakota were faced with horrible hunger as they had the responsibility to feed thousands of people a day. At Yellow Medicine Agency, trader Andrew Myrick said "so far as I am concerned, let them eat grass".

In response to the lies, the greed and the hunger, relations between the white and the Dakota were unstable. The war itself began in Mdewakanton villages in summer of 1862. On a dare, a group of young Dakota men stealing chickens were caught and ended up killing a white farmer and his family. They enlisted the aid of Mdewakanton chief, Little Crow. Little Crow reluctantly agreed to go to war. Dakota war parties made their first attack at the Lower Sioux Agency near present day Morton. Here they won a victory over platoon of soldiers sent from Fort Ridgely. Next, white settlements in "Big Woods" and New Ulm were attacked. In all over 500 white colonists were killed. The number of Dakota lost in the war was never counted.

The Battle of Wood Lake was the turning point of the war when the Dakota lost. Many Dakota who took part escaped to prairies to the west. Others, tired of fighting or who had remained neutral, formed a Friendly Camp. Henry Sibley, now General Sibley took them all prisoner. Some 1200 Dakota were arrested and marched to concentration camps at Mankato and Fort Snelling. At New Ulm and other locations the whites threw rocks and poured boiling water on Dakota women and children. Three hundred Dakota men condemned to death and on December 26, 1862. President Lincoln commuted some of those sentences but still what became the largest mass hanging in U.S. history took place in Mankato Minnesota as 38 Dakota men were hanged at once.

As a result of this War, Congress nullified all treaties with Minnesota Dakota. Whether they were participants in this war or not, all were denied further treaty benefits. Congress appropriated money for removal of Minnesota to Crow Creek, South Dakota. With no provisions, 300 Dakota died the first winter at Crow Creek. To escape further starvation many moved further to a place called Santee, Nebraska.

Finally in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of the land was restored to Dakota in Minnesota. More land was added in 20<sup>th</sup> century which represent the four Dakota communities in Minnesota today, Prairie Island, Prior Lake, Upper and Lower Sioux.

## V. Student Activities:

1. The US Dakota War has been named the US Indian Massacre in Minnesota, the Dakota War of 1862, the Sioux Uprising, the Sioux Outbreak of 1862 , the US Dakota War of 1862 and Little Crow's War. Using the internet, research the meaning of the words and names and write a short paragraph explaining if and why the terminology matters.
2. Using the website , [http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23\\_steilm\\_1862-m/index.shtml](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23_steilm_1862-m/index.shtml), review the story of Minnesota's Uncivil war with students. Portions can be listened to online.

See supplemental material for further activities.

## Additional Resources:

What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle For Liberation in the Dakota Homeland. Waziyatawin, PhD. Living Justice Press. 2008.

In The Footsteps of Our Ancestors. The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, Living Justice Press, 2006.

## Pazahiyayewin and the Importance of Remembering Dakota Women

Ramona Stately

On November 7, 2004 I decided to participate in the Dakota Commemorative March. We gathered before dawn and had a feast together and began our walk. It was an especially moving experience for me for two reasons. First, it was moving to me because my own research on my family history had led me to my great-great-grandparents. My great-great-grandfather, Mazaadidi (Walks on Iron), was one of the men imprisoned for his participation in the war and my great-great-grandmother, Pazahiyayewin (She Radiates in Her Path Like the Sun), was on the original death march in 1862. Second, I was so moved because it didn't really occur to me at first that I too was modeling the colonizer's patriarchal worldview by focusing my research on Mazaadidi rather than Pazahiyayewin. We called our family reunions in Santee "Mazaadidi" family reunions. We made and wore jackets with his name on them in his honor because he was the eldest member we could find at that time.

One of the biggest negative stereotypes people have about Indigenous people is that they did not value women. The European culture did not value their own women and therefore they undervalued Indigenous women. The reality is that women played a significant role in Indigenous societies. They were known as carriers of the culture and the Dakotas were matrilineal. Contact with Europeans altered women's roles, colonialism weakened the women's role and the missionaries affirmed it by introducing the fact that God was male and the women were inferior like Eve. To the Dakota and many other Indigenous Peoples, women were thought to provide sustenance to the tribe

and held the power of creation. Because the Europeans were the writers of history and did not recognize the contributions of women or value their opinion, an important part of the history of the U.S.-Dakota War was not recognized and that is the story of the wives and families of the condemned warriors. Seldom do we hear what happened to them.

After speaking briefly with Mary Beth Faimon at the Granite Falls powwow, however, I realized that it is the women we should also be honoring. This was a “light bulb” moment and it was powerful. I was filled with many emotions. I was sad and ashamed that I didn’t make the connection sooner, but happy and rejuvenated that I finally realized the power of the Dakota women. Little did I know how much I would be impacted by that conversation.

From that moment on, I became involved in the Commemorative March, as did my entire family. One of the first things I did was call my dad and order a new jacket. Now instead of Mazaadidi on the back, mine says Pazahiyayewin! He thought that was a great idea. Then we got on the moccasin telegraph to spread the news that we had to really support this next event. We organized a meal to feed the walkers who stopped to rest one evening in Shakopee. They were so weary, and more than halfway into their 150-mile walk. It was a great honor to be able to provide some comfort to them.

As I walked, I thought of Pazahiyayewin and I felt her there. This was my way of walking in her path, acknowledging her suffering, reclaiming my identity and teaching this to my children who walked by my side. Our friend, Carolyn Anderson had found Pazahiyayewin’s (AKA Mrs. Ellen Kitto) obituary in the *Iapi Oaye – The Word Carrier*, a bi-monthly newspaper printed by students at the Santee Normal Training School on the Santee Reservation, Volume 48, number 1, January-February 1919. This is how we

knew so much about her. There were two obituaries written for her, one by her daughter and one by a “Miss Collins” who was on the staff at the Santee Normal Training School.

Miss Collins states:

*It was in 1862 when the Indians were driven out of Minnesota, and Mrs. Kitto and her children were among the unfortunate ones. Her husband, a non-combatant, was taken by the soldiers and cast in prison. Dr. Stephen Riggs and Dr. Thomas Williamson, missionaries, succeeded in securing a pardon from President Lincoln, but it was after long imprisonment. He had taken no part in the trouble which was afterward proven to the satisfaction of the President. The very night that he was torn from his home and family, and his home destroyed, his wife gave birth to a baby.*

*The families of three hundred prisoners were driven from the state. Only a few old men were allowed to accompany them. Mrs. Kitto with her new born babe in her arms and three little ones at her side, with her old mother too, to care for, started on the long journey from Minnesota to Nebraska. There were not enough men to supply game to feed the flock. Mrs. Kitto's children were crying with hunger, and the brave mother's heart could not endure that. She took a gun and went out to help hunt for meat. This is a thing that Indian women never do. But, she was successful and would take her share of the burden of supplying the camp with food, notwithstanding the heart sorrow because of not expecting to ever see her husband again, the burden of carrying one child all the time, the care of the others, and the old mother.*

As a Dakota woman, I believe in carrying on the art and culture of my nation. I have been given a gift of making moccasins. I never really knew where this gift came from, but I have always kept an open mind to my sixth sense or unconscious self. I did know that I was guided by a spirit who gave me this particular talent. I knew for sure

who guided me when I read Pazahiyawin's obituary written by her daughter Eunice Baskin which said "no one at Santee could make a better moccasin than she" and also that "she taught us [the sisters] how to do beadwork ...and how to make a good moccasin." The moment I read that, I understood what Waziyatawin Angela Wilson meant when she said "stories handed down from grandmother to granddaughter are rooted in a deep sense of kinship responsibility, a responsibility that relays a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential to my life."

Today, in an effort to unite nations, women are gathering together and taking back their traditional roles as leaders. Although we have conflict between the white world we live in and the tradition ways, we must maintain our culture to survive. Indigenous women are taking these responsibilities to heart. As Indigenous women, we must reclaim our identity by creating relationships with other women and maintaining and teaching the culture that we know. It is our responsibility as Native American women to tell the stories we know and listen to others.

The purpose of the Dakota Commemorative March is to tell our stories. Dakota women are now the voices of our grandmothers and as we come together to touch the earth of our ancestors, walk the same path they did in what must have been their darkest hours, we remember and honor them. In this way, we can take back the spirit of our identities and begin healing for our future generations. It doesn't matter where the stories come from. Some are passed down through the generations, others must be found amongst piles and piles of papers. The important thing is that we discover them and we share them.

At the end of the march, everyone gathered for a pipe ceremony and I was honored to have my father to my right and my daughter to my left. Three generations standing together in unity and love and there was a lot of healing that day. I realized that right there I was the link, linking the past with the present, honoring history and creating it, all at once.

## **Timeline of Events Leading Up to the Dakota Conflict and the Exile of the Dakota People**

Taken from <http://www.ktca.org/dakota>

**1851:** Treaty of Traverse des Sioux. After years of mounting pressure from white settlers and facing huge debts to fur traders, the people of the Eastern Dakota Nation sign a treaty giving up all of their lands west of the Mississippi River. However, the U.S. Senate strikes out the provision granting the Dakota a reservation in Minnesota. Territorial governor Alexander Ramsey saves the deal by getting the president to allow the Dakota a reservation on a five-year lease. The Dakota are relocated to a strip of land bordering the Minnesota River in west-central Minnesota.

**1858:** Dakota leaders on a diplomatic visit to Washington D.C. are told they did not own the reservation land. Faced with more debt and threatened with expulsion, they are forced to sell the northern half of their reservation.

**August-September 1862:** Frustrated by broken promises, reservation policies that forced cultural change, failed crops and the refusal of the government agent and traders to release food to starving families, Dakota men went to war to reclaim their land. As a result, over 500 settlers were killed, leaving 23 southwestern Minnesota counties virtually depopulated by the mass exodus. The U.S. Army under General Henry Sibley defeat the Dakota in six weeks. Over 6,000 Dakota refugees flee the state and about 2,000 are taken prisoner.

**September-December 1862:** In 15 minute trials, over 300 Dakota men are condemned by a military court. On December 26<sup>th</sup>, President Abraham Lincoln, in a compromise decision, lowers the number to 38. This is the same week he signs the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves. Meanwhile, 1,700 Dakota people are held in a prison camp on the river flats below Fort Snelling.

**December 26, 1862:** 38 Dakota men are hanged before a crowd of 3,000 in Mankato, Minnesota. It remains the largest mass execution on U.S. history.

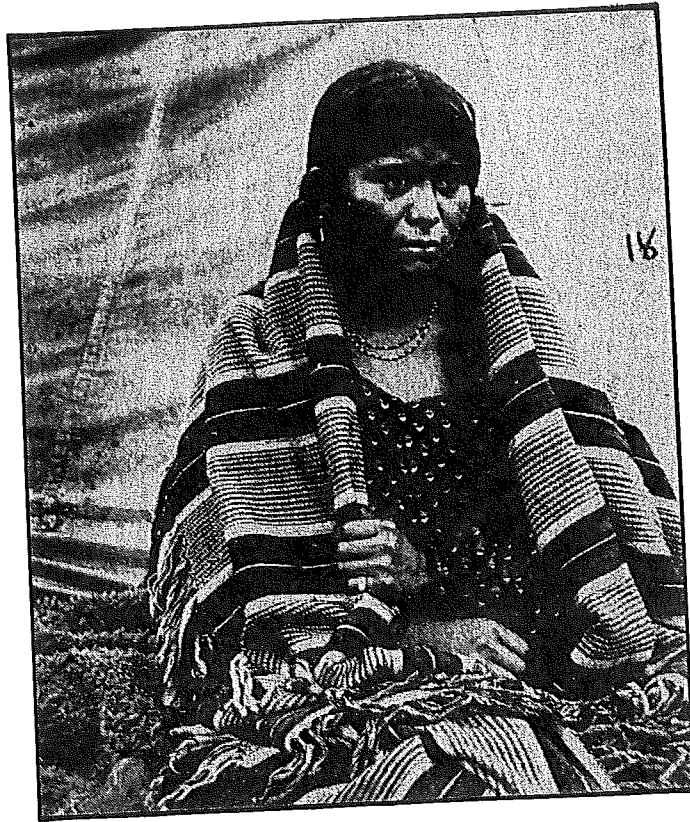
**1863:** Forced removal of the prisoners at Fort Snelling by steamboat and railroad boxcar to the Crow Creek Reservation on the Missouri River in Dakota Territory. More than 300 people, mostly children, died of exposure and starvation in the first winter.

**1866:** Abandonment of the Crow Creek Reservation and establishment of the Santee Reservation near the mouth of the Niobrara River in Nebraska. Pardoned prisoners from the military prison in Davenport, IA join the Crow Creek survivors in this new location.

**1867:** Simultaneous establishment of the Sisseton (or Lake Traverse) Reservation in northeastern South Dakota and the Devil's Lake (now called Spirit Lake) Reservation in central North Dakota for the Sissetonwan and Wahpetonwan Dakota peoples.

**1869:** The Flandreau Colony. Tired of government interference, 25 Mdewakantonwan Dakota families leave the Santee reservation to establish independent homesteads in and around Flandreau, South Dakota.

## #9 - PRISONER AT FORT SNELLING



When my grandparents saw this picture it made them feel sad. They said they could see the sorrow in the girl's face. Her name was Apistoka. In the winter of 1862, she was in a prison at Fort Snelling. That's in Minneapolis! I asked my grandfather, "Why was she put in prison? What did she do?"

"A long time ago," he told me, "over a hundred years ago, this land that is known as Minnesota was our homeland. Our people loved this land. We planted our corn at our summer villages on the Minnesota River. In winter, we hunted in the Big Woods west of where the Twin Cities now stand. Then the wasicu (white men) came. They came with treaties for us to sign. Treaties were supposed to be agreements between our two nations. The wasicu said they wanted us to share our land with them. They said their families needed to use this land so their children could eat. Those who asked us to sign the treaties called us relatives.

Our people didn't mind sharing the land. We have always believed in sharing. But the wasicu did not live up to what they said they were going to do in their treaties. In return for our land, they promised to share their food and other things we needed to survive. These things they promised did not come. Some of our young men became angry and started a war against these people. In the war, our own people were divided. Some wanted to drive the wasicu from our lands. Others wanted to try and live in peace and follow their ways. When the war was over, the families of those who had fought were rounded up and put into prison. The girl in the picture, she was probably a wife or daughter of one of our soldiers.

When our families were finally released, they were sent to live on barren lands west of Minnesota. Only slowly were some of our people allowed to return to our Minnesota homelands that we loved. Here, at Prairie Island, is one of our communities."

## DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

After reading the story, the teacher asks students the following questions: How did the Dakota make use of their Minnesota homelands? Why do you think some Dakota leaders signed a treaty with the wasicu? Can you think of one reason why a war started between the wasicu and the Dakota? Do any Dakota families live in Minnesota today? The teacher then asks students to empathize with this young woman. Why does she look so sad? How would they feel if they had been put in prison and did not know what had happened to other members of their family?

### Activities

1. Students locate the Minnesota River on a Minnesota map. They trace the course of that river with a marker on their blank map.
2. Students look up the word "treaty" in a dictionary. They write down the meaning they find. The students discover that a treaty is a formal agreement between independent nations. The teacher divides the class into two sections. Each section promises to give something of value to the other. An agreement is written up and each student signs the "treaty." The teacher then discusses a situation where one section of the class lives up to their agreement and the other does not. Students are asked how each section feels about that agreement.
3. Students locate five cities, counties, streets, or lakes in the state that have been named after Dakota leaders. They find these locations on a Minnesota map and place them on their blank maps. The following, among others, can be used:

Shakopee (Shakpe) which means "Little Six."  
His village was located one mile east of present-day Shakopee.

Mankato (Mahkato) which means "Blue Earth."

Wabasha (Wabasha) which means "Red Banner." This is the name of a county in southeastern Minnesota and also a street in St. Paul. There were two famous Dakota leaders names Wabasha. Their villages were located in southern Minnesota.

Red Wing (Koo-poo-hoo-she)

which is an English translation of a Dakota leader's name. His village was located where Red Wing now stands.

Sleepy Eye (Maga-tanka-mde)

This Dakota leader was called Sleepy Eyes because of a peculiar fold in his eyes that made him appear sleepy. His village was located at Swan Lake in southwestern Minnesota. A city, creek, lake, and state park are named after him.

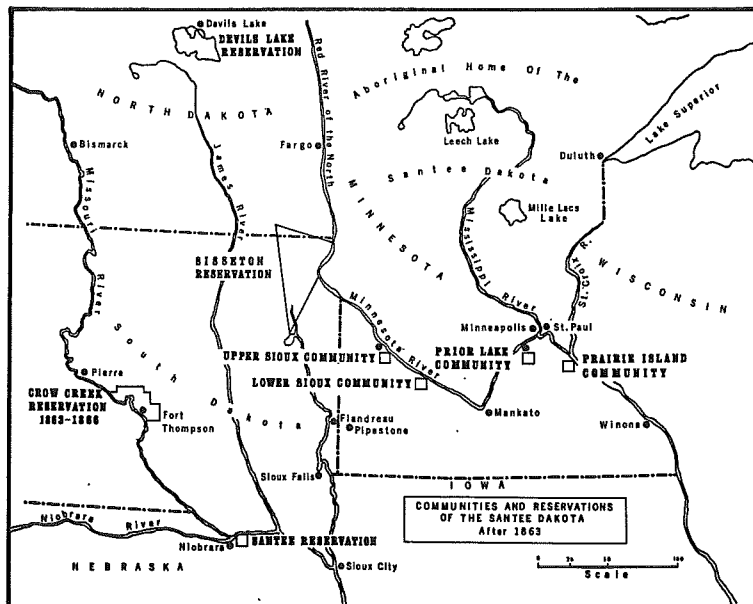
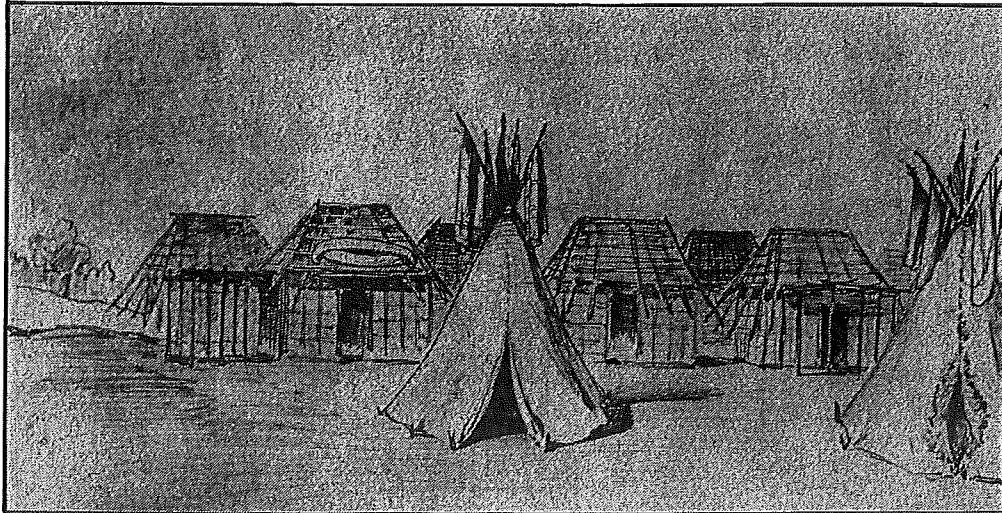
Chaska (Caske)

which means "first born, a son."



## DAKOTA VOCABULARY

1. **wacipi** = dance
2. **Dakota** = friends or allies
3. **Oceti Sakowin** = Seven Fires of the Dakota nation
4. **Wahpeton** = "dwellers among the leaves." One of the seven divisions of the Dakota Nation.
5. **Mdewakanton** = "dwellers of the Spirit Lake." One of the seven divisions of the Dakota Nation.
6. **unkana** = grandfather
7. **kunsi** = grandmother
8. **wacicu** = people of European descent
9. **Mnisota** = unclear or cloudy waters. It is also sometimes translated as sky tinted waters.
10. **ohiyesa** = winner
11. **wapeda** = "barks" or "little bark," a dog's name
12. **mato** = bear
13. **Hapan** = second born, a girl
14. **Caske** = first born, a boy
15. **Winuna** = first born, a girl



Present Day Reservations and Communities

