



# Trail of Tears

## Thematic Unit

### Introduction

The Trail of Tears is a dark chapter in our nation's history, especially for a nation built on liberty, equality, and justice for all. Join Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, Home of the People's President, in an interactive examination of the events leading up to the Indian Removal Act – events that reach back into the earliest days of America – and the treatment of our Native Americans that resulted. See from first-hand accounts how the policies of Presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson combined with the discovery of gold near Dahlonega, Georgia, culminated in the forced relocation of thousands of Native Americans. This program will make students consider which group was truly the civilized group and which group acted as the “savages.”

### Objectives

- A. Examine historical information from a variety of sources, including museum and library collections, letters, maps, government documents, oral histories, firsthand accounts, and web sites.
- B. Analyze documentation to determine the reasoning, policies and outcomes of the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears.
- C. Understand, through dialogue and discussion, how the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears was the culmination of a centuries-old attitude toward the Native Americans of the United States.

## **Background**

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which exchanged frontier land west of the Mississippi for the Indian land of what is the present-day American Southeast. This brought about the removal of over 46,000 Native Americans and resulted in the deaths of between 4,000-8,000 Cherokees on what is known as the Trail of Tears.

## **Vocabulary**

Abstain  
Assimilation  
Cession  
Five Civilized Tribes  
Genocide  
Indian Removal Act  
Louisiana Purchase  
New Echota  
Over-population  
Petition  
Prospectors  
Ratification  
Relocation  
Savages  
Treaties

## **Suggested Pre-Program Activities**

1. Have students research the policies of Indian Removal by previous United States presidents, focusing on: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe, and write a one page report.
2. Assign one of the Five Civilized Tribes to each student and ask them to give an oral presentation of their culture and heritage, pre-Removal.
3. Have students write a paragraph or two based on their existing perception of the Trail of Tears.

## **Presentation Outline**

*Note to classroom instructor: this information will be covered within the education program.*

1. Begin discussion by talking about the Georgia Gold Rush of 1829, in which gold was found near Dahlonega, Georgia. This led to mass-migration and over-crowding in Cherokee-owned land. Discuss the history of Georgia's dealings with

Native Americans, as far back as Thomas Jefferson's "agreement" with the state regarding their territorial holdings in present-day Mississippi and Alabama.

2. Note how the policy of government-supported removal goes back to the presidencies of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.
3. However, Andrew Jackson was the first president to take action on removing the Native Americans west of the Mississippi. In Jackson's 2nd Message to Congress (1830), the stated purpose of removal was to: End conflict between state/federal government; provide a place for the "dense and civilized" population to expand; strengthen the southwestern frontier; relieve Mississippi and Alabama of Indian occupancy; separate Indians from immediate contact with whites; frees the Indians from the power of the States; Help them preserve their heritage and traditions.
4. Discuss the idea of the Cherokees (and the other of the Civilized Tribes) as "wandering savages." Contrast this with the Joseph Vann house and the establishment of the Cherokee *Phoenix*.
5. Examine the geography of the voting on the Indian Removal Act in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
6. Discuss what the passage of the Indian Removal actually provided: the trading of lands in the West for Native American lands east of the Mississippi.
7. Who are the Five Civilized Tribes, and how did the Indian Removal Act pave the way for their removal to the West?
8. Discuss the history of governmental dealings with Native Americans in North America: the Louisiana Purchase (the French merely sold their *claim* to the land), and the "purchase" of Manhattan by the Dutch.
9. Introduce the Treaty of New Echota, how it came about, its impact on Cherokee Nation, and on the now-inevitable removal of the Cherokee from the Southeast. Take this opportunity to discuss Native American assimilation. This was a group of people who were told to assimilate, or be removed. They had a newspaper, they had a constitution, they used a democratic method to address their struggle. What does this say about the United States' government?
10. Introduce the Trail of Tears. Reflect on one Georgia militiamen's quote regarding the initial removal process: "*I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest I ever saw.*"
11. Where were the Native Americans moved to? Why? Why was it called the Trail of Tears?
12. Was it Andrew Jackson's intention for so many Native Americans to die? Read this excerpt from his 1st Message to Congress in 1829: "Look at what happened to the Mohegans, the Narragansetts, and the Delawares. They are gone, extinct. And the same fate is fast overtaking the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek...Humanity and national honor demand that every effort should be made to avert so great a calamity." Discuss how the Trail of Tears could have been avoided.
13. Discuss the Five Civilized Tribes today. How do we stop this from happening again?

## **Suggested Post-Program Activities**

1. Have students write an editorial regarding the passage of the Indian Removal Act for the Cherokee *Phoenix*.
2. Have students brainstorm on alternatives to the Indian Removal Act. What else could have been done?
3. Ask students to research their Congressmen – both House of Representatives and Senate in 1830. How did their representatives vote on the Indian Removal Act? Contact your local historical society/library and find primary source documents relating to the debates in Congress regarding the Indian Removal Act to aid in research.
4. If you participated in Pre-Activity #2, ask students to report on the Five Civilized Tribes' culture and heritage, post-Removal.
5. Hold a Native American Heritage event. Ask students to bring food, listen to music, and make crafts for a classroom celebration of Native American culture.
6. Contact Andrew Jackson's Hermitage's Education Department to be under consideration for a Pen Pal project with a school in Oklahoma.

## **Selected Bibliography**

Conley, Robert J. *The Cherokee Nation: A History*. University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

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Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. Touchstone Books, 1995.

North American Review. "Removal of the Indians." Volume 0030, Issue 66 (January 1830).

Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson: Volume Two, The Course of American Freedom*. Johns Hopkins, 1981.

Satz, Ronald N. *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

## **Web Links**

Library of Congress' Primary Documents – Indian Removal Act  
(<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>)

Mintz, S. (2007). Jacksonian Democracy. Retrieved December 4, 2009 from

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>  
([http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\\_display.cfm?HHID=638](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=638))

Official Site of Cherokee Nation  
(<http://www.cherokee.org/>)

Text of Treaty of New Echota from Oklahoma State University  
(<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/KAPPLER/VOL2/treaties/cheo439.htm>)

Senate Roll Call Vote, Indian Removal Act, April 24, 1830.  
(<http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/ampage?collId=llsj&fileName=019/llsj019.db&recNum=267&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28sj019100%29%29%230190268&linkText=1>)