To Have a Voice: Tecumseh’s Purpose

- **Compelling Question**
  - How can Tecumseh’s drive toward his purpose inspire us to pursue the purpose in our own lives?

- **Virtue: Purpose**

- **Definition** – Purpose is my answer to the question “why do I exist?” It is the reason for which I exist; it is my goal, that thing to which my actions are directed. It is our answer to the question “what are you for?”

- **Lesson Overview**
  - In this lesson, students will study the life and work of Tecumseh and his attempt to form a strong Indian Confederacy. They will explore how purpose played a role in Tecumseh’s life and can direct their lives and help advance freedom for themselves and others.

- **Objectives**
  - Students will analyze Tecumseh’s performance in uniting the native tribes
  - Students will understand how they can pursue their purpose in their own lives
  - Students will apply this knowledge to discover their own purpose

- **Background**
  - Tensions between the native peoples of North America and settlers has existed since the first Europeans set foot in the “New World.” As the population in North America grew, it inevitably expanded, putting more and more pressure on tribes in the interior. The growth of the population also provided an opportunity for native tribes. Trade with European settlers allowed them to obtain goods previously unknown to them. However, this too created tensions. Not only did Europeans introduce new vices into Indian culture, primarily alcohol, but their trade also threatened to forever alter the traditional life of the native tribes. Many saw this as a threat to their existence. That and the continual taking of native lands through treaties, inevitably led to conflict. One leader among these tribes resisting westward expansion was a Shawnee leader named Tecumseh.

- **Vocabulary**
  - Vice
  - Treaties
  - Disintegration
  - Confederacies
  - Tumultuous
  - Proclamation
  - Embroiled
  - Instability
  - Incursion
  - Religious revival
  - Encroaching
  - Rescind
  - Clout
  - Amenable

- **Introduce Text**
  - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
  - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
    - What challenges are you facing?
    - What fears or concerns might you have?
    - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
• **Observation Questions**
  o Who was Tecumseh?
  o What did he attempt to do on the frontier?
  o What do Tecumseh’s actions say about his identity?

• **Discussion Questions**
  o Discuss the following questions with your students.
    ▪ What is the historical context of the narrative?
    ▪ What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
    ▪ How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
    ▪ How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
    ▪ How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
    ▪ What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
    ▪ Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
    ▪ How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

• **Additional Resources**
Handout A: To Have a Voice: Tecumseh's Purpose

Background

Tensions between the native peoples of North America and settlers has existed since the first Europeans set foot in the “New World.” As the population in North America grew, it inevitably expanded, putting more and more pressure on tribes in the interior. The growth of the population also provided an opportunity for native tribes. Trade with European settlers allowed them to obtain goods previously unknown to them. However, this too created tensions. Not only did Europeans introduce new vices into Indian culture, primarily alcohol, but their trade also threatened to forever alter the traditional life of the native tribes. Many saw this as a threat to their existence. That and the continual taking of native lands through treaties, inevitably led to conflict. One leader among these tribes resisting westward expansion was a Shawnee leader named Tecumseh.

Narrative

Tecumseh was born in 1768 in the Ohio territory, near the present day city of Dayton. He was born into the Shawnee tribe, which made its home primarily in the Ohio River valley and north, up to Lake Erie. Many of the Shawnee had been displaced as a result of the Beaver Wars during the mid-seventeenth century. One major impact of these wars was a disintegration of centralized native confederacies, making their interactions with Europeans much more difficult to coordinate.

Tecumseh grew up during tumultuous years on the continent. The French and Indian War concluded just before Tecumseh’s birth in 1763. Many of the native tribes had been embroiled in the conflict. Tecumseh’s own father, Puckshinwa, had even taken part. The war had ended with a British victory, giving them control over the Ohio River valley, including the territory occupied by the Shawnee.

In 1763, the British also made a proclamation, stating that no British settlers would be allowed to settle west of the Appalachian Mountains. Although this seemed to offer hope of stable relations with the native peoples, the proclamation was soon over turned through a series of treaties. This instability of relations with the Europeans, continued to make life unstable and worrisome for the native tribes in the region.

By the 1770s, a flood of immigrants was spilling over the Appalachians. Conflict inevitably followed. It was during one of these violent periods that Tecumseh’s father was killed. Losing his father so early in his life, only fueled his anger toward the European settlers.

Soon, another international conflict broke out in North America, the American Revolution. This war was not limited to the coast, but once again spilled over into the lands of the Shawnee. Tecumseh was forced to move three times because of the conflict. After the conclusion of the Revolution, another conflict broke out for control of the Northwest Territory.

This conflict involved a large tribal confederacy, known as the Wabash Confederacy, and fighting over control of the Northwest Territory. The Wabash Confederacy was made up of several tribes from the regions of Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. Mostly lacking a centralized government in favor of loose alliances amongst tribal chieftains. Tecumseh volunteered to take part in this conflict and soon began to understand that creating these coalitions gave added power and weight to the native tribes.

Tecumseh got his first taste of combat in various raids and conflicts throughout the war. In 1794, he was at the major Battle of Fallen Timbers. The Indian’s loss here forced them to make peace and sign the Treaty of Greenville. Though defeated, Tecumseh refused to sign.

Eventually Tecumseh would settle back in Ohio with his younger brother. After a short time, his brother began to receive religious visions. After changing his name to Tenskwatawa, meaning “Open Door” in Shawnee, his brother began to preach. His message was one of the preserving Shawnee traditions and customs and rejecting the incursion of Europeans into their territory.
Tenskwatawa began to gather a larger and larger following, leading to a religious revival of sorts amongst the tribes in the region. To escape growing pressures from settlers, Tecumseh and his brother moved further west, establishing Prophetstown near the Wabash and Tippecanoe rivers. At this new settlement, Tenskwatawa continued to preach, and the numbers of their tribe continued to grow.

It was at this time that Tecumseh began to seriously consider and organize his own Indian confederacy. He knew that separately, the tribes were weak and unable to confront their well-organized foes. The year was 1805 and his opponent was the new nation of the United States. By 1808, he had become seen as a leader in his own community, but continued to hold the same vision. Only together could the tribes hope to mount enough interest and resistance to stop the ever encroaching settlers and protect native lands. This would become Tecumseh's mission for the rest of his life.

Tecumseh began to travel all across the Great Lakes region, preaching his brother's prophecies and his own vision for a great native confederacy. After several more treaties had opened up significant portions of land in Indiana for settlement, Tecumseh had had enough. He took a large band of men to confront the governor of the newly formed Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison in Vincennes. Harrison had been primarily responsible for bribing many of the chieftains into signing treaties to give up their territory. Tecumseh demanded the treaties that had been forced upon the Shawnee be rescinded. At one point during the conversation, Tecumseh is noted to have said, "Sell a country? Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Didn't the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children? How can we have confidence in the white people?"

Tecumseh believed the land belonged to all, and he would set about seeing that it remained that way. The atmosphere was tense as he left the meeting with Harrison, and soon it would get worse. He traveled south, bringing even more tribes into his confederacy. Although he met some resistance, many tribes joined his ranks. Tecumseh knew his dream of a confederacy was at hand. He was uniting the tribes and soon they would have enough clout to resist the actions of the American government.

However, while he was away, Harrison went on the offensive, attacking Tecumseh's village at Prophetstown, routing the forces of his brother and burning the village to the ground. This was a devastating blow to Tecumseh and to his confederacy. Losing prestige, many of his allies began to desert him. He was forced to turn to a more powerful empire in the hopes that they could salvage his life's work. This powerful friend was the British Empire. The war of 1812 had begun, and Tecumseh offered his help to the British. Though initially successful in helping take Fort Detroit, the campaign would ultimately prove disastrous. Now bound to follow the movements of the British Army, Tecumseh's confederacy began to crumble. When he was killed in the Battle of the Thames in 1813, the last of his tribes surrendered.

The end of the War of 1812 spelled disaster for the native tribes. The British, their only powerful ally in the region, left all of their frontier forts and could not lend them aid. The Americans, who had fought so bitterly against the native tribes while settling and during the war, sought to put as much space between them and the native tribes as possible. What followed was the forceful removal of Indians to new lands.

Although ultimately a failure, Tecumseh's plan to unite the tribes offered hope to native peoples. Had he been successful in creating a powerful alliance, there could possibly have been a more amenable and peaceful solution to the tensions between settlers and Indians, sparing countless lives on both sides. It was to that purpose that he dedicated his life and fought to his dying breath to achieve.