

-Tribes of Dakota- Cheyenne River Reservation: Elders

History is alive in Indian country. Many Native people in South Dakota remain connected to the past. Their culture, traditions and stories keep them tied to their ancestors. For many, what happened 120 years ago is every bit as alive today as it was then.



Oglala Sioux Nation Pow Wow

The elders remember the teachings of their grandmothers and grandfathers who told first-hand stories of life on the Plains. The elders are the keepers of the culture and language.

We start our journey by speaking with elders from the Cheyenne River Reservation. We will hear about their effort to overcome the impact of government policies and about the struggle to hold onto cultural values within the dominant culture.



Claudia Iron Hawk a Lakota Elder, is one of the leaders of the Wounded Knee Survivors Association.



Listen to the following in your classroom.

[Elders \(9:40\)](#)

By Frances Linn

[To learn more about the history and conditions in boarding schools, click on the following "SD Forum" program.](#)

[Frontline: Living old \(Learn more about the cost of care for the elderly.\)](#)



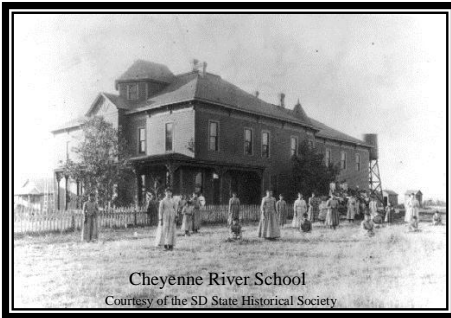
Reflection, Research, and Discussion (Discuss one or all of the following)

1. The United States is known for helping the underprivileged, mistreated and persecuted of the world by providing resources, protection, and aid whenever possible. Refugees from countries riddled with religious and political persecution find safety within our borders.

This wasn't always the case. How did the United States government justify removing Native American children from their homes - forcing them to give up their families, culture and way of life for the white man's ways?

-Tribes of Dakota-

Cheyenne River Reservation: Elders Continued



2. Forced change in beliefs, customs, culture and self comes in many forms. For example, during the reign of Hitler, genocide was accomplished by brutal force, terror and death. Did the Native Americans experience genocide as part of the official government policy which sought to "Kill the Indian and Save the Man"? Is there a difference between the genocide that took place during the Nazi reign and the forced elimination of a way of life for the Indian people of South Dakota?

To learn more about the history and conditions in boarding schools, [click on the following "SD Forum" program](#).

3. In this segment, Charging Eagle commented that he is alarmed by what he sees as a vanishing language, culture and spirituality: "...there's a generation of people that are ashamed to be Indian so they'd rather not speak the language or rather not learn the ways...." Does the loss of a language also mean the loss of a culture? Do you feel forced assimilation of Native American children decades ago has contributed to the possible extinction of the Lakota language? How can the Lakota language be saved?



Try This

(15-20 min)

1. "Dominoes: Importance of Language within a Culture" The following activity is a very simple, but visually effective demonstration that reinforces the importance of culture and language. This can be set up as a large demonstration or in small groups; the format you choose will depend on the number of dominoes you have available. Have two to three students set up 30 to 50 dominoes in a row so that when one is touched they will all eventually fall. Describe how each of the dominoes represents different stages within their life. One might represent their first steps, another, the death of a grandparent, etc. All of the dominos together make them who they are. Hit the first domino, which is birth, and they all fall, representing their life to date.

The dominoes can also represent a culture, like the Native American culture. The dominoes now represent stages in the development of a culture. Three dominoes could represent the three separate dialects (Dakota, Nakota and Lakota); another could represent the ghost dance, etc. Push the first domino and watch them fall.



Then remove the dominoes that represent the three separate dialects. Ask the students if the culture will survive



Oglala Boarding School Harness Shop
Courtesy of the SD State Historical Society

without the language. No one will be able to answer this question with 100% accuracy until the dominoes have fallen.

([Library of Congress - Indian Boarding Schools](#))

