

The Métis Archipelago

Lesson 1

Guiding Question for the Lesson

- How did the Little Shell and Métis people end up scattered in an “archipelago”?

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

EU 1 There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

EU 5 There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and continue to shape who they are today. Many of these policies conflicted with one another. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods.

EU 6 History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

Social Studies Standards

SS.G.6-8.5 Explain the role and impact of spatial patterns of settlement and movement in shaping societies and cultures, including Indigenous cultures.

SS.G.6-8.6 Identify how the historical and contemporary movement of people, goods, and ideas from one area can impact change, conflict, and cooperation in other areas.

SS.H.6-8.2 Analyze how the historical events relate to one another and are shaped by historical context, including societies in the Americas.

SS.H.6-8.3 Analyze how, since European contact, historical events and policies have mutually impacted American Indian and European societies.

SS.H.608.5 Explain how Montana has changed over time and how this history impacts the present.

Materials

[Nicholas Vrooman](#) (20 minutes) by Helena Weekend, C-SPAN2 BookTV, October 8, 2013. video (20 minutes)

Métis map by Gerhard Ens (Appendix A)



Length

One class period

Key Vocabulary

archipelago disperse lingua franca polyethnic

Steps

Step One

Brainstorm as a group what might cause a group of people, who had previously lived together in one area or been related, to scatter. You might write it all on the board as students contribute ideas or give them a google doc to share – whatever works to have a full-group collection of thoughts on this topic.

Step Two

Explain that they will be watching a video where Nicholas Vrooman, a Little Shell historian, is interviewed about the Little Shell tribe. Stop the video several times and ask for clarifying questions, so students should have paper/pen ready for notetaking.

Before you begin, prepare students by telling them to listen for which groups got left out of treaties.

Stop at 5:54. Review which groups were left out and how they got left out of treaties. (Answer: connected to location [north of the Missouri River] and timing [after the Civil War], any groups left in that location at that time did not have a treaty resulting in a reservation.) Note use of “polyethnic” in this section, worth reviewing.

To prepare for the next section, ask students to pay attention to the how these groups lived, as well as the soldiers’ role.

Stop at 7:42. How did many people in these groups live? (Answer: in large communities with permanent structures.) What was the soldiers’ role? (Answer: to burn the villages and destroy this communal way of life.)

To prepare for the next section, ask students to listen for why the Little Shell families dispersed and what their lives were like.

Stop at 9:46. Why did they disperse and where did they go? (Answer: because of pressure from the military when their villages were destroyed and because there were no resources once the buffalo were gone. They needed money and jobs and did not have any, so they migrated to the edges of Montana’s cities and lived in the only place nobody seemed to mind if they camped, the dumps.)

To prepare for the next section, ask students to listen for how Vrooman describes people’s reactions to these Indigenous groups living in their cities. Note that from 9:49-10:04, this is Vrooman’s version of what white people who lived nearby at the time were thinking and saying, not Nicholas Vrooman’s own words and thoughts. It is worth pointing out to students who might miss his tone shift and misconstrue what he is saying here.

Stop at 12:51. How did white people respond to the Indigenous groups living along the edges of the cities? (Answer: they mostly could not understand where they had come from, since they thought Indians were confined to reservations. And they did not want them nearby.) How did the military respond? (Answer: the Cree Deportation Act of 1896.)

To prepare for the next section, ask students to listen for who became known as “The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians.”

Stop at 15:41. Who became known as The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians and why? (Answer: in 1916 the Rocky Boy’s reservation was created, but it could only support a fraction, maybe a third, of the people who needed it. Those left out became known as The Little Shell.)

To prepare for the next section, ask students to listen for how the government avoided dealing with the Little Shell.

Play to the end. How did the government avoid dealing with the Little Shell? (Answer: first, Congress did not allocate enough money to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide support to these Indigenous people. Second, they claimed the Little Shell were not “real Indians” in part because they were métis [little m, mixed].)

Step Three

Display the Métis map (Attachment A). Connect the settlement areas to the idea of an archipelago. Ponder with students about the locations of the Métis families, why they went where they did, and how this affected their cultural cohesiveness. How would it be different to try to share a culture with people living hundreds of miles away, versus those living on reservations where you are close all the time?

Assessment

Depending on the energy level of the group after this prolonged video and discussion, you may wish to ask for students to write their thoughts on an index card and turn it in, write lingering questions, or conduct a final classroom discussion focused on the review question, “How did the Little Shell and Métis people end up scattered in an ‘archipelago’?”

Extension Options

Invite students to compare this [1864 map of Montana territory](#) to the Métis map attached to this lesson. Do they see overlaps? How can these be explained?

Vrooman mentions the Chinese Exclusion Act. This connected topic may be worth a lesson, considering the role of the Chinese in Montana (railroad-building, which affected all the tribes of Montana).

Create a set of parallel timelines in which you invite students to add events they are learning about: one that depicts national events such as the Civil War, one that depicts events affecting many tribes (or pick just one), one that depicts events affecting other people like Chinese Americans or other immigrant groups, and one that depicts events affecting the Little Shell (or any combination). Students may be surprised to see how much overlap they see, or cause-and-effect combinations they can describe as a result.

Appendix A - Métis Map

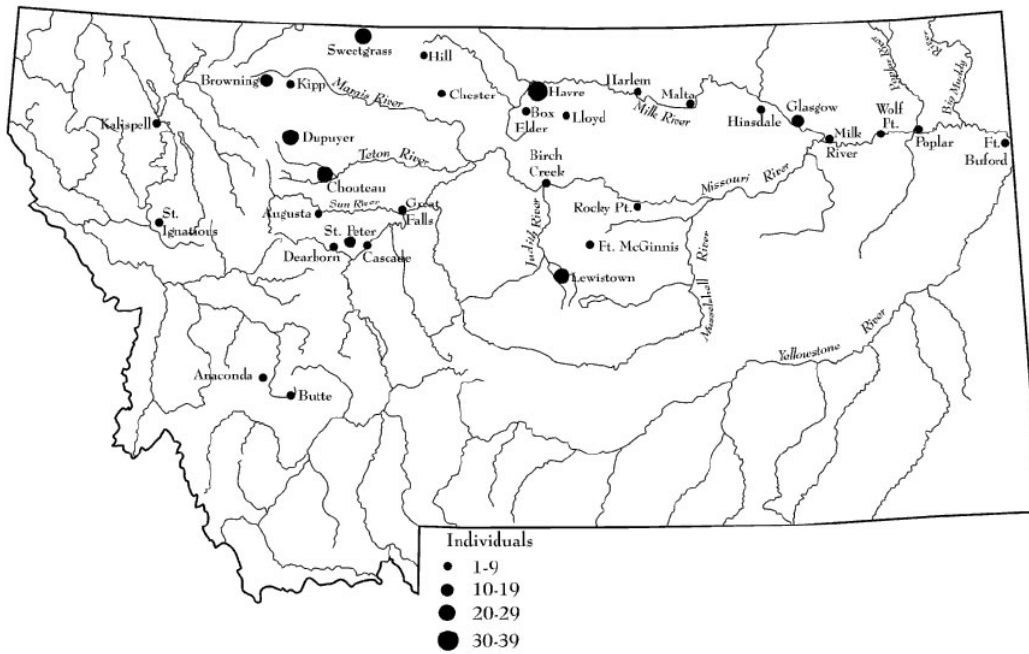


Figure 15. Métis settlement sites in Montana circa 1900. Map by Gerhard Ens.