

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 3: "A Cheyenne Odyssey"

Wooden Leg Recalls Trips to the Trading Post

Wooden Leg was a Northern Cheyenne warrior who lived during the nineteenth century. He witnessed the transition from traditional life on the plains to life on reservations. He participated in several famous battles including the Battle of the Little Big Horn, which the Cheyenne called the Battle of the Greasy Grass. In 1903, Wooden Leg was interviewed extensively by Thomas B. Marquis, a former agency doctor for the Cheyenne. In this excerpt, he describes two separate visits to a white man's trading post:

The only trading post I ever saw during [my childhood] was someone on the Geese river.* The trader was known to us as Big Nosed White Man. I was twelve years old the first time I went there, and I never was at any other trading place during those times. My father got me a rifle at this place. It used powder and bullets and caps, not cartridges. I learned how to make bullets for it.

...when I was about thirteen years old, Wolf Medicine and other men loaded their pack horses with buffalo robes and other skins and went to the trader post at the southward (Fort Laramie) for buying some supplies. They got tobacco, caps, powder, lead, sugar, and goods of that character. Wolf Medicine brought a sack of flour. Our women were just then learning how to make bread. Wolf Medicine's wife knew how to make it so it tasted good. He was a little chief of the Elk warriors, and he wanted to give them a feast. He said to his wife:

"Make plenty of bread. I shall invite all Elks to come."

"How," she assented, and she went immediately at mixing flour and water. Then: "Oh, I have no soda."

A young woman there said: "My mother has soda. I will go and get some." She went to her home lodge and rummaged among her packages, looking into one after another. "Here it is," she finally announced. The young woman took the white powder to the wife of Wolf Medicine. As the good cook proceeded with her work, her proud husband went out to the front of his lodge and stood there calling:

"All Elk warriors, come. Wolf Medicine has a feast of bread....When the food was being eaten everybody said: "Wolf Medicine's wife can make good bread."....After a while somebody said: "I feel sick. My stomach pains me." Just then the neighbor woman came running and screaming:

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"I gave you the wrong powder! It is the wolf poison!"

The commotion aroused and brought the whole population of the camp. The victims were wallowing and groaning: An old man herald went among them calling out: "Make yourselves vomit." ...[All] got relief soon after the gagging and vomiting....The woman who had provided the supposed soda was not punished. On the contrary, she was for a long time afterward so distressed in mind that people sympathized with and tried to console her."

Source: *Wooden Leg A Warrior Who Fought Custer*, Interpreted by Thomas B. Marquis (University of Nebraska Press, 2003) 7, 111-13.