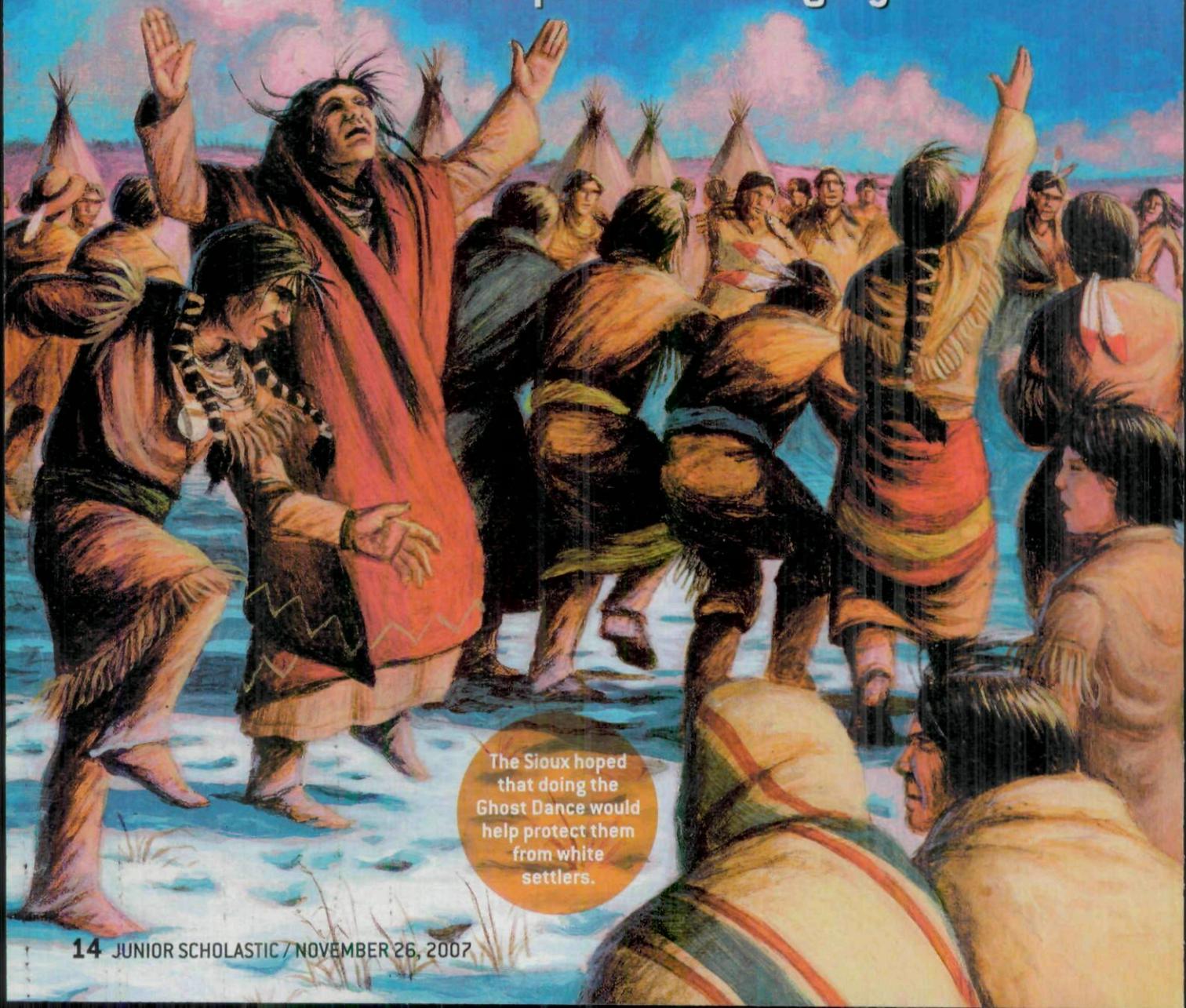


Massacre at Wounded Knee

Both **settlers** and **Sioux** claimed the vast sweep of the Great Plains. Could greater understanding between the two have prevented a tragedy?



The Sioux hoped that doing the Ghost Dance would help protect them from white settlers.

PROLOGUE

Prologue narrator: In the late 1800s, whites were moving to the Great Plains in droves. U.S. treaties had promised Plains Indians land in exchange for peace. However, arriving settlers displaced Native Americans whose ancestors had lived there for centuries.

The Plains Indians fought back. Later, U.S. Army General Philip Sheridan said: "We took away their country and their means of support, broke up their mode of living, introduced disease and decay among them. And it was for this and against this that they made war. Could anyone expect less?"

Indians won some battles. But usually they were outnumbered, and their firepower was no match for that of whites. Some Indian leaders began to give up hope.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: In January 1889, a medicine man named Wovoka has a dream. In it, the **Great Spirit** tells him that if the people perform a special dance, the Plains will once again belong to Indians. Wovoka holds a ceremony called the Ghost Dance.

Narrator B: Word of the ceremony spreads. Indians travel far and wide to learn from him. Kicking Bear and other Sioux ride from the Dakotas to Wovoka's camp in Nevada.

Words to Know

- **Badlands:** a large, dry area in South Dakota marked by deep gullies, eroded soil, and little plant life.
- **confiscate:** take possession by authority or command; seize.
- **game:** wild animals hunted for food or sport.
- **Great Spirit:** Indians' name for God.

Kicking Bear: Tell us all you know.
Wovoka: The Great Spirit said, "Do no harm to anyone. Do right always. Do not tell lies. Do not fight. When your friends die, you must not cry."

If we keep doing the Ghost Dance, next spring the Great Spirit will come. All dead Indians will live again. We will go up into the mountains. A big flood will come, and all white people will drown. When the water goes away, there will be just Indians and **game** everywhere.

Short Bull: We'll do anything to regain the ways of our fathers. Please, teach us the Ghost Dance!

Narrator C: Wovoka does so. Later, as his visitors head for home . . .

Wovoka: Tell all Indians to keep dancing, and good times will come. Those who don't dance and don't believe will turn into wood and burn in fire. Warn them! This may be the last chance the Great Spirit gives us.

SCENE 2

Narrator D: In the spring of 1890, at Pine Ridge Reservation, in what is now South Dakota . . .

Sitting Bull: For many years, I made war against the whites. Sometimes they won, other times we won. But they keep coming, more and more.

Kicking Bear: The Army should be keeping settlers off our land. But it is us the Army chases away.

Wind-in-Trees: They promised us this land—by their own law!

Sitting Bull: Yes, they made that law. But later, they made others. You can't believe anything they say. The Ghost Dance is a better way. It has the Great Spirit behind it.

Kicking Bear (*chanting*):

My Father, have pity on me!

I have nothing to eat.

I am thirsty. Everything is gone!

Narrator E: The people dance until they can dance no more. The same

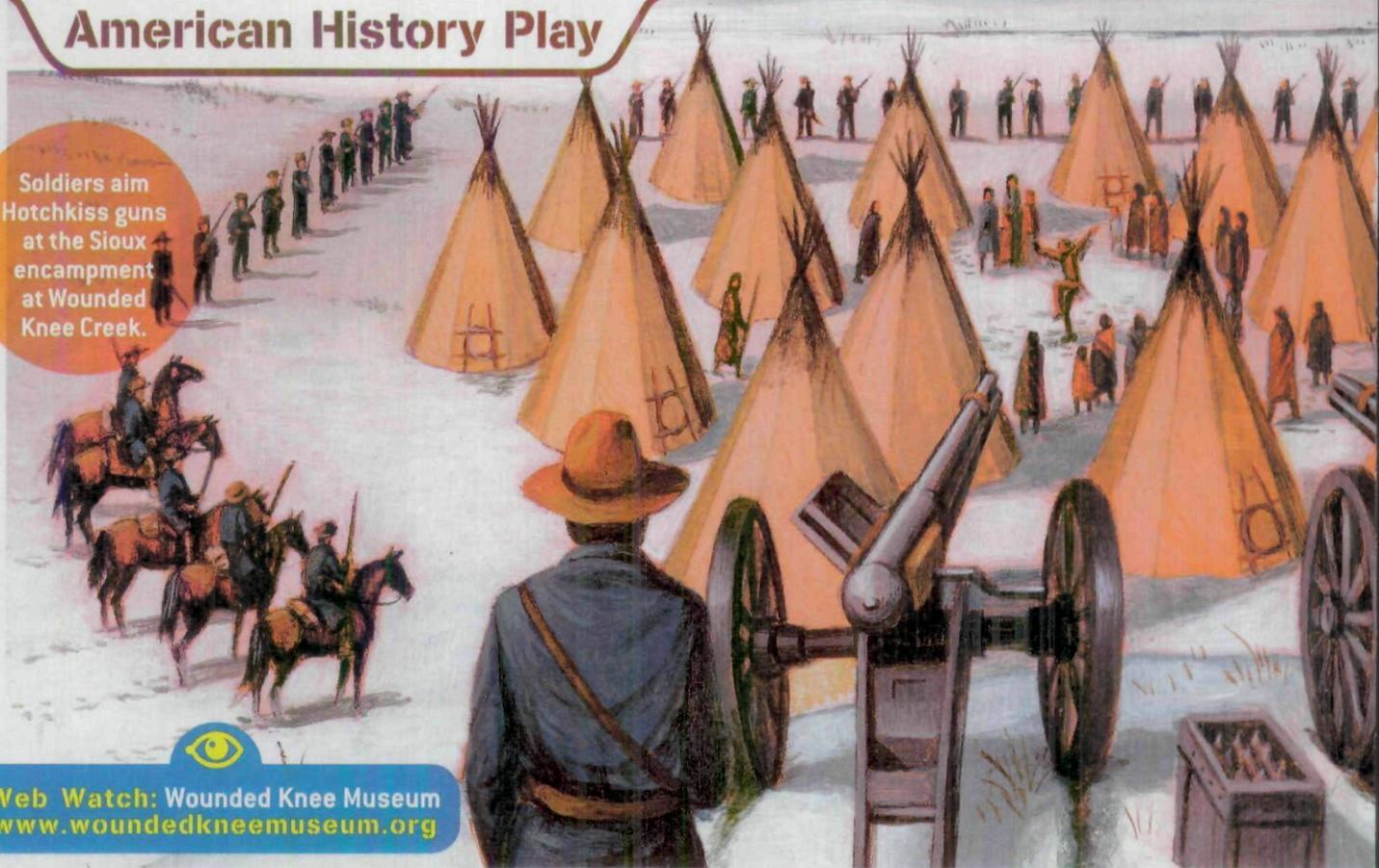
Characters

- Kicking Bear,**
a Minneconjou Sioux
medicine man
- Wovoka** (*woh-VOH-kuh*),
a Paiute medicine man
- Short Bull,**
Kicking Bear's brother-in-
law, also a medicine man
- Sitting Bull,**
a Hunkpapa Sioux warrior
and widely respected
leader
- ***Wind-in-Trees,**
a Hunkpapa Sioux woman
- ***Bella Rhodes,**
a white woman
- James McLaughlin,**
a government agent at
Standing Rock Reservation
- Lieutenant Bull Head,**
an Indian police officer at
Standing Rock
- Big Foot,**
a Minneconjou Sioux chief
- Major Samuel Whitside,**
U.S. Army
- Colonel George A. Forsyth,**
U.S. Army
- ***Second Snow,**
an old Sioux woman
- Yellow Bird,**
another Minneconjou Sioux
medicine man
- Black Coyote,**
a young Sioux man
- ***Soldier,**
under Forsyth's command
- Prologue narrator**
Narrators A-E
Epilogue narrator

*Characters with asterisks by their names are fictitious. All others were real people.

American History Play

Soldiers aim Hotchkiss guns at the Sioux encampment at Wounded Knee Creek.



Web Watch: Wounded Knee Museum
www.woundedkneemuseum.org

thing is happening on all the reservations in the Dakotas.

SCENE 3

Narrator A: Whites don't understand the Ghost Dance's peaceful origin. They fear that it is a war dance, and the Sioux are about to attack. At the government agent's office on Standing Rock Reservation . . .

Bella Rhodes: Indians from all over are banding together. It's happening at the Cheyenne Reservation too.

James McLaughlin: They're gathering for the Ghost Dance. The government ordered Big Foot to stop people from doing it, but he hasn't.

Rhodes: Did you get a copy of a message to Washington, D.C., from the government agent at Pine Ridge? What's happening there?

McLaughlin (reads): "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. We need protection, and we need it now. The leaders should be

arrested and confined at some military post until the matter is quieted. This should be done at once."

Rhodes: That's the most sensible thing I've heard in months!

SCENE 4

Narrator B: McLaughlin and other officials believe that Sitting Bull is behind the Ghost Dance craze. Before dawn on December 15, 1890, 43 Indian police officers arrive at Sitting Bull's cabin at Pine Ridge.

Lieutenant Bull Head: Wake up, old man. We're here to arrest you.

Narrator C: About 150 of Sitting Bull's followers gather in protest.

Wind-in-Trees: Why are you doing this? He is an old and honored man!

Bull Head: We have our orders.

Narrator D: As Sitting Bull is led away, his people crowd around to protect him. This gives him courage.

Sitting Bull (to police): I will not go with you. *[To followers]* Let's go

where we may dance in peace!

Narrator E: Some followers pull out guns. So do the police. Fists fly, and shots ring out. In the confusion, Sitting Bull is killed.

SCENE 5

Narrator A: Overcome by the loss of their leader, some of Sitting Bull's people surrender. Others flee.

Big Foot: Let's go to the **Badlands** and do the Ghost Dance. It's our only hope.

Narrator B: U.S. Army troops, who have been trying to stop the dancing, catch up with them.

Major Samuel Whitside: Big Foot, you must stop this.

Big Foot: We are mostly women and children. The few men are old or ailing. We travel in peace.

Whitside: You must come to our camp near Wounded Knee Creek.

Narrator C: The troops take the captured Sioux to the camp. On



The prairie is large, and the bullets will not go toward you.

Narrator B: The troops find only a few firearms—including Black Coyote’s new rifle.

Black Coyote: I paid good money for this rifle. It’s mine!

Soldier: Not anymore. Give it to me!

Narrator C: There is a gunshot. No one knows if it came from a soldier or a Sioux. In the panic, troops fire the Hotchkiss guns. Indians and soldiers are caught in the cross-fire. All is chaos, smoke, and bloodshed.

Narrator D: Moments later, the shooting stops. In a still, unearthly silence, the dead and dying—most of them Sioux women and children—lie bleeding on the snowy ground.

Narrator E: Then the wailing begins. Survivors mourn the death of the great Sioux nation. The Indian wars to win back the Plains are over. Never again will the Sioux roam the Plains, as their ancestors did for centuries.

a nearby hill, soldiers set up four Hotchkiss guns—small, powerful cannon able to fire 50 explosive shells a minute.

SCENE 6

Narrator D: Early the next morning—December 29, 1890 . . .

Colonel George A. Forsyth: Surrender all weapons. Where is Big Foot?

Second Snow: In his tepee, very ill. He’s weak, and can’t stop coughing.

Forsyth: I want him out here too.

Narrator E: Big Foot has pneumonia, but is carried out as ordered.

Forsyth (to troops): OK, men!

Confiscate all weapons.

Narrator A: The soldiers think the Indians will attack. The Indians think the soldiers mean to kill them. One man starts the Ghost Dance.

Yellow Bird (singing in Sioux):

Do not fear them, we are safe.

Remember: The Ghost Dance

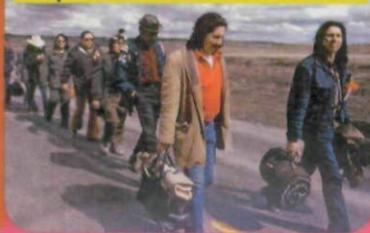
protects us. . . .



“STILL A GRIEF”

In 1973, Native Americans and the U.S. government again clashed at Wounded Knee. That February 27, about 200 armed protesters seized the village. Most were members of a militant Indian-rights group called the American Indian Movement (AIM). FBI agents and federal marshals demanded that they surrender.

AIM protesters at Wounded Knee.



The militants wanted to oust corrupt leaders of the Pine Ridge Reservation’s government. They also denounced the poverty on many reservations. AIM called for federal investigations into the violation of treaties and the loss of tribal lands.

During the 71-day siege, two protesters were killed and an FBI agent wounded. It ended when White House officials finally agreed to meet with tribal leaders.

Leonard Little Finger was a witness to the 1973 incident, and his great-great-grandfather died in the 1890 massacre. “There’s still a grief that I have when I go to Wounded Knee,” he told *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in 1998. “I have this sickness that mankind can do that to one another.”

EPILOGUE

Epilogue narrator: More than 170 Sioux died by Wounded Knee Creek that day. A blizzard soon covered their bodies with snow. Of Forsyth’s men, 25 were killed.

Later, Chief Red Cloud said: “The white men were frightened [of the Ghost Dance] and called for soldiers. We had begged for life, and the white men thought we wanted theirs.”

—Kathy Wilmore



Think About It

1. In what ways did the settlers and Sioux misunderstand each other’s language and culture?
2. How did that contribute to the tragedy at Wounded Knee Creek? Could the bloodshed have been prevented?