

## What Is A Reservation?

**Code: EL1 and MID: SS,VA**

The term "reservation" comes from the early days of Indian contact with the white people. The Indians gave up large portions of their land through treaties "reserving" a portion of the land for their own use. Reservations are usually small parcels of land on which Indian people were supposed to live. When the reservations were first formed, the Indians were not allowed to leave their plot of land, not even to hunt.

**1853** Washington Territory was created. Isaac I. Stevens was appointed governor. He was in charge of a survey group being sent to find the most feasible route across the trans-Mississippi west for a railroad to the Pacific.

**1855** Stevens having secured permission to make treaties with the Northwestern tribes, met with the Nez Perce and several other tribes in Walla Walla that May. After many days of disagreement, Lawyer warned the people that there would be no protection if they turned down the treaty. The white men would seize their lands anyway. Finally, all the headmen agreed to sign the treaty. The leaders of every band had signed, so in the eyes of the Nez Perce, this treaty became the basic document in their dealings with the American Government. The arrangements and conditions of this treaty formed the fundamental rights of the Nez Perce, and the obligation of the Federal Government to them.

**1855** Buffalo Country Treaty was a peace brought about between the Blackfeet and many Western tribes which included the Flatheads, Nez Perce, Kutenais, Pend d'Oreilles.

**1863** There was increasing pressure from non-Indian settlements and gold miners for land. The Nez Perce were asked to give up all but about 25% of the land reserved for them in the Treaty of 1855. Only a portion of the Nez Perce bands agreed to the treaty.

**1868** Final treaty with the Nez Perce. The government wished to acquire more reservation land. This treaty was signed by only three headmen after they were taken back east to be shown how strong the United States was. The new boundaries now encompassed approximately 1/10th of the reservation lands set aside for the Nez Perce in the first treaty of 1855.

**1887** The General Allotment Act was passed by the U.S. Congress. This provided for the division of tribal lands into parcels to be owned by individual Indians. This was also called the Dawes Act, and its aim was to assimilate the Indians into the body of the nation.

**1893** The survey of the reservation was conducted from 1889-1892. Nez Percés were given individual allotments. These and lands held in common trust comprised 11% of the Nez Perce Reservation. The remainder was opened to homesteading by non-Indians. The Nez Perce now had control over only about 1% of their original (1855) reservation.

**1924** American citizenship was extended to all Native Americans in the United States.

**1934** The Indian Reorganization Act passed by U.S. Congress. Allotment ceased and tribes were encouraged to adopt constitutions and develop autonomous governments.

**1950** The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, began a relocation program for reservation Indians. This encouraged their migration to urban centers by offering them transportation one way, some help in housing, and limited job training.

**1968** Indian Civil Rights Act became law. This extended the Bill of Rights to reservation Indians and also required states to obtain Indian consent before assuming law and order jurisdiction on Indian reservations.

**Reference:**

*Oregon Indians Culture, History and Current Affairs*, by Jeff Zucker, Kay Hummel, and Bob Hogfoss, Western Imprints, 1983.

*Nez Perce Country, Official National Park Handbook*, produced by the Division of Publications National Park Service, 1983.

**Vocabulary:**

1. Reservation
2. General Allotment Act
3. Treaty
4. Dawes Act

**Activity:**

In this activity challenge the students to think about what it must have meant for the Nez Perce to have been faced with being removed from their beloved homes and placed on a reservation.

Invite a student to read the above information aloud. Ask students to imagine how these Indians might have felt about being removed from their homes and placed on a piece of land. Ask them how this might affect how they lived. How would their diets change from a hunting and gathering society to a farming and gardening one? Invite students to draw a series of pictures that could describe the event from the Indian's point of view.