

National Native American Hall of Fame  
2019 Inductee

**ADA DEER**  
**MENOMINEE**



**ADVOCACY**  
**NATIVE RIGHTS ADVOCATE**

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**

- Ada Deer was a guiding force for Native Americans during the transition from the Termination era to the era of Self-Determination
- Ada Deer's legacy as a leader for her tribal nation and as a trailblazer for all Native people is strong.
- Ada Deer is a member of the Menominee Nation

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

What US Governmental Agency did Ada become the director of in 1993?

Why was Ada Deer's appointment to her position a breakthrough for and Native women?

How did Ada Deer become legendary among the Menominee Nation?

What role did Ada Deer play during the nation's transition from the Era of Termination to the Era of Self-Determination?

## **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 Ada Deer?

What achievements did Ada Deer accumulate during her career to be inducted into the National Native American Hall of Fame?

Of which Native American Nation is Ada Deer a member, and once served as President of?

## MATERIALS

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

4-minute video of Ada Deer's speech September 22nd, 2016 on the site of a proposed sulfide mining project on the Menominee River

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=9&v=O56tTi15Ey0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=O56tTi15Ey0&feature=emb_logo)

20-minute video with Dartmouth's Montgomery Fellow, Ada Deer, interviewed by Professor Bruce Duthu

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y97LijZKgg&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y97LijZKgg&feature=emb_logo)

49-minute Hall of Fame "Inspirational Leadership" interview with Ada Deer

[Ada Deer \(Menominee\) on Vimeo](#) The interview is also accessible by scanning the Quick Response (QR) code below with a smartphone or QR Reader.



## LEARNING MODALITIES



**Audio/Visual:** Students will watch recorded interviews with Ada Deer and hear about her remarkable career and legacy. Ada's commitment to Native people, her charisma and joy of storytelling all come through in her interviews

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

## OVERT INSTRUCTION

- 1) The instructor divides the class into groups of four, and asks each person and each group to begin making 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” The teacher can introduce Ada Deer by playing her speech to the class, which is linked here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=9&v=O56tTi15Ey0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=O56tTi15Ey0&feature=emb_logo) which can be accessed through streaming services on the internet.
- 2) After showing Ada’s speech, the instructor will ask the class to read the short biography. Using the information in the bio, the students will begin completing their learning graphic organizer charts.
- 3) After about 15-minutes of discussion and chart work, the teacher will have two options: A. Watch the longer 49-minute Hall of Fame interview with Ada Deer: [Ada Deer \(Menominee\) on Vimeo](#) and continue work on the lesson during the next class period; or B. show students one of the shorter videos and continue with lesson with step 4.
- 4) Following the video interview, 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. How did Ada Deer distinguish herself as a Native American, as a woman and as a citizen of the Menominee Nation?
  - b. What did Ada Deer achieve as a leader for her nation and for Native Americans throughout the country?
  - c. Why is Ada Deer considered to be a legendary leader?
  - d. What types of challenges did Ada Deer overcome on her path to becoming the first woman Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and how did she succeed?
- 5) Following the small group discussions, each group will report out on their answers, and the answers will be included into a class K/W/H/L chart organized by the instructor on a smartboard or projector.
  - 6) The instructor will open the discussion to include any final thoughts, questions or insights about Ada Deer and her career and legacy.

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

### Extension Exercises

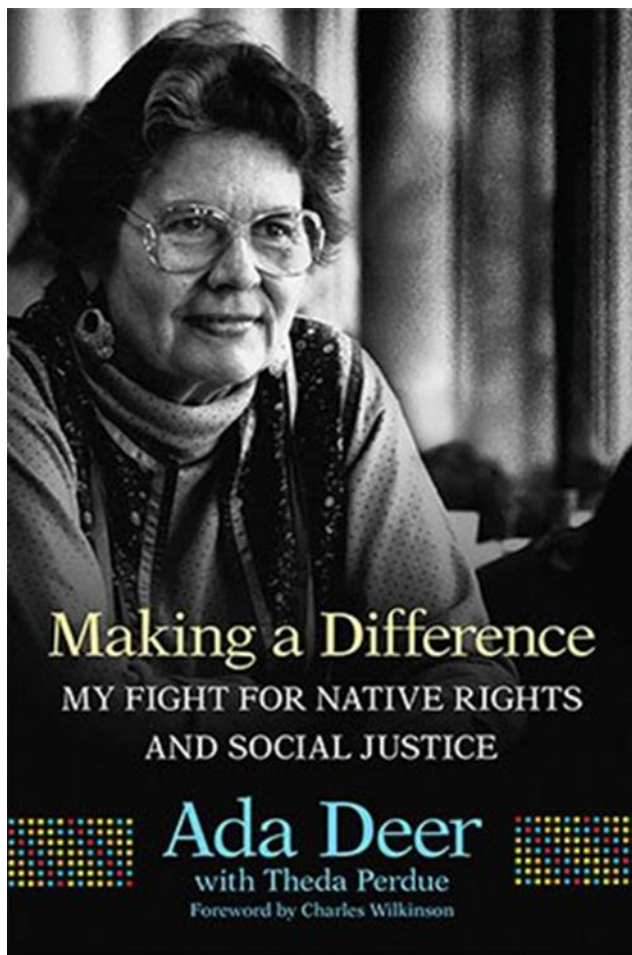
Students who wish to continue their research on Ada Deer can read her memoir, *Making a Difference, My Fight for Native Rights and Social Justice* and write an essay where they attempt to answer the following questions:

What are the unique qualities and background that gave Ada Deer the foundation to achieve great things?

What did Ada Deer achieve as a leader, and what remains to be accomplished for Native rights in the United States?

Is Ada Deer part of the Red Power movement? Why, or why not?

## CRITICAL FRAMING



Ada Deer's life and career took place during a time of great social justice change in the USA. As a young lady she was witness to the Civil Rights Era, and the turbulent 1960's, people of color began raising their voices and asserting their presence in American society. Her time as Assistant Secretary of the Interior came on the heels of her accomplishments in fighting against the policy of Termination; she not only helped end Termination, she was a leader in the Era of Self-determination.

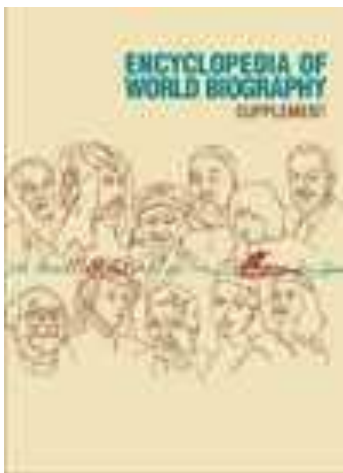
## DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION FOR ADVANCED AND EMERGING LEARNERS

Ada Deer's life story and remarkable sense of joy make her a personality that all levels of learners can appreciate and be enriched by. For advanced students who wish to continue

their study of Ada Deer and her accomplishments, reading her memoir is an opportunity to explore more in depth the world she lived in and how she helped to change it to one more open for Native people to achieve success. For students who are emerging learners, they can review the Eras of Federal Indian Policy, this will help them to contextualize Ada Deer's life and times.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Ada E. Deer Facts**



**Ada E. Deer (born 1935) was the first woman to head the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).**

Life-long advocate for social justice, Ada E. Deer was the first woman to head the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). As Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs in the Interior Department, she was "turning the BIA upside down and shaking it," as she told hundreds of Navajos in Arizona a month after taking office in late July of 1993. For Deer, an activist for the rights of American Indians, youth, and women, turning things upside down was nothing new. Her career as a social worker, leader in numerous community and political organizations, and her successful fight to restore federal recognition to the Menominee Tribe all attest to her actions on behalf of human rights and her belief in coalition building. She told members of the Alaska Federation of Natives in August of 1993, as quoted in the *Tundra Times*, "I want to emphasize (that) my administration will be based on the Indian values of caring, sharing, and respect. ... These values have been missing too long in the halls of government."

Deer was born in Keshena on the Menominee Indian Reservation in northeastern Wisconsin on August 7, 1935. She is the eldest of five children (her siblings are Joseph Deer, Jr., Robert Deer, Ferial Skye, and Connie Deer); four other children died in infancy. Her mother, Constance Stockton (Wood) Deer, is an Anglo-American from Philadelphia and a former BIA nurse. Her father was Joseph Deer, a nearly full-blood Menominee Indian who was a former employee of the Menominee Indian Mills; he died at the age of 85 on January 10, 1994. For the first 18 years

of Deer's life, her family lived in a log cabin near the Wolf River with no running water or electricity. Deer told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs at the hearing to confirm her as head of the BIA that "while all the statistics said we were poor, I never felt poor in spirit. My mother ... was the single greatest influence on my life. She instilled in me rich values which have shaped my lifetime commitment to service."

This service began with a solid education in the Shawano and Milwaukee public schools. An outstanding student, Deer graduated in the top ten of her high school class before attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison on a tribal scholarship. She was one of two Native Americans out of 19,000 students and became the first Menominee to graduate from the university. She received her B.A. in social work in 1957; and in 1961, she went on to become the first Native American to receive a M.S.W. from Columbia University.

From the time she was a graduate student and over the next ten years, Deer held several professional positions. She was employed as a social worker in New York City and Minneapolis Public Schools. She also worked with the Peace Corps in Puerto Rico. It was between the years of 1964 and 1967 that Deer had her first job with the BIA in Minnesota as Community Service Coordinator. From 1967 to 1968, she served as Coordinator of Indian Affairs in the University of Minnesota's Training Center for Community Programs. During the same time, Deer served on the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children, Inc., and in 1969 she became a member of the national board of Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., a post she held until 1975. During the summer of 1971, Deer studied at the American Indian Law Program at the University of New Mexico and then briefly attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School. She left after one semester to work on an urgent tribal matter that was to become her major focus over the next several years.

## **Fights to Regain Menominee Tribe Recognition**

As part of the U.S. government's 1950s termination policy—an attempt to assimilate Indians forcibly—the U.S. Congress passed in 1954 the Menominee Termination Act. Fully implemented by 1961, it meant the loss of federal recognition of the Menominee Tribe and along with it, the closing of membership rolls, a loss of benefits such as health and educational services, and an imposition of state jurisdiction. The Menominee's were taxed and had to sell off ancestral lands to pay the bills. As Deer testified in her confirmation hearing, the Menominee's "literally went from being prosperous to being Wisconsin's newest, smallest and poorest county."

Deer left law school and returned to what was now Menominee County to help gather together tribal leaders to regain control of tribal interests from a group of Menominee elites, and to attempt to reverse termination. There, in 1970, Deer and many others created a new political organization known as Determination of Rights and Unity for Menominee Shareholders (DRUMS). With assistance from the Native American Rights Fund and local legal aid organizations, Deer and other leaders of DRUMS fought to regain federal recognition for the Menominee's. Their tactics included a 220-mile "march for justice" from Menominee County to the capital in Madison. As a vital part of the restoration effort, in 1972 and 1973 Deer served as vice president and lobbyist in Washington, D.C., for the National Committee to Save the Menominee People and Forest, Inc.



Author Nicholas C. Peroff stated in *Menominee Drums* that Deer's positive attitude concerning restoration was evident in her comment to a *Washington Post* reporter in 1973: "Mainly I want to show people who say nothing can be done in this society that it just isn't so. You don't have to collapse just because there's federal law in your way. Change it!" The efforts of Deer and the members of DRUMS resulted in national publicity for the issue of termination and finally the introduction of a bill in Congress to reverse this policy for the Menominee's. On December 22, 1973, President Nixon signed the Menominee Restoration Act into law.



*Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton signing the Menominee Restoration bill.  
Watching the ceremony are Senator Gaylord Nelson (behind Morton),  
and Ada Deer, head of the interim Menominee Restoration Committee (standing right).*

From 1974 to 1976, Deer chaired the Menominee Tribe and headed the Menominee Restoration Committee. After its work was completed, she resigned. In 1977, she became a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Work and in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she taught until 1993. Deer also moved into the democratic political arena more fully at this time, serving as legislative liaison to the Native American Rights Fund from 1979 to 1981. In 1982, Deer was a candidate for Wisconsin secretary of state. In 1984, she was delegate-at-large at the Democratic National Convention and vice-chair of the National Mondale-Ferraro Presidential Campaign. In 1992, Deer almost became the first Native American woman in Congress; after a strong showing in the Second Congressional District of Wisconsin, she lost in the general election to Republican Scot Klug. May of 1993, however, brought a nomination by President Clinton from a field of four candidates (including Navajo tribal chairman Peterson Zah) to head the BIA. Congress, with overwhelming support from its members and from tribal leaders, confirmed her nomination in July of 1993.

## **Turning the BIA Around**

With the BIA, Deer inherited an agency that is infamous for its bureaucracy and historically poor relations with tribes. Deer has had to contend with, among many issues, budget reductions for her agency; conflicts between tribes and localities over land management, water resources, and mineral rights; tribal recognition; education; and religious freedom. Deer is a strong proponent of Indian self-determination; this coincides with the BIA's planned reorganization which will shift more power to tribes. Her approach since being in office has been to visit individual Indian tribes, bringing them together with businesses, organizations, and government entities to find ways to work cooperatively, with the ultimate goal of helping tribes gain economic self-sufficiency. Deer, in her confirmation hearing, maintained: "I want to help the BIA be a full partner in the effort to fulfill the Indian agenda developed in Indian country. The best way we can do this is for the tribes to decide what needs to be done and for the tribes to do it on their own terms, with our enthusiastic support."

Deer's motto in life is "one person can make a difference." For the difference she has made in her many spheres of activity, she has received numerous awards over her lifetime. Deer was one of the Outstanding Young Women of America in 1966. In 1974, she received the White Buffalo Council Achievement Award, along with honorary doctorates from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Northland College. Other honors include the Woman of the Year Award from Girl Scouts of America (1982), the Wonder Woman Award (1982), the Indian Council Fire Achievement Award (1984), and the National Distinguished Achievement Award from the American Indian Resources Institute (1991).

There have been many achievements during Deer's tenure as Assistant Secretary. Some examples are: the recognition of over 220 Alaska Native villages, the increasing number of self-governance tribes and tribes who contract for programs previously administered by the federal government, and the reorganization of the Bureau. Deer is also active in many initiatives undertaken by the Clinton administration. She is a member of the President's Inter-Agency Council on Women which is charged with the implementation of the Platform for Action agreed upon at the UN's Fourth Conference on Women. In addition, she has testified before the UN Human Rights Committee and is the lead for the domestic activities in conjunction with the Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples working closely with the State Department.

## **Further Reading on Ada E. Deer**

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