Episode 1: Our Land, Our Roots

Land, Decisions, and Displacement: Understanding Sand Creek

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Episode Description

Our Land, Our Roots introduces audiences to the deep, layered histories that shaped Colorado long before statehood and continues through the settlement era of the 19th century. It establishes the thematic foundation for the entire series by highlighting land, roots, movement and adaptation. This story reinforces that Colorado's identity has always been shaped by many peoples whose connections with place continue to evolve, intersect and endure.

Episode Inquiry Question(s):

- How have differing views about land and resources impacted human migration of various ethnic and cultural groups across Colorado?
- How have humans adapted to and changed the physical environment?
- How do the stories and memories of various individuals tell the story of Colorado?
- How do the interactions of differing cultural groups impact the development of Colorado?

Lesson Description

In this inquiry-based lesson, students investigate how changing relationships to land contributed to the displacement of the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the events at the Sand Creek Massacre. Through the analysis of historical maps, government documents, contextual information, eyewitness testimonies, and a modern image of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, students examine how decisions about land shaped Colorado's history. Students synthesize evidence from multiple sources to construct an evidence-based claim, reinforcing

the enduring theme that Colorado's identity has been shaped by the interactions, decisions, and experiences of many peoples.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

8th grade/ 1 class period (45-55 minutes)

Lesson Inquiry Question(s):

1. How did a series of decisions about land lead to the events at Sand Creek?

Supporting Questions:

1. How have different understandings of land shaped the movement and displacement of people in Colorado?
2. How did different ideas about land contribute to the events at Sand Creek?
3. How did different groups understand the land around Big Sandy Creek?
4. How did repeated U.S. treaty violations and broken promises remove the Cheyenne and Arapaho of their homeland, leading to the massacre at Sand Creek?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Analyze multiple historical sources to explain how differing relationships to land contributed to the displacement of the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the events at Sand Creek.
2. Construct an evidence-based claim using information from primary and secondary sources.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

The Sand Creek Massacre occurred on November 29, 1864, in southeastern Colorado Territory, when approximately 675 Colorado volunteer soldiers, under the command of Colonel John M. Chivington, attacked a village of Cheyenne and Arapaho people camped along Big Sandy Creek. Many of the people in the village, including women, children, and elders, had sought peace with U.S. officials and believed they were under the protection of the U.S. Army. The attack resulted in the deaths of more than 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho people and is recognized by

the State of Colorado, the National Park Service, and descendant Tribal Nations as a massacre.

This lesson examines the Sand Creek Massacre through the broader themes of land, displacement, and decision-making. During the mid-1800s, increasing migration to Colorado following the Pike's Peak Gold Rush placed significant pressure on Indigenous homelands. Treaty agreements, including the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1851) and the Treaty of Fort Wise (1861), altered the lands recognized for the Cheyenne and Arapaho, while territorial leaders pursued policies that encouraged settlement and, ultimately, military action. Rather than presenting the massacre as an isolated event, this lesson invites students to investigate how changing relationships with the land, government decisions, and individual actions contributed to displacement and the events at Sand Creek.

Because this lesson addresses a traumatic event in Colorado's history, teachers should establish norms for respectful discussion and recognize that students may respond differently to the content. The lesson centers evidence from multiple historical sources while acknowledging that descendant Cheyenne and Arapaho communities continue to commemorate and interpret the significance of Sand Creek today.

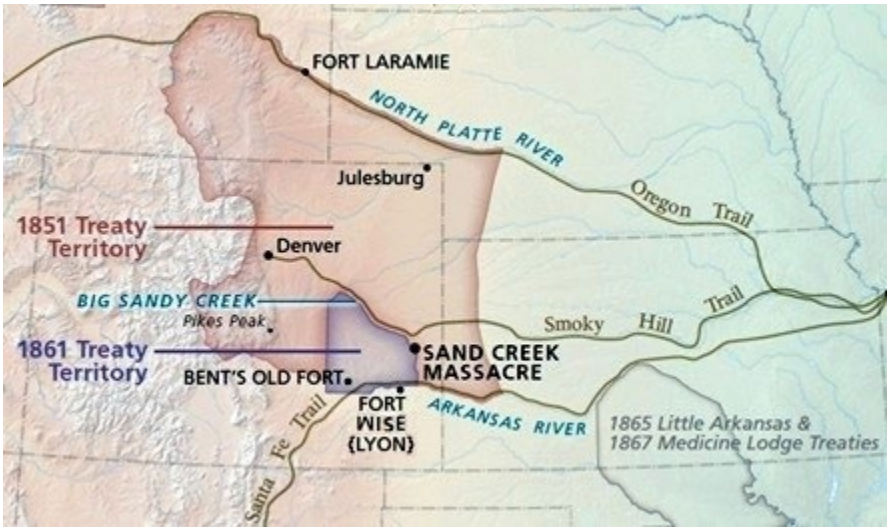
Building Background Knowledge for the Student

Before beginning the inquiry, invite students to activate their prior knowledge using the “I Notice, I Wonder” strategy with the historical treaty map (Source 1). Encourage students to make observations about changes in the map and generate questions about how and why the land changed over time. If students have viewed “Episode 1: Our Land, Our Roots”, prompt them to recall ideas from the documentary about how people have interacted with and adapted to Colorado's landscape throughout history.

As needed, briefly introduce key vocabulary such as **treaty**, **displacement**, **proclamation**, **testimony**, and **sovereignty** before students begin analyzing sources. Teachers may also provide a short overview of the historical context,

including the Pike's Peak Gold Rush, changing treaty boundaries, and the presence of the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Colorado Territory, to ensure students have sufficient background knowledge to engage meaningfully with the inquiry.

Lesson Sources:



Source 1: Map of Indian Treaties: Ft. Laramie and Ft. Wise. Historical map comparing Cheyenne and Arapaho homelands before and after treaties, showing a significant reduction in their recognized territory.
Source: Eric Sainio, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site.

Source 2: Colorado Governor John Evans Announcement (August, 1864)

> *"[M]ost of the Indian tribes of the plains are at war and hostile to whites… Now … I, John Evans, governor of the Colorado Territory, [give permission to] all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such **parties** as they may organize, to go in **pursuit** of all hostile Indians on the plains, **scrupulously** avoiding those who have responded to my call to **rendezvous** at the **points indicated**; also to kill and destroy as enemies of the country… all such hostile Indians."*

Source: Governor John Evans Proclamation in Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1864 (Washington, DC, 1965), 230–31.



Source 3: Portrait of Black Kettle, a Southern Cheyenne peace chief who sought peace with U.S. officials before the Sand Creek Massacre. Historical Context: Black Kettle (Mo'ohtavetoo'o) was a Southern Cheyenne peace chief who worked to maintain peaceful relations with the United States during a period of increasing tension on the Plains. After meeting with territorial and federal officials at Camp Weld in 1864, Black Kettle and other Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders believed they would be protected if they camped near Fort Lyon. They later moved their village to Sand Creek, where they believed they were under the protection of the U.S. Army. On November 29, 1864, Colorado volunteer soldiers attacked the village despite these efforts to seek peace.

Source: Adapted from Todd Laugen and Meg Frisbee, Colorado History Detectives: "Sand Creek—Why Did This Event Happen?" (Metropolitan State University of Denver); National Park Service, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site; and Denver Public Library, Black Kettle (1807–1868).

Source 4: John Chivington's view of what happened at Sand Creek on November 29, 1864

Governor John Evans told John Chivington to organize and lead a group of volunteer soldiers from among the white settlers of Colorado. These formed the Third Calvary. These men were not trained soldiers of the U.S. Army, but volunteers. On November 29, 1864 Col. Chivington ordered an attack on Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians camped along Sand Creek in southeast Colorado. He had earlier commanded a victorious group of Union soldiers at the Battle of Glorieta Pass in the Civil War. Five months after the events at Sand Creek, a US government committee asked Chivington about what happened at Sand Creek.

> *4th question: [Tell]…the number of Indians that were in the village or camp at the time the attack was made; how many of them were warriors; how many of them were old men, how many of them were women, and how many of them were children?*
> *Chivington's Answer: From the best and most reliable information I could obtain, there were in the Indian camp, at the time of the attack, about eleven (11) or twelve (12) hundred Indians: of these about seven hundred were warriors, and the remainder were women and children. I am not aware that there were any old men among them. There was an unusual number of males among them, for the reason that the war chiefs of both nations were assembled there evidently for some special purpose.*
>
> *7th question: What number of Indians were killed; and what number of the killed were women, and what number were children?*
> *Chivington's Answer: From the best information I could obtain, I judge there were five hundred or six hundred Indians killed; I cannot state positively the number killed, nor can I state positively the number of women and children killed. Officers*

who passed over the field, by my orders, after the battle, for the purpose of [finding out] the number of Indians killed, report that they saw but few women or children dead, no more than would certainly fall in an attack upon a camp in which they were. I myself passed over some portions of the field after the fight, and I saw but one woman who had been killed, and one who had hanged herself; I saw no dead children. From all I could learn, I arrived at the conclusion that but few women or children had been slain. I am of the opinion that when the attack was made on the Indian camp the greater number of [women] and children made their escape, while the warriors remained to fight my troops.

Source: Chivington's Deposition in Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Massacre of Cheyenne Indians, 38th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865), 101–8.

Source 5: John M. Smith's Testimony (March 14, 1865)
John Smith was a white government agent who was sent to Sand Creek to check out the Cheyenne Indian camp along Sand Creek before the attack. He was present during the attack and had married an Indian woman. He had previously acted as an interpreter and Indian agent. Like Chivington, Smith was also asked afterward about what happened on November 29, 1864. Below are the questions he was asked followed by Smith's answers.

Question: How many Indians were there there?
Smith's Answer: There were 100 families of Cheyennes, and some six or eight lodges of Arapahoes.

Question: How many persons in all, should you say?
Smith's Answer: About 500 we estimate them at five to a lodge.

Question: 500 men, women and children?
Smith's Answer: Yes, sir.

Question: Do you know the reason for that attack on the Indians? Do you know whether or not Colonel Chivington knew the friendly character of these Indians before he made the attack on them?
Smith's Answer: It is my opinion that he did.

Question: Were the women and children slaughtered indiscriminately, or only so far as they were with warriors?
Smith's Answer: Indiscriminately.

Question: Can you state how many Indians were killed – how many women and how many children?
Smith's Answer: Perhaps one-half were men, and the balance were women and children. I do not think that I saw more than 70 lying dead then, as far as I went. But I saw parties of men scattered in every direction, pursuing little bands of Indians.

Question: What time of day or night was this attack made?
Smith's Answer: The attack commenced about sunrise and lasted until between 10 and 11 o'clock.

Question: How large a body of [army] troops?
Smith's Answer: From about 800 to 1,000 men.

Question: What amount of resistance did the Indian [warriors] make?
Smith's Answer. I think that probably there may have been about 60 or 70 warriors who were armed and stood their ground and fought. Those that were unarmed got out of the way as they best could.

Source: Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Massacre of Cheyenne Indians, 38th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865) 6-9.



Source 6: Sand Creek National Historic Site Photograph of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site showing an open prairie landscape with grasses, low vegetation, and a wide sky.
Source: National Park Service. Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site.

Lesson Materials Needed:

1. Copies of the sources listed in the lesson
2. Note catcher

Lesson Instructions:

Step 1: Engage
Strategy: I Notice, I Wonder

1. Display the treaty map (Source 1) showing the changing lands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho.
    a. Students record:
        i. I Notice...
        ii. I Wonder...
2. Invite students to share observations and questions with a partner before facilitating a brief whole-class discussion.

3. Transition - Introduce the lesson's driving question: How did a series of decisions about land lead to the events at Sand Creek?
4. Explain that students will investigate several historical sources to understand how changing relationships to land shaped this event in Colorado's history.

Step 2: Explore

Strategy: Why-Lighting

1. Students work independently or with a partner to analyze four sources using a Why-Lighting strategy. As students read each source, they highlight evidence that helps answer the driving question and annotate: Why is this evidence important?
2. Students record evidence in a simple organizer.
    a. Source Sequence:
        i. Source 1 – Treaty Map
            1. How did the land available to the Cheyenne and Arapaho change?
            2. Who made these decisions about the land and land ownership?
        ii. Source 2 – Governor Evans' Proclamation
            1. How did territorial leaders respond to increasing settlement?
            2. How might this proclamation have influenced people's actions?
        iii. Source 3 – Black Kettle
            1. How did Black Kettle respond to changing conditions?
            2. What does this source reveal about efforts to seek peace?
        iv. Source 4 – Chivington and John Smith Testimonies
            1. Students compare excerpts from both testimonies.
            2. Prompt: How do these testimonies help us understand the consequences of the decisions and changing relationships to land explored in the earlier sources?

3. The teacher circulates, asking probing questions and encouraging students to connect evidence across sources rather than analyze each in isolation.

Step 3: Reflect (10–15 minutes)

Strategy: Think, Pair, Share & Claims, Evidence, and Reasoning

1. Students discuss:
    a. Which source most helped you answer today's driving question? Why?
2. After discussion, students complete a short Claims, Evidence, and Reasoning.

Writing prompt: How did a series of decisions about land lead to the events at Sand Creek?

Students write:

Claim

Evidence

Use evidence from at least two sources.

Reasoning

Explain how the evidence supports the claim.

Step 4: Closure

Strategy: Exit Ticket

1. Display Source 6, the photograph of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site.
2. Ask students: How does preserving this place help us understand Colorado's history today?
3. Allow students to share brief reflections before concluding the lesson.

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

Access

- Preview key vocabulary (e.g., treaty, displacement, proclamation, testimony) before students begin source analysis.
- Read sources aloud or provide audio support for students who benefit from hearing the text.

- Chunk longer documents and provide guiding questions or sentence starters for annotations.
- Pair text with visual supports, including maps, photographs, and historical images, to build context.

Engagement

- Allow students to work independently, with a partner, or in small groups during source analysis.
- Encourage discussion through Think, Pair, Share before independent writing to help students process ideas verbally.
- Invite students to connect information across sources by revisiting the driving question after each document.

Expression

- Provide sentence stems or a graphic organizer for the CER response (e.g., One reason..., The evidence shows..., This demonstrates...).
- Allow students to communicate their understanding through a written response, verbal explanation, or annotated organizer before completing the CER.
- Challenge students who are ready for extension to compare how different historical perspectives shape interpretations of the events at Sand Creek or evaluate which source they found most persuasive and why.

Assessment:

Students will demonstrate their learning through two complementary assessment opportunities. Throughout the inquiry, students will complete a source analysis note-catcher, recording evidence and observations from each source to explain how decisions about land contributed to the displacement of the Cheyenne and Arapaho and the events at Sand Creek. As a culminating assessment, students will complete a Claim-Evidence-Reasoning (CER) response to the lesson's driving question, using evidence from multiple sources to construct and support an evidence-based historical claim. Together, these assessments provide evidence of students' ability to analyze historical sources, make connections across perspectives, and communicate their understanding using historical evidence.

2022 Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- SS.8.1.GLE 1.EO.a: Use and interpret documents and other relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to United States history from multiple diverse perspectives.
- SS.8.1.GLE 1.EO.b: Analyze evidence from multiple sources including those with conflicting accounts about specific events in both Colorado and United States history. For example: Indigenous Peoples', Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and African American perspectives on Western colonization and enslavement; Asian American and Latinos' perspectives on immigration; and the Indian Removal Act, the Buffalo Soldiers, and the Sand Creek Massacre.
- SS.8.4.GLE 2.EO.b: Analyze patterns of conflict and cooperation that resulted from human migration and the economic, political, ethnic, and social implications of those interactions

Extension Activities:

To deepen their understanding, students can explore the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site through the National Park Service website. Students can examine additional photographs, maps, and interpretive resources to learn how the site is preserved today and why it remains an important place of remembrance for descendant communities.

Students interested in further investigating the historical event can also read Captain Silas Soule's testimony, an eyewitness account that offers an additional perspective on the Sand Creek Massacre. After reading, students can compare Soule's account with the testimonies of John Chivington and John Smith, considering how multiple perspectives contribute to historians' understanding of the past.

Additional Resources:

- Colorado Encyclopedia: *Sand Creek Massacre*
- National Park Service: *Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site*
- History Colorado: Sand Creek resources
- Colorado History Detectives: *Sand Creek—Why Did This Event Happen?*

Notecatcher:	
Source	**What does this source tell us about land, displacement, and decisions?**
Treaty Map	
Governor Evans' Proclamation	
Black Kettle Context	
Chivington & John Smith Testimonies	