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BOOK GUIDES

Indian Chiefs

BY RUSSELL FREEDMAN

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Overview Chart

Comprehension Skills and Strategies

Comparing and Contrasting
Drawing Conclusions
Interpreting Character Actions
Interpreting Character Traits
Making Evaluations
Making Inferences
Stating Personal Reactions

Literary Concepts

Characterization
Conflict
Setting
Theme

Management System

Indian Chiefs and the accompanying guide may be used in the classroom in the following manner:

Whole Class: Have the whole class read the book together. The class then responds to the literature through discussions and activities. For this system, each student has a copy of the book.

Small Group: Divide the class into reading groups. The groups can be set up by interest level, topic, or ability. (Remember to have some fluent readers in each group share their reading with less-fluent readers.) Each group responds to the literature through discussions and activities. For this system, each student in the group has a copy of the book.

Read Aloud: Read the book aloud to the whole class or to a small group. This will help less-fluent readers and allow all students to hear the language and appreciate the author's technique. For this system, only the person reading aloud has a copy of the book.

Story Overview

Indian Chiefs chronicles the lives of six well-known Native American chiefs, all of whom led their tribes during a period of crisis. Each of the six chiefs—Red Cloud, Satanta, Quanah Parker, Joseph, Washakie, and Sitting Bull—were leaders of tribes that made their homes in the plains and mountains west of the Mississippi River.

Russell Freedman interweaves biographical information with historical accounts of the Indian wars that raged through the American West during much of the nineteenth century. As white settlers continuously moved into areas that the Indians felt were rightfully theirs, each chief struggled to protect the hunting grounds that belonged to his tribe. Their individual stories shed light on the full scope of the tragedy that befell a way of life hundreds of years old.

Opening his account with an overview of the struggle between the Indians and the whites, Freedman quotes Army General George Crook, who told a group of Indian leaders exactly what to expect in the early 1850s: “The white men in the East are like birds. They are hatching out their eggs every year, and there is not enough room in the East and they must go elsewhere. And they come west, as you have seen them coming for the last few years. And they are still coming, and will come until they overrun all of this country. And you can’t prevent it.”

But many tried. Red Cloud, chief of the Oglala Sioux, was the only chief to win a war against white settlers when he led attacks on the famous Bozeman Trail. Rather than face a long and costly conflict, the U.S. Army surrendered to Red Cloud in 1868. He became the first Indian chief to win a war against the U.S. government. He was also the last.

Satanta, a chief of the Kiowa tribe, was not nearly as fortunate. Captured and charged with murder for leading an attack on an army fort, he eventually committed suicide in a prison hospital. Quanah Parker, a Comanche chief, was the son of a white frontier woman and a Comanche warrior. After refusing to live on a reservation, he led the U.S. Cavalry on a desperate chase through the parched grasslands of the Texas Panhandle. In 1875 he finally surrendered, and over the next twenty years he eventually became a wealthy rancher.

Of all the Indian chiefs, only Washakie of the Shoshoni tribe never went to war against the white settlers. He thought such a conflict would be futile, and he urged his people to give up hunting and become farmers. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces, however, refused to abandon the old ways of his people. “If we ever owned the land, we own it still,” said Joseph, “for we never sold it.” The heroic saga of the Nez Perces began when they were pursued by an army battalion across Idaho until they were caught just forty miles from the safety of the Canadian border.

The book ends, fittingly, with one of the last of the great Indian chiefs, Sitting Bull. The leading strategist of the Sioux victory at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull was seen as a threat long after his power had been broken. His death during a bungled arrest foreshadowed the last and saddest battle of the Western Indian wars, the Massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, in 1890.