

Becoming Wisconsin: From Indian Lands to Territory to Statehood

Activity 5.1: Whose Land? A Story of Black Hawk

Teacher Materials

Preparation/Organization It will take several days to complete the full activity, since students will need several rehearsal sessions before carrying out their performance. Depending upon time constraints, you might want to devote some time for the preparations each day for a week or so. (**Note:** If you and students wish, you might want to invite other classes or even friends and families to the performance.) In terms of organization, it should not be difficult to get the whole class involved in the production, since there are 16 actors and also directors, set designers, stagehands, and prop masters. You will want to have enough copies of Student Pages 1–10 for all students involved. A number of readily available or easily made items will also be needed:

- two chairs
- a desk
- a large cloth sack
- a blanket
- an inkwell (or similar object)
- a long sheet of paper
- several sheets of writing paper
- life-size drawing of several corn stalks
- shovel or garden hoe (or two broomsticks)
- map of the United States

Procedure

1. Select those students who will be actors and inform students of the parts they will be playing. Also assign students to jobs as directors, set designers, prop masters, and stagehands.
2. Hand out scripts to those who will be acting, highlighting their parts for them. Also give out copies of the script to students who will be helping you direct, designing and making sets, preparing props, and serving as stagehands. The chart on Teacher Page 2 will help you organize the cast and crew of the play.
3. Work with those students who will be performing, helping them learn and practice their parts. Students need not memorize their parts, but they should still know the words well enough to read them smoothly and to convey the appropriate emotion and intonation. Also work with the students who will be preparing the set and creating the props for the play, making sure that they create the correct materials and have everything ready.

4. Meanwhile, have the class review and discuss pages 88–89 of *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story* to refresh students’ memories about the events involved in the story of Black Hawk.
5. When it is time for the performance, pass out scripts to anyone in the audience.
6. Have actors assume their places and begin the performance.
7. Afterwards, elicit student responses to gauge whether the play helped them more fully understand the Black Hawk War and its aftermath.

Character	Student(s)
Narrator	
Black Hawk	
Antoine Le Clair, interpreter	
Keokuk	
Neapope	
White Cloud, a Ho-Chunk man	
Sauk Woman 1	
Sauk Woman 2	
Fisherman 1	
Fisherman 2	
Sauk Brave 1	
Sauk Brave 2	
General Edmund P. Gaines	
Daniel Johnson (settler)	
Tim Johnson (settler)	
Went Howards (settler)	
Assistant Directors	
Set Designers	
Prop Masters	
Stagehands	

Name _____ Date _____

Activity 5.1 Whose Land? A Story of Black Hawk

This play tells the story of Black Hawk in prison, following his surrender. There he recalls several events that explain the clash between the Native and the non-native worldviews. Anne Jordan wrote the first version of this play that appeared in *Wisconsin Indians since 1634*, which was published in 1976. Then the play was included in *Wisconsin History on Stage*.

SCENE 1

Narrator: There is an old Indian story about American settlers. It says they are like a spot of raccoon grease on a blanket. At first the spot is small. But do not be fooled. It will spread and cover the whole blanket.

In the early 1830s settlers were moving into the land that is now Wisconsin and Illinois. They came to build farms, to trade, or to work in lead mines. They thought of the land as rich and new. But it was not new. For thousands of years, many groups of American Indians have lived, hunted, planted fields of corn, and buried their dead here. They had developed many traditions that made life good.

Black Hawk was a proud leader of a band of Sauk people. As an old man, he wanted to tell the story of his life. Antoine (**An** twon) Le Clair, who spoke both English and Sauk, wrote it down. Many things Black Hawk says in this play were taken from his book. The play is about to begin. There, I see the old warrior fast asleep. (*Exit*)



Name _____ Date _____

(Setting: Night. On the left, two chairs face each other. On one chair is an inkwell, quill pen, and some paper. Black Hawk is asleep on a blanket in front of the chairs. In the center back is a long piece of paper, rolled up. On the right is a picture of several corn stalks. To the right of that is a desk.)

Sauk Brave 1 sneaks softly into the cornfield. He glances around. Then he brings to fill an imaginary sack with ears of corn. A settler, Went Howards, rushes in.)

Howards: Thief! Come back! *(The settler reaches for an imaginary weapon and the brave turns to run. Just then Black Hawk wakes.)*

B. Hawk: STOP! *(The two actors freeze. Black Hawk rubs his face.)* Mr. Le Clair! *(Le Clair enters from the left—turning on the light. When the light comes on, the actors are gone.)*

Le Clair: Yes, what is it?

B. Hawk: I've dreamt again of the things that have happened to my people. Please, let us continue with my story. *(He wraps himself in his blanket.)*

Le Clair: Of course. *(He picks up his pen and sits down.)* I'm ready. Begin.

B. Hawk: I want people to know about the village where I grew up. *(He crosses to the roll of paper and spreads it out so that it cuts the stage in half from front to back.)* Imagine that this is the wide Mississippi. Just at the place where the Rock River flows into it was Saukenuk (**Saw**k uh nuk), our village. *(He gestures toward the right side of the river. Le Clair writes.)*

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Le Clair: I understand.

B. Hawk: Here we had our cornfields, 800 acres, worked by our women. *(As he speaks, two Sauk women enter from the right. They begin to hoe the fields. Black Hawk does not see them.)*

Here, several fine springs broke from the earth. These springs supplied us with good water. We fished at the rapids of the Rock River. *(As he speaks, two men enter and begin to fish.)* Sauk women harvested corn, beans, pumpkins, and squash. Our children never cried from hunger. In the distance were our rich hunting grounds, which we visited each winter.

Le Clair: How long had the Sauk people lived there?

B. Hawk: Our village was more than 100 years old. The bones of our forefathers and friends had found rest there. I lived at Saukenuk for 64 years.

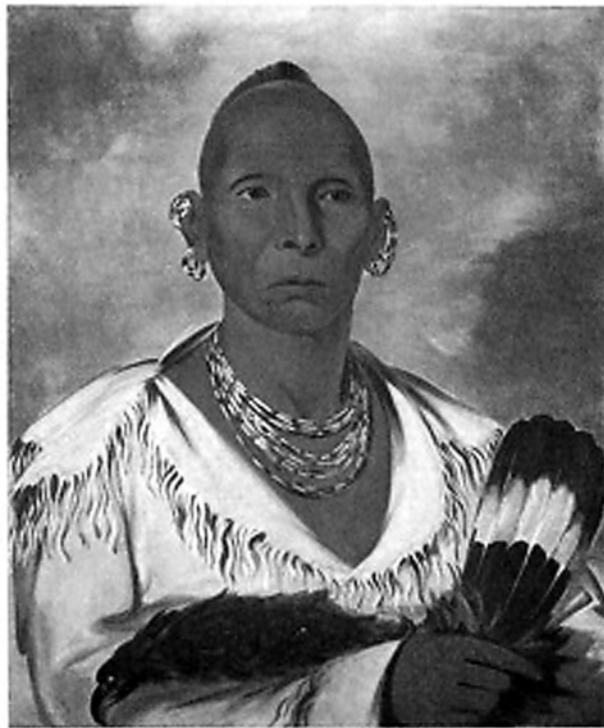
Le Clair: *(Reading)* In the fall, Indians played games, raced horses, and feasted. Women brought in the harvest. Traders bartered supplies for pelts. The winter hunt began. Sometimes the old people spent the winter with the traders.

B. Hawk: After the winter hunt, we gathered maple sugar and feasted. Then we returned to our village in time for planting the corn. So the years rolled by happily. I grew to be an old man. *(Women and fishermen exit.)*

Le Clair: *(Continues to read from his papers.)* But these times were not to last. One winter while the Sauk were at the hunting grounds, settlers moved into Saukenuk. *(Daniel Johnson and his son Tim enter right. They begin to work the fields.)*

Tim: The ground is not hard. It is easy to dig here.

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An oil portrait of Black Hawk by George Catlin

Dan: That's because Indians planted these fields for many years.

Tim: Aren't they coming back?

Dan: No. The United States made a treaty with some of the Sauk people. Our government owns the land now. This year it was opened to settlers. The Sauk people have been told not to come back.

Tim: Look! Here comes a man! (*Enter Went Howards*)

Dan: Hello! My name's Dan Johnson. (*Offers hand*)

Howards: (*Shaking hands*) And I'm Went Howards. I'm going to register for some of this land. I could put a fence along through here. (*Motions with hand*)

Name _____ Date _____

Dan: Not here. I've chosen this land to fence. You must find another place. (*Three leave the stage.*)

B. Hawk: Imagine! These men quarreled among themselves about dividing our land. For three years my people worked sadly beside the settlers. The settlers were unhappy that we had come back. We looked at our village with sadness and anger.

(*As Black Hawk speaks, the Sauk enter from the right: Keokuk, Neapope, women, braves, and the Ho-Chunk, White Cloud. Then, General Gaines enters. He sits at the desk.*)

General: Sauk warriors!

B. Hawk: (*Angry and scowling*) I am Black Hawk.

Keokuk: And I am Keokuk (**Kee** o kuk). (*The settlers continue to work behind.*)

General: (*Firmly*) You have been asked many times to leave this village. And still you are here.

B. Hawk: The Great Spirit gave us this land. Why should we leave our fields?

General: Because your chiefs sold this land in 1804.

B. Hawk: (*Angrily*) No! That was not a true treaty. Under our law, chiefs cannot sell land without a vote of the tribe. They cannot make decisions that affect our people.

Name _____ Date _____



Keokuk, a Sauk-Fox Chief

General: You yourself signed a treaty to sell these lands. I did not come here to beg you to leave. I came to remove you. I will do it peacefully if I can. If not, I will force you off! You have two days to leave.

Keokuk: Let me have to talk to our people.

B. Hawk: I do not wish to go!

Woman 1: Nor do I. These cornfields belong to us.

Woman 2: We women work to soften the earth for the seed. Our corn is in the soil. How can we leave it before it is ready to harvest? How will our people survive through the winter?

Name _____ Date _____

General: The government will send your people food and supplies after you move to the lands west of the Great Mississippi. There is nothing more to be said. You have two days. (*Exit General. Settlers continue to work.*)

B. Hawk: We knew soldiers were on their way to Saukenuk. So, during the last night, we crossed the Mississippi. (*All Sauk people cross over, then sit in a large circle near Black Hawk and Le Clair.*) We signed a treaty agreeing never to return. The white chief promised us corn in place of the corn we had left growing in our fields. But it was not enough. At night, braves went to take corn at Saukenuk. (*Sighing*) That is how I came to dream of my people stealing their own corn!

Le Clair: (*Reading from his notes*) But even across the river, things were not peaceful. The land seemed strange, harder to work. We missed our villages and our fields. The Sauk people still felt the control of the Americans over their lives. I grew restless. (*Black Hawk joins the circle.*)

B. Hawk: (*Thinking, pauses*) We have abandoned our lands and village to strangers.

Keokuk: Don't you know how many Americans are there? Don't you know that it is useless to fight them?

W. Cloud: (*Whispering in Black Hawk's ear*) Other tribes have sent word. They will help you fight the Americans.

Neapope: (*In Black Hawk's other ear*) I have talked with the British. They will help you fight!

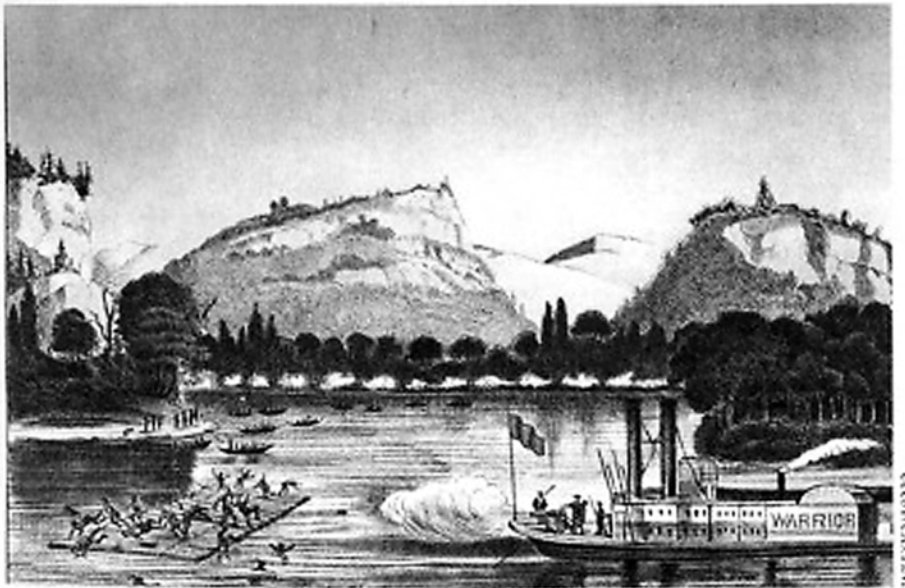
Name _____ Date _____

W. Cloud: (*Whispering*) The white soldiers only want to scare you!

B. Hawk: Keokuk, braves, do you hear our friends?

Keokuk: Do not listen to these lies. If you go back, you will bring sorrow to your people. We must find another way.

B. Hawk: These ways will not work. I will go back peacefully. Those who choose, can join me. (*The tribe splits. Neapope, White Cloud, and women side with Black Hawk. The others exit left with Keokuk.*)



The Massacre at Bad Axe by Henry Lewis

B. Hawk: About one thousand people came with me. We crossed the Mississippi and traveled to our old village. We went in peace, but we were met by men with firearms. (*All exit to the right except Black Hawk and Le Clair. Black Hawk sits.*) I told my people that we would go back across the river peacefully. There was no use in going on without food.

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Le Clair: *(Reading)* I sent a party of braves to the soldiers with a white flag. But the soldiers attacked them, killing three braves. All of my followers expected to be killed. There were several hundred soldiers. But we won! *(Le Clair stops writing.)*

Narrator: This is how Black Hawk's attempted surrender caused the first battle of the war. Now Black Hawk and his people had to move on. To distract the soldiers from the women, children and old people, Black Hawk sent out warriors to attack and collect food.

The main group of Sauk continued north, then west, toward the Mississippi. They grew weary. The old and the weak began to die. Perhaps they could find safety across the Mississippi. But the soldiers kept coming. There were several battles.

Finally the Sauk reached the place where the Bad Axe River flows into the Mississippi. Just as they began to cross, the soldiers fell on them. Hundreds of men, women, and children were killed. Black Hawk and some others escaped, then peacefully surrendered. The painful journey ended in loss and great sadness. *(Exit) (Black Hawk and Le Clair sit listening.)*

B. Hawk: *(Tired)* The struggle is over. *(Sadly)* I am afraid, however, that in a few years, the Americans will begin to drive our people away from where they now make their homes. *(He notices the sun is rising.)* The sky is turning red.

Le Clair: Yes, it is almost morning.

B. Hawk: Put your things away. We can talk more later. *(Le Clair puts his paper and pen on the chair. He goes out, turning off the light. Black Hawk spreads out his blanket and lies down.)*

Name _____ Date _____

Narrator: *(With map of the United States)* Black Hawk lived to see his people sell 400 square miles of their land in Iowa to pay debts. He stood off to the side during the ceremony. The following year the Sauk people sold more than one million acres of land to the government. Black Hawk did not live to see his people trade their remaining land for land in Kansas (*points*), and then for land in Oklahoma (*points*). The Sauk Nation had to move because of the settlers—as Black Hawk had feared.