Landless Indians in the 20th Century
Lesson 2

Guiding Question for the Lesson

- What efforts were made throughout the 20th century to address the needs of the Landless Indians?

Standards

Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

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.

EU 7 American Indian tribal nations are inherent 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.CG.6-8.5 Identify events and leaders that ensure that key United States principles of equality and civil rights are applied to various groups, including American Indians.

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

Materials

"Indian Poverty is Real Problem to Great Falls," Big Timber Pioneer, October 2, 1941, p. 2.

Joseph Laurent Dussome. (1880-1963): Montana Metis Leader by Judy Jacoby and Lawrence Barkwell, Metis Heritage and History Research, Louis Riel Institute.

Length

One class period

Steps

Step One

Return to the 12th slide (72) in the last lesson, the one that pictures Joe Dussome and his wife Caroline. The notes for that slide read, "Following the creation of Rocky Boy's Reservation, and the realization in the early 1920s that not all the Landless Indians were to be accommodated by the federal government, new leadership arose to meet the new challenges. Chief among them was Joe Dussome.

Dussome served as Headman for the Landless Indians from 1921 until his death in 1963." Ask students to predict what Dussome might have done as leader of the Landless Indians.

Step Two

One of the standards for this lesson is Essential Understanding 7. Begin the lesson by bringing up this EU and asking students to explain how it applies to this lesson. (Answer - Because the Little Shell Tribe was not federally recognized, it lacked acknowledgement of itself as a self-governing unit. The tribe was unable to communicate directly with the federal government, ask for assistance, provide for its members as a government should, and so on.) It is important to make this point so students understand exactly how important federal recognition is, and why the Landless Indians were different from other tribes in Montana.

Step Three

Provide the article from the 1941 Big Timber Pioneer that describes some of the effects of the poverty at Hill 57 and efforts to address those problems. Work with students to read it. This article does a good job of highlighting positivity as well as the heartbreaking effects of unclean water and other problems of impoverished areas.

Now hand out the Joseph Dussome article. Preview it to discover how its difficulty level aligns with your students' reading skill and whether you want to read it to them or have them attempt it independently. Of note, in this article there is a lengthy excerpt from the Vern Dusenberry piece "Waiting for a Day That Never Comes" which will be referenced in the next segment on federal recognition. Help students see, through this article, that efforts to attain recognition, a land base, assistance for the Chippewa/Métis/Cree people occurred continuously since the 1863 Old Crossing Treaty.

Assessment

Ask students to imagine they are Joe Dussome or Jim Gopher. Ask them to write a letter from him to a cousin living in another place, in which he describes his efforts and why he is so dedicated to them.

Extension Option

The "Montana & Métis History" exhibit at the Mansfield Library at University of Montana Missoula contains a lot of information regarding everything in this unit, and there is a photo of Dussome.