

Cherokee History Through Historical Fiction

A Teaching Guide for Libraries and Classrooms

Based on The Cherokee Trilogy by James A. Humphrey



Produced in co-operation with Cherokee411, independent online news outlet of the three Cherokee tribes



Free Educational Resource

Download videos at: www.cherokeetrilogy.com
www.cherokee411.com

Overview

This guide supports a free educational video series exploring Cherokee history from 1779–1880, produced by Cherokee 411 and narrated by Cherokee citizen and author James A. Humphrey.

Learning Objectives

- 1 Identify key events in Cherokee history (1779–1880)
- 2 Explain the impact of removal on Cherokee society
- 3 Understand internal divisions within the Cherokee Nation
- 4 Distinguish between historical fact and fiction
- 5 Discuss storytelling as preservation of history

Suggested Program Formats

- 1 Single session: 15-minute video + discussion
- 2 Full program: 45-minute video + extended discussion
- 3 Multi-session: one video per session with final synthesis

Historical Timeline

- 1 Late 1700s: Cherokee-American conflict
- 2 Early 1800s: Cultural adaptation and governance
- 3 1830s: Indian Removal and Trail of Tears
- 4 Mid-1800s: Rebuilding in Indian Territory
- 5 Late 1800s: Continued political and cultural change

Discussion Questions

- 1 What events most affected Cherokee society during this period?
- 2 How did removal change daily life for Cherokee families?
- 3 How does historical fiction enhance understanding of history?
- 4 What perspectives are often missing in traditional textbooks?
- 5 What lessons from this history remain relevant today?

Classroom / Group Activity

Fact vs. Fiction Analysis:

- 1 Identify elements that appear historically documented
- 2 Identify elements that appear fictionalized
- 3 Discuss why authors combine fact and fiction
- 4 Reflect on how storytelling preserves cultural memory

Standards Alignment (Summary)

Aligned with Texas TEKS, NCSS themes, and Common Core standards supporting historical analysis, critical thinking, and evaluation of perspective

Library & Community Use

- 1 Native American Heritage Month programming
- 2 Community history events
- 3 Book clubs and discussion groups
- 4 Educational screenings with optional author Q&A;

Access Videos

Download free at:

www.cherokeetrlology.com/history-videos

www.cherokee411.com

Teacher/Instructor/Group Leader Guide:

Historical Timeline

Late 1700s: Cherokee-American conflict

- 1760/61 Cherokee Middle Settlements Invaded
- 1769 Montgomery destroys Middle Towns
- 1770/71 Land cessions continue, Sequoyah and Major Ridge born
- 1773 Treaties have taken most of Cherokee traditional homeland
- 1776 Cherokees side with British in American Revolution
- 1780 Major Smallpox epidemic
- 1783 More land cessions to colonies
- 1784 State of Franklin formed in Georgia
- 1785 Treaty of Hopewell, first treaty between the U.S and Cherokee
- 1788 Cherokee Council meets at Oostanauleh, 4 mi. E. of New Echota
- 1791 Treat of Holston, Washington guarantees no more settlement
- 1792 Town of Hightower moves after attack by Whites
- 1794 Tellico Blockhouse ends war/Nickajack and Running Water destroyed
- 1797 Principal Chief and council elected/Watts and Doublehead real power
- 1797 Regulating Companies formed, mounted tribal police
- 1798/99 Arrival of Moravian missionaries, migration into Arkansas

Early 1800s: Cultural adaptation and governance

- 1801 Return Meigs apt. "Indian Agent"/Spring Place Moravian Mission est.
- 1802 Thomas Jeffersons signs Georgia Compact to remove Cherokee
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase by U.S
- 1804 James Vann builds showplace home in Georgia
- 1805 Cherokee population less than 12,000
- 1806 Revolt of the Young Chiefs begins
- 1809 Death of Doublehead, 583 slaves counted, lower towns explore move
- 1810 Cherokee forbids blood law in accidental deaths, James Vann dies
- 1811 New Marid Earthquake inspires religious revival among Cherokee
- 1812/14 Creek War/Shawnee Tecumseh inspires Cherokee Red Sticks
- 1814 Cherokee assist Jackson defeating Creeks at Horseshoe Bend
- 1815 Sequoyah marries Sally Waters of the Bird Clan
- 1817 Treaty of Turkey Town/U.S. cedes land to Old Settlers
- 1818/19 More Georgia land concessions/1st Council House in New Echota

1820 Dwight Mission established near Russellville, Arkansas
1821 Sequoyah introduces Syllabary/Within 10 years,90% read and write
1822 Cherokee establish Supreme Court
1824 Est.1300 slaves owned in Cherokee Nation/Shoe Boots vs Council
1825 New Echota becomes Cherokee Capital
1827 John Ross elected Chief and national constitution
1828 First edition of the Cherokee Phoenix/Gold discovered in Georgia
1828/30 Georgia legislature outlaws Cherokee tribal government and land

1830s: Indian Removal and Trail of Tears

1829 Jackson announces Indian Removal Act
1830 Removal act passes U.S. Congress/Georgia requires allegiance oath
1831 Cherokee vs. Georgia – Cherokee Nation a domestic dependent nation
1832 Worcester vs. Georgia – Sup. Court upholds Cherokee sovereignty
1832 Jackson ignores court/Georgia begins land and gold lottery
1833 Cherokee Council begins meeting in Red Clay Tennessee
1834 Georgia Guard confiscates the Phoenix press
1835 Census: most Cherokee farmers till their own land, 7% own slaves
1836 Senate ratifies Treaty of New Echota by one vote
1837 Cherokee Council meets at Red Clay
1838 Gen. Winfield Scott and US Army dispatched to remove Cherokees
1838/39 Roundup, imprisonment, 800 mile trek to Oklahoma, 4,000+ died

Mid-1800s: Rebuilding in Indian Territory

1842 The Cherokee Slave Revolt
1843 Treaty of Bird's Fort with the Republic of Texas
1846 Treaty of Washington to end open hostility in the Nation
1853 East/West Railroad route surveyed by U.S.
1862 Ross vs Watie, Confederacy vs Union, Cherokee Civil War
1865 Treaty of Fort Smith endorse John Ross, ignores Stand Watie
1866 Treaty of Tahlequah ends hostilities of Civil War, reunites nation
1867 North/South and East/West RR routes begin in Indian Territory
1868 2nd Treaty of Washington signed to supplement Tahlequah Treaty
1871 East/West KATY line first spike driven in Indian Territory
1872 Going Snake Massacre, lingering Civil War disagreements
1873 Coal first mined commercially in shaft mines

Late 1800s: Continued political and cultural change

1881 Coal production estimated at 150,000 tons

1885 Fed Government opens Indian Territory to all railroads

1887 The Dawes Act land grab/Coal production 600,000 tons

1898 The Curtis Act abolishes tribes to merge into state of Oklahoma

1900 Railroads crisscross Oklahoma

Teacher/Instructor/Group Leader Guide:

Discussion Questions

What events most affected Cherokee society during the late 1700s?

Several interrelated forces reshaped Cherokee society in the late 1700s, producing lasting political, territorial, and cultural change.

First, imperial wars drew the Cherokee into shifting alliances. During the French and Indian War (1754–1763), most Cherokee aligned with Britain, but tensions over trade abuses and settler encroachment sparked the Anglo-Cherokee War (1758–1761). British military retaliation destroyed key towns, weakening traditional town-based autonomy and leadership structures.

Second, the American Revolution (1775–1783) intensified conflict on the frontier. Many Cherokee factions sided with Britain, hoping to curb colonial expansion. In response, American militia campaigns—sometimes called the “Cherokee–American wars”—burned towns, destroyed crops, and forced cessions of vast lands through treaties such as Treaty of Hopewell (1785). These losses accelerated migration south and west and fragmented political unity.

Third, expanding American settlement and a growing market economy altered daily life. The deerskin trade declined, and dependence on European goods increased. Some Cherokee leaders, including Dragging Canoe, resisted accommodation, forming the Chickamauga faction, while others pursued diplomacy and selective adoption of Euro-American practices.

Finally, disease and demographic pressure compounded these disruptions, reducing population and straining social systems.

Together, warfare, land dispossession, economic transition, and internal divisions transformed the Cherokee from a network of autonomous towns into a more centralized, adaptive society facing the early United States.

What events most affected Cherokee society during the early 1800s?

In the early 1800s, Cherokee society was transformed by a combination of internal reform and escalating pressure from the United States.

A central development was political and cultural adaptation. Leaders such as Major Ridge and John Ross supported nation-building efforts, while Sequoyah created the Cherokee syllabary (c. 1821), rapidly increasing literacy. This enabled the launch of the Cherokee Phoenix (1828) and contributed to the written Cherokee Constitution of 1827, which centralized governance and asserted sovereignty.

At the same time, U.S. expansion intensified. The Louisiana Purchase (1803) and growing southern settlement increased pressure on Cherokee lands. Conflict

sharpened after gold was discovered in Georgia (1828), prompting state efforts to dissolve Cherokee authority.

Legal resistance culminated in landmark cases. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the U.S. Supreme Court recognized limits on state power within Cherokee territory, but enforcement proved weak.

The decisive turning point was federal removal policy under Andrew Jackson. The Indian Removal Act (1830) authorized relocation west of the Mississippi. Internal divisions deepened as a minority signed the Treaty of New Echota (1835), ceding all eastern lands without broad consent.

These developments led directly to forced removal on the Trail of Tears (1838–1839), causing profound loss of life and permanently reshaping Cherokee society in Indian Territory.

How did forced removal change daily life for Cherokee families?

Forced removal—culminating in the Trail of Tears (1838–1839)—reshaped Cherokee daily life in immediate and lasting ways.

1. Disruption of home and routine. Families were expelled from established farms, towns, and sacred places with little time to prepare. Daily rhythms tied to seasons—planting, harvesting, hunting—were replaced by confinement in stockades and long, regimented marches.

2. Food, shelter, and health. Rations were often inadequate or unfamiliar; exposure to cold, rain, and poor sanitation increased disease. Illness and death became frequent realities, altering family structures as elders and children were lost.

3. Family separation and social strain. Some families were split during roundups or along different detachments. Traditional kin networks—central to childcare, decision-making, and mutual aid—were strained or broken.

4. Cultural interruption. Ceremonies, language transmission, and community governance were disrupted. Although many practices persisted, the conditions of removal limited gatherings and the teaching of traditions.

5. Economic upheaval. Productive farms, livestock, and tools were left behind or confiscated. In Indian Territory, families had to rebuild from minimal resources, often in unfamiliar environments with new soil and climate conditions.

6. Psychological impact. Grief, trauma, and uncertainty became part of daily experience, influencing behavior, trust, and community cohesion.

7. Adaptation and rebuilding. Despite these losses, Cherokee families reestablished homes, schools, and a national government, blending continuity with change. Daily life gradually stabilized, but under new constraints and with enduring memory of displacement.

How does the Cherokee Trilogy by James A. Humphrey's historical fiction enhance understanding of Cherokee history?

James A. Humphrey's Cherokee Trilogy uses narrative to translate major historical forces into lived, personal experience, which can deepen readers' understanding when read alongside documented history.

What it adds:

- **Human-scale perspective on known events.** By situating characters within moments such as the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears, the trilogy turns policy into daily decisions about family, survival, and identity—helping readers grasp consequences beyond summaries and dates.
- **Continuity across generations.** A multi-book arc can show how pre-removal lifeways, removal, and rebuilding in Indian Territory connect, clarifying cause-and-effect over time rather than as isolated episodes.
- **Cultural texture.** Fictional scenes can depict language, kinship, and community governance influenced by developments like Sequoyah's syllabary, adding context often compressed in textbooks.
- **Internal diversity.** By presenting differing viewpoints (e.g., accommodation vs. resistance), the narrative can reflect real historical debates within Cherokee leadership and communities.

Limits (important for accuracy):

- **Invented elements.** Dialogue, inner thoughts, and some characters are imagined; these should not be treated as primary evidence.
- **Authorial framing.** Emphasis and interpretation can shape readers' conclusions.

Best use:

The trilogy is most effective as a complement to primary sources and scholarship—helping readers visualize and remember Cherokee history while grounding understanding in verifiable facts.

What perspectives are often missing in traditional textbooks?

Traditional textbooks on Cherokee history often focus heavily on political treaties, wars, and federal policies, which can leave several critical perspectives underrepresented. One commonly missing viewpoint is **everyday Cherokee life**—the experiences of families, women, and children navigating social, economic, and cultural changes are rarely detailed. Textbooks frequently frame Cherokee history through the lens of conflict with European settlers or the U.S. government, overlooking how the Cherokee adapted agriculture, education, governance, and spirituality to maintain community cohesion.

Internal diversity is also often ignored. The Cherokee were not a monolithic group; regional differences, clan structures, and varying responses to pressures like land cession, Christian missions, and European-American trade are rarely explored. Similarly, the voices of **Cherokee women**—who played key roles in governance, farming, and cultural preservation—are often marginalized.

Cultural resilience and continuity receive limited attention. Many texts emphasize forced removal, especially the Trail of Tears, but downplay how the Cherokee preserved language, storytelling, ceremonies, and traditional knowledge despite displacement. Oral histories and storytelling, essential to Cherokee understanding of the past, are largely absent in favor of written records, which can misrepresent or simplify complex social dynamics.

Finally, textbooks often lack a **contemporary perspective**, leaving students with the impression that Cherokee history ended in the 19th century. Modern Cherokee governance, cultural revitalization, and contributions to broader society are seldom integrated, missing the chance to connect historical events to living communities today.

Including these perspectives provides a more **holistic, nuanced understanding** of Cherokee history as a lived, evolving experience rather than solely a sequence of treaties and conflicts.

What lessons from this history remain relevant today?

Cherokee history from 1760 through 1838 offers enduring lessons about resilience, adaptation, and the consequences of injustice. During this period, the Cherokee navigated European colonization, shifting alliances, and U.S. expansion, demonstrating the importance of **strategic adaptation**. They embraced formal education, legal systems, and written language to strengthen community cohesion and protect sovereignty—showing that cultural preservation and innovation can coexist.

The era also highlights the dangers of **broken promises and systemic oppression**. Treaties were repeatedly violated, culminating in the forced removal of 1838, the Trail of Tears, which underscores how legal agreements alone cannot ensure justice when power is unbalanced. This remains relevant in discussions about government accountability, Indigenous rights, and the protection of marginalized communities.

Another lesson is the **value of community and kinship**. Families and clans relied on mutual support to survive displacement, maintain traditions, and transmit knowledge, illustrating how social cohesion sustains cultures under extreme stress.

Finally, this history emphasizes **the importance of historical memory**. By remembering the challenges, achievements, and losses of the Cherokee, contemporary society can better understand the human costs of prejudice and displacement, as well as the strength it takes to persevere. These lessons resonate today in conversations about equity, cultural survival, and civic responsibility, encouraging reflection on how societies treat minority communities and how those communities continue to thrive despite adversity.

In short, Cherokee history from 1760 to 1838 teaches resilience, vigilance against injustice, and the enduring power of culture and community—lessons with broad relevance in modern social, political, and cultural life.