

Teacher's Guide: Abbie Gardner Sharp Cabin

Goal

Students will understand the conflict, known as the Spirit Lake Massacre in the context of the relationships between the Dakota nation and the newly arrived European-American settlers.

Site Summary

The Dakota People in Northwest Iowa

The Dakota, also known as the Sioux, and nicknamed the Santee, were the main group of Indians in the large wetland and prairie of northwest Iowa. In the 1850s they came to the area from eastern Minnesota. In Iowa they adopted a successful hunting and gathering way of life, which required cooperative community living. As was common in many Native American tribes, Dakota men and women shared equal work responsibilities. Men hunted, made tools, and repaired equipment, while women processed game, made clothing, and gathered wild fruits and vegetables.

The Settlers

Compared with the rest of the state, European-American settlement came late to northwest Iowa, where settlers faced isolation, harsh frontier conditions, limited access to supplies and long trips to the nearest neighboring settlements. Most of the area was not yet surveyed. Settlers secured their claims by marking them with stakes, rock piles, or burned trees, then filed their claims at the designated Sioux City claim office. While the relationship between settlers and Indians was usually peaceful, there was little friendship. In addition to the cultural conflict, the Indians considered the European Americans trespassers on their land. To make matters worse, settlers often treated Indians like children or unintelligent adults.

The Conflict

One of the few violent conflicts in Iowa between settlers and Native Americans occurred near Arnolds Park in what became known as the Spirit Lake Massacre. This event has spawned a body of historical research as well as folklore. Perhaps the most well-known of these stories is that of Abbie Gardner and her family.

The Gardner family came to Lake Okoboji in July 1856. The family consisted of Rowland Gardner, his wife (Frances), a son (Rowland Jr.), three daughters (Mary, Eliza and Abbie), a son-in-law (Harvey Luce), and two grandchildren (Albert and Amanda). They had moved frequently while Rowland worked as a railroader and farmer. When they arrived at the lake it was too late in the season to plant corn or other crops, but they had brought supplies intended to last until spring. By winter they had built one cabin,

but the weather prevented them from finishing a second one, so the extended family shared the Gardner cabin at the time of the attack.

The winter of 1856-1857 was particularly harsh, and tension was high as both Indians and settlers ran out of supplies. Inkpaduta and his band arrived in the Great Lakes region on March 5 or 6. The Indians' unsuccessful attempts to gain food triggered a violent gun battle and subsequent bloodshed on March 8.

Over several days 33 settlers were killed and four women, including Abbie, were taken captive. Abbie reported that one Indian, was seriously wounded by Henry Lott. The Dakota band unsuccessfully attacked Springfield, Minnesota, and then fled into the Dakotas.

Two of the captives, Elizabeth Thatcher and Lydia Noble, were killed. Margaret Ann Marble and 13-year-old Abbie Gardner, who had watched the deaths of her father, mother and three siblings, were eventually released for ransom. Margaret was freed in April, Abbie on May 30. Abbie was in captivity for 84 days.

Living in the Shadow of the Uprising

Early on Inkpaduta became a scapegoat for some of the tensions between the settlers and the Indians. Left out of the treaty negotiations in 1851 that transferred the land in northwestern Iowa to the United States, Inkpaduta refused to recognize the treaty restrictions. Between 1853 and 1856 he had several altercations with settlers, including Henry Lott, who in 1854 killed Inkpaduta's brother Sidorninadotah near what is now Livermore in Humboldt County. Because government officials refrained from prosecuting Lott, Inkpaduta thereafter treated the settlers as the enemy.

After the battles in Iowa and Minnesota, Inkpaduta's reputation grew to mythic proportions, partly because he was never captured. His legend often connected him to events with which he had no involvement. He fled to the Dakotas and spent several years skirmishing with the U.S. Army. It was reported that Inkpaduta was present at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, where his sons were fearless in battle. Inkpaduta eventually moved to Canada and he died in 1881.

Abbie Gardner Sharp returned to Arnolds Park 34 years after the uprising. She purchased the cabin and operated it as one of Iowa's earliest tourist attractions. One of Iowa's first business women, Abbie sold souvenirs and copies of her book, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*.

In her later years Abbie made peace with American Indians, becoming fascinated with their culture and filling her museum with Indian artifacts. She died in Colfax, Iowa, in 1921 at the age of 77.

Vocabulary

Students should become familiar with these vocabulary words before visiting Gardner Cabin.

- **Annuity Payment:** Yearly payments to Indians for lands obtained through a treaty.
- **Claim:** A tract of land staked out by a homesteader.
- **Culture:** Behavior, belief, thought, and products characteristic of a community or population.
- **Dakota:** Preferred name for a North American Woodlands nation also known as Eastern Sioux, nicknamed Santee.
- **Massacre:** To kill a large number of people.
- **Survey:** To determine on paper maps the boundaries of an area.
- **Treaty:** An agreement between the United States and another government, in this case the Dakota nation, who traded land to the U.S. in exchange for money and goods.
- **Uprising:** Organized rebellion intended to change or overthrow existing authority.

Pre-Visit Activities

Before your visit, plan some classroom time to try one or more of the following activities.

- Talk about museums and collections. Explain that a collection is a group of items assembled in a logical order, and gathered because they have some kind of significance. Museums have collections that they study and exhibit to the public. The collections are used to explain the past, present, and future.
- A historic site is one type of museum. A site is related to a specific place, event, or person. The Gardner Cabin Historic Site is related to the Spirit Lake Massacre and the early tourist industry. Have students consider whether any places in their own town or county would make good historic sites. Make a list of these sites and describe what aspects of history they represent.
- Explain that museums use both two-dimensional and three-dimensional materials (called artifacts) to illustrate history or natural history. An artifact can tell us much about the people, the time, and the region from which it came. It reveals what materials it's made from, when and where it was made, and how it was used. Sometimes its color and style can tell us about popular trends. All of this helps us determine its relative value within the "material culture."
- Think about your upcoming trip to Arnolds Park and the Gardner Cabin. Talk about what you expect to see.

On-Site Activities

Include these activities in your visit to Gardner Cabin.

- Abbie Gardner Sharp and her children are buried on the grounds. There is also a mass grave for the victims. Visit the gravesites and the monument to the massacre victims.
- One of the reasons the Gardner family settled here was to be near the lake. Although the area surrounding the lake is now developed, walk down to the lake through Pillsbury Point State Park to get an idea of how the area might have looked in the 1850s. Have students discuss the changes to the environment (consider wildlife, native grasses).
- Look at the artifacts in the visitor's center. Which artifacts do you think are souvenirs? Which ones might have been gifts to Abbie Gardner?
- Look at the contents of the cabin. Where did the children sleep? Would students like to live in one cabin shared by nine people?
- Have students discuss where the Indians of northwest Iowa live today.

Post-Visit Activities

Discussion

Ask some of the following questions after visiting Gardner Cabin. After each question we give some suggested answers. Have your students expand on these answers.

- The Spirit Lake Massacre was the result of a variety of extraordinary circumstances. If circumstances had been different, the outcome might also have been different. What might have changed, and how might the outcome have been different? (Consider: if the winter hadn't been so harsh; if the Lott family had not started the disagreements years before; if the settlers had shared supplies with the Indians.)
- Following the massacre, Inkpaduta's character took on mythic proportions. He was said to have been involved in every major conflict between settlers and Indians on the northern plains. People were afraid of him and his band. Name some other famous people of that time whose deeds have become legendary. (Consider: Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse; also, name some famous people in our own time.)
- When cultures come into conflict, often it's because the people involved are very different from each other. However, sometimes similarities can cause conflict, too. Make a list of the differences and similarities between the Dakota and the

settlers at Okoboji. Which ones might cause disagreements between the two groups? Discuss how conflicts between cultures can be resolved.

- Abbie Gardner returned to Okoboji and lived there for many years. Do you think you would return to the area following a tragedy like this? Why or why not?

Detective Work

Here are some suggested themes for student research. Their results might be presented in both written and oral reports.

- The Gardner family and their neighbors constructed log houses when they reached Okoboji. Log houses have different designs and characteristics, often representing the native region of the settler. Research log house designs. How do houses differ by regions within Iowa, or across the country?
- Iowa was opened for settlement through a series of treaties with the Sauk, Meskwaki, Winnebago, and Dakota Indians. When were these treaties enacted? Find the language of each treaty. How are these treaties alike and different?
- The Spirit Lake Massacre is often considered one of the first events in a series of conflicts between the U.S. government and the Dakota Indians. Some of the other events are the Sioux Uprising in Minnesota in 1862, the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado in 1864, the Battle of the Little Big Horn, Montana in 1876, and, finally, the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890. Pick one of these events, or another from your reading. Find out more about it. Who was involved, how did it start, what was the end result? How does the Spirit Lake Massacre relate to the event?
- Northwest Iowa was the last section of Iowa to be settled. What did the rest of the state look like during the late 1850s? Choose a county and research this. What towns were there, what jobs were available, what community functions existed? If you can find access to newspapers from the county through microfilm, see if they record the events at Spirit Lake.
- Gardner Cabin was one of the first tourist sites in the state. What other places did people like to visit in Iowa before 1920? What did these sites have to offer? How did people learn about them?

Doing History

These activities may be used to further explore ideas presented at Gardner Cabin. You may want to adjust the activities to the students' interests and abilities.

- Abbie's mother had to make quilts to keep the family warm. Quilt patterns were often named and copied from objects found in the settlers' natural or cultural environment. Find some patterns from your surroundings (such as a school, yard, park, or highway). On a piece of paper, draw and color the patterns. Name them (for example, North Elementary Rose). How does the pattern represent its name? Display these on the bulletin board.

- When settlers moved to an area, they had to file (or stake) their claims to legally own them. You can try this in your school yard. Divide the class into small groups to represent family units (most settlers came to Iowa in family units). Have the families choose their claim, mark it, and then file that claim with the teacher. They can then set up areas for a house and a crop.
- The Dakota and the settlers both depended greatly on the buffalo as a source for many products, from food to clothing. They were able to use almost the entire animal. Find a drawing of a buffalo. Discuss the products Indians and settlers might have made from the buffalo.
- Design a tourism brochure for Arnolds Park. Be sure to include Gardner Cabin, the amusement park, the lake, and restaurants and motels. You can also design postcards.
- Gardner Cabin holds several paintings of the Spirit Lake Massacre. Make your own pictures of the way you think the lake area looked in 1857 and make another picture to show how it looks today. Imagine a trip to the lakes just before cars were available. Draw a picture of what you think the lake looked like then.

Resources

These materials will help you learn more about the Spirit Lake Massacre, northwest Iowa and the Sioux Indians.

Books, Articles and Videotapes: 4th-8th Grade

["Forts in Iowa." *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 8, No. 1](#) (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

["Indians of Iowa." *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 13, No. 3](#) (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

["Lake Life." *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 14, No. 4.](#) (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

["Peace: The Iowa Link." *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 13, No. 1.](#) (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

Iowa Heritage: The Toll Grass Whispers. Iowa Public Television. (State Historical Society of Iowa, State Library, Area Education Agency)

Books and Articles: 9th Grade-Adult

Baker, Miriam Hawthorne. "Inkpaduta's Camp at Smithland." *Annals of Iowa* 39 (1967): 81-104. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library)

Bataille, Gretchen M. *The World Between Two Rivers: Perspectives on American Indians in Iowa*. Iowa State University Press, 1978. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library, School Library)

Bristow, David. "Inkpaduta's Revenge", *The Iowan Magazine*, 47 (1999): 28-33

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"Inkpaduta's Great White Friend." *Iowan* 9 (Dec. 1960-Jan. 11): 17-19, 48. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library)

Larson, Peggy Rodina. "A New Look at the Elusive Inkpaduta." *Minnesota History* 48 (1982): 24-35. (Interlibrary Loan, State Historical Society of Iowa)

Kantor, MacKinley. *Spirit Lake*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1961. (Public Library) [fiction]

Harnack, Curtis. "Prelude to Massacre." *Iowan* 4 (Feb, March 1956):36-39. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library)

Petersen, William J. "The Spirit Lake Massacre." *Palimpsest* 38 (1957): 206-64. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library, School Library)

Reed, B.F. *History of Kossuth County, Iowa*. Vol. 1. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1913. (State Historical Society of Iowa)

Robinson, Duane. *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*. Aberdeen: State of South Dakota, 1904. (State Historical Society of Iowa)

Sharp, Abigail Gardner. *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*. New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1976. (Public Library)

Smith, R.A. *A History of Dickinson County, Iowa*. Des Moines: Kenyon Printing 1902. (State Historical Society of Iowa)

Williams, William. "Report of Major Williams." *Palimpsest* 38 (1957): 266-72. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library)

[Wilson, Walter C. "Reached Iowa Assembly on Muleback." *Annals of Iowa* 34 \(1957\): 52-55.](#) (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library)

Woolworth, Alan R. and Gary Clayton Anderson. *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War 1862*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988.