

Little Bighorn: The Native American View

Subject Areas: Social Studies, U.S. History, Native American Studies

Synopsis: Challenges historic views of “Custer’s Last Stand” by presenting the accounts given by three surviving Indian scouts who accompanied Lt. Col. George Custer on his mission. An exciting cinematic recreation details the events of the Battle. Includes insightful profiles of George Armstrong Custer, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Gall.

Learning Objectives:

- Objective 1)** Students will be able to explain the causes of the U.S. war against the Plains Indians as the context for the Battle of the Little Bighorn
- Objective 2)** Students will be able to name the leaders in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, including Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Gall, George Armstrong Custer, Marcus Reno, and Frederick Benteen
- Objective 3)** Students will be able to recall the events of the battle as recorded by three Indian scouts who accompanied Custer on his mission
- Objective 4)** Students will be able to examine the reasons for contradictory accounts of the battle

Vocabulary:

Wagon trains, reservations, flamboyant, ruthless, ambitious, egotistical, marauders, cavalry, Indian Wars, Plains Indians, gallantry, benign, retreat, scouts, siege, mercy, cowardice, carnage, villains

Pre-Viewing Questions and Activities:

- 1) Ask students to share what they know about the Battle of Little Bighorn and George Armstrong Custer.
- 2) Locate the traditional Sioux lands, the Black Hills, and the site of the Battle of the Little Bighorn on a map.

Post-Viewing Questions and Discussion:

- 1) Describe the Plains Indians’ villages. Why did they constantly move their camps? In what ways did westward expansion threaten their way of life? Why were the buffalo important to the Plains Indians? Why did Whites kill buffalo?
- 2) Where did the United States government want the Native Americans to live? Why did they refuse to move?
- 3) What did the government promise the Sioux in the Treaty of 1868? Why were the Black Hills significant to the Sioux? How did the U.S. government respond to the Sioux refusal to sell the Black Hills? Did the Sioux comply? Why not?

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- 4) Describe the leaders in the Battle of Little Bighorn: Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Gall, George Armstrong Custer, Marcus Reno, and Frederick Benteen. What was Custer's military rank during and after the Civil War? What were his experiences as an Indian fighter prior to Little Bighorn?
- 5) Describe Sitting Bull's vision before the Battle of Little Bighorn.
- 6) Why was Sitting Bull's village larger than expected? Why did Custer decide to attack the Indians despite the large number of Indian warriors?
- 7) According to Native American accounts, could the Battle of the Little Bighorn have turned out differently? How? What problems led to Custer's defeat?
- 8) In what ways did Indian accounts of the Battle of the Little Bighorn differ from traditional accounts of the battle? Why didn't White Americans believe Native American accounts of the Battle of Little Bighorn?

Additional Activities:

- 1) Have students write the story of the Battle of the Little Bighorn from the point of view of Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull or George Armstrong Custer. Guide students to relate their feelings and expectations before and after the battle.
- 2) Investigate the Sand Creek Massacre. How did this event affect Native American-U.S. relations?
- 3) Break the class into groups to research different aspects of Sioux culture, including community life, family structure, religious beliefs, the Sun Dance, and art. Have each group report their findings to the class.
- 4) Look Edward S. Curtis' photographs of the Plains Indians. His work can be viewed at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/curthome.html>. Write or report about how his pictures seem to portray Native Americans.

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