



An Alliance Betrayed

A short history of Treaty 7

On September 12, 1877, Chief Crowfoot of the Siksika tribe (Blackfoot) along with chiefs from other tribes signed Treaty 7 along the banks of the Bow River in Southern Alberta. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, “Aboriginal treaties in Canada are constitutionally recognized agreements between the Crown and Aboriginal people.” Commissioner David Laird, few days before the signing, commented:

“In a very few years, the buffalo will probably be all destroyed, and for this reason the queen wishes to help you to live in the future in some other way.”

The government depended on Crowfoot’s diplomacy to negotiate with the other chiefs. The government promised that, in exchange for giving up their land, the tribes would have the right to hunt and trap on the “tract surrendered,” the First Nations people would be taught how to grow grain and raise cattle, and they would be given financial assistance and protection.

After negotiating the terms of Treaty 7, Chief Crowfoot delivered a speech on behalf of the Blackfoot people:

“While I speak, be kind and patient. I have to speak for my people, who are numerous, and who rely upon me to follow that course which in the future will tend to their good. The plains are large and wide. We are the children of the plains, it is our home, and the buffalo has been our food always. I hope you look upon the Blackfeet, Bloods and Sarcees as your children now, and that you will be indulgent and charitable to them. . . . The advice given me and my people has proved to be very good. If the Police had not come to the country, where would we be all now? Bad men and whiskey were killing us so fast that very few, indeed, of us would have been left to-day. The Police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frosts of winter. I wish them all good, and trust that all our hearts will increase in goodness from this time forward. I am satisfied. I will sign the treaty.”

Only two years later, the Siksika people were forced to migrate south into Montana because of hunger and the dwindling buffalo herds and because the Canadian government failed to deliver any real support. They returned to their reserve in 1881 but continued to face many threats from American whisky traders and from the Lakota Sioux. Crowfoot became disillusioned with the Canadian government but refused to join the rebellion of 1885, probably because he believed it could not succeed.

Shortly before he died, Crowfoot is quoted as saying, “What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time. It is as the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.”

Instructional strategies

1. As a class, watch [The Ballad of Crowfoot](#) (10:21) by Willie Dunn, a National Film Board of Canada video, and facilitate a class discussion using questions such as:
 - a. In the chorus, Dunn sings, “Crowfoot, Crowfoot, why the tears? You’ve been a brave man for many years, Why the sadness? Why the sorrow?” What might have led to Crowfoot’s sorrow? What hints are there in the ballad?
 - b. Reflect on the verse: “There’s still the hypocrisy, and still the hate, was that in the treaties, was that our fate? We’re all unhappy pawns in the government’s game, and it’s always the native who gets the blame; it’s a problem which money can never lessen.”
 - i. What do you think this verse means?

- ii. How might it relate to the experience of the Blackfoot people?
 - iii. What do you think Willie Dunn means by using the word “hypocrisy”?
2. Have students read the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* article, [Isapo-muxika \(Crowfoot\)](#) by Hugh Dempsey and [The Whiskey Trade](#) in the CBC resource, *Canada: A People’s History*. Have students work in groups to discuss the following:
 - a. Why was whisky such a problem for the Blackfoot people in Crowfoot’s time?
 - b. Was the whisky trade “fair”? Explain.
 - c. Did alcohol cause all the problems experienced by the Blackfoot? What else was happening to the Blackfoot that might have impacted the situation? How?
 - d. Why was Crowfoot prepared to negotiate and establish relationships with the Hudson’s Bay Company traders, the North-West Mounted Police, the missionaries, and the Canadian government? What did he hope would come from these relationships?
 - e. Why was the whisky trade not suppressed until the buffalo were gone? Was this related to Crowfoot’s later sense of betrayal?

Curricular competencies (Social Studies 9)

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, and developments, and compare varying perspectives on their historical significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups during this time period (continuity and change)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, and developments (cause and consequence)
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, and events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past and present, and whether we have a responsibility to respond (ethical judgment)

Drug literacy objectives

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

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