

The Allotment Period – American Indian Perspectives

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: 6 - 8
Suggested Duration: Three – four class periods

Note: This model lesson plan would work well when studying about westward expansion and homesteading.

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals

(3) The geography content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:
(c) analyze maps and charts from a specific time period to understand an issue or event;
(e) explain the role and impact of spatial patterns of settlement and movement in shaping societies and cultures, including Indigenous cultures.

(4) The history content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:
(c) analyze how, since European contact, historical events and policies have mutually impacted American Indian and European societies;
(e) explain how Montana has changed over time and how this history impacts the present;
(f) understand that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events;
(h) identify limitations and biases in primary and secondary sources, specifically regarding misinformation and stereotypes.

Understandings

- A basic overview/introduction into the allotment period; analyzing formal interactions with the US government and American Indian Nations. (EU 4)
- A comparison/contrast of allotment act and homesteading act, reflecting on the similarities and differences.

Essential Questions

- How do historical events and accompanying documents influence the relationships between the US government and tribal nations?
- Why is it important to understand the historical background regarding the shrinking land base of tribal nations?
- How do these historical events and policies still influence relations between the US government and tribal nations?



Indian Education for All Unit

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Students will be able to...

- understand and explain the basis for the Allotment Act.
- analyze and interpret primary sources.
- develop an understanding of the historical significance of the Allotment Act.
- demonstrate their understanding of the historical context in which laws were made and how they are still relevant today.

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

1. Research and analyze issues and events associated with the allotment period utilizing primary documents.
2. Students will gather evidence about the Dawes Act and present their findings in the form of a research paper.
3. Through research and class discussions students will demonstrate their understanding of the Dawes Act and the ongoing impacts of the act.

Stage 3 Learning Plan

Background Information – Historical Context

In 1887, eleven years after the Battle of the Little Big Horn and just two years before Montana attained statehood, Congress passed the Dawes General Allotment Act which emphasized severalty, the treatment of American Indians as individuals rather than as members of tribal communities. The Dawes Act severed land, breaking up reservations into small parcels, or allotments, and registering them to individual Indian heads-of-households who were required to sign-up or enroll in the program on a tribal “roll” (census), leading to the term enrollment. Enrollment was based on age, family status, and blood quantum—an assumption of race-based identity. Enrollment severed families, and remains a very serious matter of contention and debate among tribal membership on many Indian reservations today. Enrollment reinforced paternalism and economic dependency on the government. The Dawes Act intended to force Native people into assimilating into American society and values. For nearly twenty years after it was enacted in 1887, the Allotment Act and consequent acts that extended its provisions caused nearly two-thirds of the total Indian land base that remained after treaties to be taken out of Indian ownership and control. During this era, millions of acres of “surplus” Indian lands were sold or transferred to non-Indians, and another 30 million acres were lost due to the 1906 Burke Act, forced sales, and other takings. Land that had been held in common by an entire tribal community was, and still is, divided into increasingly smaller sections and fractionated (fragmented) within reservation boundaries, rendering it difficult to manage, sell, or utilize.

In 1887, there were approximately 138 million acres of Indian reservation lands in the country. By 1891, 20 million acres went out of Indian hands. By the end of the allotment period in 1934, Indian people were deprived of 90 million acres of their lands. Half of the remaining 48 million acres were

unsuitable for agriculture, consisting of desert and semi-desert land.

Learning Activities

Day 1

Begin the class period by showing the video clip called “The Invasion of America.” Facilitate a class discussion. Pose the question “Why do you think the producers of the video called it ‘The Invasion of America’?” How does this differ from previous perspectives you have learned about regarding the “Manifest Destiny” of America? For a review of “Manifest Destiny” check out the OPI lesson plan called, “Movement Patterns Leading to Interdependence and/or Conflict.”

Next, introduce the lesson topic and tell students they will be learning about the Federal Indian Policy of Allotment. “The Dawes Act – Excerpts from American Indian Homelands” video clip from the Indian Land Tenure Foundation provides a good introduction to the historical significance of the Act.

Have students analyze the primary source “Indian Policy Reform, Extract from President Chester Arthur’s First Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1881” to provide a historical context. The source is a speech from President Arthur.

After students have read the document make two columns on the board, one labeled "problems" and the other "solutions." Elicit from students the following information and list their answers on the board:

- What problems does Arthur identify regarding the US government and the Indians? List them.
- What solutions does Arthur offer to remedy the situation?
- Whom does Arthur blame, if anyone, for the sorry state of Indian and US relations?
- What is the "tone" of his speech?
- How does Arthur view American Indians?

Next, share the following two video clips on YouTube from Shane Doyle (Crow) and Vernon Finley (Kootenai)

The Dawes Act and Blood Quantum - Shane Doyle

Assimilation and the Dawes Act - Vernon Finley

Have students summarize key points made by Shane and Vernon and facilitate a class discussion.

Close out the class by having students write a brief reaction paper utilizing a 3 – 2 – 1 prompt: three things you have learned today; two questions you have regarding the topics covered; one topic that surprised you.

Day 2

Facilitate a class discussion regarding key points from the previous class. Now turn to the Dawes Act.

- In what ways does the Dawes Act seem to remedy the problems identified by Arthur?
- In what ways does the act seem to be protecting Indians?
- In what way(s) does the act weaken and dismantle the power of Indian nations?
- What do you predict will be the outcome of the Dawes Act on Indian nations?

Print out copies of the Dawes Act for students and have them utilize the Document Analysis Worksheets from the National Archives as they interpret the document. This analysis could be done individually or in student pairs. Have students turn in their analysis worksheet at the end of the class period.

Day 3

Begin the class by showing the PBS Newshour Video called “Why Native Americans are buying back land that was stolen from them.”

News video summary from PBS:

From 1877 to 1934, under a range of laws and reneged-upon treaties, the U.S. government appropriated tens of millions of acres of Native American land. In recent years there has been a growing movement known as “land back” to reclaim their lands. In some cases that has meant tribes are choosing to buy it back on the open market.

Ask students to write down a couple of key ideas from the clip and then facilitate a class discussion.

The *Montana Stories of the Land* textbook has a land status map that provides an excellent visual aid that shows how allotment impacted the Flathead Reservation. Land status is color-coded, and the map includes a key. Original tribal allotments on the map are depicted in orange. (See: Flathead Indian Reservation Land Status map located within the Montana history textbook *Montana: Stories of the Land* companion website, Ch. 13, page 255 – the link to the on-line version of the textbook is included in the resource section). Display the maps on a screen/smartboard and conduct a visual thinking strategy with the students. What’s going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?

Final Assignment: Students will write a short essay about the Dawes Act addressing the following questions:

- Who were the most active sponsors of the Dawes Act?
- Were the sponsors aware the land allotted under the Dawes Act may or may have not been suitable for farming?
- What happened to land not allotted to Indians? What does this show about possible motives of the plan?
- What does your textbook say about the Dawes Act? Does it present multiple perspectives?

Share with students the links to the on-line resources for research provided in the Materials/Resource section. Allow class time for student research and writing. Have students turn their papers in at the next class period or allow a few days for more research and writing if needed.

Assessment will be based upon the teacher interpretation of the student essays and how well they addressed the questions asked.

Materials/Resources Needed

[American Indians and the Homestead Act](#) Homestead National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service)

[Assimilation and the Dawes Act - Vernon Finley](#)

[The Dawes Act February 8, 1887](#)

[The Dawes Act – Excerpts from American Indian Homelands](#)

[The Dawes Act and Blood Quantum - Shane Doyle](#)

[Document Analysis Worksheets](#) National Archives

[Flathead Indian Reservation Land Status map from Montana Stories of the Land](#) – see page 255

[The Homestead Act of 1862](#) National Archives

[Indian Policy Reform, Extract from President Chester Arthur’s First Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1881](#)

[The Invasion of America](#)

[Movement Patterns Leading to Interdependence and/or Conflict - Grades 7-8*](#)

[Why Native Americans are buying back land that was stolen from them](#) YouTube

Materials/Resources Other

The following resources contain numerous activities, lessons, and resources for teaching about the Dawes Act.

[The Dawes Act](#) National Park Service

[Dawes Act \(1887\) and Resource Material](#) PBS LearningMedia

[Dawes Act Lesson Plan](#) Nebraska Studies

[Dawes Act Summary](#) – Ourdocuments

[Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#) Montana Office of Public Instruction

[History of Allotment](#) Indian Land Tenure Foundation