

## The Densmore Repatriation Project



*Densmore and Mountain Chief 1916*

The Densmore Repatriation Project is named for ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minnesota, who made her first visit to the Standing Rock Reservation in 1911.

She recorded traditional songs on a hand-cranked, wax cylinder recorder and spoke with dozens of tribal elders. The songs she recorded, many over 100 years old, had been passed down for generations. Densmore documented this work in her book *Teton Sioux Music*, which contained additional stories and insights into Lakota/Dakota life and became a touchstone for learning about the culture.

This work of Densmore's has been in storage for over 100 years. The purpose of the Densmore Repatriation Project is to re-introduce these songs and stories and make them easily accessible for a new generation of Native singers and educators.

In 1927 Densmore wrote, "Research work is only worthwhile when its results are transmitted to others." That's the purpose of this project: to transmit what she called research work to others, particularly the people who it belongs to.

# Lesson One – Setting the Stage

## Introduction to Frances Densmore and the Densmore Repatriation Project



Image 1 - Frances Densmore and Mountain Chief  
Commissioned ledger art by Telsa Belcourt

**Estimated Time:** two, 50–60-minute class periods

**Lesson Overview:** This lesson begins by introducing students to historical events surrounding westward expansion, namely the Dakota Conflict of 1862 and work of Frances Densmore. Introducing awareness of the historical significance and ramifications of efforts to forcibly remove the Dakota People from their homelands sets the stage for understanding the future impact of Frances Densmore's work which focused on the study and preservation American Indian music.

### Learning Objectives

**Students will be able to:**

- Use historical context and prior knowledge to describe and analyze works of art and primary source photos.
- Recognize and describe the negative impacts of western expansion on Indigenous Peoples, culture, and communities.
- Discuss and examine the purpose and goals of Frances Densmore's work encompassing the study and preservation of American Indian music.

## Materials:

- Image 1 (image should be enlarged and projected on either a screen or white board)
- Copies of Study Guide 1 – About Frances Densmore
- Computer with internet access
- Student journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site where students can share their reflections.
- Large chart paper

## Vocabulary:

- Repatriation - the return of someone or something to their own country.
- Ethnology - the study of the characteristics of various peoples and the differences and relationships between them.
- Methodology - research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research. It's a logical, systematic plan to resolve a research problem. A methodology details a researcher's approach to the research to ensure reliable, valid results that address their aims and objectives.
- Acculturation – Often tied to political conquest or expansion, the process of change in beliefs or traditional practices that occurs when the cultural system of one group displaces that of another.
- Sun Dance - Wiwányang Wačípi, was the most important ceremony practiced by the Lakota (Sioux) and nearly all Plains Indians. It was a time of renewal for the tribe, people and earth. The village was large, as many bands came together for this annual rite.

## Learning Activities:

### Part One – Day One

#### **Activity One** – Setting the Stage (approximately 15 min.)

#### **Project Image 1 on screen or white board and implement the Visual Thinking Strategy**

*This image contains many clues and elements that will stir students' curiosity thereby enabling them to ask good questions and actively seek out answers.*

- Instruct students to observe the image silently for two-minutes
- Following two-minutes of silent observation, open the discussion through the Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) process:
  1. **“What’s going on here?”** Summarize student responses using conditional language (“Markus thinks this could be...”). This keeps the conversation open to other interpretations by other students.
  2. **If appropriate: “What do you see that makes you say that?”** This encourages students to back up their statements with things they see in the work of art.
  3. **Ask the group: “What more can we find?”** This continues the conversation.

#### **Activity Two** – Background Knowledge and Introduction of the Dakota Conflict of 1862

(approximately 20 min.)

#### **Background**

Following the VTS exercise, share the following information with students:

*“The image you have been discussing was created as part of a historical project called the Densmore Repatriation Project. The Densmore Repatriation Project is named for ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minnesota, who made her first visit to the Standing Rock Reservation in 1911 where she recorded traditional songs on a hand-cranked, wax cylinder recorder and spoke with dozens of tribal elders.”*

*As students begin this unit of study, we encourage you to create space for sharing information concerning time, place and historical events prior to and surrounding Frances Densmore’s research, in particular westward expansion and the Dakota Wars of 1862. For six weeks in 1862, war raged throughout southwestern Minnesota. There were many causes for the war. The war and its aftermath changed the course of the state’s history and descendants of those touched by the war continue to live with the trauma it caused. Viewing the following historical documentaries will create a foundation for understanding the significance of westward expansion and revolutionary work of Frances Densmore.*

**As a class, view the following video to provide insight regarding time, place, and historical events prior to and surrounding Frances Densmore’s research.**

- The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ: A History of the Lakota/Dakota Tribes <https://vimeo.com/786725353> (running time 6:39)

If time remains, the following videos may also be viewed as a class or independently.

- U.S.-Dakota War - War <https://youtu.be/Y1uwsqT2Kkc> (approximately 3 min.)
- Internment <https://youtu.be/BS-GelkjhHg> (approximately 3 min.)
- U.S.-Dakota War – Aftermath <https://youtu.be/-sm1ITspWig> (approximately 3 min.)

**Activity Three - Think, Pair, Share Activity** (approximately 10 -15 min.)

1. **THINK:** Have students reflect on the following question and record their response in their journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site:
  - *Who were the Sioux tribes and where did they live prior to westward expansion?*
  - *How did westward expansion and the Dakota War of 1862 impact Indigenous peoples and their communities?*
2. **PAIR:** Have students pair up and share their responses.
3. **SHARE:** When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations. Alternatively, you could ask students to share what their partner said. In this way, the strategy focuses on students’ skills as careful listeners.
4. **LIST:** List responses to this question on large chart paper and save as a review and/or refresher for part two.

## **Part Two – Day Two**

Before you begin, review the question and responses created during previous day’s Think, Pair, Share. Ask students if they have more to share or would like to add more to the list.

**Activity Four - Read Study Guide 1 – About Frances Densmore** (approximately 5 min.)

- Ask students if they have more to share or would like to add more to the list.

- Ask students to read Study Topic 1. This may be done independently or as a class.

**Activity Five – Video: The Densmore Repatriation Project** (approximately 17 min.)

- View at <https://vimeo.com/730825306> or <https://youtu.be/iCcEnzzEXTw>

**Activity Six – Think, Pair, Share Activity** (approximately 15 -20 min.)

1. **THINK:** Have students reflect on the following questions and record responses in their journals, notebooks, or virtual discussion board site:
  - *How/why did acculturation take place?*
  - *Why was music so important to Indigenous Cultures?*
  - *What made Frances Densmore's research so extraordinary?*
  - *What challenges did she face?*
2. **PAIR:** Have students pair up and share their responses.
3. **SHARE:** When the larger group reconvenes, ask pairs to report back on their conversations. Alternatively, you could ask students to share what their partner said. In this way, the strategy focuses on students' skills as careful listeners.
4. **LIST:** List responses to these questions on large chart paper and save as a review and/or refresher for lesson two.

**Lesson Extension:**

- The Sun Dance <https://vimeo.com/786099379> The meaning and history of The Sun Dance
- The Dakota Conflict <https://video.tpt.org/video/tpt-documentaries-dakota-conflict/> Explores the causes, events and aftermath of the fierce fighting that broke out in 1862 between Minnesota's white European settlers and the native people of the state.