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National Endowment for the Humanities
Landmarks of American History and Culture
Shifting Power on the Plains: Fort Robinson and the American West
Lesson Plan

I Am a Man by Joe Starita:
***SPAWN* Writing (S - Special Powers, P –Problem Solving, A – Alternative View
Points, W – What If? N –Next)**

I. Introduction

Students will be required to read *I Am a Man* by Joe Starita. If time does not allow for students to read the entire book the teacher may decide to assign portions of the book. The teacher will assign stimulating and meaningful *SPAWN* prompts. Students will reflect on Standing Bear's plight and respond using the *SPAWN* literacy strategy.

II. Guiding Question

How did Standing Bear go about convincing Judge Elmer S. Dundy and the jury that that Native Americans are "persons within the meaning of the law" and are entitled to the right of habeus corpus?

III. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of what it is to be human as illustrated by Chief Standing Bear.
- Understand the term habeus corpus and the significance of this right in Chief Standing Bear's case.
- Connect an aspect of Standing Bear's story to prior knowledge or real-life experiences or related text.

IV. Teaching Process

Review the Louisiana Content Literacy Strategy Descriptions,
<http://www.lpssonline.com/uploads/MicrosoftWordLitStrategiesDescriptions.pdf>.

V. Suggested Prompts

S – Special Powers

You have the power to turn yourself into a fly. You are a fly on the wall at Chief Standing Bear’s trial. Choose one person on the jury and follow him around. Follow him behind closed doors when the jury is deciding this case. Write about what happened behind closed doors. Was this an easy case to decide or did the jury argue? Give us the inside scoop.

P – Problem Solving

After reading *I Am a Man*, what can you say about both the compassion and prejudice of the people of America? What made the Great Plains the perfect setting for civil rights struggles?

A – Alternative View

Chief Standing Bear addresses the jury, “That hand is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow, and I shall feel pain. The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me, and I am a man. I never committed any crime. If I had, I would not stand here to make a defense. I would suffer the punishment and make no complaint.” Do you agree with Standing Bear? Is he a lot like you? Are the courts today “the great levelers,” making us all equal, or do wealth and race play a role in the way justice is distributed in America?

W – What If?

Chief Standing Bear says, “But in the center of the path there stands a man. Behind him I see soldiers in number like the leaves of the trees. If that man gives me the permission, I may pass on to life and liberty. If he refuses, I must go back and sink beneath the flood.”

Then, in a lower tone, “You are that man.”

What if you could make a difference in somebody’s life? Would you grab hold of the opportunity? What sacrifices would you be willing to make? How far would you go?

N – Next

What is next? What needs to be done today as far as civil rights?

VI. Assessment

The teacher may use the prompts above or create his/her own. Try to address comprehension and reasoning skills, higher-order thinking, and connections between text and real-life experiences. Prompts can be used to begin discussions, for journaling, writing essays or for assessments. When discussing, students employ active listening. Students should recognize strong insight offered by peers.