



SOCIAL SCIENCES

Changing Land, Enduring People: Oregon Tribes and the Dawes Act

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Sovereignty & History**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will understand:

- the impact of the Dawes Act on Oregon Tribes,
- Treaties and how they took away Tribes' land, and
- How Tribes maintained cultural connections to their land despite these changes.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did tribal lands change over time?
- What is an allotment?
- What is the Dawes Act, and how did it change the way Oregon Tribes lived on their land?

REQUIRED TIME

- 30 minutes

Overview

Students will learn about the impact of the Dawes Act on different Oregon Tribes' land. They will learn about how Native Nations adapted to significant changes while maintaining their cultural identities and connections to the land. The lesson activities will help students visualize the loss of shared land and community and honor Native ecological knowledge. The lesson encourages students to build greater empathy through discussion.

Background for Teachers

The Dawes Act of 1887 (also known as the General Allotment Act) divided reservation lands into individual parcels for Native American families. This dramatically altered the traditional communal land-use practices of Tribes. In Oregon, different Tribes experienced and responded to this harmful policy in various ways. While the Dawes Act intended to assimilate Native Americans into Euro-American farming practices, Tribes found ways to adapt while



preserving important cultural connections to their lands and communities. Additional information on the impact of the Dawes Act can be found at [Oregon History Project](#).

Considerations for Teachers

Practices

While teaching this lesson, the following principles can help guide your decision-making and engagement with students.

- Keep language simple and accessible for 2nd grade readers.
- Use plenty of visuals to support understanding.
- Focus on the shift from communal land to allotments of land, not just the loss of land.

Success Criteria

- I can explain in simple terms what the Dawes Act was and how it changed tribal lands.
- I can explain how acts of the federal government took away Tribes' land.
- I can identify ways Oregon tribes adapted to changes while maintaining their culture.

For the following activities, use the slide deck to support your implementation.

STANDARDS

Oregon Social Science Standards

2.G.GR.1. Use the information on maps and other geographic tools to locate, identify, and describe the physical and human features of the community.

2.G.GR.2. Utilize maps and globes to investigate and identify the world's physical geography.

2.G.HI.6. Examine the group identities in a community and describe how a diversity of cultural elements can enrich it.

Oregon Arts Standards

VA.10.CO1.2. Create works of art about events in home, school or community life (e.g. narrative, documentation).

KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Treaty:** an agreement between sovereign nations
- **Reservation:** land set aside for tribal communities by federal treaties.
- **Allotment:** a small plot of land
- **Communal:** shared by a community



Opening

Time: 5-10 minutes

Step 1:

Explain to students that today, they will learn about an important law called the Dawes Act and how it changed life for Oregon Tribes.

Step 2:

Review the learning outcomes and success criteria with students.

Step 3:

Show two maps. The first map is of Tribal lands prior to treaties with the U.S. government. The second map is of tribal lands as reservation currently.

Ask students

- What do you notice about these two maps? What is different?

Step 4:

Review the key words and ideas with students.

Main Activity

Time: 15 minutes

Step 1:

Read the handout reading aloud to students or provide them copies to read themselves.

Have students turn and talk about the effects of the Dawes Act. Then facilitate a whole group discussion with students on the topic.

Step 2:

Give students a large piece of paper that represents tribal lands in Oregon. You can also use the handout at the end of this document.

Have students draw the resources and living spaces Tribes used on the lands- have them include:

- A plankhouse- a house large enough for 8 whole families to live in, or 50-70 people
- A stream to fish in
- An area with small bushes and grasses where roots would grow like camas
- Mountains or hills where deer and elk would be hunted

Step 3:

Have students fold their paper into eight sections to represent the land being divided.

Have students cross out two sections to represent the allotments sold to non-tribal members.

Tell the students: "Pick one section, and circle it. Pretend that is your allotment. Write down at least one thing you could still do, if you were only allowed to use that section. Write at least two things you would not be able to do any more.

Step 4:

Bring the students together in a whole group and say to them, "Tell me what you lost access to that was outside the section you circled."

Provide students with sentence stems to support their explanations, such as, "In the allotment, we could _____, but we could not _____."

Make a list on the board of student responses.

Ask students to tell the class what they lost access to, what was outside the allotment they circled.

Add to the list on the board. Then ask students,

- "What do you notice about our lists?"
- "How do you think it affected the Tribe to lose those land parcels that were sold off?"



Closing

Time: 5 minutes

Step 1:

With the whole class, review what the Dawes Act was and how it changed tribal lands.

Ask the class,

“Who can remind us of what the Dawes Act was?”

“Can someone else tell us how the Dawes Act changed tribal lands?”

Step 2:

Discuss with the class what Tribes were still able to do with the allotment they circled.

Make the connection to what Oregon Tribes are still able to do to maintain their identity and culture even with smaller amounts of land.

Step 3:

Ask students to complete the self-assessment. Review the success criteria with them as needed

Additional Resources

4th grade ELA and Social Sciences lesson, [Mapping our Land](#), by the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Below are additional lesson resources.

- [Mapping our Land Presentation](#)
- Handout: [The People are Dancing Again - Chapter 1](#)
- [Student Map Handout](#)

Handout: The Dawes Act

The Dawes Act was a law passed in 1887 that changed how Native American Tribes lived on their land. Before this law, Tribes shared the land and moved with the seasons to hunt, fish, and farm in ways that worked with nature. They had agreements, called treaties, with the U.S. government to protect their land and way of life.

But the federal government broke those agreements. The Dawes Act split up tribal land into small pieces called "allotments." Each Native American family was supposed to get a piece of land, usually about 160 acres. The U.S. government wanted them to live like settlers and farm in one place instead of moving and working together as a Tribe. Any land left over after giving out allotments was sold to non-Native people. Many Native families didn't get the land they were promised, and Tribes lost more than half of their land. This made it hard for Native communities to stay together and continue their traditional ways of life.

How do you think the Dawes Act changed life for Native American families?



Student Self-Assessment

Name:

Directions: Read the lesson success criteria in the first column. Then decide, did I meet these criteria? Choose Not Yet or Yes.

If you chose Not Yet, share one thing you can do to meet the criteria.

If you chose Yes, share what you did well to meet that criterion.

Success Criteria	Not Yet	Yes
		
I can explain in simple terms what the Dawes Act was and how it changed tribal lands.		
I can explain how acts of the federal government took away Tribes' land.		
I can identify ways Oregon Tribes adapted to changes while maintaining their culture.		

Handout: Tribal Land Drawing

