



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places



(Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Benjamin Nance, photographer)

By the end of the 1830s, the U.S. government forced or coerced an estimated 100,000 American Indians to move from their homelands in the southeast to distant Reservations. These people included members of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations. They traveled many different paths, but share a story. The Trail of Tears today is a cultural and physical landscape that tells that story. It has the power to teach why and how the majority of people from these Nations moved from their homes in parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

This lesson emphasizes the struggle for Cherokee members to hold on to their land, government, and culture in the face of overwhelming pressure. The Cherokee Nation's journey occurred between 1838 and 1839. In this lesson, students investigate a complicated story about how indigenous people negotiated through law and culture to preserve their identities. They will analyze pro-relocation and anti-relocation perspectives.

The historic Major Ridge House in Georgia and the National Park Service's Trail of Tears National Historic Trail tell the histories of Cherokee Indian forced relocation. At a time when the Cherokee struggled to keep their nation in the east, a Cherokee leader named Major Ridge supported moving west. Historic places like the Major Ridge House provide evidence of Cherokee experiences and of the United States' policy of American Indian removal. The materials here introduce students to these topics through evidence-based investigations and skill-building exercises.



Document Contents

About This Lesson

National Curriculum Standards

Getting Started: Inquiry Question

Locating the Site: Map

1. Map 1: Cherokee Removal Routes

Determining the Facts: Readings

1. Reading 1: "You cannot remain where you are now": Cherokee Resistance and Relocation in the 1830s.

Visual Evidence: Images

1. Major Ridge House and Chieftains Museum, 2008.

Putting It All Together: Activities

1. Activity 1: Investigate American Indian History in Your Region
2. Activity 2: Report on Relocation Beyond the Cherokee Experience
3. Activity 3: Cherokee Voices for Resistance Close Readings



About This Lesson

This National Park Service lesson plan is based on the National Register of Historic Places nomination for “Chieftains;” Major Ridge House in Rome, Georgia (<https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/71000273>). The lesson plan was published in 2018. This lesson was written by education consultant Kathleen Hunter and National Park Service historian Katie Orr, with assistance from consultants Sarah Curtis and Marilyn Harper. It was produced by NPS Cultural Resources staff in Washington, DC. *Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places* is based on the earlier Teaching with Historic Places publication, *The Trail of Tears and the Forced Relocation of the Cherokee Nation* published in 2004. This lesson is one in a series that brings the power of place and historic sites to students around the world.

Objectives

1. To explain how Cherokee Indians rejected and embraced European-American political and cultural influence in the 1800s;
2. To trace the paths Cherokee Indians traveled during the “Trail of Tears” and to theorize what challenges they faced during the journey west;
3. To report on the regional history of American Indian and European-American interactions OR present on a different American Indian group’s relocation experience OR complete a close reading of two primary sources authored by Cherokee opposed to relocation.

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer, projected on the wall, or printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. One map depicting the Cherokee Removal Routes that were their Trail of Tears.
2. One reading (secondary source with primary source excerpts) about the events leading up to the forced relocation of the Cherokee, perspectives on U.S.-Cherokee relations, and cultural conflict.
3. One photograph of the Major Ridge Home in Rome, Georgia.

Visiting the site

The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is an organization of cultural and physical landscapes, historic sites, and museum collections in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. The Trail is coordinated by the National Park Service’s National Trails in the Intermountain Regional Office. Visit our website to learn more at [<https://www.nps.gov/trte/>] or call 505-988-6098. Chieftains Museum/Major Ridge Home is a National Historic Landmark and one of only a few private entities to be certified by the National Park Service as a site on the Trail of Tears. It is located at 501 Riverside Parkway Northeast, Rome, GA. Call 706-291-9494 or visit the website [<https://chieftainsmuseum.org>].



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: Jacksonian Era, 1820s and 1830s

Topics: This lesson could be a part of a history unit on American Indians, Jacksonian America, Manifest Destiny, or westward expansion; a social studies unit on cultural diversity or Civil Rights in U.S. history; or a geography unit on demography or the natural features of North America and their role in American history.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

US History Era 4

- **Standard 1B:** The student understands federal and state Native American policy and the strategies for survival by Native Americans.
- **Standard 2E:** The student understands the settlement of the West.

US History Era 6

- **Standard 4A:** The student understands various perspectives on federal Native American policy, westward expansion, and the resulting struggles.

Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme I: Culture

- **Standard A:** The student compares similarities and differences in the way groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
- **Standard B:** The student explains how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- **Standard C:** The student explains and gives examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to development and transmission of culture.
- **Standard D:** The student explains why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.
- **Standard E:** The student articulates the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups.

Theme II: Time, Continuity, and Change

- **Standard A:** The student demonstrates an understanding that different scholars may describe the same event or situation in different ways but must provide reasons or evidence of their views.
- **Standard C:** The student identifies and describes selected historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of civilizations, the development of transportation systems, the growth and breakdown of colonial systems and others.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

- Standard D: The student identifies and uses processes important to reconstructing and interpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality.
- Standard E: The student develops critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attributes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts.
- Standard F: The student uses knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with methods of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about and action-taking on public issues.

Theme III: People, Places, and Environment

- Standard A: The student elaborates mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size, and shape.
- Standard G: The student describes how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping, centers, and the like.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

- Standard B: The student describes personal connections to places associated with community, nation, and world.
- Standard E: The student identifies and describes ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.
- Standard G: The student identifies and interprets examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism.
- Standard H: The student works independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals.

Theme V: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- Standard A: The student demonstrates an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.

Theme VI: Power, Authority, and Governance

- Standard A: The student examines issues involving the rights, roles, and status of the individual in relation to the general welfare.
- Standard B: The student describes the purpose of the government and how its powers are acquired.
- Standard C: The student analyzes and explains ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet wants and needs of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security.
- Standard D: The student describes the way nations and organizations respond to forces of unity and diversity affecting order and security.
- Standard F: The student explains actions and motivations that contribute to conflict cooperation within and among organizations.

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Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2**

Craft and Structure

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6**

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9**

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10**



Getting Started Prompt

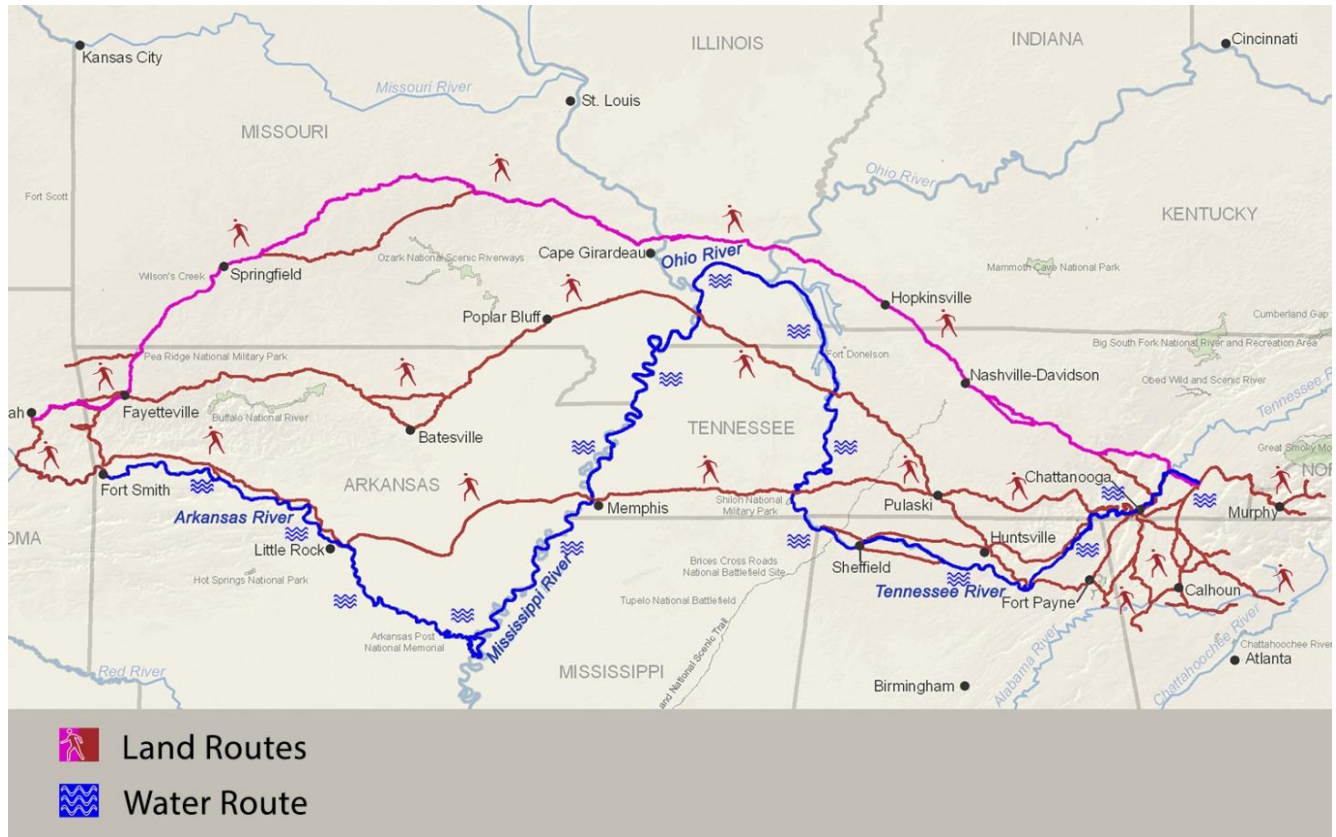
What were the consequences of the
Indian Removal Act of 1830?

What historic place might you study to answer this question?



Locating the Site

Map 1: Cherokee Removal Routes, 1838-1839.



(National Park Service)

This map shows the routes that the Cherokee Nation traveled to relocate to present-day Oklahoma, known as Indian Territory at the time. Most relocation groups from the Cherokee Nation and other American Indian societies used the land routes to reach the reservation land, but some traveled by water on the rivers.



Questions for Map 1

1) One of the largest groups of Cherokee left Tennessee in the late fall of 1838. Accompanied by Federal troops and missionaries, the group followed the far-northern route and arrived in Indian Territory by March. This was a land route. Based on the Map evidence, list three challenges you think they faced while making a land journey on foot.

2) Find the water route. What rivers does it follow? What advantages do you think this route may have had over the land route? How might it have been more difficult than traveling over land?

Cite evidence in the Map to support your answer.

3) If you were part of a Cherokee group faced with the choice of the land or water route, which would you want to travel? Why? List two pieces of evidence from the Map and one piece of evidence from your own experiences to support your answer.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Determining the Facts

Reading 1: “You cannot remain where you are now”: Cherokee Resistance and Relocation in the 1830s

In the centuries that followed Christopher Columbus landing in the Caribbean, Europeans and European-Americans slowly but steadily took control of the land already home to indigenous Americans. Cherokee Indian lands in the 1800s were no exception. The United States used violence and coercion through treaties to acquire land in the south-eastern United States, especially in the state of Georgia. Eventually, the Cherokee, along with other American Indian Tribes, were forced to move west in migrations known as the “Trail of Tears.”

The Cherokees might have been able to hold out against American settlers for a long time. But two circumstances combined to severely limit the possibility of staying put. In 1828 Andrew Jackson became president of the United States. In 1830--the same year the Indian Removal Act was passed--gold was found on Cherokee lands. There was no holding back the tide of Georgians, Carolinians, Virginians, and Alabamians seeking instant wealth. Georgia held lotteries to give Cherokee land and gold rights to white prospectors. The state had already declared all laws of the Cherokee Nation null and void after June 1, 1830, and also prohibited Cherokees from conducting tribal business, contracting, testifying against U.S. citizens in court, or mining for gold. Cherokee leaders successfully challenged Georgia in the U.S. Supreme Court, but President Jackson refused to enforce the Court's decision.

The Jackson Administration was hostile to indigenous sovereignty. In 1830, the U.S. Federal government passed the Indian Removal Act. This Act gave the president authority to make treaties with the Cherokee, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, Seminole, and Chickasaw Nations. Its purpose was to move these entire societies from their land in the southeast to land west of the Mississippi River. Americans and the United States could then move to claim the land.

The Cherokee were the last to move voluntarily. Many Cherokee wanted to stay on their land and spoke openly at their Council meetings about resisting the U.S. government and the Americans. Other Cherokee felt that it was futile to fight any longer. Pressure grew as other American Indian societies moved west under the Indian Removal Act. By the early 1830s, a Cherokee man called Major Ridge, decided the American invasion into Cherokee lands was so severe, that moving was the only way to survive as a nation. He spoke out as well.

Major Ridge was a wealthy Cherokee leader who had embraced white culture, owned slaves, and managed a plantation on Cherokee land that is now part of Rome, Georgia. Major Ridge led Cherokee in a military alliance with Andrew Jackson against the Creek and British during the War of 1812. Years later, he allied with Jackson again. Major Ridge believed a new treaty would at least pay the Cherokee for their land before they lost everything by force. Major Ridge lived his Cherokee culture through its practices and language. He believed the culture would be conserved if they moved west and destroyed if they stayed. Major Ridge and his supporters organized themselves into a Treaty Party within the Cherokee community. He did not speak English and his son, John Ridge, translated for him. The father and son presented a resolution to the Cherokee National Council in October 1832, to support a treaty for relocation. They were not successful: it was defeated and no treaty was made at the time.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

The U.S. government submitted a new treaty to the Cherokee National Council in 1835. President Jackson sent a letter outlining the treaty terms and urging its approval. The letter stated,

My Friends: I have long viewed your condition with great interest. For many years I have been acquainted with your people, and under all variety of circumstances in peace and war. You are now placed in the midst of a white population. Your peculiar customs, which regulated your intercourse with one another, have been abrogated by the great political community among which you live; and you are now subject to the same laws which govern the other citizens of Georgia and Alabama.

I have no motive, my friends, to deceive you. I am sincerely desirous to promote your welfare. Listen to me, therefore, while I tell you that you cannot remain where you now are. Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the West and join your countrymen, who are already established there. And the sooner you do this the sooner you will commence your career of improvement and prosperity.²

John Ross, the Principal Chief of Cherokee, persuaded the Council not to approve the treaty. He continued to negotiate with the federal government, trying to strike a better bargain for the Cherokee people. Each side—Major Ridge's Treaty Party and Ross's supporters--accused the other of working for personal financial gain. Ross, however, clearly won the passionate support of the majority of the Cherokee nation, and Cherokee resistance to removal continued.

In December 1835, the U.S. resubmitted the treaty to a meeting of 300 to 500 Cherokee at New Echota, Georgia. Major Ridge addressed the Cherokee to explain why he supported the Treaty of New Echota:

I know the Indians have an older title than theirs. We obtained the land from the living God above. They got their title from the British. Yet they are strong and we are weak. We are few, they are many. We cannot remain here in safety and comfort. I know we love the graves of our fathers. We can never forget these homes, but an unbending, iron necessity tells us we must leave them. I would willingly die to preserve them, but any forcible effort to keep them will cost us our lands, our lives and the lives of our children. There is but one path of safety, one road to future existence as a Nation. That path is open before you. Make a treaty of cession. Give up these lands and go over beyond the great Father of Waters.³

The U.S. Senate approved the controversial Treaty of New Echota on December 29, 1835. It passed by a single vote. Twenty Cherokee men, none of them elected officials of the tribe, signed the treaty. It gave all Cherokee territory east of the Mississippi to the U.S. in exchange for \$5 million and new homelands in Indian Territory.

The Treaty of New Echota was widely protested by Cherokee and by whites. The tribal members who opposed relocation considered Major Ridge and the others who signed the treaty traitors. The Ridge family moved west in 1837 voluntarily along with other supporters. In 1839, Major Ridge, his son, and his nephew were murdered in Indian Territory. Major Ridge feared



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

this would happen and it is believed they were killed because they supported the treaty. As John Ross worked to negotiate a better treaty, the Cherokee tried to sustain some sort of normal life--even as white settlers carved up their lands and drove them from their homes.

In Spring 1838, Federal troops forced thousands of Cherokee to gather in camps and organize for the journey. Groups of Cherokee were escorted by soldiers west by railroad, boat, and wagon. Christian missionaries and American doctors accompanied some of the groups to give relief, but the conditions of the march were harsh. Many walked. Food, medicine, clothing, even coffins for the dead, were in short supply. Water was scarce and often contaminated. Diseases raged through the camps. Over the next year, groups of Cherokee traveled west and the last arrived at their destination in March 1839.

No one knows exactly how many died during the journey. One doctor on the Trail estimated that nearly one fifth of the Cherokee population died. The trip was especially hard on infants, children, and the elderly. The U.S. government never paid the \$5 million promised to the Cherokee in the Treaty of New Echota. The Cherokee coined the term "Trail of Tears" at the time, but other indigenous societies used it to describe their own forced relocation marches.

Today, Americans recognize and rediscover this history through private and public organizations, including the National Park Service. The Park Service manages the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail and documents historic places like the Major Ridge House in Rome, Georgia. The Major Ridge House is a private museum where people go to learn about this important history and American heritage. The descendants of the historical Cherokee Nation belong to contemporary Tribes, including three recognized by the Federal Government in Oklahoma and North Carolina.

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Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Questions for Reading 1

1) What was the Treaty of New Echota and who did it affect? How were they affected? Cite evidence to explain your answer.

2) Who was Major Ridge? Based on the evidence, why was Major Ridge in favor of the treaty? Explain in 3-5 sentences how his appeal was both similar and different to President Jackson's statement.

3) President Andrew Jackson claimed that "Your peculiar customs, which regulated your intercourse with one another, have been abrogated by the great political community among which you live..." In your own words, summarize what he means. What do you think he assumes about the future, based on this statement?

4) Why was the Treaty of New Echota criticized? Do you think the U.S. government had the right to enforce this treaty? Explain why and use evidence from the reading to support your answers.



Visual Evidence

Photo One: The Major Ridge House and Chieftains Museum, 2008.



(Public Domain photo courtesy of Cculber007, WikimediaCommons)

The Major Ridge House was built in the early 1800s and is located in present-day Rome, Georgia. But it was still Cherokee land when Major Ridge and his wife, Susanna, moved into the home around 1819. The family occupied the plantation until they migrated west in 1837. Over those years, the Ridge family expanded the home from a simple log cabin to a large, white clapboard house and added additional rooms and out-buildings. (The single-story wings were added in 1923, almost 100 years later.) The property included Major Ridge's ferry boat that sold passage across the Oothcalooga River, a trading post, and an active plantation where enslaved people lived and worked for the Cherokee leader.

The Major Ridge home is open to the public today as the Chieftains Museum/Major Ridge Home. It is dedicated to preserving and teaching Cherokee history and culture.



Questions for Photo/Image 1

1) Can you see any features that might indicate that this house was built by a Cherokee? In what ways do you think the design of the house reflects Ridge's attitudes towards accommodation to white society?

2) Do you think Major Ridge was a man of high or low status in his community? Why might a Cherokee respect him? Why might an American admire him? Refer to evidence from Reading 1 and Photo 1 to support your answers.

3) Why do you think the Major Ridge House was preserved and turned into a museum? Give three reasons and explain each one in a single sentence.

4) Major Ridge was viewed as a villain and as a hero by different people. The Chieftains Museum teaches visitors about his life and about Cherokee history.

Name another figure in history who is or was both admired and hated. Where can you go to learn about their history? Next, name an individual who is controversial today. Where might students 100 years from now go to study this person? Write a mission statement for this future historical museum. In a short paragraph, describe the history (your current events) that it will teach.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Post-Lesson Activity 1: Investigate American Indian History in Your Region

Conflicts, compromises, and decisions made in the past affect the people living in the present. Allow students to explore that connection with the following activity.

Ask students to study a map of their region that identifies the American Indian tribes governing the region at the time of conflict (declared war or political/cultural strain) between indigenous and colonizing groups, including white Americans. Next, ask your students to look up any official treaties or records of compromise between the groups and answer the following questions.

1. What provisions did the treaties or agreements contain? What do you think motivated the parties who agreed to the terms?
2. Are the tribes or tribe described in the records still present in the region? Are they a federally recognized tribe? (<https://www.tribalsegov.org/self-governance/news/federal-register-updates-federally-recognized-tribes/>)
3. If they are no longer in the area, where are they now located?
4. If some tribes are present, are there still treaty issues being debated or negotiated today?

Students should present their findings to class for discussion on how their research of other tribes' experiences compare with that of the Cherokee Nation. The presentation could be in the form of a PowerPoint, poster, or paper-based oral presentation.

A possible map for this activity can be located at: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/buffalo/map.html>



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Post-Lesson Activity 2: Report on Relocation Beyond the Cherokee Experience

The Cherokee were only one of the many indigenous sovereign nations forced to relocate from their homes and travel to a strange land. Other nations also called their forced migrations a “Trail of Tears.” Divide the class into four groups and have each group research the history of one of the following tribes now living in Oklahoma, making sure that each tribe is covered: Choctaw, Chickasaw, (Muscogee) Creek, and Seminole.

Ask each group to compare the culture of the tribe it researched, and its forced removal experiences, to that of the Cherokee. As the students are comparing the experiences of the tribe they researched, they should also contrast these experiences with those of the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears. In a discussion or recorded on paper, have each group answer the following: How were the migrations similar? How might they be different and why? Why do you think all of these migrations are remembered as the “Trail of Tears?” Ask them to support their answers with evidence from their textbooks or this lesson. After analyzing the Trail of Tears experiences by different tribes, have each group appoint a spokesperson to report its reflections to class, including a brief update on its tribal nation in the 21st century.

This activity may be expanded by having the class work together to create an exhibit for their school or local library telling the story of the five Tribes' journeys from their traditional homelands to Indian Territory. It may also be expanded by including other classrooms into the research of the different tribes and creating the exhibit together.



Post-Lesson Activity 3: Cherokee Voices for Resistance Close Readings

In the 1830s, the Cherokee were divided on the issue of adopting aspects of white, European-American culture or trying to maintain an indigenous culture and identity. Ask students to read and review the three readings provided below. Then, ask them to answer the Questions for Activity 3.

Hold a classroom discussion or assign them to small groups to explore the questions. If they are in small groups, after a short period small group discussion, ask each group to volunteer an answer for the class based on their conversation. You may want to assign a spokesperson or recorder for each group.



Questions for Activity 3

1) Use a dictionary to look up the following five vocabulary words found in the passage. For the following five vocabulary words, identify them in the passages and underline them. For each word, explain in a short sentence how you think the writer defines the word.

Despoiled:

Injunction:

Vexations:

Covenant:

Agency:

2) What arguments does Chief Womankiller make in his presentation to the Cherokee Nation and its council? What are his concerns?

3) What arguments does Chief John Ross make? How is his writing different from Chief Womankiller's? Why do you think they might be different?



Activity 3 Reading: Chief Womankiller Passage. 1829.

On motion of Choonagkee of Chickamauga District, an old law, making death the penalty for selling any lands in treaty, without the authority of the nation, was committed to writing. The bill was adopted. Womankiller, of Hickory Log District, who is probably more than eighty years of age, rose and spoke substantially as follows in reference to the bill:

My Children,

Permit me to call you so as I am an old man, and has lived a long time, watching the well being of this Nation. I love your lives, and wish our people to increase on the land of our fathers. The bill before you is to punish wicked men, who may arise to cede away our country contrary to the consent of the Council. It is a good law -- it will not kill the innocent but the guilty. I feel the importance of the subject, and am glad the law has been suggested.

My companions, men of renown, in Council, who now sleep in the dust, spoke the same language, and I now stand on the verge of the grave to bear witness to their love of country. My sun of existence is fast approaching to its sitting, and my aged bones will soon be laid under ground, and I wish them laid in the bosom of this earth we have received from our fathers who had it from the Great Being above. When I shall sleep in forgetfulness, I hope my bones will not be deserted by you.

I do not speak this in fear of any of you, as the evidence of your attachment to the country is proved by the bill now before your consideration, I am indeed told, that the Government of the U. States will spoil their treaties with us and sink our National Council under their fee. It may be so, but it shall not be without our consent, or by the misconduct of our people. We hold them by the golden chain of friendship; made when our friendship was worth a price, and if they act the tyrant and kill us for our lands, we shall, in a state of unoffending innocence, sleep with the thousands of our departed people.

My feeble limbs will not allow me to stand longer. I can say no more, but, before I sit, allow me to tell you that I am in favor of the bill.

Source: The Cherokee Nation at Cherokee.Org → About the Nation → Facts → Council Meetings from 1829. www.cherokee.org/About-The-Nation/History/Facts/Council-Meetings-from-1829.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

Activity 3 Reading: Chief John Ross Letter Protesting the Treaty of New Echota

Letter from Chief John Ross, "To the Senate and House of Representatives" [Red Clay Council Ground, Cherokee Nation, September 28, 1836]

It is well known that for a number of years past we have been harassed by a series of vexations, which it is deemed unnecessary to recite in detail, but the evidence of which our delegation will be prepared to furnish. With a view to bringing our troubles to a close, a delegation was appointed on the 23rd of October, 1835, by the General Council of the nation, clothed with full powers to enter into arrangements with the Government of the United States, for the final adjustment of all our existing difficulties.

The delegation failing to effect an arrangement with the United States commissioner, then in the nation, proceeded, agreeably to their instructions in that case, to Washington City, for the purpose of negotiating a treaty with the authorities of the United States.

After the departure of the Delegation, a contract was made by the Rev. John F. Schermerhorn, and certain individual Cherokee, purporting to be a "treaty, concluded at New Echota, in the State of Georgia, on the 29th day of December, 1835, by General William Carroll and John F. Schermerhorn, commissioners on the part of the United States, and the chiefs, headmen, and people of the Cherokee tribes of Indians."

A spurious Delegation, in violation of a special injunction of the general council of the nation, proceeded to Washington City with this pretended treaty, and by false and fraudulent representations supplanted in the favor of the Government the legal and accredited Delegation of the Cherokee people, and obtained for this instrument, after making important alterations in its provisions, the recognition of the United States Government.

And now it is presented to us as a treaty, ratified by the Senate, and approved by the President [Andrew Jackson], and our acquiescence in its requirements demanded, under the sanction of the displeasure of the United States, and the threat of summary compulsion, in case of refusal. It comes to us, not through our legitimate authorities, the known and usual medium of communication between the Government of the United States and our nation, but through the agency of a complication of powers, civil and military.

By the stipulations of this instrument, we are despoiled of our private possessions, the indefeasible property of individuals. We are stripped of every attribute of freedom and eligibility for legal self-defence. Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away, and there is none to regard our complaints. We are denationalized; we are disfranchised. We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own. And this is effected by the provisions of a compact which assumes the venerated, the sacred appellation of treaty.

We are overwhelmed! Our hearts are sickened, our utterance is paralyzed (*sic*), when we reflect on the condition in which we are placed, by the audacious practices of unprincipled men, who have managed their stratagems with so much dexterity as to impose on the Government of the United States, in the face of our earnest, solemn, and reiterated protestations.



Discover the Trail of Tears: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places

The instrument in question is not the act of our Nation; we are not parties to its covenants; it has not received the sanction of our people. The makers of it sustain no office nor appointment in our Nation, under the designation of Chiefs, Head men, or any other title, by which they hold, or could acquire, authority to assume the reins of Government, and to make bargain and sale of our rights, our possessions, and our common country.

And we are constrained solemnly to declare, that we cannot but contemplate the enforcement of the stipulations of this instrument on us, against our consent, as an act of injustice and oppression, which, we are well persuaded, can never knowingly be countenanced by the Government and people of the United States; nor can we believe it to be the design of these honorable and highminded individuals, who stand at the head of the Govt., to bind a whole Nation, by the acts of a few unauthorized individuals.

And, therefore, we, the parties to be affected by the result, appeal with confidence to the justice, the magnanimity, the compassion, of your honorable bodies, against the enforcement, on us, of the provisions of a compact, in the formation of which we have had no agency.

Source: The Papers of Chief John Ross, vol 1, 1807-1839, Norman OK. Gary E. Moulton, ed. University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3083t.html>



References and Contributing Resources

Determining the Facts

Reading One

Reading One was adapted from Benjamin Levy, "Major Ridge House" (Floyd County, Georgia, National Historic Landmark documentation, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1973; James F. Corn, "Red Clay Council Ground" (Bradley County, Tennessee), National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972; and John Ehle, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

¹ *Cherokee Phoenix* (October 28, 1829); cited in Ehle, *Trail of Tears*, 224.

² *Allegheny Democrat* (March 16, 1835); quoted in Ehle, *Trail of Tears*, 275-278.

³ Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Story of the Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 276-77; quoted in Ehle, *Trail of Tears*, 294.



Additional Online Resources

National Park Service

The National Park Service commemorated the trail through the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. They provide information about where to see remaining evidence of the physical trail through their [website](http://www.nps.gov/trte/). [www.nps.gov/trte/]

Cherokee Nation

The Cherokee Nation (a federally recognized tribe) offers online resources on the history of the Cherokee, including the Trail of Tears, and contemporary concerns at its official government [website](http://www.cherokee.org/). [www.cherokee.org/]

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (a federally recognized tribe) provides contemporary concerns at its [government website](http://www.ebci.com/) [www.ebci.com/] and information about its culture and history at websites for the [Museum of the Cherokee Indian](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/) [http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/] and [Cherokee Preservation Foundation](http://www.cherokeepreservation.org/) [www.cherokeepreservation.org/]

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma

The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians (a federally recognized tribe) offers online essays about Cherokee history and resources to study its cultural heritage [here](http://www.ukb-nsn.gov/) [www.ukb-nsn.gov/] or click [here](http://www.keetoowahcherokeemuseum.org/) [www.keetoowahcherokeemuseum.org/] to visit the UKB 'John Hair Cultural Center and Museum' website.

Museum of the Cherokee Indian

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian offers workshops, exhibits, and events that commemorate Cherokee history. Information on the museum can be found through its [website](http://www.cherokeemuseum.org/). [www.cherokeemuseum.org/]

Cherokee Heritage Center

The Cherokee Heritage Center was created by the Cherokee National Historical Society and offers resources for the study and preservation of the history of the Cherokee. Information can be found through its [website](http://www.cherokeeheritage.org/). [http://www.cherokeeheritage.org/]

Trail of Tears Association

The Trail of Tears Association offers online resources and background information on the Trail of Tears through their [website](http://www.nationaltota.com/history). It also contains links to the different tribes affected by the Trail of Tears. [http://www.nationaltota.com/history]

Chieftains Museum/Major Ridge Home

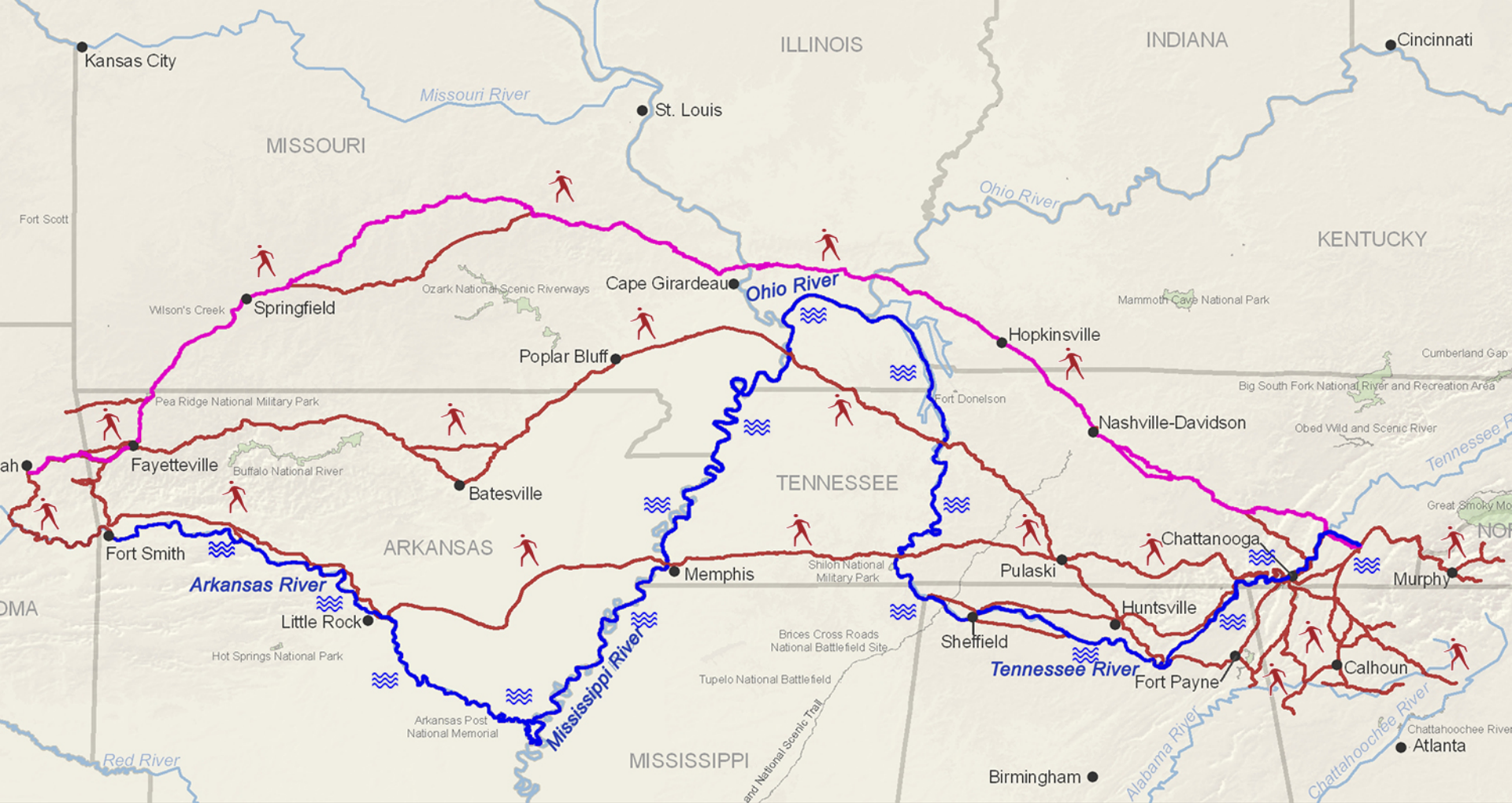
The Major Ridge Home is also home to the Chieftains Museum and their [website](https://chieftainmuseum.org/) offers a wealth of information about the man himself, along with history of the property and of the broader Cherokee experience. [https://chieftainmuseum.org/]

Library of Congress

The Library of Congress houses a collection of primary documents pertaining to the Indian Removal Act which is in direct relation to the Trail of Tears. These documents can be found on the LOC [website](https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html). [https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html]



CHIEFTAINS
MUSEUM



Land Routes



Water Route