THE NORTHWESTERN SHOSHONES, THE BEAR RIVER, AND ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

TEACHER BACKGROUND

This lesson explores the legacy of the Bear River Massacre and the ways the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation is using the site of the massacre for development and the assertion of sovereignty. One of four tribal bands of Shoshones, the Northwestern Shoshones—who were recognized as a sovereign nation by the federal government on April 29th, 1987—today have tribal land in Utah and Idaho. In 1863 approximately 350 Shoshones, including many women and children, were slaughtered by U.S. troops. This little-known massacre was one of the worst in U.S. history and began a long period of displacement for Northwestern Shoshones.

However, the story of the site of the Bear River Massacre also offers a clear example of the importance of American Indian sovereignty over land. Today, while the site still carries a tragic legacy, the Northwestern Shoshones have reestablished sovereignty over the land and are turning it into a place of renewal. The struggle of the Northwestern Band to develop a viable land base and its decision to harness geothermal power at Bear River brings the importance of Indian sovereignty into focus.

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to understand the tragic circumstances of the Bear River Massacre. They will also discover the adaptability and determination of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone in their ability to repurpose the site.

TEACHER MATERIALS

At a Glance: The Bear River Then and Now

We Shall Remain: The Northwestern Shoshone (chapter 3, 5:00–11:32; chapter 5, 21:25–23:16)

STUDENT MATERIALS

Henry Woonsook's Grandmother's Tale of the Bear River Massacre

TIME FRAME - VERSATILE

Two standard class periods with homework
One block period with homework
Three standard class periods

PROCEDURE

Review the concepts of federalism, sovereignty, and land use with the class, and have them keep those ideas in their minds as they take notes on *We Shall Remain: The Northwestern Shoshone.* (If there is not time to screen the whole film, the selected clips will give them the background they need.) They may want to note people of interest and dates of events.

PROCEDURE (CONT.)

Give students the oral history excerpt to read; then as a class discuss their impressions and comprehension of the Bear River Massacre and the current use of the land where the event took place.

Have them research both the Bear River Massacre and the geothermal project using the digital archive at www.UtahIndians.org and current newspaper articles. Using direct quotes to support their theses, have them write a narrative essay about this unusual repurposing of land. The essay should reflect the journey of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone from tragedy to sovereignty.

ASSESSMENT/PRODUCTS

Film notes
Essays
Discussion participation

VARIATIONS/EXTENSIONS

Compare and contrast the current situation of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone with other Utah tribes.

Students can do additional research and participate in a debate on the merits of the geothermal plant.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Blackhawk, Ned. *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Fogarty, Mark. "Northwestern Band of Shoshone Thinking Big." *USA Today.* June 25, 2004.

Moulten, Kristen. "Shoshone Tribe Plans Geothermal Plant in N. Utah Set to Run in 2010." *Salt Lake Tribune.* Oct. 2, 2008.

Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. "Historical Events." http://www.nwbshoshone-nsn.gov/culture/history/index.htm.

Parry, Mae. "The Northwestern Shoshone." In *A History of Utah's American Indians.* Ed. Forrest S. Cuch. Salt Lake City: Utah State Division of Indian Affairs, 2000.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

State Standards

High School – United States Government and Citizenship: 1/3/b&d; 3/2/d; 4/3/a

Accreditation Competencies

Thinking and Reasoning/Integrates new learning with existing knowledge and experiences/Uses various reading and writing strategies to organize, interpret, analyze, and comprehend information; Social and Civic Responsibility/Demonstrates an appreciation of diversity and interdependence of all people/ Analyzes diverse viewpoints of social and civic issues in local, regional, and global events

NCSS Standards

High School: 1/a-f, 4/c,e& f; 5/a,b&d; 10/c

AT A GLANCE:
THE BEAR RIVER THEN AND NOW

Before white encroachment onto their lands, the Shoshone people lived, hunted, and gathered plants throughout parts of what are now Utah, Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming. The Northwestern Shoshones predominantly lived in the area that is now southern Idaho and northern Utah. Among the most ecologically efficient and well-adapted Indians of the American West, they moved with the seasons to harvest a variety of foods from the land, and their subsistence practices were cleverly adapted to the region and time of year. (For more information, see "Shoshone Seasonal Land Use and Culture.") The Bear River site was an important winter campsite for the Northwestern Shoshones, as the deep embankments served as a barrier against the winter weather. The immediate area also served as an important fishing and gathering place.

At the beginning of the 1860s, life became increasingly difficult for the Northwestern Shoshones, as they faced multiple interruptions to and stresses on their way of life. Other powerful tribes to the north and to the south limited the Shoshones' range, while non-Indian overland emigrants destroyed the Shoshones' water resources with their livestock and chopped down precious timber for their campfires. At the same time, other, more permanent settlers who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, began moving farther north and deeper into Northwestern Shoshone territory. In addition to the problems created by other tribes and non-Indian settlers, the United States Army, freed from a duty to fight the Civil War in the Southwest by the Confederate surrender of New Mexico in 1862, began to have an increasing presence throughout the area.

The Shoshones became angry and frustrated by these threats to their traditional way of life, and tensions started to escalate into violent conflict. In January of 1863, while the Northwestern Shoshones were at their winter campsite on the Bear River, several altercations between whites and Indians erupted. Most of the Shoshones involved were not members of the Northwestern band, but non-Indians from nearby settlements had been putting pressure on the army to remove the Shoshones from the desirable land near the Bear River and to put an end to the conflict through force. On January 29, 1863, troops from the United States Army, under the command of Colonel Patrick Edward Connor, attacked the winter camp. Though the Northwestern Shoshones had been warned of the army's impending arrival, they believed they would be able to negotiate. Instead, the troops attacked the encampment of over seven hundred Shoshone men, women, and children, killing approximately half of those in the encampment. In addition to murdering so many of their people, the army also destroyed all of the Northwestern Shoshones' food and shelter, leaving survivors of the massacre destitute.

In the aftermath of the Bear River Massacre, white settlers moved unopposed into traditional Northwestern Shoshone lands. As American settlements grew around them, the few remaining Northwestern Shoshones lost their land base and could no longer sustain their traditional nomadic lifestyle. Some Northwestern Shoshones moved to

the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho, but those who wanted to remain in their traditional homeland were left without a reservation and had to search for alternative means to secure a land base. Many adopted the LDS faith and white methods of agriculture, but they were repeatedly displaced from their farming communities (for a detailed look at these settlement attempts, see "A Brief History of Utah's Northwestern Shoshones").

Repeatedly denied a viable land base and scattered throughout the states of Utah and Idaho, the Northwestern Shoshones became active members of their various communities, working as business owners, schoolteachers, and local leaders. In 1987, this diverse community gained official recognition as the Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation, a group separate from the various other bands of Shoshones. Federal recognition of the nation restored the basis for sovereignty, and today the Northwestern Shoshones have begun to develop their small tribal holdings in Idaho and Utah.

Perhaps most significantly, the Northwestern Shoshones are using one of the most difficult moments of their history in a positive manner through their development of the Bear River. In 1990 the Bear River Massacre Site was declared a National Historic Landmark, and in March 2003, twenty six acres that included the Bear River Massacre site were donated to the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. In the last two years the Northwestern Shoshones have come up with a plan to develop five plants on their tribal lands and sell the geothermal energy. The plan offers a means of economic development and reflects the Shoshones' commitment to a clean environment. One of the proposed plants is to be built near the site of the Bear River Massacre. Though this plan has created some controversy, it takes a place that was economically important to the Northwestern Shoshones' ancestors and allows it to become part of the tribe's economic future.

HENRY WOONSOOK'S GRANDMOTHER'S TALE OF THE BEAR RIVER MASSACRE

Long ago in 1863 at a place on the Bear River where a lot of Indians were living there was a battle where many Indians were killed. The Indians were wintering there. A white man from Preston, I don't know what kind of white man, maybe a bishop, maybe a stake president, told the Indians that they were going to be killed. "You could all run away to safety," the white man told them. But the chief said, "No. We will not run away." The men of the group said, "We don't have to worry. We can handle the soldiers." The young men were feeling good and were throwing rocks at a target and throwing spears. "We can handle the soldiers," they said. "We don't have to run away."

Then the soldiers, a hundred or more, came over the hill. The soldiers descended the hill toward the camp, saying to themselves as they came that they could kill the Indians right in their camp. The soldiers forded a stream near the camp but did not begin to kill the Indians until they were right up to them. Then they began to battle with the Indians. When the battle began, the chiefs said to the women and young people, "You must stay with us because if you leave the rest will leave." Then those Indians who lived there in that place began to battle with the soldiers. My maternal grandmother said that the place where they lived was a place of many willows and when the soldiers began to shoot, the willows began to fall as if they were being moved by a scythe. The Indians were fighting back and they were killing some of the soldiers.

The Indians fought back but there wasn't much they could do because the white men had guns and the Indians had only bows and arrows. One little boy, whose relatives were killed, lay there on the cold ground among the dead ones. As the soldiers came through they checked and any of the Indians who were still alive they shot. The little boy lay still and they passed him by. The little boy lay there and pretended to be dead and they passed him by. That is the way he saved his life. After the soldiers had killed all the Indians who were still alive, they left. Some of the Indians had escaped across the river on the ice in the winter and had come north. When the Indians were away from the scene of the battle, they stopped along the river bank and my grandmother, who had a shoulder wound herself, doctored the other wounded Indians. With the Indians who escaped were my maternal grandfather Cikuci, One-Eyed Tom and another man whose name I don't know. That Cikuci was the one who caused it all.

The little boy who had pretended to be dead and who had escaped was suffering from the cold there on the river bank, and Cikuci, who had a buffalo robe wrapped around himself, refused to share it with the little boy. He just ignored the little boy. When they had rested they got up and came on up the river farther until finally they stopped and build another fire and warmed themselves.

The man Cikuci was the one who caused this trouble. He and two other men had raided a California-bound wagon train and had killed the immigrants. They had taken the horses and the belongings from the wagon train and that is why the soldiers killed those people. That was the cause of the Bear River Battle that I have been telling you about.

The little boy who was called Taaboci, "Brush Rabbit," was the son of Segwici, "Little Buddy Boy."

Henry Woonsook, interview with Lorin Gaarder, Fort Hall, Idaho, Feb. 29, 1968, interview no. 352, American West Center Doris Duke American Indian Oral History Project, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, t.s.