



THE SHOSHONES

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CHIEF WASHAKIE: AN EXAMPLE OF INGENUITY

TEACHER BACKGROUND

This lesson examines the life of Shoshone leader Washakie. Born at a time when the Shoshones were on equal footing with the United States, Washakie came to represent a group of the Shoshones during the mid-1800s, as they and other Indian nations found themselves less able to match the military power of the United States due to loss of population, changing technology, treaty-breaking, and differing land ethics.

Washakie helped to establish peace for the Shoshones as the United States Army and non-Indian settlers proved insurmountable adversaries for American Indian communities throughout North America. Perhaps influenced by the Bear River Massacre, which had devastated the Northwestern Shoshone people, Washakie entered treaty negotiations with the United States. His leadership was memorialized when the Northwestern Shoshones established a farm in the Malad Valley, near Brigham City, Utah, and named their new settlement Washakie.

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to comprehend the changing circumstances impacting the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone through the life story of Chief Washakie.

TEACHER MATERIALS

At a Glance: Washakie and His Legacy

Shoshone Interactive Map (available at www.UtahIndians.org)

We Shall Remain: The Northwestern Shoshone (chapter 4, 10:30–13:40)

STUDENT MATERIALS

The Life of Chief Washakie (three sections)

TIME FRAME

Two thirty-minute periods

PROCEDURE

Question students to see if they have any previous knowledge about Chief Washakie, and then introduce Washakie briefly to the students in your own words. Let them know that he lived through three different eras of political relations between the federal government and American Indians. Pass out the readings so that each student gets one of the three sections detailing a period of Washakie's life. Each student should write down the five most important things he/she learned from the section.



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PROCEDURE (CONT.)

Place students into groups of three so that each student has knowledge of one period of Washakie's life. Have the students take turns teaching each other the five facts they found most important. All team members should take notes from their teammates. Once every member has fifteen important facts about Washakie, they can return to their seats.

ASSESSMENT/PRODUCTS

Participation

Teamwork notes (with fifteen facts)

VARIATIONS/EXTENSIONS

Lead the students in a discussion comparing Washakie to other American Indian leaders or other leaders in our federal government. They may want to create a chart or Venn diagram showing the comparison.

Create a timeline of Washakie's long life and note all the changes in world, American, and Utah history that he lived through.

Work with students to review the Fort Bridger Treaties of 1863 and 1868 (copies available online at http://www.windriverhistory.org/archives/treaty_docs/treatydocumentsi.html). Have the students try to figure out the real meaning these documents would have had for the Shoshone. Ask the class to vote on whether they would have signed the treaties.

Review the following newspaper articles about Washakie, all available online through the University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library's Utah Digital Newspaper Project (online at <http://digitalnewspapers.org/>):

"Some History of Chief Washakie," *Deseret News*, Feb. 24, 1900, p. 8

"Old Chief Washakie," *Deseret News*, Mar. 18, 1896, p. 16

"He Was a Chief of Peace," *Ogden Standard Examiner*, Feb. 27, 1900, p. 6

"San Francisco Fair to Exhibit Washakie's Autobiography," *Richfield Reaper*, Dec. 8, 1938, p. 8

Pick a few articles to share with the class. Have them think about the point of view of the author and how it reflects a different period in history.



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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Allotment Information for Rocky Mountain BIA Region.

<http://www.indianlandtenure.org/ILTFallotment/specinfo/sc%20Rocky%20Mountain.pdf>.

Dramer, Kim. *The Shoshone*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1997.

Hebard, Grace Raymond. *Washakie: Chief of the Shoshones*. Introduction by Richard O. Clemmer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

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 and the Utah Division of State History, 2000.

"Promontory Point, May 10, 1896,"

<http://www.nwbshoshone-nsn.gov/culture/history/promontory.htm#content>.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

State Standards

Seventh Grade Social Studies – Utah Studies: 2/1/a&d; 3/1/c; 4/2/d; 5/2/d

Accreditation Competencies

Social and Civic Responsibility/Demonstrates an appreciation of diversity and interdependence of all people/Understands the history, people, and traditions that have shaped local communities, nations, and the world

NCSS Standards

Middle Grades: 2/b&c; 3/i; 5/a&e; 6/b,d&f



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AT A GLANCE: WASHAKIE AND HIS LEGACY

Chief Washakie was an important American Indian leader whose life spanned nearly one hundred years—from sometime around 1804 to 1900—and he witnessed many intense developments in Shoshone history. Washakie’s story is particularly informative because he lived through three important phases of American Indian–United States relations. When he was born, Native American nations made agreements with the United States as equal parties. Starting around 1828, however, the balance of power between Indians and the federal government shifted, and the United States enacted policies to remove and relocate Indians, usually in order to free up Indian lands for non-Indian settlers. Finally, starting in 1887, the government developed policies of assimilation and allotment, seeking to destroy the sovereign status of tribal communities. Washakie’s life stretched through these eras; thus, his experiences reflect the degrees of agency the Shoshone people exercised during these periods of change.

Washakie was born around 1801 in the Bitterroot Valley of what is now Montana. His father was a member of the Salish tribe and his mother was a member of the Shoshone tribe. When Washakie was about five years old, a group of Blackfoot Indians attacked the Salish village where he and his family lived. Washakie’s father was killed, and Washakie’s mother decided to take her children and try to return to her tribe. The family settled with the Lemhi Shoshones on the Salmon River in what is now Idaho.

Washakie lived with the Lemhi until, as a young man, he left to live with a group of Bannock

Indians for a few years before settling with a group of Shoshones in what is now southwestern Wyoming. Washakie married during this time and began hunting, trapping, and trading with non-Indian trappers and traders. Through these activities he befriended a number of non-Indian trappers and traders, including Jim Bridger. In addition to his activities in the fur trade, Washakie successfully participated in a number of battles defending the Shoshones against their enemies in the Blackfoot and Crow tribes. By the early 1840s, Washakie became the leader of a number of bands of Shoshones who lived in the area.

Washakie’s emergence as the leader of the Shoshone coincided with a dramatic increase in the white presence on Shoshone lands. In 1843 the first large group of settlers headed out across what came to be known as the Oregon Trail, and thousands of other whites followed, making their way to Oregon and California. In 1847, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, known as the Mormons, entered Shoshone territory and began to settle in Utah near the Great Salt Lake. Washakie was friendly to these various groups of early settlers, as were most other Shoshone leaders in the area. In 1851, the federal government, in an attempt to secure the safety of the overland trails, signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie with several Great Plains tribes. Though the Shoshones were not officially part of the treaty, Washakie and a contingent of Shoshones attended the negotiations. Washakie’s military strength and diplomacy impressed white officials, building his reputation as a great leader of the Shoshones.



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As white settlers pushed further into Shoshone lands and began to use, or interfere with, more and more of the vital resources of the area, tensions between settlers and some of the Shoshones rose. This was especially true of the area along the Snake River, in what is now southern Idaho and eastern Oregon, and in northern Utah. Beginning in the 1850s, in response to the destruction of water holes, game, and vital plant resources, Shoshone groups not directly affiliated with Chief Washakie began to conduct raids against emigrant groups.

In 1858 as a result of the “Utah War,” control over Indian affairs passed from Mormon leaders to U.S. government and military leaders. While tensions existed between the Mormons and the Shoshones prior to 1858, this change in leadership further destabilized the region. In January 1863, several small incidents of violence and theft between the Shoshones and settlers occurred near the town of Franklin, Washington Territory (now Idaho). On January 29, 1863 Colonel Patrick Edward Connor and about two-hundred army volunteers from Camp Douglas in Salt Lake City attacked a group of 450 Shoshone men, women, and children in a winter camp along the Bear River, about twelve miles from Franklin. In the early hours of the morning, Connor and his men surrounded the Shoshones and began a four-hour assault on the virtually defenseless group. Some 350 Shoshones were slaughtered by the troops, including many women and children. This was one of the most violent events in Utah’s history and the largest Indian massacre in U.S. history. Chief Sagwitch, who at the time had been trying to negotiate peace with the United States, survived. So did his young son Beshup Timimboo,

although he had been shot many times. 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. Many of the survivors escaped to Washakie’s camp in Wind River.

In the aftermath of the Bear River Massacre, the Shoshones felt the full impact of the federal government’s removal and relocation policies. In 1863 Washakie, along with other Shoshone leaders, signed a treaty at Fort Bridger that was designed to help keep peace between the Shoshones and the white emigrants and settlers. It allowed for white roads, ferries, and settlements, while only loosely defining what constituted Shoshone land. In the years following this treaty, the Shoshones under Washakie faced increasing conflict with neighboring groups and pressure from increased settlement. In 1867 Washakie and a local Indian agent requested that the Wind River Valley be set aside as a reservation, and in 1868 a second treaty was signed at Fort Bridger granting those lands to the eastern Shoshones under Washakie. However, between 1896 and 1904 this reservation was slowly whittled down to one-fifth of its original size.

Throughout these difficult times for the Shoshones, Chief Washakie offered friendship to the American settlers. For instance, he was a friend of Brigham Young, the leader of Mormon Church, and he and about three hundred other Shoshones converted to the LDS faith in 1880. Although Washakie would later convert to Episcopalianism, many Shoshones, including many from the Northwestern band, remained members of the Mormon Church.



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In 1876, after being displaced from farms in Corinne, Utah, many members of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone applied for land under the Homestead Act, and they and several Mormon families created what was eventually known as the Malad Indian Farm. Though this farm was later abandoned, it was an important step in the formation of the Washakie settlement and also demonstrates the ingenuity of the Northwestern band in using the Homestead Act, a tool of white expansion, to gain advantages for their own people. The Washakie settlement, named for the great Shoshone leader, was founded on lands purchased by the Mormon Church in 1881. The Northwestern Shoshones later expanded the Washakie settlement by filing for land under the Homestead Act.

While some Shoshones were able to use the tools of western expansion, to maintain a small amount of control over their original lands, ideas of assimilation continued to dominate federal Indian policy. On February 8, 1887, thirteen years before Washakie's death in 1900, Congress passed the

General Allotment or Dawes Act requiring that land be removed from tribal control, portioned to individuals, and the remainder opened to white settlement. As a result of this act over 18,000 acres were stripped from Washakie's Wind River Reservation by 1935.

In spite of these losses, as the name of the Washakie settlement attests, Washakie commanded respect among both Indians and non-Indians alike. Several locations and buildings throughout the West have been named for him, including the dining hall at the University of Wyoming in Laramie and a county in Wyoming. In World War II, the United States launched a both a battleship and a tugboat named after the statesman. A bronze statue of Washakie, donated by the state of Wyoming, is part of the National Statuary Hall collection in Washington, D.C.

THE LIFE OF CHIEF WASHAKIE

PART ONE: WASHAKIE'S EARLY LIFE



Chief Washakie

Historians don't know when Washakie was born, but many believe it was between 1800 and 1804. Through his participation in many adventures and battles, Washakie became a leader for the Shoshone nation. He negotiated many agreements between the Shoshones and the United States. Washakie lived for nearly one hundred years and had an exciting life.

As a young man he traveled through the western part of North America and traded with trappers and mountain men. He met many different people and learned English, French, and many Native American languages. Being able to get along with non-Indians helped him be a good leader for the Shoshone people. He was known for being good at communicating with others and being brave during battle for the Shoshone nation.

When Washakie was a young man, the American Indian nations and the U.S. military were equally strong. But non-Indians continued to move beyond the Mississippi River, eventually traveling as far west as Shoshone territory. To protect Shoshone lands, many men, Washakie included, went into battle against the United States and other Native American groups. Washakie fought fearlessly and became known as a fierce opponent.

D. B. Huntington, an interpreter between the Shoshones and the United States, wrote about Washakie:

The First Buffalo [Washakie] ever killed he skinned the pate, took the hair off, puckered it up, and tied it around a stick with a hole in it, and when it became perfectly dry it would rattle, and when the Sioux came to war with them, he would ride in among them and scare their horses; so they called him Wash-a-Kii, "The Rattler."

His name reminded people how tough he was in battle. But he wasn't just a fighter; Washakie was also interested in getting to know people from other backgrounds. He became friends with many U.S. settlers.

THE LIFE OF CHIEF WASHAKIE

PART TWO: WASHAKIE BECOMES A LEADER

Washakie became a leader of the Shoshone around 1851. By this time, the United States had a stronger military than many American Indians nations. Non-Indians were expanding across the continent, and they wanted Indian lands. Many tribal nations, including the Shoshones, agreed to give up some of their land to the United States in order to keep some land and avoid war. Washakie was a charismatic leader, and he used his leadership abilities to help negotiate treaties that ensured peace for the Shoshone people.

In the 1850s and 1860s, whites traveled through Shoshone territory on their way to the West Coast. The new travelers destroyed grasslands and killed game the Shoshones needed to survive. Sometimes they also killed Shoshone Indians. With their way of life threatened, some Shoshones fought back by stealing food and cattle from the settlers' wagons.

The U.S. government was angry that some Shoshones were causing trouble, so in January 1863, United States troops from Salt Lake City attacked a group of Shoshones camped along the Bear River near what is now Franklin, Idaho. The troops killed over 350 defenseless Shoshone people, including many women and children. This was the worst Indian massacre in U.S. history, and it showed the Shoshone people how far the government would go to protect white settlers.

Later that year, Washakie helped negotiate a treaty with the United States to ensure the safety of his people. The treaty, known as the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1863, promised safe travel to American settlers and reduced the amount of Shoshone land. Knowing how many had died at Bear River, Washakie may have signed the treaty because he was afraid for his people. The Fort Bridger Treaty of 1863 encouraged peace with these words:

Friendly and amicable relations are hereby re-established between the bands of the Shoshonee nation, parties hereto, and the United States; and it is declared that a firm and perpetual peace shall be henceforth maintained between the Shoshone nation and the United States.

A second treaty in 1868 took away even more Shoshone land, and many Shoshones had to move to the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Washakie could not keep the government from taking Shoshone land, but he is an important figure in Shoshone history because he helped established peace with the United States government.



Chief Washakie

THE LIFE OF CHIEF WASHAKIE

PART THREE: THE LEGACY OF WASHAKIE



Chief Washakie

There are many different groups of Shoshone Indians. Washakie led many of these groups, with the help of several sub-chiefs. One band that Washakie led was called the Northwestern Shoshone, who lived in what is now southeastern Idaho and northwestern Utah. Many Northwestern Shoshone had been killed in the Bear River Massacre; those who lived did not want to move to the Wind River Reservation or the nearby Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho. Instead, they worked hard to remain in their traditional homeland. In the 1880s, many Northwestern Shoshone moved to land near Brigham City. With help from members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they established a farm. They called the new settlement Washakie, in honor of their beloved leader. In 1882, two years after the settlement, the Washakie Day School opened to teach the Shoshone youth.

After a long life of service and high achievements, Washakie passed away on February 20, 1900. His influence and importance to the Shoshones and to the United States is still felt in Indian country and many western states. He is the only American Indian leader to receive a military funeral from the United States government.

In 2004 the state of Wyoming legislature dedicated a statue to the memory of Washakie with an inscription attributed to him:

I fought to keep our land, our water and our hunting grounds—today, education is the weapon my people need to protect them.

Washakie led an adventurous life, one of great service to Shoshone people. His commitment to peace is respected and admired by both American Indian and non-Indian people alike, and his legacy will always be remembered by the Northwestern Shoshone of Utah.