

The Woman Who Turned Herself to Stone

Teacher's Guide and Introduction to the Story Told by Mary Louise Defender Wilson



*Mary Louise Defender Wilson on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, North Dakota.
(Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © 2009)*

**Developed by Susan Eleuterio with assistance from Linda Ehreth and Troyd Geist
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Introduction

This teachers' guide is designed to accompany the story "The Woman Who Turned Herself to Stone" featured in the CD *The Elders Speak*, and in the associated documentary by Prairie Public Broadcasting. The enhanced CD, *The Elders Speak*, was produced by the North Dakota Council on the Arts and Makoché Recording Company with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. (Please note: All North Dakota Public School Libraries have a copy of this CD.)

The documentary, produced by Prairie Public Broadcasting and the North Dakota Council on the Arts, and the CD will introduce your students to the stories, legends, culture and language of Mary Louise Defender Wilson and the Dakotah tribe. Mary Louise Defender Wilson's wisdom, artistry, and serene dignified presence have earned her the nation's highest honor for a traditional artist, a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She also has received multiple Native American Music Awards for Best Spoken Word Recording, the National Education Association's H. Councill Trenholm Memorial Award for Human and Civil Rights and a Notable Document Award from the Government Documents Round Table of the American Library Association (Makoché Word/North Dakota Council on the Arts: 1999. www.makoché.com)

Overview

Mary Louise Defender Wilson is often found with a black dog by her side. Her new dog, *Sapa*, is named with the word for "black" in the Dakotah language.

"The geography of Defender's life and culture, and that of her tribe for as far back as anyone remembers, comes alive in the stories she tells. In one story featured on the *Wisdom of the Elders* radio broadcast, Defender explains how a [big black dog] saves the world over and over by ripping out the quill work of an elderly woman as she sits by the fire. If that quill work was ever finished, Defender said, the world would end. But she doesn't worry because [dogs] are persistent.

Born in October, 1930 to a family of midwives and storytellers, Defender was raised speaking Dakotah... She is also Hidatsa. She began telling her tribes' old stories when she was 11. As a little girl, she marveled at how much her grandfather knew. Now that she is older, she believes the old tribal stories, which talked about values and human nature, taught him to think deeply.

Defender met William Wilson at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1949. Wilson, a Navajo, had been a U.S. Marine and one of the original Navajo code talkers in the South Pacific during World War II. Though the United States had classified most information about the code talkers until recently, Wilson told his bride bits and pieces of how Navajo Marines made Navajo words into a code, which helped the U.S. win the war. On her husband's Navajo reservation in the 1970s, Defender listened to Navajos who were telling old stories and reciting family lineages with the purpose of bringing them back into circulation among the tribe. When Defender went home to Standing Rock in 1976 she asked the elders to teach her more stories.

She most enjoys telling stories at home in Dakotah with other people who can then tell their stories, too. She also travels extensively telling her stories at schools and concert halls. She tells them in English mixed with Dakotah words for a taste of where the stories come from. Standing on stage she is slender and tall wearing a floor length velvet red dress in a style traditional to her tribe. Her voice sounds, someone said, like ‘leaves falling in a stone canyon.’ Suddenly, you know you are listening to someone doing something she was born to do.” (Excerpted from Wisdom of the Elders, Portland, Oregon)

Note to Teachers:

Lesson 1 should be used before listening to the story, Lessons 2 and 3 are designed to be used when your students watch the documentary and/or listen to the CD and Lesson 4 is designed to be used after your students have finished watching the documentary and/or completed listening to the CD

(Please note: Your public library should have a copy of the enhanced CD *The Elders Speak: Dakotah and Ojibway Stories of the Land as Told by Gourd Woman and Eagle Heart* which can be used or a copy can be ordered. See resources below.)

Grade Level Focus:

4-8th Grades

Connections with North Dakota Arts Grades 4-8 Standards and Benchmarks

English Language Arts Standards

Standard 1: *Students gather and organize information.*

Benchmark 4

1.4.1 1.4.2 1.4.3 1.4.4

Understand main idea and supporting details

Use simple organizational strategies

Use appropriate reference tools

Use vocabulary knowledge to gather information

Benchmark 8

1.8.1 1.8.2 1.8.3 1.8.4 1.8.5

Provide accurate summaries using story elements

Use context clues to determine meaning

Use a variety of organizational strategies

Use appropriate reference tools and available technology to support learning

Use new vocabulary from reading and listening

Standard 2: *Students engage in the reading process.*

Benchmark 4

2.4.1 2.4.2 2.4.3 2.4.4 2.4.5 2.4.6

Use strategies for activating prior knowledge to comprehend text

Make and confirm predictions to enhance understanding

Determine a specific purpose for reading

Seek help to understand information

Use a variety of clues to determine the meaning of words

Use mental pictures to help increase understanding

Benchmark 8

2.8.1 2.8.2 2.8.3 2.8.4 2.8.5

Read a variety of materials

Organize prior knowledge of a topic before reading

Make and confirm/disconfirm complex predictions to increase understanding Independently set a purpose for reading

Use strategies for clarification

Standard 3: *Students comprehend literature.*

Benchmark 4

3.4.1. 3.4.2. 3.4.4.

Make connections between personal experiences and specific incidents in a text

Make connections among works of literature

Understand the characteristics of various simple genres

Benchmark 8

3.8.1 3.8.2

3.8.3 3.8.4

Understand that events and themes in literature parallel and often impact events in their lives

Use specific aspects of literature to better understand their own and/or others' thoughts and actions

Understand that a single text may elicit a wide variety of responses

Understand the characteristics of a wide variety of genres

Standard 4: *Students engage in the writing process.*

Benchmark 4

3.4.1 3.4.2 3.4.3 3.4.4

Make connections between personal experiences and specific incidents in a text Understand the story elements

Make connections among works of literature

Understand the characteristics of various simple genres

Benchmark 8

3.8.1 3.8.2

3.8.3 3.8.4

Understand that events and themes in literature parallel and often impact events in their lives

Use specific aspects of literature to better understand their own and/or others' thoughts and actions

Understand that a single text may elicit a wide variety of responses

Understand the characteristics of a wide variety of genres

Standard 5: *Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.*

Benchmark 4

5.4.1 5.4.2 5.4.3 5.4.4.

Write for different audiences

Understand that different purposes require different forms of writing

Understand characteristics of different forms of writing

Benchmark 8

5.8.1 5.8.2 5.8.3 5.8.4

Write for a wide variety of specific audiences

Initiate writing for various purposes

Understand that writing is a way of expressing and understanding one's self Compose

comprehensive and detailed examples of writing that contain the characteristics of the selected form

Standard 6: *Students engage in speaking and listening processes.*

Benchmark 4

6.4.1 6.4.2 6.4.3

Use voice and body to communicate

Express ideas clearly and concisely

Respond to spoken words and body language

Benchmark 8

6.8.1. 6.8.2. 6.8.3. 6.8.4.

Speak with a purpose

Use various dimensions of delivery

Select materials for communicating

Give and receive feedback

Standard 7: *Students understand and use principles of language.*

Benchmark 4

7.4.1 7.4.2 7.4.3 7.4.4 7.4.5

Understand the characteristic sounds and rhythms of language

Use language for a variety of purposes

Understand basic phonological patterns in English

Understand simple figurative language

Identify specific ways in which language varies across situations

Benchmark 8

7.8.1 7.8.2 7.8.3 7.8.4

Understand conventions of English grammar

Understand cultural differences in language

Use a variety of types of figurative language

Understand how language, both written and spoken, reflects a point of view

Social Studies

Standard 1: *Students apply Social Studies skills and resources.*

Standard 2: *Students understand important historical events*

4.2.4 Use chronological terms (i.e., decade, century, generation)

Identify similarities and differences between past events and current events in North Dakota (e.g., in the lives of people from different cultures past and present)

Standard 5: *Students understand and apply concepts of geography.*

Human Geography

4.5.4 Explain how the physical environment (e.g., rainfall, climate, natural hazards) affects human activity in North Dakota

Human Development and Behavior

4.6.1 Use chronological terms (i.e., decade, century, generation)

Identify similarities and differences between past events and current events in North Dakota (e.g., in the lives of people from different cultures past and present)

4.6.2 Explain the contributions of various ethnic groups (e.g., Native Americans, immigrants) to the history of North Dakota (e.g., food, traditions, languages, celebrations)



Mary Louise Defender Wilson playing with her dog Sapa on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. (Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © 2009)

Objectives

- 1) To help students see connections between the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's use of specific language for certain events, and how words and phrases including nicknames, references to past events, slang, jokes, and customs are used in their families and community to mark events, maintain traditions and relationships, preserve family heritage and history and to draw parallels between these events and the events of the story (Lessons 1 and 2)
- 2) To help students see connections between groups of people and their own experience in terms of what's expected as they get older; such as getting your own home, your own car, establishing yourself as an independent person. (Lesson 2)
- 3) To help students think about connection between places that give us comfort- where we physically go when we have problems. (Lesson 3)
- 4) To help students make connections between North Dakota landscape and commemorations, nature and man made, idea of nature as art (Lesson 4)

Outcomes

- 1) Students will identify language used in their families which maintain traditions, relationships, and heritage and connect this to Dakotah expressions used in the story for the same purpose (Lessons 1 and 2)
- 2) Students will outline expectations for adolescents and young adults in the story and in their own communities (Lesson 2)
- 3) Students will identify places they and others in their community go for comfort, both in the natural and the built environment (Lesson 3)
- 4) Students will identify landmarks in North Dakota which are used for commemorations (Lesson 4)
- 5) Students will create a class map showing connections between places of significance to members of the Standing Rock Sioux and places of significance in their community (Lesson 4)

Pre-listening Lesson 1

Goals: Identifying language used for specific purposes

Introduction of Mary Louise Defender Wilson's background and the significance of language in culture and storytelling

Time Needed: 1 classroom period

Equipment Needed: Index cards, class copies of the worksheet

Directions:

1) Read *Overview* to students (or have selected students read it aloud)

2) Share this with your students:

Mary Louise Defender Wilson uses the Dokotah language to express ideas and traditions that don't easily translate into English. All cultures and people have specific language, words and phrases they use for certain situations and with certain people. When you listen to the story about the "Woman Who Turned Herself to Stone" notice when Mary Louise Defender Wilson uses Dakotah instead of English.

3) Have students use these worksheets to make a list of the words and phrases that they can think of for the following situations:

(**Note:** please make sure students are comfortable sharing these with others)

These pages can be printed and given to students to complete.



A) At home

What words do your parents use to show they are serious?

What family sayings do you have for good luck?

List any special words said before you eat a meal:

List any nicknames family members use for each other:

List any word games your family uses in the car when you're on a long trip:

What names or nicknames do you have for any family pets?

List any special vocabulary that your parents or others in the family use for their jobs (for instance, ranching or farming terms)

List any words that your family uses that aren't English and what language they came from (for example, "*uff da*" among Norwegian-Americans)

Select one of these words or phrases and write the history of how it came about. (You may need to interview your parents about the history.)

B) With your friends and classmates

For each of these, try to list where and when you learned these words:

What are some nicknames for you or your friends? How did they or you get this nickname? Do you have any avatar names for *Playstation* or *Wii*? Why did you choose that name?

What words or phrases do you and your friends use when something seems odd or strange?

What words or phrases do you and your classmates use when something is funny?

What words or phrases do you and your classmates use when something is great?

What cell phone text abbreviations do you know and what do they mean?

Extra Credit: Take your list home and give it to your parents as a quiz. See how many of the words or phrases they can correctly identify.



Mary Louise Defender Wilson sitting in the tall grass on top of a hill in southeastern North Dakota. She is telling the story about the woman who turned herself to stone. That "stone woman" is the large rock next to Mary Louise. It is one of four such stones. (Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © circa 1999)

4) Have students pair and share their lists and make a Venn diagram for any words, phrases or sayings they have in common.

5) Hold a class discussion on family and student words and phrases. Tell students some of the slang or phrases used when you were their age. Compare which phrases are still in use and which have changed and ask students why they think certain phrases and words continue to be used. You can have them do research on the origins by using the following sites: (both may have some offensive language so need to be used with caution)

Snopes.com has a useful page on language origins

<http://www.snopes.com/language/language.asp>

Slangsite.com <http://www.slangsite.com/>

Lessons for Use Along with the Documentary and/or CD (Lessons 2 and 3)

Lesson 2

Goals: having students explore cultural expectations of adolescents and young adults

Time Needed: 1 classroom period

Equipment: Computer/projector, paper, pencils

Directions:

- 1) Before playing the documentary, tell students this is a story about growing up and making personal decisions. Ask students to take notes on the choices that the young woman's family wants her to make and the choices she decides to make.
- 2) Play documentary. (And/or listen to Track 5 on the CD) Stop at the point that Grandma wants to start searching for the girl.
- 3) Ask students to review the places in the story when Mary Louise Defender Wilson used Dakota language. Class can make a group list or each student can write down at least two examples. Discuss why she might be using Dakota when the grandmother speaks. Do their grandparents or other relatives use older language or different languages when they speak? What advice have they heard older relatives give? Are there standard phrases they have heard on these occasions?
- 4) Have students brainstorm with a partner five things that show a young person is growing up. (Getting a driver's license, being able to go out without an adult, getting a job, getting a car, having a later curfew, going to school, being allowed to hunt, getting an apartment, etc)
- 5) Have them compare their lists with the signs the young woman is growing up (she travels alone, her brothers talk about her getting married, plan to select a young man for her, talk about her having her own home). They should put a checkmark next to each item on their list which is in the story.

Lesson 3

Goals: making connections to places of comfort, connections to nature and built environment between the story and students' experience

Time Needed: 1 classroom period

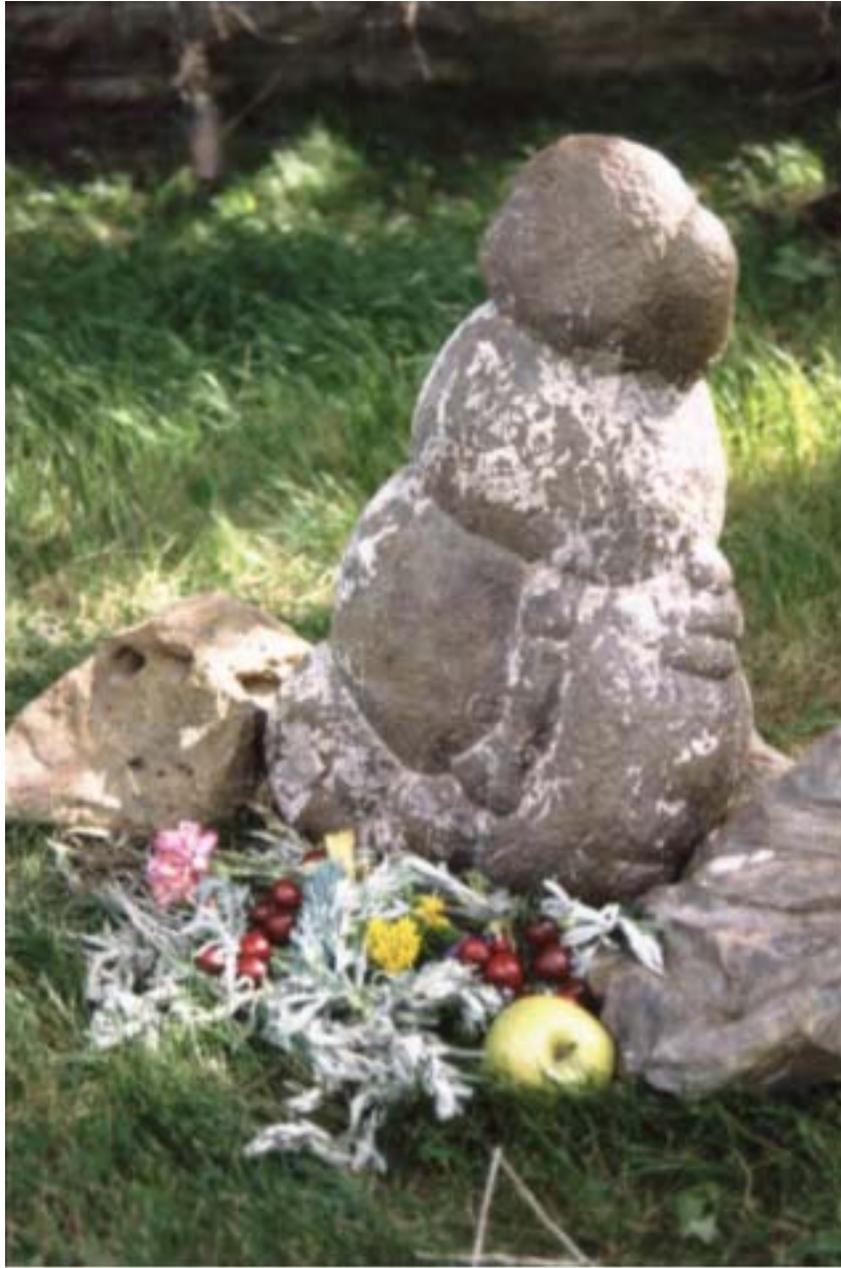
Directions

- 1) Finish playing the documentary/CD
- 2) Discuss the girl's actions with the class. She loved Nature so much that she wanted to be a permanent part of it as a stone, and she followed her heart in her decision. Ask students about their connections to nature. Do they have a favorite spot they go to? Have they or their families brought a part of nature into their home (such as plants, rocks, animal bones)? Do they think she made a good decision? Why or why not? What stories, songs, or poems do they know where someone follows their heart in making a decision?
- 3) In the CD version of the story, the girl tells her grandmother that she will always be a place of comfort to her.

She says:

“You always must tell about me and what I did so people know they have to respect the life that lives out here around us. I will always be here to help you...I am here and I can help you. if you have trouble bring me a plant or something from a tree, leave it with me and I will be able to help you.”

- 4) Show students this photo of one of the four rocks which are considered by the Standing Rock Sioux to be a woman turned to stone at a place described in this story.



One of four large rocks identified in traditional Dakota lore as a woman who turned herself to stone out of her desire to be one with Nature. The "woman" is sitting and has her hair in a bun. Sage, fruit, and flower offerings are left out of great respect. (Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © 1999)

5) Ask students to list places that people go to for comfort, both built and in nature (our rooms, homes, relative's homes, gardens, bird sanctuaries, woods, cemeteries, churches, temples, synagogues, mosques and other religious sites). How do we ask for help at these places? List any examples of people using flowers or plants for comfort at a time of trouble.

6) Have students write a poem about a place of comfort for them. Save the poems for use in Lesson 4.



Strips of colored cloth tied to trees near the "stone woman" in southeastern North Dakota. Such offerings are made in respect and in beseeching help. (Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © 2008) (See Image in Lesson 4)

Lesson 4 (To be used after watching the documentary and/or playing the CD)

Goals: to have students identify places of commemoration associated with North Dakota

Time Needed: 1 classroom period

Equipment Needed: Computer projector

Directions:

1) The woman who turned to stone wanted to become a part of nature and a site where others could come for comfort. In the CD's version, Mary Louise Defender Wilson says at the end of the story

‘We know that the earth itself and the places on the land is where the people learn lessons on how to be human beings.’

2) Tell students that there are sites and places on the land around North Dakota where people go to remember history and heritage. Put students in groups of four and have each group select a site from this list of National Historic Landmarks in North Dakota

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_National_Historic_Landmarks_in_North_Dakota

(They can also use a printed state road map of North Dakota to look for landmarks)

Students should research and describe

a) Why is this site important? Do not copy from the website, do research in at least two other places about this site (one should be a book in your school's library, the other can be a website)

b) Describe what you would see at this site in one or more complete paragraphs

c) What people and events are commemorated at this site?

- How have the Standing Rock Sioux and other tribes remembered sites from the natural landscape and the built environment which are important to them? Use this map to look at North Dakota sites related to the different tribes
<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/maps/dakotas/nd.html>
- Compare to the map on the list of National Historic Landmarks in North Dakota.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_National_Historic_Landmarks_in_North_Dakota

d) What similarities are there between the ways different cultures in North Dakota have used places and sites to remember important events and traditions in their history and heritage? What differences are there?

3) Have students read their poems from Lesson 3. Ask them “What material or physical markers might you create to commemorate this place of comfort? “

4) Have students make a list of significant landmarks, markers, and sites of commemoration in their community. They should place these landmarks as well as a mark for places of comfort to them on one of the maps used above. Compare where their landmarks are to those that have been commemorated. How would they change the maps in the future?



One of four large rocks said in Dakotah lore to be a woman who turned herself to stone. This "stone woman" is found in southeastern North Dakota and is visited often by Mary Louise Defender Wilson. Sage, a plant traditionally used for purification, was placed at the base of the stone by a previous visitor. (Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts © 2008)

Resources

North Dakota Council on the Arts Folk Arts Program

For more information, contact Troyd Geist at (701) 328-7591 or tgeist@nd.gov.

http://www.nd.gov/arts/whatsnew/publications_recordings.html

The Elders Speak: Dakotah and Ojibway Stories of the Land. Told by Gourd Woman and Eagle Heart Limited quantities available at the NDCA office, call (701) 328-7590, or contact Makoche Recording Company at <http://www.makoche.com/> or call (701) 223-7316 or (800) 637-6863.

“With a simple offering and acceptance of tobacco, the ‘Old Ones’ unfold ancient stories and make known a mystical and spiritual land. The storytellers speak of a land where the waters, buttes, stones, plants and animals reveal the lessons and origins of Humanity. These places and their stories are all around us and speak to us today. Gourd Woman and Eagle Heart, with kindly hearts and a genuine desire to preserve these rare stories for future generations, share them on this remarkable recording, available on cassette and enhanced CD. Great for children, adults, students, educators and those simply wanting to be entertained, this enhanced CD contains maps and photos of the landmark areas and folk arts described in their stories. This enhanced CD can be heard in any CD player.”

The following sound clips are available:

Track 2, [*Sky Woman and the Great Flood*](#)

Track 5, [*The Woman Who Turned Herself to Stone*](#)

Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains

Produced by Prairie Public Television, written by Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz

"Prairie Crosses, Prairie Voices: Iron Crosses of the Great Plains"—a video documentary co-produced by Prairie Public Broadcasting and the North Dakota State University Libraries—follows the history of the traditional iron cemetery grave marker as the folk art migrated from Germany to the Russian Ukraine—and eventually to the Great Plains of North Dakota and Canada. The iron crosses—some intricate, some simple, but no two quite the same—are found in cemeteries and in agricultural fields across the region. Major funding for the documentary was provided by the North Dakota Humanities Council, North Dakota State University Libraries, the North Dakota Council on the Arts, which receives funding from the state legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the members of Prairie Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit www.prairiepublic.org

North Dakota Council on the Arts: Arts in Education Program Artist in Residence Artists Roster

Artists represented on the Artist-in-Residence Roster have successfully undergone a peer panel review process that evaluates their artistic and instructional abilities as they relate to artists working in a school residency program. The roster is a resource guide for communities searching for qualified professionals to conduct residencies in schools and other educational settings. Artists provide students the environment to develop critical thinking skills, help build confidence, share their ideas with others, and be involved in the creative process.

http://www.nd.gov/arts/arts_ed/roster_folk.html

Arts in Education Grants for Teachers and Schools Need help? Call (701) 328-7593 or e-mail lehreth@nd.gov.

All NDCA grants are only available online. To apply for a grant, or for more information, please visit: <http://northdakota.cgweb.org>

Artist in Residence. The Artist in Residence program provides matching funds for schools and other non-profit organizations to bring artists into North Dakota schools and communities to conduct residencies of three days or longer. This program is designed to provide students, teachers, and community members with hands-on experiences and personal interactions with working artists. Residencies give students an understanding of quality art and appreciation for cultural traditions. [Guidelines are available via this link.](#)

- Maximum grant: 50% of the artist's negotiated fee and expenses
- Deadline dates: April 1 and November 1 (submitted online)

Schools and Artists as Learning Teams (SALT) is a professional development grant program that supports and strengthens partnerships between schools, community arts organizations and artists. Through thoughtful collaboration, teachers and artists create opportunities for success so that all students achieve to high standards. The grant can be renewed for up to three years, dependent on legislative funding, which allows the opportunity to stretch and explore what it means to work collaboratively. [Guidelines, program overview and FAQ's are available via this link.](#)

- SALT Grant Program Time Frame/Deadlines Application deadline: Applications must be submitted by August 1.
- Notification: All applicants will be notified of funding status on or about September 1.
- Grant period: Grants begin in September and ends by June 30.

Teacher Incentive. The Teacher Incentive program is a means of providing financial assistance to teachers who wish to explore new and creative ways of incorporating the arts into the non-arts curriculum of a classroom. Projects may involve the visual arts, poetry/fiction writing, performing arts, architecture, folk arts, or any combination of artistic disciplines. [Guidelines are available via this link.](#)

- Maximum grant: \$300
- Deadline dates: April 1 and November 1 (submitted online)

North Dakota Indian Tribes Map and links to Tribal Councils

<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/maps/dakotas/nd.html>

Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students http://www.carts.org/artist_wilson3.html)

