



Packing the West - Curriculum Guide

Standing Bear of the Ponca

To be used with Native American Film - Standing Bear of the Poncas

Content Standard - Culture and Cultural Diversity - Students demonstrate an understanding of the contributions and impacts of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies.

Content Standard - Time, Continuity, and Change - Students analyze events, people, problems, and ideas within their historical contexts.

Content Standard - People, Places, and Environments - Students apply their knowledge of the geographic themes (location, place, movement, region, and human/environment interactions) and skills to demonstrate an understanding of interrelationships among people, places, and environment.

General Introduction:

Standing Bear of the Ponca: His Trails and Trials

Native Americans, or those people who are often called Indians, were some of the first people living in North America. Each tribe usually had their own language, customs, and way of life. Their lives depended upon nature, so they respected nature, seldom wasted anything, and had their own religion and stories. Some tribes stayed in one place and did more farming than hunting. Other tribes moved around a lot, hunting, and doing more gathering than farming. Related tribes often lived near each other for protection from enemy tribes.



Many different Indian tribes lived in North America, and several of those lived in what is now the state of Nebraska. At one time, the Ponca, Omaha, Otoe-Missouria, Winnebago, Pawnee, and other farming tribes lived there, in their very old villages, in central or eastern Nebraska, and away from enemy tribes who often lived more to the north and west. When Europeans and other Easterners moved into what is now Nebraska, many non-Native towns and cities like Omaha, Lincoln, and others started to grow. Then, Native tribes were often forced off their ancient homelands and were moved to other areas much further away. That happened to the Ponca Tribe. In 1868, the U.S. government gave away the Ponca lands to the Sioux or

Lakota—an enemy of the Poncas. Then Ponca leaders and their families and followers were taken south to what is now Oklahoma to look at their new reservation there. The Ponca leaders did not like it, but the government had decided that was where they were to go.

The Ponca tribe protested, but they were forced to leave Nebraska in 1877 and move almost 500 miles south, to an unfamiliar place. That led to many troubles. Many of the Ponca had to walk most of the way. They could not take much with them. They were sad to leave their villages, their homes, and, of course, the graveyards where their families had been buried. They were forced to move to more southern lands that often did not grow the same crops that the Poncas had grown for centuries, to a place where they had no shelter and no food, and where the weather was very different than what they were used to. It was a time of great suffering, problems, and personal troubles. Many Ponca people died along the way. Those people were buried beside a trail that some people called the Trail of Tears, along the path to their new reservation lands in Oklahoma Territory—or what later came to be called Indian Territory.

Standing Bear of the Ponca: Graves Along the Trail

(View the Nebraska Stories at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKQ2JEs8380>)

Many people died while on that Ponca Trail of Tears. One of the first was White Buffalo Girl, a Ponca child (1 ½ years old), who died on May 23, 1877, near Neligh, Nebraska. ...And there, her parents Black Elk and Moon Hawk of the Ponca tribe had to bury her.

White Buffalo Girl was not Standing Bear's child, but she was one of his people just as his own daughter, Prairie Flower, was. So, he begged the people of Neligh to take care of her as their own. As he later said, "I want the whites (white people) to respect the grave of my child just as they do the graves of their own dead. The Indians don't like to leave the graves of their ancestors but we had to move and hope it will be for the best. I leave the grave in your care. I may never see it again. Care for it for me."

The people of Neligh took Standing Bear's words to heart. They continue to take great care of White Buffalo Girl's grave even today. It is on top of a hill at the edge of Neligh's Laurel Hill Cemetery. Her grave first had a wooden cross, but now it has a granite marker, and people truly respect her grave. White Buffalo Girl's grave is always decorated—often with flowers, toys, beadwork, and lots of other pretty things—all year, even when the rest of the cemetery is bare, according to the cemetery rules.

One of Standing Bear's daughters, Prairie Flower, also died not much further down that trail. She was buried near Milford, Nebraska. There, Standing Bear asked the people of Milford to take care of his own daughter's grave—just like he had asked the people of Neligh to do for White Buffalo Girl. His grand-daughter would also die further down the trail. Many white people felt sorry for what the Ponca were going through. Things would not get better for many years.

The Ponca were not the only Native Americans who were forced from their homelands to another place. Many tribes from Nebraska, Kansas, and other states were also forcibly removed to other areas of the country, especially to Oklahoma Territory, before it became a state. So many tribes were moved to Indian Reservations there, that for a time, Oklahoma was called "Indian Territory."

Activity #1 – Mapping the Ponca Trail of Tears

Purpose: Students will have an opportunity to learn about geographic place names and connect specific locations along the Ponca Trail of Tears (sometimes called Chief Standing Bear Trail).

(Teachers: Use the interactive map at

<http://chiefstandingbearmap.com/neatline/fullscreen/ponca-removal-trail-map> and/or

<https://chiefstandingbear.org> to have students map many of the following sites or areas on a paper map to show the trail. Possible extra credit for marking other adjoining tribal reservations and possibly rivers.)

Map the following places:

- **Nebraska** (the territory and state where the Ponca first lived in the 1800s)
- **Niobrara River** and **Missouri River** in Nebraska
- **Ponca Reservation** near **Niobrara**, in Nebraska
- **Ponca, Neligh** (White Buffalo Girl's Grave), **Omaha, Columbus, Seward, Milford** (Prairie Flower's Grave), **Lincoln, Beatrice** (towns all in Nebraska)
- **Marysville, Manhattan, Emporia, Council Grove** (towns in Kansas)
- **Baxter Springs** and/or **Joplin** (towns in Missouri)
- **Quapaw Agency** and/or **Ponca City** (in Oklahoma)
- **Kansas** (state)
- **Missouri** (state)
- **Oklahoma** (state)

Activity #2—Trails, Trials, and other Multiple Meaning Words

The English language is a language that is not only used in England but is also used in the United States. But the English language is often very confusing, because our language actually has many words that have multiple meanings or more than one meaning for the same word. Some of those words are even used in this Standing Bear lesson plan. Use the Word Bank words below to fill in the blank with the word that fits the definitions in each sentence.

Word Bank: **grave** **reservation** **right** **trail** **trial**

1. The word _____ can be **the opposite of left** or it can mean **a freedom**.
2. The word _____ can mean **hard times** or a **problem** or a **court case**.
3. The word _____ can mean **to follow behind** or it can be a **pathway**.
4. The word _____ can be **a place saved for dinner** or a **place where American Indian tribes often live today**.
5. The word _____ can mean **something very serious** or a **burial place**.

Some of those words even have other definitions or meanings. Can you think of some of those?

Standing Bear of the Ponca: Another Trail Back to Nebraska

For at least two years, the Ponca tribe suffered terribly in Oklahoma. There, nearly one-third of the tribe died. The Ponca leader named Standing Bear even lost a second child of his own—this time it was his eldest son, Bear Shield. As Bear Shield was dying, he begged his father to take his body back home to Nebraska for burial. Standing Bear did take his son's body and his Ponca followers back home to Nebraska, but he took a different trail, further west and then north, to Nebraska. However, it was against the law for the Ponca people to leave Oklahoma and to be back in Nebraska without permission. No one knew what to do with Chief Standing Bear and his band of 30 or more Ponca people, when they came back to Nebraska. They had no land there anymore, so Standing Bear's people stayed with Chief Joseph (also known as "Iron Eye") La Flesche, chief of the Omaha tribe. But the Ponca could not stay there forever, and they refused to go back to Oklahoma. What could be done?

An Army officer named General George Crook was then ordered to arrest Standing Bear for leaving the Oklahoma reservation without permission. General Crook did arrest Standing Bear, but he also respected Standing Bear and he felt sorry for him and the Ponca people. So, General Crook told Standing Bear to use U.S. laws to demand a trial, just like any other American—even though Native Americans (and many other people, especially people of color) did not yet have rights, and Chief Standing Bear was not even considered to be a person under the law, at that time.

General Information:

The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

When the United States of America first became an independent country, our leaders realized that they needed to establish a government and to make some important rules or laws for its citizens. (**Citizens** are the people who legally live in or were born in a particular country. People born in the United States or born to American Citizens are automatically citizens and are called **U.S. Citizens** or American Citizens. **Naturalized citizens** are people from other countries who legally took certain classes and also took an **oath** (a declaration to keep a promise, no matter what) saying they understood and agreed to obey the laws and responsibilities of being a U.S. Citizen.

Those early leaders soon wrote something called the U.S. **Constitution**. The Constitution is a document that explained their purpose for becoming a nation, detailed the organization of the three branches of the government, and defined the Constitution as the supreme law, or the main law, of the land.

Those early American leaders added ten **amendments** (additions or changes) to the Constitution. Those first ten amendments are also an important part of the Constitution. They are called **the Bill of Rights**, and they make up a list of laws or **legal rights** that protect the citizens of our country from other people and also from the government, so that the government cannot become overly powerful. (More amendments have been added over the years, but those additional amendments are not considered part of the Bill of Rights.) The Bill of Rights and some other amendments to the Constitution are also called civil rights.

Civil rights are the rights that citizens have, to protect themselves, their families, and their property. Those Civil Rights ensure citizens' political and social freedoms and equality. The United States of America probably has the most civil rights, freedoms, and equality of any country in the world.

Some of those many Civil Rights include:

- *Freedom of speech (to be able to say what you think)**
- *Freedom of the press (to be able to write what you think or want to write)**
- *Freedom of religion (to be able to worship as you please)**
- *Freedom of assembly (to be able to gather together)**
- *Freedom to petition (to write or contact) the government (if you believe something is unfair/wrong)**
- *Freedom (or the Right) to vote**
- *Freedom (or the Right) to have a fair trial**
- *The Right to remain silent if arrested**

U.S. or American Citizens are guaranteed those and other Civil Rights by law, but Civil Rights are not intended to be used to hurt or harm others. Also, if a person is arrested and found guilty of major crimes, he or she may lose some or all of their own Civil Rights. All of that is true, but until the late 1800s, those civil rights were not for all people. Native Americans and other people of color did not always have those rights...yet. ...Not until Standing Bear's trial....

Activity #3—Vocabulary Matching

Purpose: Read the previous General Information section on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Civil Rights. Then use the correct vocabulary word or words from the word bank to fill in the blanks to show that you understand.

Word Bank:

amendment

the Bill of Rights

the Constitution

oath

U.S. Citizen

Naturalized Citizen

laws

civil rights

_____ - a change, addition, or correction, sometimes to a law

_____ - a declaration to keep a promise, no matter what happens

_____ - the first ten amendments to the Constitution

_____ - a document that is the supreme law of the land in America

_____ - a person born in the United States or to American parents

_____ - a person who took an oath to be an American citizen

_____ - rights involving social and political freedoms and equality

_____ - legal rules

Watch the video if students have not already done so.

Activity #4—(Extension for older students)

So, the big question for this lesson could be: **Should Standing Bear have been considered an American Citizen?**

1. What do you know about Standing Bear and his people that could prove that he should have been considered an American citizen? (Hint: In what country was he born? Or why was he able to go on trial?)
2. Look up the following term and tell how it relates to Standing Bear's trial: *Habeas corpus*
3. Standing Bear had many people on his side when he went on trial. Use or read the book *Standing Bear of the Ponca* by Virginia Driving-Hawk Sneve, or use other sources, to research the following people and tell who they were and how they helped and/or how they were against Standing Bear:

- * Joseph "Iron Eye" La Flesche
- * General George C. Crook
- * Thomas Tibbles
- * Susette La Flesche (later Susette La Flesche Tibbles)
- * John Webster and Andrew Poppleton
- * Genio Lamberson
- * Judge Elmer Dundy

Activity #5—Extensions for Further or Advanced Study

Possible Discussion Questions for Extensions: Re-read the Civil Rights or Freedoms listed in the Section on the Constitution and Civil Rights, then discuss some of the following:

Which of those rights did Standing Bear use to protect himself and his people and to help them regain their old land?

If he had known his rights, which other Civil Rights could he have used to help himself and his people?

How did the Trial of Standing Bear help other Indians or Native Americans ...or other people?

Do you think it might have helped people of other races or religions? If so, who and how?

Can you think of others who might have benefitted from Standing Bear's trial?

Did people respect Standing Bear after he went to trial? How do you know?

Why are Civil Rights important? How do they protect people who are American Citizens?

Why are laws important?

Can you name any other famous people who have used their Civil Rights to protect themselves/themselves?

Standing Bear of the Ponca: At and After His Court Trial

During his trial, Standing Bear had the option (or choice) to speak, or **not** to speak. From what you saw in the video or have read in books, what did he choose to do?

Some people believe that his short but important questions or speech about the color of his hand and about his blood were the most important reason that good things happened for him and for his people after the trial. What comparisons did Standing Bear make?

The whole story of *Standing Bear's Trial and Speech* was carried by the *Indian Journal* (no date given) and is online at [The Trial of Chief Standing Bear v. General Crook - Home \(weebly.com\)](#) and also at [Stories Worth Rereading > Standing Bear's Speech | Various \(timelesstruths.org\)](#) [Standing Bear's Courtroom Speech – Native American Heritage Month | United States Courts \(uscourts.gov\)](#). During that speech, note that Standing Bear chose to speak for himself, and compared his hand (and the blood that came from it) to the hand and blood of any man or person. That speech has been called the "I Am a Man" speech. But his speech was actually much longer and told of a dream that he had had, about himself, his wife, and their daughter, and how they needed to stay in Nebraska or the floodwaters of life would drown them all. People in the courthouse actually cried when they heard that part of the story. Then Standing Bear said that his life was in the hands of the judge.

After that, Judge Elmer Dundy closed the case for the day and went back to his office to think about what he had seen and heard, as noted in [Standing Bear's Courtroom Speech – Native American Heritage Month | United States Courts \(uscourts.gov\)](#). The judge was so convinced by the speech that he later said that Standing Bear and all Native people were persons or people under the law. He said that Standing Bear could bury his son's body in the old Ponca graveyard. He also said that Standing Bear's followers could stay in Nebraska and have a reservation of their own. And that is where Standing Bear's Ponca people often live today. (The other Ponca people who were still in Oklahoma stayed there.)

After the trial was over, Standing Bear toured several cities in the United States with Thomas Tibbles and with Susette La Flesche Tibbles as Standing Bear's translator.

Recently, Standing Bear has been memorialized in many statues in Nebraska and other areas, and is often shown holding out his hand. One of those statues can be found near the Nebraska state capitol building on Centennial Mall in downtown Lincoln, the capital city of Nebraska. That statue stands ten feet tall. A nine-foot-tall statue of Standing Bear also now stands in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol Building, in Washington, D.C. Standing Bear (of the Ponca) is used as a role model and is studied in the school curriculum of Nebraska, Oklahoma, and sometimes in other states.

Additional Resources

Elementary Standing Bear Books

Keating, Frank. *The Trial of Standing Bear*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 2008, 14 pp.

Sneve, Virginia Driving-Hawk. *Standing Bear of the Ponca*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2008, 56 pp.

Middle and High School Standing Bear Books

Brennan, John. *“I Have Found a Better Way”: The Story of Standing Bear of the Ponca Tribe*. BookSurge, 2008, 400 pp.

Dando-Collins, Stephen. *Standing Bear Is a Person: The True Story of a Native American’s Quest for Justice*. DeCapo Press, 2009, 290 pp.

Dwyer, Lawrence A. *Standing Bear’s Quest for Freedom: First Civil Rights Victory for Native Americans*. KLD Books, 2019, 262 pp.

Headman, Louis V. *Dictionary of the Ponca People*. Lincoln, NE: 2020, 408 pp.

Headman, Louis V. *Walks on the Ground: A Tribal History of the Ponca*. Lincoln, NE: 2020, 570 pp.

Howard, James H. *The Ponca Tribe*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2010, 240 pp.

Mathes, Valarie S. *The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform*. University of Illinois Press, 2003, 240 pp.

Schurz, Carl. *Removal of the Ponca Indians*. CreateSpace, 2015, 26 pp.

Sneve, Virginia Driving-Hawk. *Standing Bear of the Ponca*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2008, 56 pp.

Starita, Joe. *“I Am a Man”: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice*. St. Martin’s Press, 2010, 280 pp.

Tibbles, Thomas Henry. *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1972, 143 pp.

Other Educational Media

Standing Bear's Footsteps: Meaning of Home. PBS. Available from <https://thinktv.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/standing-bears-footsteps-meaning-of-home/> grades 3-5, 6-8.

Other Media on White Buffalo Girl is available online at <https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/white-buffalo-girl> <https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2021/june/04/the-legacy-of-white-buffalo-girl-and-the-resiliency-of-a-people/> <https://www.railstotrails.org/media/1064111/white-buffalo-girl-gravesite-courtesy-antelope-county-museum-neligh-ne.jpg> (picture of White Buffalo Girl's grave at the Neligh Cemetery) <https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/white-buffalo-girl>; at the Rails to Trails Conservancy at the Antelope County (Nebraska) Museum site at <https://www.antelopcounty-museum.org/notable-residents/white-buffalo-girl>; and at <https://www.neligh.org/vnews/display.v/ART/5c86877aba813>; as well as other sites.]



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