

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 1

Lands & Environment

The original land base and natural resources of the *Oceti Sakowin* [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] were under communal stewardship prior to immigrant settlement. *Oceti Sakowin* have a distinct and unique interrelationship with the environment that is essential to South Dakota.



“Whenever I’d go back home... I’d hunt with my dad. We’d eat a lot of rabbit... beaver... raccoon– tastes like pork. But I’d watch my aunt Francis... cook it. So I caught on to the cooking.”

Pearl Kennedy-Colombe, Elder, Crow Creek

To find out more about the *Oceti Sakowin* Essential Understandings, the Wolakota Project, and to see Elder interviews, visit www.wolakotaproject.org

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 2

Identity & Resiliency

There is variety and resiliency among individuals within the *Oceti Sakowin* [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] Oyate [oh-YAH-tay] (people) as identity is developed, defined and redefined by entities, by organization, and by people. A continuum of tribal identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional lifestyle. There is no “generic American Indian.”



“The world is a book – read it. And you know what? There’s a chapter in that book that’s about you. It’s your chapter... What will you contribute to the world? What is your chapter going to say?”

Duane Hollow Horn Bear, Sicangu Lakota Elder

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 3

Culture & Language

The origin, thought and philosophy of the *Oceti Sakowin* [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] continues in the contemporary lifestyles of Tribal members. Tribal cultures, traditions and languages are incorporated and observed by many Tribal members both on and off the reservations.



“Welcoming back the Thunder Beings... we know that spring is here when you hear the thunder and see the lightening. The ancestors are coming back, they are making their way back to bring rain, to bring nourishment to Mother Earth.”

Ricky Gray Grass, Oglala Elder

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 4

Kinship & Harmony

Oceti Sakowin [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] kinship systems provide a framework for both individual and group behavior. Its unwritten rules promote harmony, compromise, a sense of order, and group cohesion.



“Our dad had heart trouble bad, and then our mom wasn’t well either, so we just stayed with them. I’m just thankful that we stayed with them. My sister and I lived with them until they all passed on.”

Irene Eagle Thunder-Skunk, Elder, Lower Brule

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 5

Oral Tradition & Storytelling

History told from the *Oceti Sakowin* [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] perspective, through oral tradition and written accounts, frequently conflicts with the stories told by mainstream historians. An analysis of multiple perspectives reveals history in a more inclusive and accurate way.



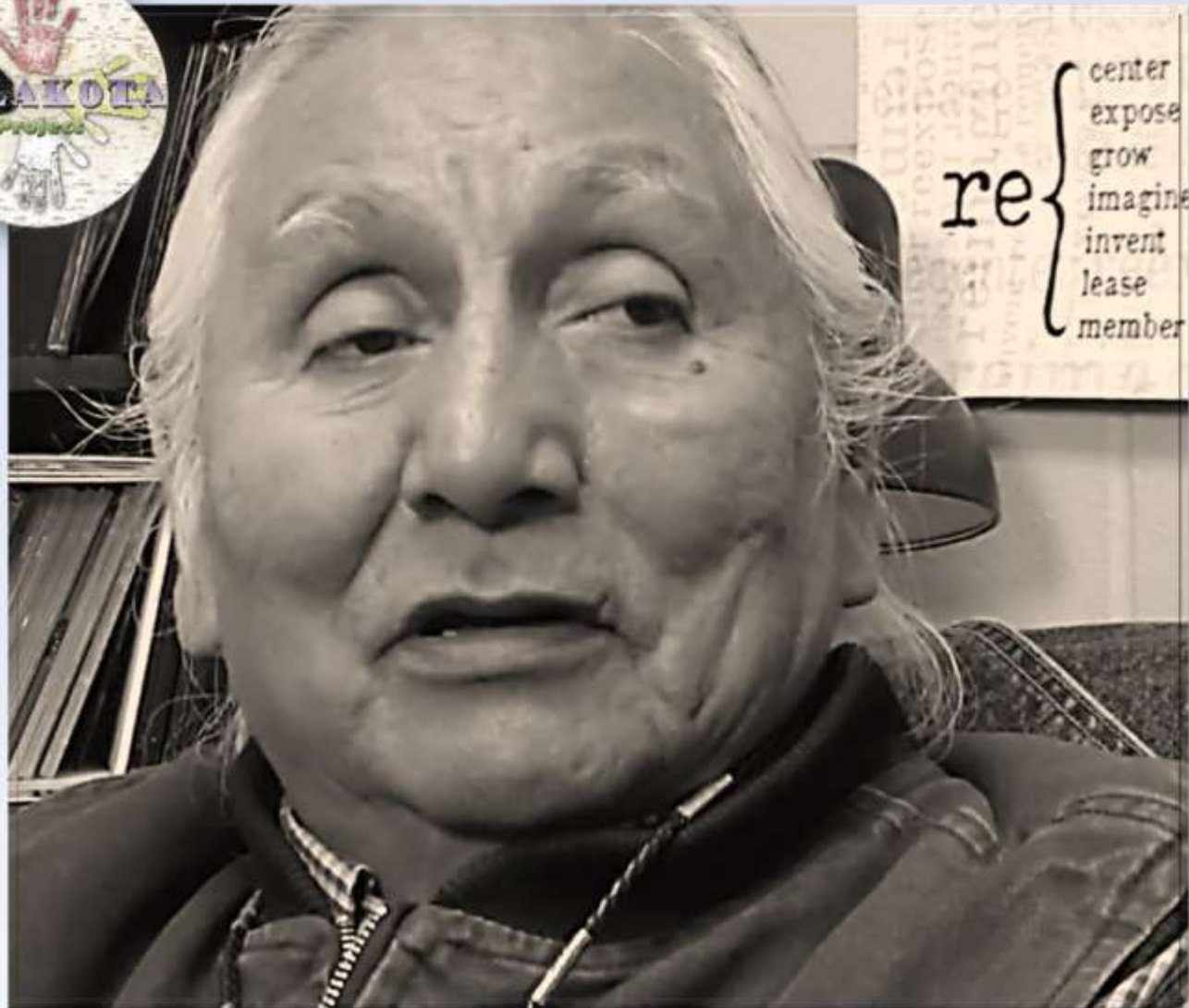
“The Lakota stories have values. If you read it, you read it and it’s gone, but if somebody comes to our classroom and talks about the stories and the moral of them, ‘What did you get out of it? What was so important?’ ... that’s why I believe in oral storytelling.”

Delores Taken Alive, Elder, Standing Rock

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 6

Sovereignty & Treaties

Federal policies and treaties put into place throughout American history have affected Oceti Sakowin [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] people adversely. Tribes as sovereign nations have the authority to enter into government to government relationships. Currently, the relationship between each tribe, their state(s), and the federal government is not the same for each tribe.



“When I go to the center of the Black Hills, it’s a very humbling feeling knowing that I’m doing the ceremony that my great-grandfather did with this pipe, perhaps here at this same location. Maybe I’m doing it a little different, but the purpose of this prayer is the same – for Life; the resiliency of our culture is still moving forward.”

Duane Hollow Horn Bear, Sicangu Lakota Elder

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Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding 7

Way of Life & Development

The essential philosophy of the *Oceti Sakowin* [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] *wicoun* [wee-CHO] (way of life) is based on the values of the *Oceti Sakowin* which have created resiliency of the *Oyate* [oh-YAH-tay] (people). Tribal communities have put considerable effort into education and economic development, Tribal universities and colleges, wellness centers, cultural traditions, and language revitalization.



"I had this one guy I always admired. His name was Oscar Howe. He was my hero... he was an art teacher at USD- a professor. He had a family, which was really cool- I wanted to have a family. He lived in a really fine house. And also, he was an artist, and that was my main thing. Oscar, he portrayed everything I wanted to be, so he was my hero."

Donald Montileaux, Oglala Lakota Artist & Elder

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