

# Federal Indian Policy – Tribal Reorganization

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: Grades 6-8  
Suggested Duration: Two – Three Class Periods

Note: This lesson plan would be an excellent supplement for learning about the great depression and the New Deal which is covered in Chapter 18 in the *Montana Stories of the Land* textbook.

## Stage 1 Desired Results

### Established Goals

(1) The civics and government content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:

(e) identify events and leaders that ensure that key United States principles of equality and civil rights are applied to various groups, including American Indians.

(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.

### Understandings

- Prior to European contact all tribes had structured forms of government to manage their affairs.
- Historically, U.S. laws and policies have done much damage to American Indian cultures.
- Federal Indian Policy led to the formation of contemporary tribal governments.
- The U.S. Government has been influencing tribes through various federal policies, and the policy of tribal reorganization in the 1930s helped to establish modern tribal governments. (Essential Understandings 5 and 7)

### Essential Questions

- What factors influenced the passage of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act?
- To what extent did the Meriam Report influence U.S. Government officials?
- To what extent are Montana tribal governments similar and how do they differ in certain aspects?

Students will be able to...

- demonstrate an understanding of the rationale and results of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act.



Students will know...

- each Montana tribal nation has a unique form of contemporary government developed as a direct result of Federal Indian Policy.

## Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

1. Students will read pages 364 – 367 from *Montana Stories of the Land* and take notes about the main ideas regarding the “New Deal” for American Indians.
2. Students will use their listening and note taking skills as they will be required to take notes and rephrase major concepts/issues in a brief essay/oral presentation.

## Stage 3 Learning Plan

Ask students what they currently know about contemporary tribal governments. Brainstorm a list of ideas they come up with and write on the board/overhead.

After a brief discussion share the [“What Do Tribal Governments Do?”](#) video clip from the Native Governance Center. Have students take notes and ask them to summarize key ideas put forth in the clip.

Tell students they will be reading a brief historical overview about how contemporary tribal governments were formed as a direct result of Federal Indian Policy and how that policy connected with New Deal legislation put forth during the Roosevelt presidency. The reading is from Chapter 18 in the *Montana Stories of the Land* textbook (pages 364-367).

Prior to their reading emphasize the following key concepts with the students: prior to European contact each tribe had a traditional form of government (highly structured in most cases) that dealt with internal and external affairs of the tribe. Contemporary tribal governments are recent phenomena, but some do have cultural components that integrate traditional practices.

In addition to the reading share the [Indian Reorganization Act](#) video clip from the Department of Tribal Governance, University of Alaska Fairbanks. The video provides a brief overview of the Indian Reorganization Act and would be a good supplement to their reading.

Share the following two video clips from the Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education to provide Montana American Indian perspectives regarding the Indian Reorganization Act.

[1934 Indian Reorganization Act and its effect on Leadership, Vernon Finley](#)

[1934 IRA and Gros Ventre Government, Everall Fox](#)

Students will be required to take notes and write up a brief essay (one page) about what they have learned and present their summary back to the class in the form of a short speech highlighting the main points they got from the reading and video clips. Students could also share their reaction to the information learned. Have them explain why it is important for all Montanans to have a basic understanding of tribal governments.

Student work should be evaluated based upon demonstrating an understanding of the main points put forth in the reading, videos, and class discussion.

### Teacher Background

[Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide](#), Chapter Seven Tribal Histories Narrative – Indian Reorganization Act: The Indian New Deal. Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Unit

[Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide Companion DVD](#), Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act).

[1934 Indian Reorganization Act and its effect on Leadership, Vernon Finley](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education

[1934 IRA and Gros Ventre Government, Everall Fox](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education

[Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction, Indian Education for All Unit

[Essential Understandings Key Concepts](#), Montana Office of Public Instruction, Indian Education for All Unit

[Montana: Stories of the Land](#), Montana Historical Society

[The Department of Tribal Governance – University of Alaska Fairbanks](#)

### Extension Activity

For an extension activity students could also do close analytical read of the Indian Reorganization Act and highlight key terms and ideas for use in their presentations.

[Transcript of the Indian Reorganization Act](#) This document is the Indian Reorganization Act, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act. This legislation replaced the allotment policy that dominated federal-American Indian affairs for nearly 50 years. It also promoted American Indian self-determination and the revival of tribal communities.

### Source-Dependent Questions

- Using the evidence in the document, describe how the Indian Reorganization Act changed the relationship between American Indian tribes and the U.S. government going forward.
- How would this relationship have created issues for American Indians in accessing New Deal programs? Use specific evidence from the document to support your answer.