

Treat All Men Alike: Chief Joseph and Respect

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can lack of respect lead to tragedy and heartbreak?
- **Virtue:** Respect
- **Definition** – Respect is civility flowing from personal humility.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will review the words and actions of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce people in the Pacific Northwest. They will identify both examples of people treating one another with respect and examples of disrespect. They will achieve the following objectives.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze Chief Joseph’s character as a leader, and his commitment to respecting all people.
 - Students will examine Chief Joseph’s understanding of respect as a necessary virtue.
 - Students will understand why cultivating respect affects the future of the United States.
 - Students will demonstrate respect in their own lives to protect freedom.
- **Background**
 - The Wallowa Valley paradise had been the ancestral home of a band of the Nez Perce for many years before the Lewis and Clark expedition found them in 1805. His men starving and desperate, Lewis described his encounter with this exceptional group of Native Americans, calling them "the most hospitable, honest and sincere people that we have met with in our voyage." Under the leadership of Chief Joseph the Elder, the Nez Perce continued to welcome and assist the white visitors who began to arrive with increasing frequency. The green valley nestled between mountains in what is now northeastern Oregon was visually stunning, with fish-filled lakes and rivers, and the Nez Perce hoped to share it peacefully with new settlers. In 1855, Chief Joseph and Washington’s territorial governor agreed to establish a large reservation stretching through parts of present-day Washington, Oregon, and Idaho—land that would forever be designated for the Nez Perce.

However, with the discovery of gold in the region, the federal government in 1863 reclaimed almost 6 million acres. This act left Chief Joseph and his people with some scattered pockets of land in Idaho that, all together, amounted to only one-tenth of the land previously set aside for them, and did not include the ancestral Wallowa Valley home. To help sweeten the deal, the government promised cash, a hospital, and schools. Some of the Nez Perce people moved to the new smaller reservation, but Chief Joseph called the new treaty invalid and refused to sign it.
- **Vocabulary**
 - Ancestral
 - Nez Perce
 - Lewis and Clark Expedition
 - Reservation
 - Wallowa Valley
 - Joseph the Elder
 - Joseph the Younger
 - Vindicated
 - Evacuate
 - Cavalry
 - Feasible
 - Reprisals
 - Outmaneuvered
 - Skirmishes
 - Scalping
 - Elicited
 - Decimated

- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions (unless specified otherwise, students may answer all questions about Chief Joseph with reference to Joseph the Elder, Joseph the Younger, or both.)**
 - In what ways did Chief Joseph demonstrate respect for others, seeking to enhance life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for himself and others?
 - What was the identity of Chief Joseph the Younger during the 1870s? To what extent do you see emphasis on the virtue of respect in his words and actions?
 - As he led his people, how did Chief Joseph see his purpose?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - PBS New Perspectives on the West: Chief Joseph
http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/chiefjoseph.htm
 - PBS Archives of the West 1874-1879: Chief Joseph Speaks
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/six/jospeak.htm>
 - Merrill Beal. *I Will Fight No More Forever: Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.

Handout A: Treat All Men Alike: Chief Joseph and Respect

Background

The Wallowa Valley paradise had been the ancestral home of a band of the Nez Perce for many years before the Lewis and Clark expedition found them in 1805. His men starving and desperate, Lewis described his encounter with this exceptional group of Native Americans, calling them "the most hospitable, honest and sincere people that we have met with in our voyage." Under the leadership of Chief Joseph the Elder, the Nez Perce continued to welcome and assist the white visitors who began to arrive with increasing frequency. The green valley nestled between mountains in what is now northeastern Oregon was visually stunning, with fish-filled lakes and rivers, and the Nez Perce hoped to share it peacefully with new settlers. In 1855, Chief Joseph and Washington's territorial governor agreed to establish a large reservation stretching through parts of present-day Washington, Oregon, and Idaho—land that would forever be designated for the Nez Perce.

However, with the discovery of gold in the region, the federal government in 1863 reclaimed almost 6 million acres. This act left Chief Joseph and his people with some scattered pockets of land in Idaho that, all together, amounted to only one-tenth of the land previously set aside for them, and did not include the ancestral Wallowa Valley home. To help sweeten the deal, the government promised cash, a hospital, and schools. Some of the Nez Perce people moved to the new smaller reservation, but Chief Joseph called the new treaty invalid and refused to sign it.

Narrative

Settlers continued to arrive in the Wallowa Valley, and Chief Joseph refused to force his people to move, so the situation was tense when Joseph the Elder died in 1871 and his son, Joseph the Younger was elected to take his place. In 1873, it seemed that the Nez Perce cause may be vindicated when the federal government actually ordered the white settlers to evacuate and return the land to the Native Americans. However, in 1877 the government reversed the order and General Oliver Howard ordered Chief Joseph's band to abandon their homes and move to the reservation. Chief Joseph is said to have responded to the general with an address that focused on respect for human equality. He expressed his disbelief that "the Great Spirit gave one kind of men the right to tell another kind of men what they must do." Howard threatened a cavalry attack to remove the Wallowa Nez Perce. Joseph sought the counsel of tribal leaders, and decided that they had no feasible chance of successful resistance to U.S. troops. He agreed to begin the journey to Idaho with his people.

However, one of the young men reported to Chief Joseph that he and several other young warriors, furious at the injustice of their situation, had carried out a raid on nearby settlements, killing several settlers. Chief Joseph knew that the reprisals for this raid would be terrible, so he began one of the most remarkable military retreats in U.S. history. In just over three months ending in the fall of 1877, Chief Joseph and several hundred of his followers, fewer than 200 of whom were warriors, outmaneuvered more than 2000 pursuing U.S. soldiers. Their goal was Canada. Along the way, Chief Joseph's band fought General Howard's troops in four major battles and several skirmishes. The Nez Perce stampeded the general's horses and pack train, but they refrained from scalping and murders of civilians, released women captives, and paid for the supplies they needed rather than stealing them. The 1,400 mile march impressed even battle-hardened General William Tecumseh Sherman, who stated that "the Indians throughout displayed a courage and skill that elicited universal praise...[they] fought with almost scientific skill, using advance and rear guards, skirmish lines, and field fortifications." Only 40 miles from the Canadian border, they had reached the Bear Paw Mountains when Howard's troops cornered them. Chief Joseph's people, who by this time were mostly women, children, and the elderly, were unable to go any further due to starvation and cold, and their leader would not abandon the sick and the dying.

Chief Joseph's surrender message is well-known, and provides a glimpse of the tragedy—and of his character:

I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say, "Yes" or "No." He who led the young men [Olikut] is dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away

to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are -- perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.

The U.S. Army conducted the survivors first to a compound in eastern Kansas. But disease was rampant there, so they were moved to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Once again disease decimated their numbers. In 1879 Chief Joseph was allowed to present his case to President Rutherford B. Hayes. He said,

It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises. There has been too much talking by men who had no right to talk. Too many misinterpretations have been made; too many misunderstandings have come up between the white men and the Indians. If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them the same laws. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect all rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases. If you tie a horse to a stake, do you expect he will grow fat? If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented nor will he grow and prosper. I have asked some of the Great White Chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. They cannot tell me. I only ask of the Government to be treated as all other men are treated...Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other then we shall have no more wars. We shall be all alike -- brothers of one father and mother, with one sky above us and one country around us and one government for all.

Chief Joseph continued to speak out against the injustices done to Native Americans. Finally, in 1885 his people were allowed to return to the northwest—but not to their beloved Wallowa Valley. Chief Joseph lived for the day when Native Americans would be treated with respect as human beings, permitted to enjoy equality, justice, and government by consent. Sadly, he died, still in exile, in 1904 at the age of 64. His doctor said he died of a broken heart.

Handout B: Journaling

Answer the following questions in your journal, as you prepare to voluntarily share some of your responses in a class discussion.

- a. In what situations in your own life have you had opportunity to demonstrate respect, perhaps under very difficult circumstances? To what extent have you done so?
- b. To what extent are you currently cultivating respect for others to achieve your purpose?
- c. To what extent and in what ways does your performance align with your identity and purpose? What are you currently doing to cultivate skills and interests that will connect today's purposes with your long-term opportunity to enhance and protect the life and liberty of others?
- d. How can genuine respect for others contribute to freedom for yourself and others?