

# CRAZY HORSE THE LAST WARRIOR

Born in 1840 at the height of Lakota power, the enigmatic Crazy Horse left behind no paper trail. He never signed a peace treaty and his likeness was never captured in a photograph. Crazy Horse's short, mysterious life was marked by both great tragedy and fierce determination. This Lakota warrior was a symbol of staunch resistance to the encroachment on Native American land and culture – he defended the nomadic hunting tradition of the Plains Indians with a seemingly unquenchable spirit. In 1868, Crazy Horse rejected the Fort Laramie Treaty and led the resistance of the non-reservation Lakota. Later he became one of the most prominent leaders in the Great Sioux Wars of the late 1870s, playing a key role in the defeat of General Custer and the 7th Cavalry in the infamous Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. However, this stunning victory brought about brutal retaliation from the U.S. Army and ultimately led to further subjugation of the Sioux. Crazy Horse attempted to protect his people up until the bitter end – finally forced to surrender in May of 1877, he was fatally wounded while attempting to resist arrest by authorities.



The unfinished likeness of Lakota Chief Crazy Horse in Utah. Photographer: Mike Wolforth, Getty Images.

## Curriculum links

*Crazy Horse: The Last Warrior* is appropriate for middle and high school students. It would be useful for Social Studies, American History or Native American History courses. The documentary runs for 45 minutes.

## Vocabulary

Using the dictionary at [www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com) or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

**clamor**   **demise**   **extricate**   **incursion**   **malice**  
**decoy**   **enigmatic**   **forthcoming**   **introverted**   **nomadic**

## Discussion questions

1. Why was Crazy Horse such a mysterious historical figure? What about his physical appearance set him apart from other Native Americans?
2. What was significant about the era in which Crazy Horse came of age? What happened in the 1850s and 1860s that dramatically increased the tensions between white American settlers and Native Americans?
3. What seemingly insignificant event precipitated the Grattan Massacre of 1854? How was this event a turning point for Crazy Horse?
4. What was Crazy Horse's vision? What did it tell him about his future?
5. What tactic did Crazy Horse employ to lure soldiers from the safety of their fort?
6. How did Red Cloud ensure a great victory against Captain Fetterman's forces? What were the consequences of this brilliant military triumph?
7. What honor was Crazy Horse given in recognition of his leadership? What does this designation entail?
8. What romantic entanglement resulted in the loss of his shirt-wearing position? Did this affect his role as a leader in the tribe?
9. What ultimatum did the Secretary of the Interior give to the Plains Indians? How did they respond to this threat? What happened as soon as the deadline passed?
10. What happened when Crazy Horse and his men met Custer's regiment in the Battle of the Little Bighorn? What sad consequences came about because of this great Indian victory?
11. What difficult decision did Crazy Horse make in May of 1877? What happened when his comments were mistranslated?
12. What did Crazy Horse become a symbol of after his death? What did he represent to his people?

## Extended activities

1. Crazy Horse lived in a time when power was transitioning from the hands of the Lakota to the grip of Euro-American settlers moving across the Plains. Draw a timeline of Crazy Horse's life. Include all the major interactions between the Plains Indians and these settlers, particularly important battles, fort settlements and peace treaties. Pinpoint the spot on this timeline when you think the power balance truly shifted away from the Native Americans.
2. The Lakota and the non-native settlers had huge cultural differences in attitudes towards warfare, land, family and community. Write a one-page diary entry from the point of view of a Lakota warrior, mother or child. Include his or her impressions, fears or misconceptions of the white settlers. Then do the same from the perspective of a white immigrant traveling across the vast Plains. Be sure to touch on some of the most significant cultural differences between these two groups.
3. Crazy Horse's story is only one among many in the long saga of interaction between Native Americans and European Americans in the New World. Choose another Native American leader and design a mini-biography of this person. These biographies can be in essay form, written as a short encyclopedia article, or presented in PowerPoint format. Share these projects with the larger class or group.
4. One of the most infamous incidents between Native Americans and federal authorities in the 1890s was the Battle of Wounded Knee. This event culminated in the massacre of over 200 Sioux, and was prompted by fear among the authorities that the Sioux were plotting a massive resistance inspired by a ritual known as the "Ghost Dance." Online or at the library, research the Ghost Dance and write a 2-3 page essay on what it was, why it was threatening to European-American settlers, and how it prompted the Battle of Wounded Knee. These essays should conclude with a brief synopsis of the battle and its significance for the Sioux.

## Websites & books

### WEBSITES

Smithsonian's online exhibit: [www.si.edu/Encyclopedia\\_SI/History\\_and\\_Culture/AmericanIndian\\_History.htm](http://www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/History_and_Culture/AmericanIndian_History.htm)

Virtual exhibits on the Lakota from the Buechel Memorial Museum: [www.sfmmission.org/museum/exhibit/](http://www.sfmmission.org/museum/exhibit/)

National Parks Service Memorial at the site of the Battle of the Little Bighorn: [www.nps.gov/libi/indian-memorial-at-little-bighorn.htm](http://www.nps.gov/libi/indian-memorial-at-little-bighorn.htm)

### BOOKS

Bray, Kingley M. *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

Freedman, Russell. *The Life and Death of Crazy Horse* (Holiday House, 1996).

Marshall, Joseph M. III. *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (Penguin, 2005).

Matthiessen, Peter. *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (Penguin, 1992).