

## Shifting Power on the Plains Lesson Plan - "The Ballad of the Frontier Nations"

Grade Levels: 3rd grade-High School

Content Areas: music, history, social studies and English classes

Objectives:

1. To define ballad as a song that tells a story.
2. To become aware of the story of the Plains Indians and their relationship with the US Military in the 1800's through original lyrics for a song. I have chosen four topics to be the focus of 4 verses of a song entitled, "The Ballad of the Frontier Nations."

Verse one introduces the Indians and the fact that their way of life upon the open range was about to change. It brings in the topic of trading posts and the fur trade, and the prospect that the Indians could benefit from this initial introduction to whites. It hints of danger to come.

Verse two introduces the first treaty of Fort Laramie. It describes how tribes gathered (16,000 along the Platte River) to sign a treaty with the U.S. Government to live in peace. Safe passage of the emigrants was guaranteed for monetary compensation and defined boundaries. Considering that many of these tribes warred among each other, it was remarkable that they all came together. Unfortunately, it was the first of many treaties which were broken. The 2nd Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 can be tied into this discussion.

Verse three talks about the life of a soldier in these times. It talks about hardship on their end as well. ( They earned 13 to 15 dollars per month. A toothbrush cost \$1.50 and most had to pay to have their laundry done. They lived mostly on hardtack and bacon..) It introduces the Buffalo (Black) soldiers and their pride in serving their country. (Bob Marley paid tribute to them in a 1983 song called "Buffalo Soldier.") Finally it gives honor to all those who serve in the military and our civic duty to be grateful for their services.

Verse four deals with the topic of Wounded Knee. It gives some background as to what led up to the massacre, with the religion of the Ghost Dance that made the military very nervous, and the fears of the Indians in losing their way of life. It shows how fear can cause people to react in a negative way. Due to conflicting accounts of what happened there, it simply says that a shot was fired and much blood was shed. The last part alludes to the more modern day tempest which occurred there in 1973.

The chorus recognizes the validity of all sides as nations, and the pain that came with change. It seeks to give credence to the ongoing importance of history. Understanding this story gives relevance to attitudes that still linger today. It is important to note that more positive change comes through understanding on all sides.

In writing the verses, I tried to build in a new perspective that captured what we learned each day. The more I learned, the more I had to change the verses to reflect those perspectives.

- 3 To invoke discussion about Indian tribes, trading posts, treaties, soldiers and battles.
4. To aid in making the story memorable through rhyme and music.

Materials: Song Lyrics - The Ballad of the Frontier Nations - Lyrics by Dianna Spirk  
Music - Music K-8 Vol. 17 CD # 4 Track 17 (Accompaniment to Jamestown)  
Plankroad Publishing, Wawautosa, WI

### The Ballad of the Frontier Nations

vs. 1 In the 1800's there came the winds of change.  
The Indians roamed in freedom upon the open range.  
At times the Indians prospered by trading furs for guns.  
But guns were just an omen of tragic things to come..

Chorus: Frontier Nations, change that comes with pain.  
Frontier nations, your story will remain. Your story will remain.

vs. 2 In 1851, a great gathering did occur.  
The tribes from all the plains came, enemies though they were.  
Encamped outside Fort Laramie, they pledged to come in peace.  
They signed a brand new treaty, hoping strife would cease.

Chorus

vs. 3 A soldier's life was hard and for very little pay.  
They worked and followed orders every single day.  
And even Buffalo soldiers proudly served among the ranks.  
Just as it is today, few stop to give them thanks.

Chorus

vs. 4 And then we come to Wounded Knee, a tragedy born of fear.  
The Military feared when the Ghost Dance did appear.  
The Indians were afraid of a changing way of life.  
A shot was fired, much blood was shed, the memories still bring strife.

Chorus

### Extending the lesson

1. Ask questions about the story after listening to lyrics.
2. Have students write a paper on a part of the song that interests them..
3. Have students write a ballad about a story they know.
4. Act out the story, assigning each verse to a small group.
5. Choose classroom percussion instruments to help tell the story through sound effects and beat patterns. Use rainsticks, drums, jingle bells, wood blocks, whistles or whatever the kids come up with.
- 6.. Play Bob Marley's "Buffalo Soldier" .