

# The Allotment Period – American Indian Perspectives

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: High School  
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

4) The history content standards for ninth through twelfth grade are that each student will:  
(e) explain events in relation to both their intended and unintended consequences, including governmental policies impacting American Indians;  
(j) analyze perspectives of American Indians in US history.

### 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 bases of tribal nations?
- How do these historical events and policies still influence relations between the US government and tribal nations?

### 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.



Indian Education for All Unit

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## 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?

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?
- What do you think are his sources of information?
- What is your opinion of the solutions he puts forth?

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.

Facilitate a class discussion and have students turn in their analysis worksheet.

Day 3

Begin the class by showing the movie trailer from the film “100 Years: One Woman's Fight for Justice.” A link to the OPI curriculum guide for this film is included in the resource section. This award-winning documentary provides an excellent overview of the significance of the Allotment Act and the negative impact it had on Tribal Nations and American Indian allottees. (The film was sent to all Montana public high school libraries.) Facilitate a class discussion after viewing the clip.

Assign students to write up a two-page essay about the Dawes Act and have them address 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?
- Was it unreasonable to believe that private property and farming were superior to communally held land devoted to hunting, gathering, and/or farming?
- What role, if any, did Indians themselves play in arguing for or against the Dawes Act?
- 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 research paper and how well they addressed the questions asked.

### Extension Activity

Have students research the Homestead Act and compare/contrast that law with the Allotment Act.

### Materials/Resources Needed

[100 Years: One Woman's Fight for Justice - Movie Trailer](#)

[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 – Excerpts from American Indian Homelands](#)

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

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

[Document Analysis Worksheets](#) National Archives

[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](#)

## Materials/Resources Other

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

[Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide](#) and [Companion DVD](#)

[Native Americans Documents Project](#) – California State University

[Digital Classroom, Teaching With Documents – Maps of Indian Territory, The Dawes Act, and Will Rogers' Enrollment Case File](#) National Archives

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

[Dawes Act Lesson Plan](#) Nebraska Studies

[The Dawes Act](#) National Park Service

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

[Dawes Records: Enrollment and Land Allotment Jackets](#) National Archives

Background Information

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

[Essential Understandings Key Concepts](#) Montana Office of Public Instruction

[History and Foundation of American Indian Education](#) (see pages 30 - 32) – Montana Office of Public Instruction

[Dawes Act Summary](#) - Ourdocuments

[Montana Tribes Digital Archives](#)

[Native American Spaces: Cartographic Resources at the Library of Congress - Reservations and Allotments](#) Library of Congress

[Land Consolidation Plain 2012](#) Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

[Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Tribal Lands Department](#)