

Name:

Date:

Sean Sherman

Instructions: Complete the pre-reading section of the Summarization Note-Taking graphic organizer before you read the article. Then use the graphic organizer to take notes as you read and complete a final reflection.

Early Life

Sean Sherman is a chef, activist, ethnobotanist, and educator. He is a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe. Sherman was born in 1974 on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. His family had lived there for generations. Sherman grew up watching his grandparents hunt, forage, and garden to supplement government food rations. He began cooking in restaurants while attending high school. After high school, he worked for the U.S. Forest Service. Sherman learned about native plants, or plants that evolved in a specific region or ecosystem. Sherman became an executive chef in 2001.

The Sioux Chef

In 2007, Sherman was living in San Pancho, a small town in Nayarit, Mexico. He was inspired by the local Indigenous Huichol customs. Sherman realized that, though the restaurants he had worked at in the United States served different types of cuisine, his culture and local ingredients were missing. This inspired him to connect more deeply with his roots.

Sherman studied traditional Indigenous ingredients. He learned about farming methods, land stewardship, harvesting, cooking, and preserving. In 2014, his research led him to found the Sioux Chef, a catering and food education company. The following year, along with the Little Earth of United Tribes community, Sherman opened Tatanka Truck, a food truck serving traditional, sustainable food of the Indigenous peoples of the Dakota and Minnesota territories.



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Chef Sean Sherman preparing crickets at his restaurant, Owamni, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2023.

Key Terms

ethnobotanist: a person who studies how people of a particular culture and region make use of indigenous (native) plants

food sovereignty: the right of a community to choose the foods they will use to sustain themselves and their cultures

land stewardship: sustainably managing and restoring healthy relationships between people and land

Sherman founded a nonprofit called NĀTIFS (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems). It runs a commercial kitchen in Minneapolis that offers culinary training. NĀTIFS provides educational opportunities to restore Indigenous food systems. The ingredients used are sourced from tribal producers. They are grown, foraged, or hunted. These ingredients are processed using traditional methods.



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Owamni

Sherman is also the founder of the restaurant Owamni

(derived from Owámniyomni, a Dakota name for St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis that means “the place of falling, swirling water”). The award-winning restaurant offers modern Indigenous food. Owamni’s dishes are made with ingredients local to the area. Of the restaurant, Sherman said in an interview with *The Talks* in 2024:

We’re...just showcasing the foods and flavors of where we come from, trying to utilize the land better, to understand better where we are and why we’re here. We’re not after Michelin stars with our concept, we’re trying to be role models to showcase what is possible, to reconnect with the knowledge that’s been passed down to us.

Indigenous Ingredients and Food Sovereignty

Sherman champions Indigenous food sovereignty. He does not cook with wheat flour, cane sugar, dairy products, beef, or pork. These ingredients were all introduced to the Americas by European colonizers. His dishes often incorporate foraged plants (such as manoomin, a type of wild rice local to the Great Lakes that is harvested by hand from canoes), heirloom grains and vegetables (such as blue corn and sweet potatoes), and game (including bison, elk, and duck).

His nonprofit and his restaurant often engage with Indigenous-owned farms and producers who practice traditional farming. Some of the vegetables grown for Owamni come from seeds once saved by Indigenous Americans during the Trail of Tears. They sewed the seeds into their clothing to keep them safe when they were forced from their ancestral lands. Farmers continue a centuries-old tradition of saving seeds from the best plants each season. Over time, this creates varieties that grow especially well in their local areas.

Along with spreading awareness of Indigenous cuisine, Sherman created economic opportunities for

Indigenous people in the culinary world. He also hopes that inspiring Indigenous people to return to their traditional foods will have health benefits.

Health Impacts

Indigenous Americans face much higher rates of disease than other groups. They have the highest rate of diabetes in the United States and are three times more likely to die from it. Indigenous Americans also have higher rates of heart disease, liver diseases, pneumonia, and kidney issues. Sherman believes many of these health problems began when tribes were forced onto reservations in the 1800s and started eating more processed foods.

Active Indigenous lifestyles involved hunting, gardening for food, and fishing. These practices, which were focused on eating locally and seasonally, were forcibly replaced by many U.S. government policies and programs, such as the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

The food that Indigenous people received from these programs was highly processed, so it could be shipped long distances and stored for long periods of time. They had high amounts of sugar, fat, and salt.

Name:

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Summarization Note-Taking

Title of Text:

Type of Source: ☐ database ☐ website ☐ book ☐ other

Pre-Reading

What I already
know about
this topic

What I expect
to learn

Section-by-Section Summary

Summary / Main Idea
(1 sentence)

Key Details
(2-3 bullet points)

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

Name:

Date:

Overall Summary

Central theme /
main idea

Key takeaways
(3-5 bullet points)

Final Reflections

How my
understanding
changed

Questions I still have