

## *Massacre at Wounded Knee Worksheet*

Directions: Read the passage below, & then answer the questions that follow using complete sentences.

*When the Paiute prophet Wovoka introduced the Ghost Dance to his people, white Americans interpreted it as a warning of retribution rather than as a religious ceremony & an attempt at tribal unity. Fearing his people would be massacred, Big Foot led the Lakota Sioux to Wounded Knee Creek. There the American Indians were surrounded by the U.S. cavalry, with very little to defend themselves. Even though Big Foot flew a white surrender flag, most of the Sioux were gunned down. This account of the tragedy comes from Black Elk Speaks, the oral autobiography of an Oglala Sioux holy man.*

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That evening before it happened, I went in to Pine Ridge and heard these things, and while I was there, soldiers started for where the Big Foots were. There made about five hundred soldiers that were there next morning. When I saw them starting I felt that something terrible was going to happen. That night I could hardly sleep at all. I walked around most of the night.

In the morning I went out after my horses, and while I was out I heard shooting off toward the east, and I knew from the sound that it must be wagon-guns (cannons) going off. The sound went right through my body, and I felt that something terrible would happen.

I painted my face all red, and in my hair I put one eagle feather for the One Above. It did not take me long to get ready, for I could still hear the shooting over there.

I started out alone on the old road that ran across the hills to Wounded Knee. I had no gun. I carried only the sacred bow of the west that I had seen in my great vision. I had gone only a little way then a band of young men came galloping after me. The first two who came up were Loves War and Iron Wasichu. I asked what they were going to do, and they said they were just going to see where the shooting was. Then others were coming up, and some older men.

We rode fast, and there were about twenty of us now. The shooting was getting louder. A horseback (scout) from over there came galloping very fast toward us, and he said: "Hey-hey-hey! They have murdered them!" Then he whipped his horse and rode away faster toward Pine Ridge.

A little way ahead of us, just below the head of the dry gulch, there were some women and children who were huddled under a clay bank, and some cavalymen were there pointing guns at them.

We stopped back behind the ridge, and I said to the others: "Take courage. These are our relatives. We will try to get them back."

Then I rode over the ridge and the others after me, and we were crying" "Take courage! It is time to fight!" The soldiers who were guarding our relatives shot at us and then ran away fast, and some more cavalymen on the other side of the gulch did too. We got our relatives and sent them across the ridge to the northwest where they would be safe.

By now many other Lakotas, who had heard the shooting, were coming up from Pine Ridge, and we all charged on the soldiers. They ran eastward toward where the trouble began.

We followed down along the dry gulch, and what we saw was terrible. Dead and wounded women and children and little babies were scattered all along there where they had been trying to run away. The soldiers had followed along the gulch, as they ran, and murdered them in there...

When I saw this I wished that I had died too, but I was not sorry for the women and children. It was better for them to be happy in the other world, and I wanted to be there too. But before I went there I wanted to have revenge. I thought there might be a day, and we should have revenge...

It was a good winter day when all of this happened. The sun was shining. But after the soldiers marched away from their dirty work, a heavy snow began to fall. The wind came up in the night. There was a big blizzard, and it grew very cold. The snow drifted deep in the crooked gulch, and it was one long grave of butchered women and children and babies, who had never done any harm and were only trying to run away.

-From "The Butchering at Wounded Knee" from *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt

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1. What premonition did Black Elk have of the tragedy to come?

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2. Although the American Indians believed that they had rescued the women and children, what actually happened to them?

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3. How did Black Elk react to the massacre?

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4. How would you describe Black Elk's tone in narrating these events? How does it contribute to or detract from your understanding of the incident?

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