

THE DAWES ACT AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN

A re-creation of the conflict between pro and con factions,
debating whether or not the Native Americans should be “Americanized”

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Why was there a demand to solve the “Indian problem” in the 1880s?

This historical re-creation has students participate as members of Congress during the 1880s. They role-play members of three congressional factions debating how to deal with “the Indian problem.” The specific piece of legislation under consideration, the Dawes Act of 1887, was a controversial action taken by the federal government. As your students get deeply involved in the many issues related to how Indians have been treated in American history, they will experience the following:

Knowledge

1. Learning that the Dawes Severalty Act was a move to break up Indian tribal autonomy, even on the reservations.
2. Realizing that the opinion regarding the Dawes Act was definitely not unanimous: strong arguments were advanced by sides favoring and opposing the act.
3. Understanding that the decision to “civilize” the Indian was brought about by the government’s belief that this was the greatest gift the white man could give the red man.
4. Learning that the growth of a nation is a long, slow process characterized by continual challenge and change.

Attitudes

1. Recognizing the democratic alternatives that can be used to legislate a solution to a national problem.
2. Understanding the vast scope of “the Indian problem” and the many alternatives that could be tried as solutions.
3. Realizing the difficulty in solving problems when two powerful viewpoints are in conflict.

Skills

1. Using various types of information and contrary points of view as sources for a specific purpose.
2. Working effectively with others in planning, executing, and evaluating a group activity.
3. Making individual and small group decisions.
4. Organizing and presenting information clearly and accurately.

OVERVIEW



Four class periods—or days—are needed for this re-creation of the Dawes Act and the American Indian.

Day 1

In the first hour students are given background information concerning events of this historical period. Students are divided into three congressional factions: Pro, Con, and Undecided. With the aid of general and specific information provided, these factions meet and assign specific arguments for members to present during the second hour. An overnight assignment is provided.

Days 2-3


During the second and third hours the classroom is divided with the three factions seated to the left, right, and center of the chairperson. (You will likely be the chairperson.) The Pro and Con faction members speak alternately for and against Issue 1. After each side's argument is presented, the Undecided speakers will ask questions of the Pro and Con members. This sequence is followed for the remaining issues. After the debate has concluded, a vote is taken. An overnight assignment is provided.

Day 4

The class is again divided in the final hour for debriefing/testing. Emphasis is placed on the contemporary relevance of the Indian problem in modern society.



SETUP DIRECTIONS



Note: You will not need to duplicate the bulleted items the first time you use this re-creation, for Interact has provided different colored handouts for those students playing roles. If you choose to give the PRE-TEST and POST-TEST you will have to duplicate them. All other necessary items are in the Student Guide.

You will likely wish to divide the students so that each of the three groups has an equal number of capable students—particularly in their ability to speak.

- 1. Decision about time** This re-creation was written to function within four class periods—one for preparation, two for the re-creation, and one for the debriefing. However, after carefully studying the Student Guide pages and the various handouts in this Teacher Guide, you may want to alter it significantly because of your students' abilities, the materials on hand, and the time pressures you feel.
- 2. Handouts** See note at left the first time you use this re-creation. For subsequent classes, duplicate the number in parentheses, using the masters in this Teacher Guide.
 - PRO LEADER (one: one page)
 - PRO ARGUMENT: Issue 1 (one: one page)
 - PRO ARGUMENT: Issue 2 (one: one page)
 - PRO ARGUMENT: Issue 3 (one: one page)
 - PRO ARGUMENT: Issue 4 (one: one page)
 - PRO ARGUMENT: Issue 5 (one: one page)
 - CON LEADER (one: one page)
 - CON ARGUMENT: Issue 1 (one: one page)
 - CON ARGUMENT: Issue 2 (one: one page)
 - CON ARGUMENT: Issue 3 (one: one page)
 - CON ARGUMENT: Issue 4 (one: one page)
 - CON ARGUMENT: Issue 5 (one: one page)
 - UNDECIDED LEADER (one: one page)
 - UNDECIDED QUESTIONS (one: three pages for five questioners—cut apart Issues 1 and 2, 3 and 4 on broken lines)

Optional:

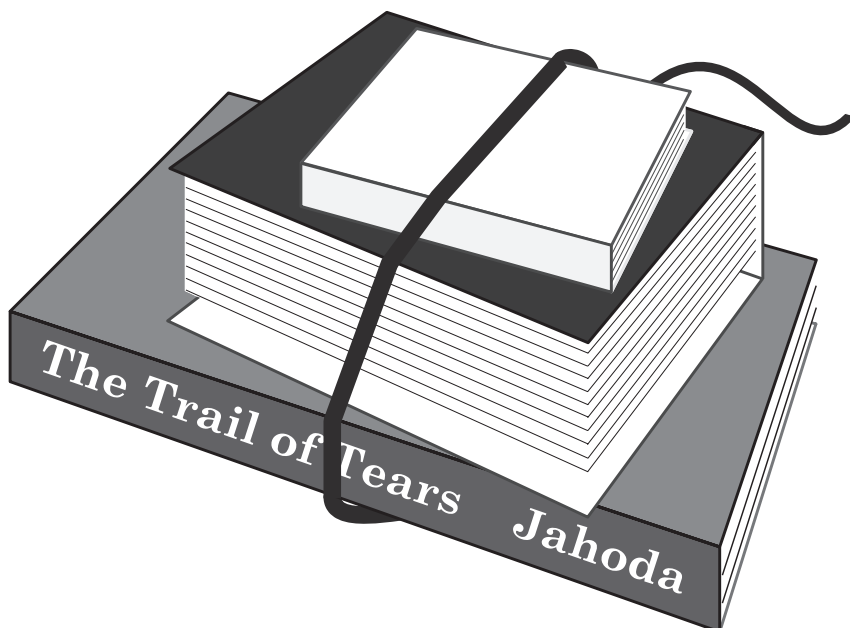
 - * PRE-TEST (class set—see master in Teacher Guide)
 - * POST-TEST (class set—see master in Teacher Guide)
- 3. Grouping** Decide if you wish to assign students to groups or allow students to group themselves. Divide the class into one-third Pro, one-third Con, and one-third Undecided.
- 4. Chairperson** As the teacher you may wish to assume the role of chairperson of the Congress to keep the Congress organized and the ideas flowing. However, you may wish to give a capable, experienced student this role.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Consider speaking to your friendly librarian. Ask him/her to set up a special DAWES ACT RESERVE bookshelf so that your capable students can check out books early in order to “flesh out” their identities.

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DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 1



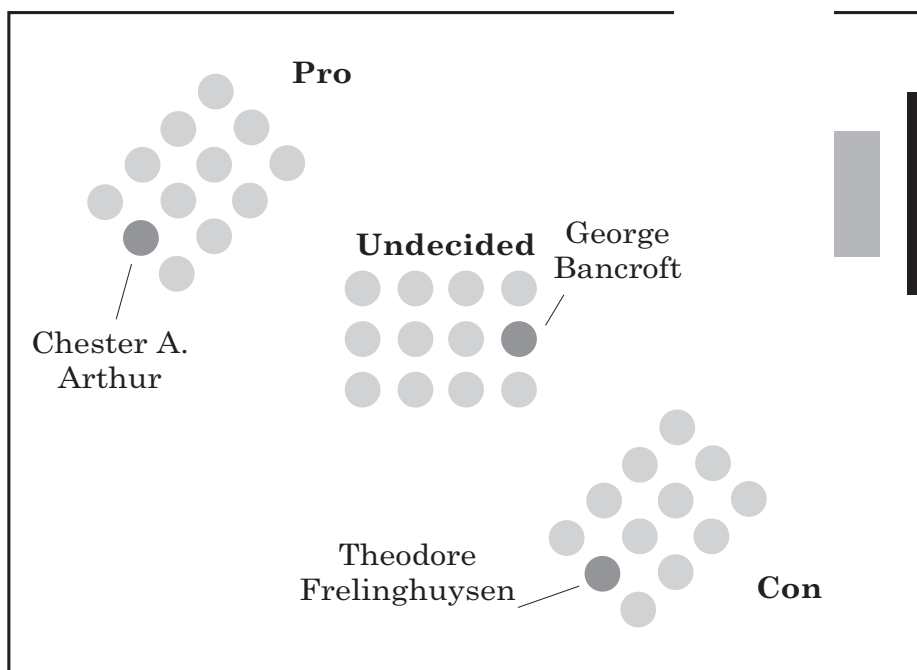
Also assign your students to read the chapter(s) in their textbook covering the controversial 1880s ...

Before Day 1 Be sure you have thoroughly examined the Teacher Guide, the Student Guide, and the various handouts.

Day 1

1. Pass out the Student Guides. Read aloud to your students the Purpose section on page 1. It is vital for you to establish interest in this period of history and the re-creation students are about to enter. You can do this in one of several ways: a) a lecture, reinforced by the reading of the Background Essay in the Student Guide; b) an audio-visual presentation (filmstrip, movie, or videotape); c) completion of the PRE-TEST on page 24; or d) any combination of the above. (If you use the PRE-TEST, here are the answers: 1. 0, 2. 0, 3. +, 4. 0, 5. +, 6. 0, 7. 0, 8. +, 9. 0, 10. 0, 11. +, 12. +, 13. +, 14. +, 15. 0.)
2. Have students read the Background Essay in the Student Guide. This will give each student the same background information to begin the re-creation. As an overnight assignment, have students answer the questions provided in the Student Guide concerning the information presented in the Background Essay. Refer them to the Procedure section on page 4 of the Student Guide, under Day 1, Assignment.
3. Divide the class into the three factions. Divide the students yourself or allow them to divide themselves.

You will want to give all factions special places in the classroom where they regularly meet.



DAILY TEACHING DIRECTIONS - 2

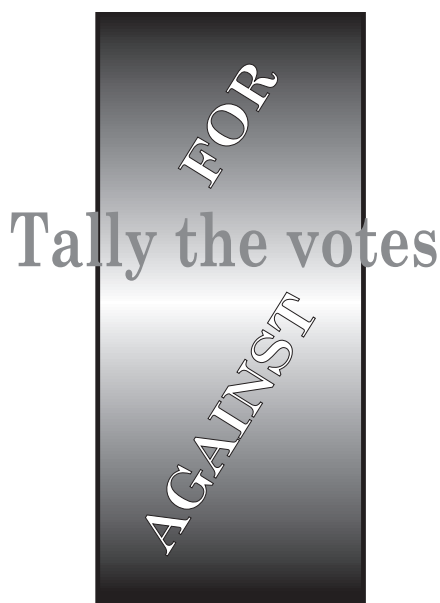


Encourage your students to practice giving their speeches and asking their questions—aloud! Above all, insure that they do not simply read their material from the handouts you have given them.

4. Give each faction the handouts for their faction. Each faction's handouts contain arguments, specific details, quotes, and questions. Be certain that each faction receives only the materials written for its point of view. Students may refer to the Arguments Outline: Pro and Con Factions in their Student Guides for an overall picture of all sides. Encourage this.
5. Allow students to meet in their factions to assign specific arguments/questions to present during the second and third hours. (Each student will present an argument, a specific detail, or question.) Have each group elect a faction leader to keep all the members on task and to role-play a powerful leader of the faction. Encourage other students to role-play other members of their faction. Names/quotes by famous persons included in the handouts should encourage such role-playing.

Days 2-3

1. You should likely assume the role of chairperson of the Congress. This will put you in the role of controlling the flow of arguments on all sides. You will fulfill the same role that the faction leader does in the three factions.
2. Arrange students by factions facing the chairperson. Place the Undecided in the center between the other two factions.
3. On the first issue have the Pro speaker(s) speak first, the Con speaker(s) second, the Undecided questioner(s) third. It is important to keep things moving. Tell speakers to use about one minute for the argument, about one minute for the quotation when he/she either becomes the historical identity or quotes that person because he/she is absent. *Example:* The first Pro faction member stands and speaks to the first issue, summarizing the argument provided in the faction's handout. This summary should last about one minute. Next, this same student (or a second Pro speaker) reads aloud Chester Arthur's own words and reaction to the ideas in Issue 1. This should take about one more minute. The Pro speaker then may make a brief closing remark and invite a Con speaker response. The total time the first speaker(s) speaks should be kept to about two minutes. Then the first Con speaker stands. This speaker(s) speaks for about two minutes, using the arguments and quote found in the faction's handout. Lastly, the Undecided questioner(s) questions both the Pro and Con speakers on Issue 1. This question/answer process



should last about two minutes. The chairperson will then move the Congress on to the next issue, following the suggested sequence.

4. At the end of the debate, allow the two opposing factions' leaders time to make statements summarizing their factions' key points.
5. As chairperson, now say that you are going to call the roll of the delegates to vote for or against the Dawes Act. Remind students that they are not committed to vote with their faction. They may vote for or against, depending on their free choice based on the arguments presented. You as chairperson may also be a voting member of the Congress.
6. After the vote, give students an overnight assignment such as that found in the Student Guide. Note: If you plan to give students the POST-TEST, refer them to the Testing section on page 8 in their Student Guides.

Final Day

1. *Optional:* Pass out POST-TEST on page 25 and have students complete the objective part of the exam and/or the essay questions. (Key to Part 1: 1. 0, 2. +, 3. 0, 4. 0, 5. +, 6. 0, 7. +, 8. 0, 9. +, 10. +.)
2. If you plan to do the Debriefing activity, have students turn to the Debriefing section on page 8 in their Student Guides. The *situation* and *instructions* are clearly provided for the students. Be sure you are familiar with the situation before you present it to the students. The debriefing situation is a modern re-creation of a similar problem involving three factions. Divide the class into three factions: For, Against, and Undecided. Allow students to meet in groups and develop arguments pro and con on the situation. The Undecided faction must generate questions to ask each side. Allow students about one-half the period to prepare their arguments. Appoint a spokesperson for each side to present the arguments to the large group and other students to participate in a debate until it is time to take a vote. Allow enough time to answer the discussion questions provided in the Student Guide. If you run out of time, you may give these questions as an overnight assignment.
3. You may wish to do the Debriefing activity in this hour and the POST-TEST the following day.

PRO LEADER

Introduction

You are **Chester A. Arthur**, the leader of the Pro faction. You feel that passing the Dawes Act will fulfill the nation's moral and legal responsibilities towards Native Americans. For too long the Indian problem has been placed in the background, and attempts throughout the decades to solve the problem have led to frustration and constant disputes. The Dawes Act is the inevitable conclusion to years of debate in response to the Indian problem. It alone can provide the basis of peaceful co-existence for the white man and the red man.



Thank your group's members for choosing you to be their leader.

And now, having been chosen leader, lead!

Look everyone right in the eye and speak slowly as you present 2a through 2g.

To check for understanding, ask questions about 2a through 2g so that your members demonstrate that they understand specific responsibilities.

Instructions

1. Your faction has met and has selected you as the person most qualified to lead your faction.
2. Carefully explain the following responsibilities to your faction members. Lead your group so that all members live up to their responsibilities.
 - a. You must convince the Undecided faction of Congress that they should vote for the Dawes Act to help Native Americans assimilate into American life.
 - b. Present the best arguments you can to advance our point of view.
 - c. While preparing to speak, consider the argument, concerns, and the reinforcing quote.
 - d. You will have approximately two minutes to speak. Use your first minute to present your argument and concerns, your second minute to reinforce the concerns by reading the quote provided.
 - e. **Note well:** When you read the quote, you are not role-playing the individual whom you are quoting—unless he was a member of Congress at that time. If he was not in Congress, explain that you are quoting this person to reinforce your argument. In either case, whether you are the person being quoted or are only quoting him, point out the person's name/background before presenting the quote.
 - f. You will be questioned by a member of the Undecided faction. Answer this individual as clearly and forcefully as you can, for members of this faction represent the swing vote. We must win them over to our position in order to win this crucial debate.
 - g. **Note well:** This issue we will be debating was one that disturbed thinking Americans during the 1880s. Therefore, as you present your arguments or answer questions, don't speak blandly. Instead speak passionately!