

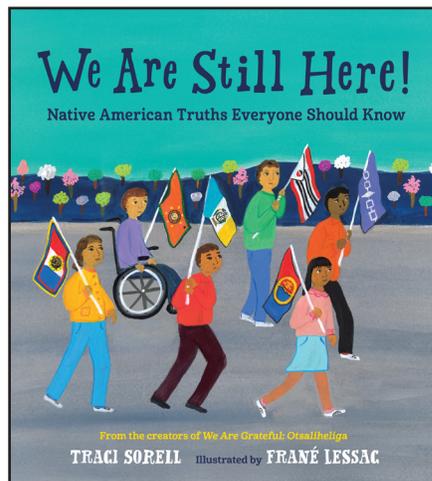
We Are Still Here!

Native American Truths Everyone Should Know

Lesson Kit

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Traci Sorell
Illustrated by Frané Lessac
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About the Book

Too often, Native American history is treated as a finished chapter instead of relevant and ongoing. This companion book to the award-winning *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* offers readers everything they never learned in school about Native American people's past, present, and future. Twelve Native American kids present historical and contemporary laws, policies, struggles, and victories in Native life, each with a powerful refrain: We are still here!



About the Author

Traci Sorell is the award-winning author of *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, a Sibert Honor, Orbis Pictus Honor, American Indian Youth Literature Honor, and Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor book; *Classified: The Secret Career of Mary Golda Ross, Cherokee Aerospace Engineer*; *At the Mountain's Base*; and co-author of *Indian No More*. She is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation and lives in Oklahoma, where her tribe is located.



About the Illustrator

Frané Lessac is the award-winning illustrator of *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, a Sibert Honor, Orbis Pictus Honor, American Indian Youth Literature Honor, and Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor book, and more than forty other books for children. She has lived on the island of Montserrat, in London, and in Australia.

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Learning Activities

Native Land

1. Watch the #HonorNativeLand video found at <<https://usdac.us/nativeland>> and take a moment as a class to reflect. What are the key words and ideas that stood out to your students from this video? Invite students to jot them down on a piece of paper before sharing.
2. If students do not already know whose Native land they live and go to school on, visit <native-land.ca> together to find out. Write down the name of the Native Nation or Nations.
3. Ask students to independently look up the tribal website(s) and learn more about them. A directory is available at <<https://www.ncai.org/tribal-directory>>. Students should also read through the articles farther down on the <<https://usdac.us/nativeland>> page under "More #HonorNativeLand," including:

New York Times, "[On This Land: Dance Presenters Honor Manhattan's First Inhabitants.](#)"
Teen Vogue, "[Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, Explained.](#)"
Native America Calling, "[Honor Native Land.](#)"
4. Students then use what they've learned to draft a land acknowledgment. Invite students to find a partner in the class and cross-check their acknowledgments with each other; they needn't come up with a unified statement, but should carefully consider each other's work and, with permission, borrow ideas to improve their own.
5. Optional extension: Students may craft their land acknowledgment together as a class and bring it to the principal and/or school board for use to open school assemblies and/or board meetings.
6. Throughout this process, emphasize to students that a land acknowledgment is only a first step. Developing meaningful knowledge about the Native Nations whose land you live and go to school on is paramount.

Native News

1. See steps 2 and 3 of the "Native Land" activity.
2. Once students become familiar with local tribe(s), they should choose one Native Nation and look up a piece of their contemporary news. Perhaps they've launched a new youth program or an art exhibit; perhaps they've just elected a new chief, president, or other official. [Indian Country Today](#) is an Indigenous-led national news network; sign up [here](#) for their weekly newsletter.
3. In small groups, students may:
 - Write a script and present it to the class like a TV or radio news segment.
 - Write a news article describing the current event and its relationship to their community.

Native Voices

1. Choose an episode from a Native podcast for children like [Molly of Denali](#) or [Warrior Kids](#). Listen to the episode as a class and discuss. Alternatively, choose an audiobook of a Native-authored picture book, such as *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* by Traci Sorell.
2. Invite students to create an art piece responding to the episode and class discussion. Students may look to Frané Lessac's illustrations for inspiration or choose to work in a style that speaks to them.
3. Optional extension: Students may present their art piece to the class with a brief speech explaining their choice of media, imagery, and other elements.

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Learning Activities

Native Languages

1. Watch the following TED Talks together as a class:

Lindsay Morcom, "[A History of Indigenous Languages—And How to Revitalize Them](#)" (13:21)
Daniel Bögre Udell, "[How to Save a Language from Extinction](#)" (6:38)
2. What are the key words and ideas that stood out to your students from these videos? Invite students to jot them down on a piece of paper before sharing.
3. As a class, reread pages 26–27 from *We Are Still Here!* and discuss how the TED Talks relate to this section.
4. Present students with the following prompt questions for writing time:
 - Do you or a grown-up in your life speak a language other than English?
 - If so, what does the language mean to you?
 - If you and your grown-ups speak only English, what language would you choose to learn and why?
5. Optional extension: Encourage students to explore the "[Education, Traditional Games, and Language](#)" section of the Lewis & Clark Trail Tribal Legacy Project independently. Ask them to select two videos from this section and compare them in writing.
6. Optional extension: Assign students to research the etymology & history of a local Native-named place, such as "Loxahatchee River" and "Neshoba County." Both geographic features and human-made places such as cities, public buildings, and states are eligible. Students may prepare a trifold board or digital equivalent to organize and present their research.

Paired Reading

1. Ask students to choose a book from the "Paired Reading" list on page 4 or select a book to read together as a class.
2. After reading, invite students to make connections in writing or as a presentation to the class between *We Are Still Here!* and their paired reading.
3. All the books on the "Paired Reading" list are by Native authors; so is *We Are Still Here!* Ask students to look up the author and, in small groups, write a script for a TV or radio announcement of their paired reading book's release. The script should include the author's name, Native Nation, current residence, any other books by the author, awards they have won, and a synopsis of the book.

Looking Closely

1. Assign students individually or in small groups to a two-page spread from *We Are Still Here!*
2. Invite students to examine Frané Lessac's illustrations closely. What do they see happening in these images? Who appears in them? Where and when is the setting? No detail is too small! Some spreads may require research to fully understand; some extra information is provided in the back of the book.
3. Ask students to present their assigned spread to the class in small groups or to a small group of their peers. Students should explain what the image is presenting without solely relying on the spread's text.

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Paired Reading

Fiction

Day, Christine. *I Can Make this Promise*. New York City: Quill Tree Books, 2019

Edie knows that her mother's adoption by a white couple cut their family off from their Native heritage—until a mysterious package in the attic ignites her curiosity and sows doubt that her parents are telling her the truth.

Lindstrom, Carole and illustrator Michaela Goade. *We Are Water Protectors*. New York City: Roaring Brook Press, 2020.

Inspired by Indigenous-led movements across North America, a young Native girl protagonist issues a rallying cry to protect water, the first medicine, which affects and connects us all.

Marshall, Joseph and illustrator Jim Yellowhawk. *In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse*. New York City: Amulet Books, 2015

Jimmy McClean is a white-passing Lakota boy from the Rosebud Sioux reservation. Over summer break, his grandfather takes him on a road trip and tells him the story of Crazy Horse, an important Lakota historical figure who, just like Jimmy, had light-brown hair.

Ortiz, Simon J. and illustrator Sharol Graves. *The People Shall Continue*. New York: Children's Book Press/Lee and Low, 2017.

A lyrically told history of the Indigenous peoples of North America, from Creation to the modern day.

Tingle, Tim. *How I Became a Ghost*. Oklahoma City: Roadrunner Press, 2015

When his family is forced to leave Mississippi on the Trail of Tears, ten-year-old Choctaw boy Isaac struggles, endures, and eventually dies. But death can't separate him from his family—or stop him from saving his friend.

Willing McManis, Charlene and Traci Sorell. *Indian No More*. New York City: Tu Books, 2019

In 1957, ten-year-old Umpqua girl Regina Petit's life changes overnight when the federal government enacts a law declaring that her tribe no longer exists.

Nonfiction

Bruchac, Joseph and illustrator Shonto Begay. *Navajo Long Walk: Tragic Story of a Proud People's Forced March from Their Homeland*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Kids, 2002.

A sobering Navajo-centered account of the forced relocation of Navajo people between 1863 and 1865.

Pokiak-Fenton, Margaret, Christy Jordan-Fenton, and illustrator Liz Amini-Holmes. *Fatty Legs: A True Story*. Toronto, Canada: Annick Press, 2010.

Eight-year-old Inuvialuit girl Margaret Pokiak stands up to bullying and asserts her dignity against an abusive nun at a residential school in this powerful memoir.

Robertson, Joanne. *The Water Walker*. Toronto, Canada: Second Story Press, 2017.

A determined Ojibwe grandmother, Josephine Mandamin, walks around all the Great Lakes to raise awareness for the protection of water.

Sorell, Traci and illustrator Frané Lessac. *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2018.

Follow a modern Cherokee family through a year of daily life as they practice the traditional value of gratitude for seasonal changes, ceremonies, and each other.

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Discussion Questions

About Laws & Policies

- What's the difference between a *law* and a *policy*?
- Think about how laws impact your daily life and the lives of your neighbors, family, and friends. What is a law that you think should exist? Why?
- Who makes laws in the US and how? Who makes laws in Native Nations and how?
- How are laws overturned?
- *We Are Still Here!* contains many examples of laws that were unfair or had negative impacts on people. Can you think of other laws like that?
- Where does the text or timeline of *We Are Still Here!* mention Native Nations asking for particular laws or policies to be enacted that would help them?

About Native Sovereignty & Activism

- What is a *trust relationship*?
- What is a *treaty*? Can you think of some examples of treaties from your historical knowledge? What happens when a treaty is broken?
- Read pages 28–29 from *We Are Still Here!* carefully and discuss. What does it mean to have *sovereignty*, in a general sense? How is that similar to and different from the legal meaning of the word when applied to Native Nations? Can you think of other words that have different meanings in different contexts?

- Look closely at the illustration on pages 28–29 from *We Are Still Here!* What do you see happening? Read some of the signs aloud. Are these messages familiar to you? Compare and contrast with the illustration and signs on pages 12–13.
- What do you know about the National Congress of American Indians?

About History

- What is history?
- Where and how do you learn about history?
- What does it mean to *whitewash* history?
- How can you tell if a historical account is accurate or not? What are some ways to evaluate a source?
- Why is learning history important? How do your lives, actions, and opinions change when you learn something about history that you didn't know before?

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My Refrain

What Is a Refrain?

We Are Still Here! has a refrain; its title repeats many times throughout the book. Repetition of a meaningful short phrase can give it power. We see refrains in poems, songs, and stories of all kinds. They can be inspiring and comforting—even funny!

Your Refrain

Reflect on the story of your life. What is your refrain? It can be a short sentence or a single word. It doesn't have to be in English. Use the space below to jot down phrases, doodle, make an idea map, or otherwise brainstorm in order to work up to a refrain. If you're stuck, try speaking aloud as you draw, going for a walk, or talking with a buddy.

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Native Land and Histories

Research whose Native land you live on and list all of those Native Nations on the line below. Select one of those tribes and complete the sections below.

I live on _____ land.

What I know about this tribe's history:

What I learned from this tribe's website & sources:

Compare and Contrast

On a separate sheet of paper, compare and contrast what you wrote in the two boxes above. Did your US or world history coursework include this tribe's history? If not, what changes would you recommend that your teachers make to the curriculum?

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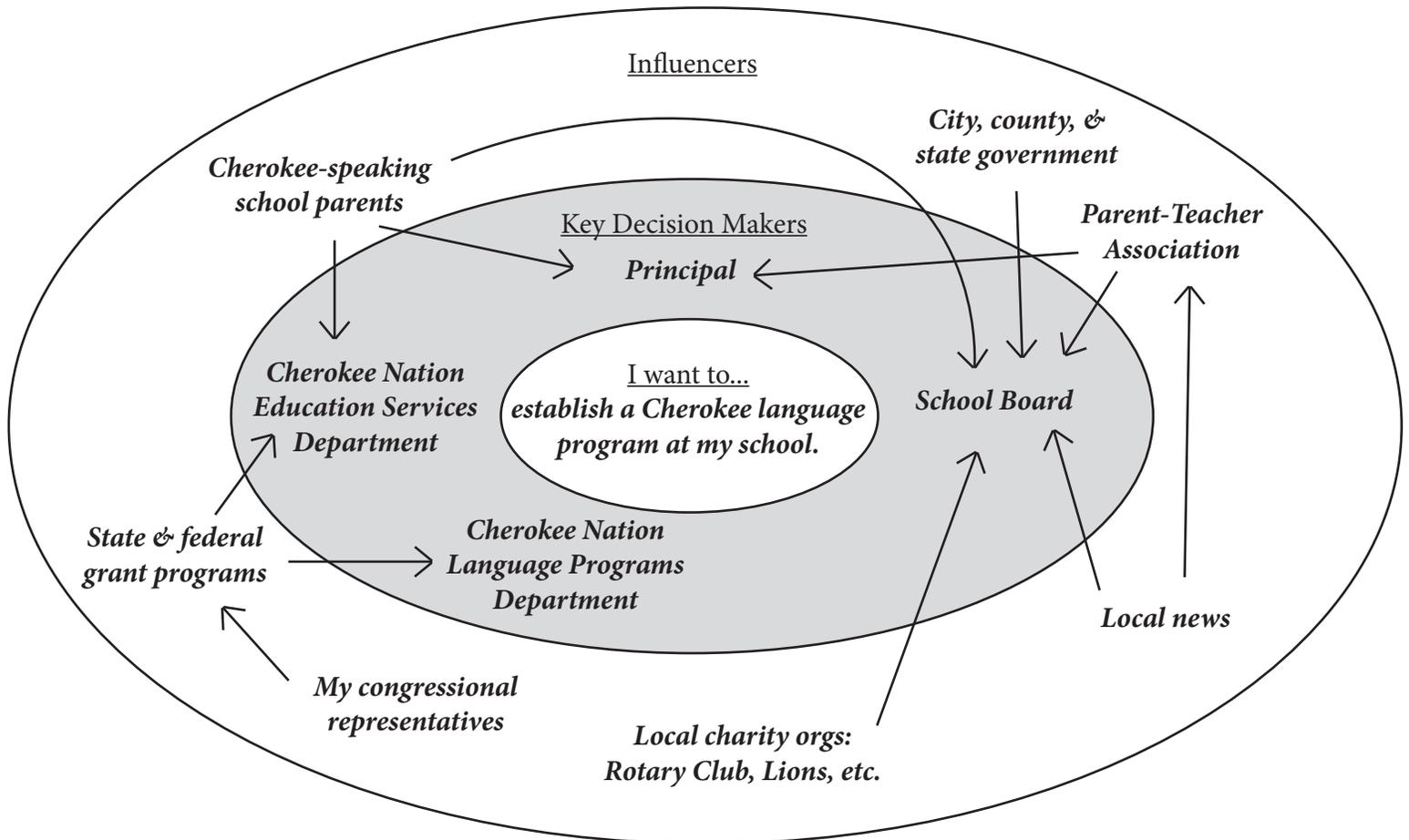
Power Map

What Is a Power Map?

As seen in *We Are Still Here!*, everyday people can seek to change laws and policies in many different ways. Kids and teens can make a difference, too. One important step of making a change happen is knowing who you need to persuade.

An example power map is provided below. Using dot paper, make your own power map. Work from the inside out (the more specific your “I want to...” statement is, the better!) and use arrows to indicate directions of influence. For example, local news can influence both the PTA and the school board.

Quick hint: “Influence” can mean many things—money, opinions & ideas, legal authority, access to a place or person. Think broadly and gather as much information as you can!



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Note: Recommended activities will pair especially well with the themes and concepts in *We Are Still Here!*, but we encourage you to explore all the curriculum activities offered!

Lessons of Our Land

www.lessonsofourland.org

Recommended:

["Tribal Resource Departments"](#)

The National Indian Education Association

www.niea.org/learning-at-home-resources

Recommended:

["Our Elders: Storytelling & Oral Traditions"](#)

["I Remember: Poems & Pictures of Heritage \(Using Acrostic Poetry\)"](#)

["Sequoyah's Talking Leaves: The Cherokee Alphabet"](#)

["Honoring Warrior Spirit: The 2020 National Native American Veteran's Memorial"](#)

More Activities & Resources

Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>

Recommended:

["Early Encounters in Native New York: Did Native People Really Sell Manhattan?"](#)

Teaching Native American Histories

<https://teachnativehistories.umass.edu>

Recommended:

["California's Unratified Treaties"](#)

["New Encounters: Asking Questions and Inferring Motive from Prime Sources"](#)

["Water and Life: An Introduction to the Lands of the Wampanoag"](#)

The Zinn Education Project

www.zinnedproject.org

Recommended:

["Rethinking the US Constitutional Convention: A Role Play"](#) by Bob Peterson