

**Sioux Victory over General Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn**  
**Grade levels 6-8**  
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**Directions:**

1. Analyze each of the documents and respond to the following questions based on your analysis.
2. At the conclusion of your documents, you are to write a well-organized essay which will respond to the essay question/prompt. Your essay should include a topic statement followed by several paragraphs to explain and support your response.
3. Use evidence from the documents (including the Historical Background introduction) to support your essay response as well as any personal knowledge of the event that you may possess.

**Essay Question/Prompt:**

Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages that were apparent between the opposing sides during the Battle of Little of Big Horn and illustrate how these differences influenced the outcome of the battle.

**Historical Background:**

The Battle of Little Big Horn came about as a result of United States government and military efforts to take possession of the Black Hills territory in what is today South Dakota. As part of a larger military strategy, General George Custer was to lead his soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry Regiment into the disputed territories to challenge the Sioux possession of the Black Hills region. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1876 Custer's command came into sight of the Sioux villages. He quickly made the decision to attack and engage the Native tribes as he thought that to wait would allow the Natives time to escape.

Custer made a fateful decision concerning his advance. He split his command into three different portions. Custer himself would lead five companies, about 260 troopers, into the battle. Major Reno and Captain Benteen would each command one of the other two portions. Once the battle began, General Custer quickly found himself completely separated from the other two portions of his command. The units under Major Reno were able to reach a strong defensive position and the troopers under the command of Captain Benteen later joined them. With their combined forces and a relatively good defensive location, many of the soldiers under these two officers would survive the battle.

Fate would not be so kind to the men under the direct command of General Custer. The troopers belonging to the five companies that Custer led into battle would be killed, every last one. It is for this reason that the Battle of Little Big Horn is more often recognized by another title, Custer's Last Stand.

**Document A**

The day was hot. In a short time the soldiers charged the camp. [This was Maj. Reno's battalion of the Seventh Cavalry.] The soldiers came on the trail made by the Sioux camp in moving, and crossed the Little Bighorn river above where the Sioux crossed, and attacked the lodges of the Uncpapas, farthest up the river. The women and children ran down the Little Bighorn River a short distance into a ravine. The soldiers set fire to the lodges. All the Sioux now charged the soldiers and drove them in confusion across the Little Bighorn River, which was very rapid, and several soldiers were drowned in it. On a hill the soldiers stopped and the Sioux surrounded them. A Sioux man came and said that a different party of Soldiers had all the women and children prisoners. Like a whirlwind the word went around, and the Sioux all heard it and left the soldiers on the hill and went quickly to save the women and children.

***An Eyewitness Account by the Lakota Chief Red Horse recorded in pictographs and text at the Cheyenne River Reservation, 1881***

1. Describe the initial reaction by the Natives when the U.S. soldiers charged into the Native village.
2. What happened as the Sioux warriors drove the U.S. Cavalry troopers back to the Little Big Horn River?
3. Why were the soldiers in a dangerous situation once they reached the nearby hill?

**Document B**

Major Marcus Reno was an officer under the command of Gen. George Custer during the Battle of Little Big Horn. Following the battle, Major Reno would be the senior surviving officer from Custer's command.

I, however, soon saw that I was being drawn into some trap, as they would certainly fight harder, and especially as we were nearing their village...., I could not see Custer or any other support, and at the same time the very earth seemed to grow Indians, and they were running toward me in swarms, and from all directions. I saw I must defend myself and give up the attack mounted. (Reno) saw that I was fighting odds of at least five to one, and that my only hope was to get out of the woods, where I would soon have been surrounded, and gain some high ground.

***Report on the Battle of Little Big Horn***  
***Major M.A. Reno***

***Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1876, 44th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 476-480.***

4. For what reasons did Major Reno realize that he needed to get out of the woods that his troops were in and get to some high ground?
5. What realization did Major Reno have as his troopers neared the Native village?
6. Why did Major Reno call a halt to his initial charge, or attack on the Native village?

Document C



BATTLE OF THE BIG HORN.





***"Jun 25th, 1876 Gen Custer, his two brothers his nephew and all his men (7th cavalry) were killed," and "copyrighted 1889 by Kurz & Allison, art publishers, 76 & 78 Wabash Ave. Chicago, U.S.A."***

***Courtesy of the Library of Congress***

7. Which side appears to have more men in the battle?
8. Which of the two sides, the Cavalry soldiers under Custer or the Sioux warriors, appear to be winning the battle at this point? Support your statement.
9. What are some of the different types of weapons being used by the Native warriors in this image?

## **Document D**

The soldiers charged the Sioux camp about noon. The soldiers were divided, one party charging right into the camp. After driving these soldiers across the river, the Sioux charged the different soldiers [i.e., Custer's] below, and drive them in confusion; these soldiers became foolish, many throwing away their guns and raising their hands, saying, "Sioux, pity us; take us prisoners." The Sioux did not take a single soldier prisoner, but killed all of them; none were left alive for even a few minutes. These different soldiers discharged their guns but little. I took a gun and two belts off two dead soldiers; out of one belt two cartridges were gone, out of the other five.

Among the soldiers was an officer who rode a horse with four white feet. [This officer was evidently Capt. French, Seventh Cavalry.] The Sioux have for a long time fought many brave men of different people, but the Sioux say this officer was the bravest man they had ever fought. I don't know whether this was Gen. Custer or not. Many of the Sioux men that I hear talking tell me

it was. I saw this officer in the fight many times, but did not see his body. It has been told me that he was killed by a Santee Indian, who took his horse. This officer wore a large-brimmed hat and a deerskin coat. This officer saved the lives of many soldiers by turning his horse and covering the retreat. Sioux say this officer was the bravest man they ever fought. I saw two officers looking alike, both having long yellowish hair.

***An Eyewitness Account by the Lakota Chief Red Horse recorded in pictographs and text at the Cheyenne River Reservation, 1881***

10. According to Chief Red Horse, what actions did some of the U.S. Cavalry troopers commit in the middle of the battle?
11. How were the Native warriors able to take advantage of the equipment taken from the dead U.S. Cavalry troopers during the Battle of Little Big Horn?
12. Based on your analysis, how do you think the Native warriors would have felt towards the Cavalry troopers who tried to surrender and why?
13. If you were a Native warrior during this battle, would you have taken any prisoners? Explain your answer.

**Document E**

*Following the defeat of Custer's soldiers at the Battle of Little Big Horn a large number of lithographs and engravings were created for use by the newspapers of that time period. The great majority of these scenes focused on the supposed final moments of General Custer as he fought with a small force of his troopers alongside of him.*



**General Custer's death struggle. The battle of the Little Big Horn. Lithograph by Britton Rey & Co., 1878, after H. Steinegger.**

14. At this point in the battle what advantages do the Native warriors appear to have over Custer's troops?
15. What has happened to the national flag that was carried into battle by Custer's unit?
16. Describe how the artist is trying to portray Custer and his soldiers in this image?

## **Document F**

*The following is an excerpt from The Chicago Tribune shortly after the Battle of Little Big Horn.*

...the country has not been more startled than it was by the announcement that General Custer and five companies of his regiment, the Seventh Cavalry, had been massacred by the Sioux Indians in a ravine ... the Indians outnumbering our troops ten to one. General Custer had personal and soldierly traits which commended him to the people. He was an officer who did not know the word fear, and, as is often the case with soldiers of this stamp, he was reckless, hasty, and impulsive, preferring to make a daredevil rush and take risks rather than to move slower and with more certainty. He was a brave, brilliant soldier, handsome and dashing, with all the attributes to make him beloved of women and admired of men; but these qualities, however admirable they may be, should not blind our eyes to the fact that it was his own madcap haste, rashness, and love of fame that cost him his own life, and cost the service the loss of many brave officers and gallant men. They drew him into an ambushade ravine.... In this instance, three hundred troops were instantly surrounded by 3,000 Indians, and the fatal ravine became a slaughter-pen from which but a few escaped.... No account seems to have been taken of numbers, of the leadership of the Sioux, of their record of courage and military skill.

### **The Chicago Tribune (4th July, 1876)**

17. According to this article, what are some of the personal qualities about General Custer that so many people admired about him?
18. What odds did General Custer face by rushing into a battle with the Sioux warriors?
19. Describe how this article seems to place blame on General Custer for the defeat at Little Big Horn.

## **Document G**

*We return to the report by Major Reno late in the battle as he and his men prepare for more expected attacks by the Sioux warriors.*

, I had the men dig rifle pits, barricade with dead horses and mules, and boxes of hard bread, the opening of the depression toward the Indians in which the animals were herded, and made every exertion to be ready for what I saw would be a terrific assault the next day. All this might night the men were busy, and the Indians holding a scalp-dance underneath us in the bottom and in our hearing. On the morning of the 26th I felt confident that I could hold my own, and was ready, as far as I could be, when at daylight, about 2.30 a.m., I heard the crack of two rifles. This was the signal for the beginning of a fire that I have never equaled. Every rifle was handled by an expert and skilled marksman, and with a range that exceeded our carbines, and it was simply impossible to show any part of the body before it was struck. We could see, as the day brightened, countless hordes of them pouring up the valley from the village and scampering over the high points toward the places designated for them by their chiefs, and which entirely surrounded our position. They had sufficient numbers to completely encircle us, and men were struck from opposite sides of the lines from where the shots were fired. I think we were fighting all the Sioux Nation,

***Report on the Battle of Little Big Horn  
Major M.A. Reno***

***Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1876, 44th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 476-480.***

20. Describe the actions taken by the men under Reno's command to try to prepare for any expected attacks.
21. Explain why it became so dangerous for the troopers to expose their body when daylight came?

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Remember to utilize the analysis from the preceding documents, along with the Historical Background and your own subject knowledge to develop and write your essay response.