

The Sheep Eater Shoshone – The Tukudeka

Objective: Students will write a historical fiction account, using historical facts to make it realistic, of a week spent as a Sheep Eater Shoshone.

Connections:

Social Studies
Writing
Informational Text
Note Taking

Background: See “History of the Sheep Eaters”, which also can serve an informational text for students to read.

Procedures:

1. Show a photo of a Sheep Eater Shoshone (Tukudeka) and ask students how they think “Sheep Eaters” earned their name. Explain that they will be learning more about one of the last groups of people to live away from modernization and then they will “become” one of these people and tell a story about a short segment of their year. It is suggested students write about one particular event that takes place over a day or week.
2. Either read the “History of the Sheep Eaters” to class or have students read it on their own. You may suggest students take notes or highlight information to help them write their story later.
3. You may wish to show them the entire segment of the movie “Sheep Eaters: Keepers of the Past” found on the USB drive or on YouTube. This is a 27-minute film accounting historical background of the people. Perhaps even starting the film at 2:59 would bypass some slow parts. The film uses excerpts from G.A. Allen’s book written in 1913 when he interviewed the last living member of the Sheep Eaters. (the actual book is in PDF on the USB drive called “Sheep Eaters by W.A. Allen” which can be used an extension for older students)
4. After students have an understanding of the Tukudeka, aka Sheep Eaters, you may wish to read or have students read the informational text titled “Bighorn Sheep Bows”. This article explains how Native Americans, including the Tukudeka make very powerful bows using bighorn sheep horns, which could add to the details of their historical fiction story they will write.
5. Explain to students that a historical fiction story is a made up story that incorporates actual things that happened, making the story seem real. Review or teach some of the critical elements of historical fiction:
 - a. **Character** – whether real or imagined, characters behave in keeping with the era they inhabit, even if they push the boundaries. And that means discovering the norms, attitudes, beliefs and expectations of their time and station in life. A Roman slave differs from a Roman centurion, as does an innkeeper from an aristocrat in the 18th

- century. Your mission as writer is to reveal the people of the past.
- b. **Dialogue** – Include dialogue between characters. Dialogue that is cumbersome and difficult to understand can detract from readers' enjoyment of historical fiction. Dip occasionally into the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the past by inserting select words and phrases so that a reader knows s/he is in another time period.
 - c. **Setting** – setting is time and place. Transport the readers into the past in the first few paragraphs.
 - d. **Plot** – the plot has to make sense for the time period. And plot will often be shaped around or by the historical events taking place at that time. Remember, it is a story, not a history book!
 - e. **Conflict** – the problems faced by the characters in your story. As with theme and plot, conflict must be realistic for the chosen time and place. Readers will want to understand the reasons for the conflicts present.
 - f. **Theme**- Even short stories involve elements of theme. Common young novel themes include: coming of age, loyalty, hope, loss, friendship, and heroism. However, there are many more themes that could be used.
6. Allow individuals in small groups to share ideas of what his or her plot, conflict, and resolution may involve. This helps trigger ideas for other students.
 7. Perhaps have students create an outline of their plot.
 8. Finally, let students have fun writing! Make sure to remind them to write in first-person (I me, we, etc.), where they are the person in the story. Also remind them to include factual information they have learned.
 9. Everyone loves to share his or her work. Try to make time for students to share their work either through reading it to small groups or by publishing it and hanging for others to read.

Extensions:

For older students, you can download the 1913 book *The Sheep Eaters*, by William Alonzo Allen from The Project Gutenberg online for free. It is also in PDF version on the Wild Sheep Foundation USB drive. This could be used for more in-depth understanding of the Tukudeka people from a first hand account with the last known person alive from their tribe.

History of the Sheep Eaters

Because groups of Shoshone traditionally spent the majority of the year spread apart throughout the Central and Northern Rockies, different groups became identified by what resources they used most frequently and on which they were most dependent. The Sheep Eater, or Tukudeka, were accustomed to life in high alpine and plateau regions from the Wind River Range in Wyoming and the Salmon River in Idaho where they frequently hunted Bighorn Sheep in the mountains



Although Yellowstone is situated in the center of this region, some anthropologists do not believe that these small groups of Shoshone entered Yellowstone until after 1800. Most, however believe that this way of life existed for several thousand years prior to the arrival of the Euro-Americans. Sheep Eaters lived and traveled in small groups of four or five families. This is because Bighorns only live in small herds and they forage in alpine areas during the summer months. This made them difficult to hunt in large numbers. By limiting the size of the groups of people from four to six families, Sheep Eaters could more easily keep a regular supply of food.

Despite their isolation and seemingly difficult way of sustenance, Sheep Eaters seem to have had relatively few wants. Therefore, they had little need for contact with others. There are also relatively few accounts by Americans who came into contact with them, which makes reconstructing their way of life difficult. One account was recorded by Osborne Russell, a fur trapper who in 1835 met a group of Sheep Eaters in Lamar Valley, which is now the northwest corner of Yellowstone. He described them as shy, but hospitable. They were comfortably dressed in sheep and deer skins. The twenty or more people he encountered were armed with strong bows made of sheep, buffalo and elk horns. These were complemented by obsidian pointed arrows. Although they did not have horses, Russell counted thirty dogs that carried their possessions. They seemed content and were also eager to trade their skins and did not demand much in return for the high quality goods that they provided.

Sheep Eaters had several ways of taking game. In addition to

their well-crafted bows, they set an extensive system of traps whose remnants can still be seen. They were equipped with driveways, which were boundaries where a deer, elk, sheep or buffalo might be driven and then pushed into the trap. The dogs that Russell described were also used for hunting. Although most Sheep Eaters did not use horses, they did have efficient means of taking game.

The shaman was an important part of the Tukudaka life-way. There is an interesting exploration of the role of the shaman and the cult of the bighorn at the NPS site COSO Rock Art.

Yellowstone did not just provide the Sheep Eaters with an abundant, regular supply of game. It also produced a variety of plants that could be baked or dried to last throughout the year. Camas, for example, is a lily that was gathered in spring and fall. The roots and bulbs were baked into cakes or dried for use in the winter. Sheep Eaters also collected and dried a variety of berries. Nuts and seeds were also abundant.

By the time Yellowstone became a national park in 1872, there were an estimated 300 or more Sheep Eaters who lived in the park. Ten years later they were forced out of the park with all other Indians because they were viewed as a threat to tourism. They were removed to either the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming or to Fort Hall in Idaho.



Bighorn Sheep Bows

The picture below is of a bighorn bow fragment found in Elko county Nevada. It was found in a large rock shelter. Date unknown. The belly is more rounded than the back. The back has been roughed for the sinew backing There is still a sinew wrap near the tip where the nock would have been. There is also evidence of a full backing and a dark substance that may have once been glue. The fragment is 22.3 cm long and 12 by 24.5mm in thickness and width. It may be quite old.



Bows made from the horns of the desert and Rocky Mt bighorn sheep were in use among many of the Plateau, Basin and plains tribes. By all accounts they were much desired and valuable possessions. On the plains they were used by the Cheyenne, Crow, Sioux, Hidatsa, Mandan, Arikara, Gros Ventre, and perhaps the Blackfoot as well. Further to the west they were in use by the Flathead, Nez Perce, Shoshoni, and Paiute. Further south they were used by the Ute centered in the Colorado Rockies, and the Southern Paiute in Utah and Nevada.

The average length of these bows were about 32 inches or so. Horn and sinew can handle a great deal more bend than wood, so this size would handle the draw length of 20+ inches. Horn can handle a great deal of compression and sinew will do the same for the tension.



With the exception of the Comanche, it appears that most of the Numic or Shoshone/Paiute nations of the basin and plains used the horn bow. The **Sheep Eater** group of the Northern Shoshone were known for their fine sheep horn bows. These are the Indians of the Yellowstone and Wind River area in Montana and Wyoming. Archaeologists say it was these Shoshone who pecked the Dinwoody style petroglyphs.

These are distinctive strange spirits or "Pandzoavits" usually around water. The large collection of Dinwoody petroglyphs on the Southern end of Stansbury Island on the Great Salt Lake show that this belief was also in the Salt Lake area of Utah, or at least used the island as a sacred site. Today it is on the shore of dry salt flats to the south, but as recently as 1869 those salt flats were water and a thin peninsula connected it to the Stansbury mountain range to the south. Historically, in there Yellowstone range they used the hot springs to make working and shaping the horn easier.

It is not known how long horn bows have been in use in the new world. The wooden bow came to be used around 200 AD in the area of horn bows. Many people believe that the western sinew backed bow and horn bow technology came to the new world from Asia. Brought here by sea going explorers before the time of Columbus.

