



WABAN-AKI

PEOPLE FROM WHERE THE SUN RISES



Yvonne M'Sadoques rocks forward in her chair. She's lived in the Abenaki community of Odanak for over a century — and has no shortage of stories to tell.

"The priest would march into our home and order us to stop dancing. We were going to the devil, he said." She pauses, a humorous glint in her eye. "But you know — I don't really believe in the devil. Do you?"

M'Sadoques is in conversation with Alanis Obomsawin, another of Odanak's proud daughters — and one of Canada's leading documentary filmmakers.

Obomsawin's illustrious career comes full circle with *Waban-Aki: People From Where the Sun Rises*. Having dedicated nearly four decades to chronicling the lives of Canada's First Nations, she returns to the village where she was raised to craft a lyric account of her own people.

WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY **ALANIS OBOMSAWIN** EDITOR **ALISON BURNS**
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104 MINUTES 2 SECONDS

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THE SUN RISES

A film by Alanis Obomsawin



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PEOPLE FROM WHERE THE SUN RISES

TIMELINE

12,000 years ago

Archeological evidence suggests that ancestors of the Abenaki were living in the northeastern regions of North America.

1524

Verrazano makes contact with Abenakis in what is today Maine. Abenakis are already engaged in fur trading with Europeans.

1604

French explorer Samuel de Champlain makes contact with the Penobscot and Maliseet, both Abenaki groups. The Abenaki become involved in the early stages of the fur trade.

Early 1600s

Europeans introduce a series of epidemics such as smallpox and diphtheria, which kill thousands of Abenaki. Many communities completely disappear.

1676

A large number of Abenaki move to the Odanak area, joining many other Abenaki already established in the region.

1680

Jean Crevier, the seigneur of St. Francis, claims the land in the Odanak area. Crevier is captured by the Iroquois and subsequently dies after suffering torture at their hands. His widow is obliged by the Governor of Nouvelle France to give back some of the land to the Abenaki in an attempt to form a protective shield against attacks from the English and Iroquois. Subsequent seigneurs give back even more of the Abenaki land. Still, the present-day Abenaki own only a small fraction of their original territory.



A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION



Late 1600s to early 1700s

The Abenaki lose much of their traditional lands in New England. Some migrate north to Quebec and others move into the northern regions of New England.

1722

The French Jesuit Sebastien Rasles compiles a dictionary of the Abenaki language.

1722

Samuel Shuttle, Governor of Massachusetts, declares war on the Abenaki.

1724

British colonialists destroy the Abenaki community of Norridge-wock, in present-day Maine.

Early 1700s

More epidemics decimate the Abenaki population. By 1776, only about 1,000 Abenaki are believed to have survived.

1812-15

During the War of 1812, some Abenaki fight on the British side against the United States.

1823

A young Abenaki man called Ozonkhiline travels by foot from Odanak to Dartmouth College, an Ivy League university in New Hampshire. After graduating, he returns to Odanak to work as a Methodist minister, introducing the Protestant faith and

challenging the control of the Catholic Church. Over the years, many Abenaki are educated at Dartmouth College.

1876

The Canadian Parliament passes the Indian Act, which includes the compulsory “emancipation” of any Native women who married non-Indians.

Late 1800s to early 1900s

The Abenaki at Odanak develop a successful industry with traditional basket making. Many Abenakis relocate to tourist areas across New England every summer where they make baskets to sell to tourists and locals.

1968

Mary Two-Axe-Early, a Mohawk, mounts a legal challenge to the discrimination against women under the Indian Act.

1985

Bill C-31 is passed, amending the Indian Act. Women who had lost their Indian status through marriage to a non-Indian prior to 1985 regain it.

2006

There are about 38,000 registered Abenaki in Canada, and about 23,000 in the United States.

OBJECTIVES

Waban-Aki: People From Where the Sun Rises explores the history and contemporary realities of the Abenaki. This study guide is designed to help make students aware of the laws that have directly affected the Abenaki, the nation’s continuing struggle for survival, and the crafts that have played an important part in their history.

BEFORE SCREENING THE VIDEO

1. Did your parents or grandparents immigrate to Canada? Does your family continue to practise cultural customs from your ancestors’ homeland? How are these customs passed on to new generations?

2. Think of movies, books or TV shows you have seen that portray First Nations people. Do you think the portrayals are positive? Have you noticed any changes in the way First Nations people have been depicted over the course of the 20th century?

3. What reaction do you imagine First Nations people of North America had to the arrival of the Europeans?

4. How do you think the Canadian government determines who is an Indian and who isn’t?

5. What would you do if there was a law that you felt discriminated against your culture?

AFTER SCREENING THE VIDEO

1. Which present-day Canadian provinces and U.S. states did the Abenaki occupy before the arrival of the Europeans?

2. When the Abenaki people first encountered the Europeans, they numbered more than 50,000. What caused their numbers to drop to only 1,000 near the end of the 1700s?

3. Why did the Canadian Parliament pass the Indian Act, once called “the Act for the gradual civilization and enfranchisement of Indians”?

4. How did the Indian Act discriminate against women and how did this create different classes of Indians?

5. Based on what you have seen in the film, write a step-by-step guide teaching people how to remove the bark from a birch tree to make a canoe.

6. Why did the Abenaki people stop selling their own crafts? What effect did this have on their earnings?

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7. Which character in the film did you find the most interesting? Why?

8. In 1985 Bill C-31 was passed to amend the Indian Act, creating new classes of Indians. Explain what 6-1, 6-2 and 6-3 status mean. How do you think this will affect the survival of the Abenaki?

FOLLOW-UP PROJECTS

1. Using the library or the Internet, find out how different First Nations people in Canada are trying to preserve their culture.

2. See if there is a First Nations history museum near where you live. Take photos of artifacts on display and show them to your classmates.

3. The film gives you an idea of how birch bark is pried from a tree to make the “skin” of a canoe. Try to find out how the rest of the canoe was traditionally built. How, for example, were the wooden ribs bent to form the shape of the canoe? When canoes were built from several pieces of birch bark, how were they joined?

4. The film talks briefly about the Indian Act of 1876. Research the Act and present a summary of your findings to your class.

Related Internet sites:

www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/menu_his.shtml
www.dickshovel.com/aben.html
www.abenakis.ca
www.canadiana.org/citm/themes/aboriginals/aboriginals8_e.html

OTHER RESOURCES**Books:**

The Voice of the Dawn: An Auto-history of the Abenaki Nation. Frederick Wiseman, Univ. Press of New England, 2001.

The Identity of the Saint Francis Indians, Gordon Day, National Museum of Canada, 1981.

Related NFB Films:

Survival in the Bush, 1954, 30 min. Directed by Bernard Devlin.

Mother of Many Children, 1977, 58 min. Directed by Alanis Obomsawin.

Is the Crown at war with us?, 2002, 96 min. Directed by Alanis Obomsawin.

Our Nationhood, 2003, 97 min. Directed by Alanis Obomsawin.

César's Bark Canoe, 1971, 58 min. Directed by Bernard Gosselin.

