

# ACROSS THE CREEK

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



From left to right, clockwise: 1) Bear Butte, South Dakota. 2) Albert White Hat (Sicangu Lakota), renowned Lakota Studies teacher on the Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota. 3) Buffalo on the Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota.

Photos by Christian Glawe.



### Program Synopsis

Living on a sliver of the original homelands they once freely roamed, Lakota tribes seek to reclaim the healthy, thriving vision their people once enjoyed. This is not an easy journey: colonialism has left the Sicangu and Oglala Lakota with high poverty, shorter life spans, and loss of traditional lifeways. Their healing journey is akin to restoring a river's natural waterflow — breaking up artificial dams and channels imposed by the U.S. Government — and unleashing earth forces so the river can wind again towards its intended destiny. Against such a challenge, many Lakota heroes are reclaiming culture and fighting oppression in ways big and small — even if it means just crossing a creek.

### In Their Words

***"It's still here. What was 200 to 300 years ago is still here. The language ... the spirituality ... is still here. The songs are still here. All we have to do is go back ... and take it."***

— Albert White Hat  
(Sicangu Lakota)



## Producer's Notes



### Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux)

The roots of the project started decades ago when I was a teenager. Our family took summer road trips to South Dakota to spend time with the Lakota relatives of my father's side on the Rosebud Reservation just "across the creek" from the world we had travelled from.

With a cassette tape recorder and the gift of a 35mm camera from my grandfather on my mother's side, I would obsessively record the stories and lives of my elder relatives who had all spent their entire lives out in the Dakota Plains. I can't explain why I was so taken with recording what I experienced on these trips. I just felt a deep connection to the land, sensed grand mysteries to learn there, and for a place most people would think is barren and uneventful, I felt an "energy buzz" in the air, in the land and in the people.

This practice was later put to use when I and a few close friends, armed with a small budget and a few nice cameras, were able to travel there and try and document this "energy buzz" I grew up fascinated by.

Several years and many amazing experiences later this film came together and attempts to present this through both the unbridled dreams and the painful reality of Lakota people. Loaded with inspiring and contemplative interviews collaged with painterly backdrops of the vivid Dakota landscape, *Across the Creek* evokes meaningful conversation about what it will take to become whole again as American-Indian people, celebrating, renewing and adapting a rich culture whose core values are based on living as relatives with all Creation and the Universe.

I am deeply moved to have been a part of this project and welcomed into our subjects' homes to record their insights and hopes for the future with the responsibility to represent them with honor in this film. Sadly, several of these tribal members have since passed and are no longer with us, including the late iconic Albert White Hat who perfectly states for us "It's still here. What was 200 to 300 years ago is still here. The language...the spirituality... is still here. The songs are still here. All we have to do is go back...and take it."

## By the Numbers



On location in South Dakota. Photo by Christian Glawe.

1. The Great Sioux Nation is the common term for the Oceti Sakowin (**Seven Council Fires**) which encompasses the entire Great Plains tribal system.
2. There are **three tribal divisions of the Oceti Sakowin** each with its own subdivisions: the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota tribes. The languages of each tribe have commonalities but are distinctively different.
3. The land base for the Oceti Sakowin once stretched over what is now six states and up into Canada. Today there are **11 reservations**, 9 of which are in South Dakota.
4. The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to the largest division of the Oceti Sakowin, the Lakota People, which include **seven bands of Lakota speakers**: Oglala, Sicangu, Mniconjou, Hun'kpapa, Itazipo, Oohenumpa, and Sisasapa.
5. The Rosebud Reservation is home to the **Sicangu band of the Lakota division**. The meaning of the name, Sicangu Oyate roughly translates into English as "Burnt Thigh."
6. The name "Sioux" originally came from a **French adaptation** of a Chippewa word that meant "enemy" or "little snake."
7. The Pine Ridge Reservation **spans 2.8 million acres** and is the **second largest reservation** in the nation—larger than Delaware and Rhode Island combined.
8. The Rosebud Reservation is **1,970 square miles** in eastern South Dakota with a **population estimated about 21,000**.



## Discussion Questions

1. Albert White Hat says that “the stories and ceremonies saved me.” As a class or group explore and discuss how an understanding of cultural identity or “knowing who I am” could be life saving.
2. In listening to the many stories in *Across the Creek* you can hear how the effects of cultural loss, land loss, and poverty have eroded the strength of the Lakota people. Consider carefully the relationship between cultural loss, land loss, and poverty. Which factor do you think currently plays a larger role both in the erosion of strength and the recovery of strength for the Lakota people?

3. *Across the Creek* presents the stories and images of many generations of Lakota people from the very young to the very old. Each generation has its own experience, yet they share a cultural common ground. As a class or group, explore the generations of your own family. What did your elders experience? What is your current experience and how is it different from the experiences of the children and youth around you? What is your common ground?

4. In the film, Nick Tilsen speaks about the importance of considering the current reality of poverty and social issues on the reservation from the foundation of Lakota culture. How do the people go forward and yet stand firm in their cultural identity while evolving into the 21st century?

As a class or group, explore this from your own point-of-view. Share and compare your experiences to the experiences of the people telling the stories in *Across the Creek*. How are they different? How are they the same?

5. In the film, we see the powerful efforts of many people to bring the young people of Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations into a strong and resourceful adulthood. Teachers, elders, youth advocates, and medicine men all recognize that the future generations rest on the small shoulders of these young people.

As a class or group, discuss these efforts and compare them with mainstream culture — how are young people being educated, trained, and parented today?



Sam Wounded Head (Rosebud Sioux, 1923-2011).

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).



Bear Butte, South Dakota.

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).



Gary Lee Christensen, Sr. (Oglala Sioux) and Dustin Kills Straight (Oglala Sioux) from the Oglala Lakota Arts Consortium in Kyle, South Dakota, performing a segment included as a Bonus Feature on the DVD of *Across the Creek*.

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).





# ACROSS THE CREEK

VIEWER  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

## Suggested Activities

1. With courage and great determination, the Lakota people are revitalizing their strength, culture, language, and economy of their nation. As a class or group, conduct research into the modern world of the Lakota people to discover some of its new leaders, the innovative projects that have been undertaken, and the many efforts that are helping the people to stand strong once again.
2. Sam Wounded Head speaks about our relationship to the plants around us as food and medicine — as well as a gift from the Creator. As a class or group explore your relationship to the natural world. Discover what plants in your area are edible or have special medicinal properties. If the season is right, organize a nature walk to identify some of these plants and their properties.
3. In the film, Ed Iron Cloud speaks about the importance of the buffalo to the Lakota people. As a class or group, trace the history of the buffalo on the Great Plains and their relationship to the Lakota People. Create a storyboard with pictures and significant dates to add detail to this timeline. Be sure to include current efforts to restore the herds of buffalo to their natural lands.
4. The Lakota people were — and are today — a resilient people. Look up the word “resilient” and name the specific actions mentioned in the film or in your research that are examples of this resilience.
5. The many divisions and bands that make up The Great Sioux Nation are complex and scattered over a wide area. As a class or group, learn more about how this nation is divided and organized, as well as why and how it split into these different subgroups.



Sage Fast Dog (Rosebud Sioux), Lakota language instructor on the Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota.

Photo by Christian Glawe.



Horse on location in South Dakota.

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).



Edward Iron Cloud III (Oglala Sioux), U.S. State Representative & Knife Chief Buffalo Nation Organization leader on the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota.

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).



## Resources

### About the Film

- [www.tenroundspictures.com](http://www.tenroundspictures.com)
- <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/across-creek>

### About the Tribes

- [www.rosebudsiouxtribe-nsn.gov](http://www.rosebudsiouxtribe-nsn.gov)
- [www.oglalalakotanation.org](http://www.oglalalakotanation.org)

### History & Education

- <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.na.107>
- <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=9017>
- <http://www.redcloudschool.org/reservation>
- <http://www.sintegleska.edu>
- [www.olc.edu](http://www.olc.edu)



Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota.

Photo by Jonny Cournoyer (Rosebud Sioux).

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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at [www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/across-creek](http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/across-creek).

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