



7th Grade Best of the Best, Round 1

For The Sake of Our Culture

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Our fathers and mothers were the first to live in this wonderful place, where herds of buffalos roam the wide-open prairies, sweet with the scent of new grass and flowers. The white man came over the open water less than a century ago, and yet it is they who claim this land.

This fertile land is all we Sioux need to live. We have brought skills and thoughts from the very deepest caverns of our minds and hearts and used our own fingers to weave, sew, hunt, and survive. We have taught these skills to our children and grandchildren after us, so that they may continue to carry on the proud tradition of the mighty Sioux Indian. Where did the white man find the right to rob us of all this that we have nurtured through generations?

Now they come to take it away from us. If we lose, we will not only lose our freedom, but also the skills and traditions we have gained from that freedom.

Every day, every evening, arms around knees and chin in hand, I stare into the depths of the fire and grapple with the war raging within me. Shall we fight? Or retreat? Should we venture to stand up against all those little eyes on the ends of the muskets? That can only be done with a great and terrible loss of life, I tell myself. Shall we allow ourselves cowardice— to save the lives of our wives and children?

I feel myself shrinking away from a decision to fight the white man. Shrinking back from any task that seems too great to be accomplished with the small numbers that we have in this war band.

My stomach, tightens into a small knot. No Indian group in the Sioux tribe has ever stood against the white man. The Cherokees that perished in the Trail of Tears still live on in our hearts and memories. We could forsake our lives if we submitted.

With these thoughts to guide me, I walked outside into the middle of the group of teepees. In the center stood the great drum, the great drum that would bring all our tribes together in war. I walked over to it.



Would I dare to pick up the stick and hit it three times? I reached out a hand to feel the smooth cap of tightly drawn buffalo hide.

The buffalo, a sacred symbol of strength.

Did I have the as much courage as the sacred buffalo?

My hands felt along the wooden frame.

Could I risk losing my life for the cause of freedom? My fingers ran down the knotted cord that held the huge drumstick to the drum.

I must do it. For the sake of our culture, I picked up the stick.

Swung it hard.

Once.

Twice.

For the third and final time.

The reverberations echoed through the lonely, sweet-smelling prairies. Soon to see bloodshed.

Not a single breeze stirred the wind.