Summary: War on the Plains

War on the Plains
In the 1840s, settlers moved west to the Great Plains. They were looking for land or gold. The government built roads and railroads for the settlers. Many Indians lived on the Great Plains. The government tried to get them to sell their land. The government wanted the Indians to move to reservations.

The Plains Indians did not want to live and farm on the reservations. The reservations were small. The land was poor. Most of the Indians were not farmers. They were hunters. For years, millions of buffalo lived on the Great Plains. The Indians hunted them to get food and clothing. The settlers killed many buffalo. New railroads, roads, and settlements hurt the buffalo habitat. By 1889, the buffalo were nearly extinct.

U.S. soldiers tried to make the Plains Indians give up their land. The Indians fought against the soldiers. Some famous battles were the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Battle of Wounded Knee, and the Sand Creek Massacre. Finally, the Indians were defeated and forced to move to the reservations.

Government Policy
Government officials wanted to make the Indians live like white settlers. Lawmakers wanted the Indians to assimilate. They tried to force the Indians to give up their culture and traditions. Indians were not allowed to have religious ceremonies. Indian children had to go to special schools. They were not allowed to speak Indian languages. They could not wear Indian clothing.

The government wanted the Indians to become farmers. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act. This law broke reservation land into small pieces. The government gave some pieces to Indians who promised to farm them. It sold the rest of the land to settlers.

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

reservation noun, land the government set aside for Indians
habitat noun, the area where an animal or plant normally lives or grows
extinct adjective, when a certain type of plant or animal no longer exists
assimilate verb, to change a group’s culture and traditions so that it blends with a larger group

REVIEW Why did Plains Indians need large areas of land? Circle reasons why Indians did not want to live on reservations.

REVIEW Why did the buffalo herds shrink? Highlight the sentences that tell how settlers changed the habitat.

REVIEW What did the Dawes Act do to reservation land? Circle the sentence that tells what happened to reservation land.