

The Day that Finally Came

Lesson 1

Guiding Question for the Lesson

- What happened when “the day finally came”?

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

EU 7 American Indian tribal nations are inherently sovereign nations and they possess sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, under the American legal system, the extent and breadth of self-governing powers are not the same for each tribe.

Social Studies Standards

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

Materials

The Day That Finally Came slide deck (see supplemental document)

[125 Years Later, Native American Tribe in Montana Gets Federal Recognition](#) by Jim Robbins, New York Times, February 1, 2020.

Quotes from New York Times article (Appendix A)

Length

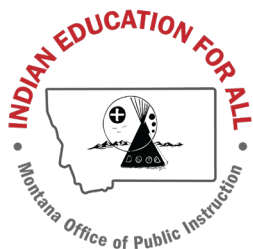
One class period

Steps

Step One

Provide students with the quotes in Appendix A, no context. You could print a quote for each student (several will have the same quotes) and ask them to mill about the classroom and compare quotes, try to make a prediction about this article.

When students have finished chatting about their quotes, seat them and ask for predictions on what happened. Also inquire if they felt the contrast between the tone of these and the one from the 10-Cent Treaty lesson.



Step Two

Project the slide show, “The Day That Finally Came.” The following are teacher notes to aid you in presenting the information.

Slide One: The title, “The Day That Finally Came”, references a Spring, 1958 article in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, written by the historian Verne Dusenberry, called “Waiting For a Day That Never Comes.” It is significant because in 1958, sixty years before federal recognition happened for the Little Shell Tribe, it already seemed like the effort toward recognition had already been going on for so long. When recognition finally came in 2019, former tribal chairman John Gilbert said in his speech, “The day that never came, finally did!”

Slide Two: When the Little Shell received federal recognition in December 2019 as part of the \$738 billion National Defense Authorization Act – the bill that funds the entire U.S. military – they were the 574th Indian tribe to be so recognized. This result came after 150+ years of petitioning the US government. At the time there were more than 5400 enrolled Little Shell members.

Slide Three: Federal recognition was a cause for celebration! More than 1,000 tribal members gathered at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Great Falls.

Slide Four: Little Shell Chairman Gerald Gray speaks to the crowd at the celebration.

Slide Five: All the other recognized tribes in Montana turned out to celebrate with the Little Shell, like the Northern Cheyenne, shown here with then-tribal chairman Rynalea Whiteman Pena in front of three elders who sang an honor song to the Little Shell.

Slide Six: Celebrations aside, what does it mean to be federally recognized and why do tribes care?

Slide Seven: Map of Reservations. This map shows the locations of the 573 tribes who preceded the Little Shell in being federally recognized. Most of these recognitions came in the form of treaties – almost 370 from 1778 to 1868 – with the government prior to 1871. In 1871 Congress stated “henceforth, no Indian nation or tribe . . . shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty....” This left many Indian nations unrecognized. In 1978 the United States realized they needed to create a path for non-treaty tribes to become federally recognized, which created an opportunity for the Little Shell to move forward.

Slide Eight: Benefits of federal recognition. Federally recognized tribes receive benefits through their relationship with the US Government that may include the following:

- **Sovereignty.** Tribes are recognized as sovereign nations, as other countries, with the ability to make their own laws for governing their people, allowing access to their lands, and interacting with state and federal governments. Tribes were already sovereign nations, but federal recognition reinforces that status, especially after the cessation of treaty-making seemed to diminish their sovereignty.
- **Access to IHS.** Members are eligible for health care through the Indian Health Services.
- **Other Federal Programs.** Examples include housing assistance, health programs (like anti-diabetes and anti-tobacco programs), and some education benefits.
- **Trust Land.** Though the Little Shell do not get a reservation, they are allowed 200 acres of land to be held in trust by the government. That means the tribe will not have to pay taxes on the land.

Slide Nine: Common misconceptions people have about what federally recognized tribes receive from the US Government include the following:

- **Money.** While tribes receive money from the government for operations – like operating the tribal government – individual members do not receive money “just because” they are Indians. Only tribes who control some kind of resource that generates income – tribes with casinos operated near populated urban regions, for example – are able to give money to members through what is called “per capita” payments. These are a kind of profit sharing. Not many tribes have this.
- **Education.** Tribal members do not automatically get free college education.
- **Reservation.** Not all tribes, like the Little Shell, have their own reservations. The Little Shell will be allowed 200 acres of trust land, but they must find and buy it first. The government did not give it to them. Likewise, other reservations made through treaties were not “given” to tribes by the government; the tribes reserved lands for themselves while ceding other lands.

Slide Ten: Organizing a tribe after federal recognition is a slow process. Not many tribes who apply for federal recognition receive it, nor is there an established process for how it unfolds when it does happen. The two federal agencies most involved in the process – IHS and the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) – are separate from one another and are largely underfunded. It takes a long time to navigate all the details for how a new tribe will move through the system. It is also a challenge for tribes, who in many instances, like the Little Shell, are essentially building a new nation from the ground up.

Slide Eleven: COVID-19. The global pandemic arrived just three months after the Little Shell received federal recognition. This slowed the process even more as people could not travel or meet in person.

Slide Twelve: However, the CARES Act – Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act – that was passed by the federal government in March 2020 provided \$8 billion of relief money to Indian tribes to fight COVID-19. The Little Shell received \$25 million. If the tribe had not been federally recognized, they would have received no money. This money allowed them to complete projects years ahead of schedule that included:

- relief checks to individual members whose livelihoods were impacted by COVID;
- purchase of delivery vans to take food and medicine to elders and other homebound citizens without the means to drive themselves;
- purchase and building of a state-of-the-art healthcare facility in Great Falls;
- renovation of their headquarters and community center to make them safer for members.

Slide Thirteen: Because of COVID, when the Little Shell hosted a pow wow in Great Falls in August 2022, it was the first time since that Holiday Inn celebration in January 2020 the tribe was able to gather as a group.

Slide Fourteen: Another cause for celebration: the first Grand Entry for the Little Shell Chippewa as a federally recognized tribe!

Step Three

Provide the *New York Times* article and read through with students or assign them to read it independently. They will see their quotes featured. One important detail that might surprise them is how many other tribes came out to support the Little Shell Tribe at their event.

Assessment

Ask students to reflect on what they have learned about the people now officially known as The Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Ask them to describe their feelings, summarize what they learned, or identify the most important idea.

Extension Options

Are there other tribes seeking federal recognition? Ask students to conduct a brief research project.

Do a brief research project on what are the services federally recognized tribes receive and what they can offer their membership.

Yellowstone Public Radio has a section of [radio shows](#) dedicated to the Little Shell.

Appendix B: Quotes from New York Times Article

“It’s really about dignity. We never had a place to call home.”

“Waiting for the day that never comes is over.”

“They said if we let them through, we’d have to let others, who might not have the same legitimacy.”

“We may buy some symbolic land right away so no one can call us landless Indians anymore.”

“Our ancestors will be here, dancing with us tonight.”