

National Native American Hall of Fame  
2019 Inductee

**RICHARD OAKES**  
**MOHAWK NATION**



**ADVOCACY**  
**OCCUPATION OF ALCATRAZ**

1 - 2 50-minute class periods

## **SELECTED COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1**

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1d**

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3**

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

## **GOALS FOR UNDERSTANDING**

### **Students will understand**

- Richard Oakes was a great leader during a critically important time for Native Americans

- Richard Oakes lived a short life but left behind a legacy in the form of Native American self-determination
- Richard Oakes was a member of the Mohawk Nation
- Richard Oakes was a visionary leader with the courage to challenge the nation to live up to the promises that were guaranteed in treaties

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

What movement did Richard Oakes become the leader of in 1968?

Why was the movement that Richard Oakes led so important to the nation and especially to Native Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Where did Richard Oakes come from and how did he come to represent so many different Native American nations?

What can we learn from Richard Oakes leadership abilities and qualities to help us understand our own leadership talents?

## **ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE**

### **Suggested Formative Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Active listening through note taking

Small group discussion

Class discussion

### **Culminating Performance Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

- Students will finish their own small group K/W/H/L charts
- Participate in a small group discussion
- Answer the essential questions when reporting out as a group to the class

## **ENTRY QUESTIONS**

Who is Richard Oakes?

What did Richard Oakes do to be inducted into the National Native American Hall of Fame?

Of which Native American Nation was Richard Oakes a member?

## **MATERIALS**

Computer and internet access for the following videos is required. Additional written materials for printing is at the end of this lesson.

7-minute video of Richard Oakes speaking to reporters and delivering a proclamation on Alcatraz Island

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=402&v=7QNfUE7hBUc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=402&v=7QNfUE7hBUc&feature=emb_logo)

5-minute video of Richard Oakes background and involvement with the Red Power Movement

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=6&v=O9fw4KRRafg&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=O9fw4KRRafg&feature=emb_logo)

5-minute video of Alcatraz Occupation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9sBk8Stms4>

25-minute video of the end of the Termination Period and beginning of the Self-Determination Era

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=46&v=gEmae2PsWJI&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=46&v=gEmae2PsWJI&feature=emb_logo)

## **LEARNING MODALITIES**

**Audio/Visual:** Students will watch videos of Richard Oakes and the Red Power Movement that emerged in the late 1960's. These videos will provide compelling stories to allow students to gain a greater insight into the history of a critically important moment in time. The Red Power Movement at Alcatraz was a turning point in American history and has only become more significant 50 years later.

**Writing/Recording:** Students will take notes while observing the films, identifying key concepts, sentences or statements that Richard makes during his interview. These notes will be used to complete the K/W/H/L chart in the small groups.

## OVERT INSTRUCTION

- 1) The instructor will introduce the lesson by creating a “K/W/H/L” Chart, which stands roughly for “What they Know/What they Want to Know/How to Research this topic/What they Learned” chart on the white board for the students contribute their voices in a classroom exercise.
- 2) The instructor will ask the class to read the short biography of Richard Oakes and follow that up with a brief discussion to begin the class K/W/H/L chart. Using the information in the bio, the students will help the instructor begin completing the chart.
- 3) The teacher will divide the class into groups of 4, with each person reading the longer biography article individually. Some of the words may be unfamiliar to students and searching for definitions may be a necessary part of this process.
- 4) Following the video, students will spend 20 minutes answering the following questions in their small groups. Every team member will contribute, with one person recording the information on a separate sheet. This information can also be utilized for the group K/W/H/L chart.

### **Questions**

- a. What personal characteristics did Richard Oakes display to become a leader in the Native American community?
  - b. What was the Red Power grassroots movement?
  - c. How did the Red Power movement lead to the end of the Termination period and the beginning of the Self-Determination period?
  - d. Why was Richard Oakes so important at that moment in time?
- 5) Following the small group discussions, each group will report out on their answers, and the answers will be included into the K/W/H/L chart.
  - 6) The instructor will open up the discussion to include any final thoughts, questions or insights about Richard Oakes and his legacy.

**This concludes the first 50 minutes of the Lesson**

### **Extension Exercises**

- 1) Students who wish to continue their research on Richard Oakes and the Red Power Movement can write a paper and consider the following questions: How did Richard Oakes and Vine Deloria combine forces to lead Native Americans into the period of

Self-Determination? If Richard Oakes was a grassroots leader, what kind of leader was Vine Deloria? Why were both men critically important to the success of the Red Power movement?

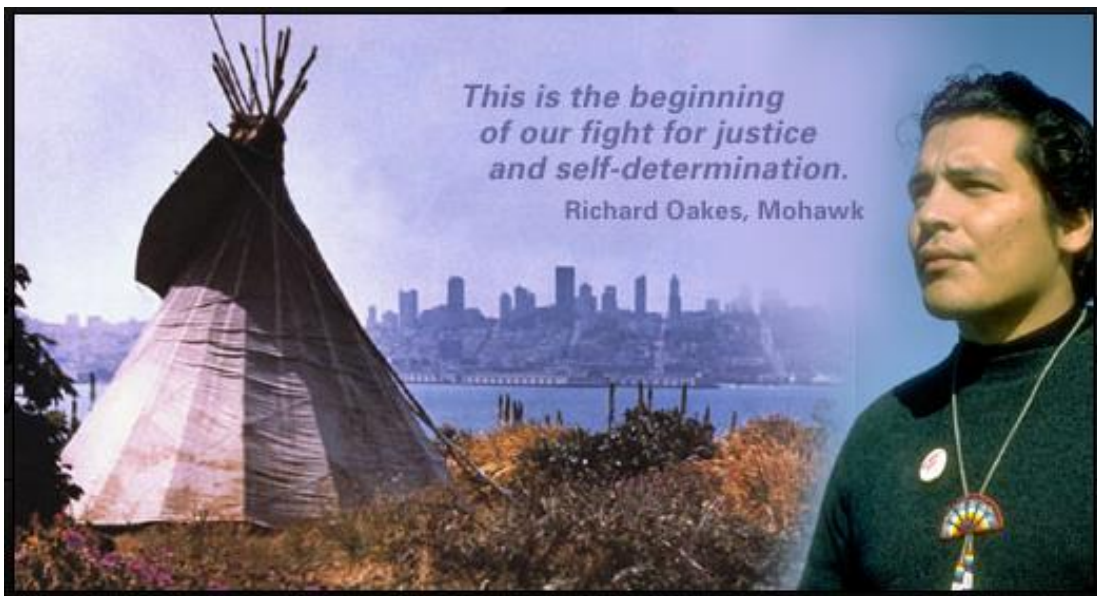
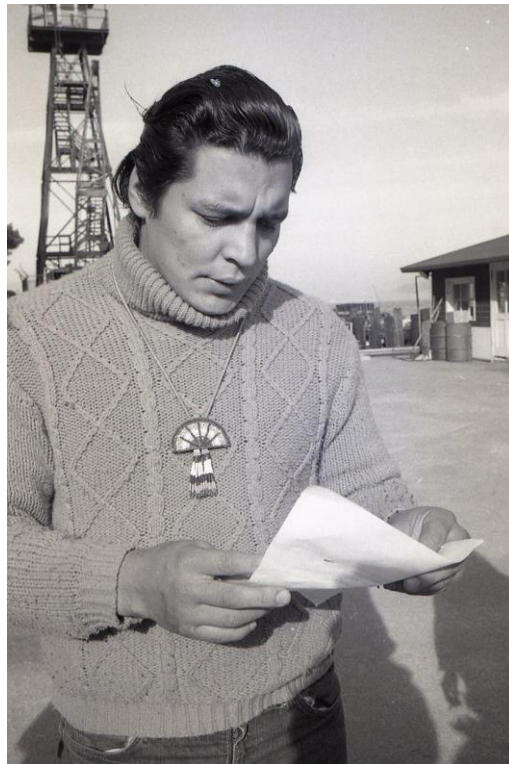
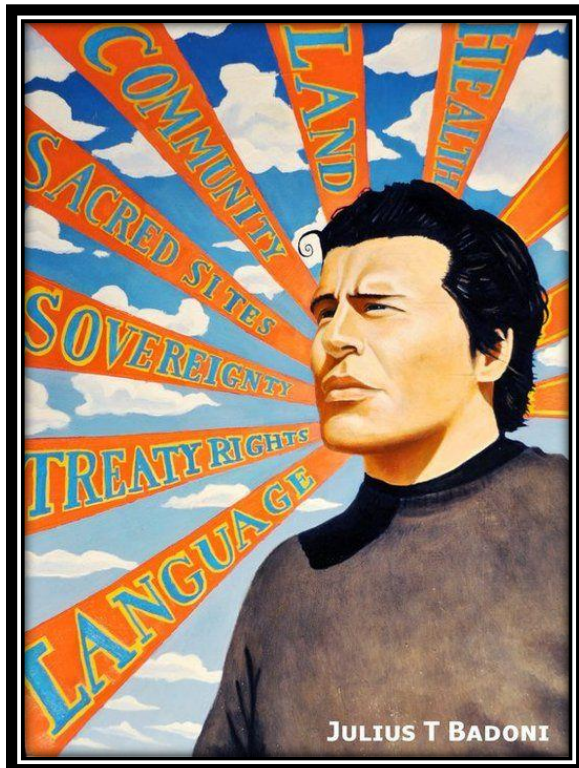
### **CRITICAL FRAMING**

Instructors have an opportunity to enlighten students on many topics in this exploration of Richard Oakes and his pivotal role in the early onset of the Red Power movement. A brief review of the periods of Federal Indian Policy would be a great way to start the conversation and provide some context for students to understand the significance of the Red Power Movement and the remarkable achievements of the current era of Self-Determination. A handout of the Federal Indian Policy Eras could be distributed at the beginning of the lesson.

### **DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION FOR ADVANCED AND EMERGING LEARNERS**

Richard Oakes and the story of the Alcatraz Island occupation is universally compelling to all age levels and learning abilities. Utilizing both the written descriptions and the videos of the Alcatraz occupation allows for a multi-sensory approach for students to assimilate the information.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES







Richard Oakes was one of the earliest leaders of the Native American rights movement that began to grow during the 1960s. In an era when many groups of people were fighting to end discrimination and claim their civil rights, the First People of the United States often felt like a forgotten minority. Oakes and those who worked with him did much to unite Indian people and to publicize their cause. Their work helped to restore Native American pride. Their efforts forced the U.S. government to take some responsibility for the destruction of Native American culture.

"We invite the United States to acknowledge the justice of our claim. The choice now lies with ... the American government—to use violence upon us as before to remove us from our Great Spirit's land, or to institute a real change in its dealing with the American Indian."

—Richard Oakes.

### **Born to a proud people**

Oakes was born into the Mohawk tribe of the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada on May 22, 1942. The Mohawk are a proud people with a long history. They were one of the five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, an alliance of native peoples created at least a hundred years before Europeans settled North America. The St. Regis Reservation, sometimes called the Akwesasne Reservation by the Indians, stretches across the Canadian-U.S. border. However, it represents only a small part of the Mohawks' ancestral land. The Mohawks have a strong tribal identity that pays little attention to the borders drawn by European immigrants.

During the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government overwhelmed various Native American peoples and gained control of most Indian territory. Native people who managed to survive the bitter wars and disease brought by white settlers lost much of their ancestral land. They were forced to live in much smaller areas that were "reserved" for them. These reservations were often filled with poverty and despair. Given little support by the government, the Native Americans living on reservations had few employment or educational opportunities. Schools were run by white educators who did little to support native culture, language, or pride. Richard Oakes found little to keep him in the reservation school, and he left when he was in eleventh grade. He continued to study throughout his life, however, and he attended community college and university classes whenever he could.

### **Balancing on the high steel**

After dropping out of school, Oakes went to work in the construction industry. He followed a long tradition of Mohawk men by getting a job as an ironworker walking the high steel beams of skyscrapers. Beginning in the late 1800s, Mohawks had proven their skill and balance in high steel construction work. Many Mohawk men traveled throughout the country seeking construction work after that, sending money back to families on the reservation.

Oakes traveled throughout the northeastern United States, working on skyscraper construction and continuing his education. He attended Adirondack Community College and Syracuse University in northern New York State. He also met native people from many other tribes who were working to improve the status of Indians in the United States. It was during his conversations with these Indian activists that he began to develop a political awareness about the need for change in the government's treatment of Native Americans.

## **West Coast activism and Native American pride**

During the mid-1960s, his work on construction crews finally took Oakes across the country to California. There, he continued to visit other Native American groups and to learn about their struggles. He made his home in San Francisco and enrolled in San Francisco State University. In 1969, he married Annie Marufo, a member of the Pomo nation. Marufo already had five children, and Oakes adopted them as his own.

In the 1960s, San Francisco was buzzing with activism. College campuses were centers of radical political energy. Oakes was a large, handsome man who drew people to him with his charm, humor, and sincerity. Soon he was the center of a passionate group of young Native American radicals, many of whom were university students. Since they came from many different tribes and from all over the country, they named their group Indians of All Tribes (IAT).

The members of IAT felt that the needs and struggles of native peoples had been forgotten and pushed aside for too long. During the fall of 1969 they began to seek a way to draw public attention to the injustices that Indians suffered, both in the past and in the present. They wanted to make a public point with drama and humor. The idea that finally came to them had been sitting in plain sight all along, right in the bay across from the city: Alcatraz Island.

### **Claiming Alcatraz**

Alcatraz Island is little more than a giant rock in the middle of San Francisco Bay. It was once a frontier fortress where leaders from the Hopi and Modoc nations had been imprisoned during the 1800s. From 1934 to 1963, the island had been home to a high-security federal prison. The federal government had not used the land and buildings since the prison was shut down.

An 1868 treaty between the U.S. government and the Lakota Sioux stated that Indians could reclaim federal land and buildings that were no longer being used by the federal government. Thus, the members of IAT plotted to take over and occupy Alcatraz Island. A group of Native Americans had the idea of claiming Alcatraz five years earlier, but the occupation had only lasted a few hours. Oakes and his group intended to attempt something much larger.

On November 21, 1969, a group of nearly eighty Indians took a chartered boat to Alcatraz Island. When the boat's captain appeared reluctant to land on the island, Oakes dramatically took leadership by diving into the bay and swimming ashore. The rest of the party followed, and the occupation of Alcatraz began.

### **The End of the Occupation**

The Native American occupation of Alcatraz lasted nineteen months. During that time, more than 15,000 people visited the island, mostly Native Americans from across the United States. Occupiers set up a decision-making council, a nursery, and a radio station (Radio Free Alcatraz). Native Americans and other activists on the outside raised money and sent supplies to the occupiers. Many liberal celebrities supported the occupation as well, including actors Marlon Brando, Anthony Quinn, and Jane Fonda. The rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival contributed \$15,000 to the occupation of Alcatraz.

The U.S. government did not agree to the demands. However, President Richard Nixon (1913–1994; served 1969–74) was reluctant to force the group off the island and did little to end the demonstration.

However, in May 1970, the government did shut down electricity on the island and stopped water deliveries, which caused difficulties for those who continued the occupation. Some occupiers were arrested for theft of building materials, and others were blamed for fires that destroyed historic sites. Discouraged by negative press coverage and worsening conditions, many left the occupation. On June 11, 1971, federal authorities removed the few who remained: six men, four women, and five children.

Although the Indian university and cultural center were never built on Alcatraz Island, the occupation and the public attention it drew to native issues had a far-reaching impact. The federal government ended its policy of breaking up tribes and granted official nation status to Indian tribes. During the occupation, 49,000 acres of land were returned to the Taos Indians. More Native Americans were hired to work at the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. Pro-Indian legislation was passed, including the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act, the Indian Financing Act, and the Indian Health Act.

The International Indian Treaty Council honors the occupation every year when they return to Alcatraz Island for an "un-Thanksgiving" ritual. The event is a remembrance of those who sacrificed their comfort and risked their safety to demonstrate for Native American rights. It is also a protest against all the injustices still suffered by native peoples in the twenty-first century.

The group painted "You Are on Indian Land" on the dock. Then, the occupiers called a press conference. Well-spoken and handsome, Oakes became the spokesperson for the group. Using characteristic humor, he told reporters that the Indians would buy the island for twenty-four dollars' worth of beads and red cloth. That was the price that European settlers had paid for Manhattan Island in New York in 1626. They wanted to create an Indian university, cultural center, and museum on the island. Oakes also criticized the government's mistreatment of native peoples, including the policy of dividing tribes, breaking treaty agreements, and giving Indian land to oil, lumber, and development corporations. Oakes triumphant yell, "We hold the Rock!," became the rallying cry of the occupiers, according to the Alcatraz Island Web site.

Oakes remained on Alcatraz for several months. Although he was respected and admired by many, some IAT members began to question his leadership. Quarrels arose among the occupiers. On January 5, 1970, his twelve-year-old stepdaughter Yvonne died when she fell off a staircase to the ground three stories below. Oakes and Marufo left the island for Yvonne's funeral and never returned.

### **Tribute to a fallen warrior**

Oakes did not stop working for Indian rights, however. In response to the work of native activists, San Francisco State University created an American Indian Studies Department and made Oakes its first chairperson. Along with helping to design a program of courses for the department, Oakes continued to work directly to help in native struggles. He was committed to protecting the status of small tribes. Always dramatic by nature, he made a very public citizen's arrest of the president of Pacific Gas and Electric in June 1970 for crimes against Native Americans. Within a day, he was attacked and beaten. In 1971, he worked with the Pit River Indians of Northern California as they attempted to recover tribal land.

Oakes's activist work put him in danger more than once. Many people believe that his activism cost him his life. He was killed in the early fall of 1972 in northern California by Michael Morgan, a white man. Oakes and Morgan had argued about Indian rights a day earlier. Oakes had a reputation as being gentle

and nonviolent. He was unarmed when he was shot by Morgan. Nevertheless, the man who shot him was cleared of manslaughter charges.

Oakes was one of the first in a long list of modern Native American activists who were killed. The loss of such a young movement leader angered many Indians who became more determined than ever to fight for justice and civil rights. With the political work he did during the 1960s, Oakes was one of the first Native American activists to insist publicly that Indian tribes deserve the respect and rights given to other nations. The occupation of Alcatraz that he helped plan and lead was a symbolic event that launched a movement.

Although Oakes died when he was only thirty years old, he is remembered with love and respect by many who appreciated the work he did. There are many memorials to his life. One of the earliest was a song, titled "Alcatraz (Pelican Island)," written by folksinger Malvina Reynolds in support of the occupation. In the mid-1970s, composer Charles Fox and choreographer Michael Smuin created the ballet "Song for a Dead Warrior" in honor of Oakes. In December 1988, San Francisco State University opened the Richard Oakes Multicultural Center, which features a prominent sign acknowledging that it is built on Indian land.

- [Encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)

### **For More Information**

#### **Books**

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Viola, Herman J. *After Columbus: The Smithsonian Chronicle of the American Indians*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1990.

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#### **Web Sites**

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