

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

British colonial forces invaded Cherokee Middle Towns during the Anglo-Cherokee War, burning villages and crops. The campaign weakened Cherokee resistance and marked a turning point, forcing accommodation with colonial powers after significant loss of life and infrastructure.

1769 – Montgomery Destroys Middle Towns

Colonel Archibald Montgomery led British troops into Cherokee territory, destroying Lower and Middle Towns. His campaign aimed to suppress Cherokee resistance but intensified long-term hostility and deepened cycles of retaliation.

1770/71 – Land Cessions Continue; Sequoyah and Major Ridge Born

Despite conflict, Cherokee leaders ceded more land under pressure. This period also saw the births of Sequoyah and Major Ridge, future influential figures in Cherokee political and cultural survival.

1773 – Treaties Take Most Traditional Homeland

A series of treaties transferred vast Cherokee lands to colonial settlers, shrinking territory dramatically. Mounting debt, trade dependency, and settler pressure forced concessions, undermining sovereignty and increasing internal divisions.

1776 – Cherokees Side with British in American Revolution

Many Cherokee allied with Britain, hoping to curb colonial expansion. Retaliatory American campaigns destroyed Cherokee towns, accelerating land loss and displacement regardless of the war's outcome.

1780 – Major Smallpox Epidemic

A devastating smallpox outbreak reduced Cherokee population significantly. Disease compounded war losses, weakened social structures, and reduced the nation's capacity to resist encroachment.

1783 – More Land Cessions to Colonies

Following American independence, treaties compelled further Cherokee land cessions to new states. Expansion pressures intensified as settlers moved west, often ignoring treaty boundaries.

1784 – State of Franklin Formed in Georgia

The short-lived State of Franklin (actually in present-day Tennessee) claimed Cherokee lands, increasing illegal settlement and conflict. It reflected weak federal control over frontier expansion.

1785 – Treaty of Hopewell

The first treaty between the United States and the Cherokee established boundaries and recognized Cherokee sovereignty in principle. However, violations by settlers quickly undermined its authority.

1788 – Cherokee Council at Oostanauleh

A national council convened near Oostanauleh (east of present New Echota), reflecting efforts to unify governance and respond to ongoing land loss and external pressures.

1791 – Treaty of Holston

Negotiated under George Washington, it guaranteed Cherokee land boundaries and federal protection. In practice, continued encroachment made these guarantees ineffective.

1792 – Hightower Moves After Attack

After violent attacks by white settlers, the Cherokee town of Hightower relocated for safety. The move illustrates persistent frontier violence and instability.

1794 – Tellico Blockhouse Ends War

The Tellico Blockhouse treaty ended the Cherokee–American wars. Destruction of Chickamauga towns like Nickajack and Running Water forced a fragile peace and further land concessions.

1797 – Principal Chief and Council Elected

A more centralized political structure emerged with elected leadership. However, figures like Doublehead and James Vann often held real influence, reflecting internal political complexity.

1797 – Regulating Companies Formed

Cherokee established mounted “Regulating Companies” to maintain order and suppress internal violence. These functioned as early tribal law enforcement during a period of rapid change.

1798/99 – Moravian Missionaries Arrive; Migration to Arkansas

Moravian missionaries introduced Christianity and literacy efforts. Simultaneously, some Cherokee began migrating west into Arkansas, seeking distance from encroaching settlers and conflict zones.

Early 1800s: Cultural adaptation and governance

1801 – Return J. Meigs Appointed; Spring Place Mission Established

Return J. Meigs Sr. became U.S. Indian Agent to the Cherokee, promoting federal policy and “civilization” efforts. The Moravian Spring Place Mission opened, introducing Christianity, formal education, and literacy, marking intensified cultural exchange and pressure toward assimilation.

1802 – Jefferson Signs Georgia Compact

Thomas Jefferson approved an agreement promising Georgia eventual removal of the Cherokee in exchange for western lands. This formalized federal commitment to Indian removal, increasing long-term pressure on Cherokee territory.

1803 – Louisiana Purchase

The U.S. acquired vast western lands from France, enabling expansion beyond the Mississippi. This acquisition provided a destination for future Indian removal policies, directly affecting Cherokee prospects.

1804 – James Vann Builds Showplace Home

James Vann constructed a large plantation-style home, symbolizing adoption of European-American economic practices, including slavery, and highlighting divisions within Cherokee society over adaptation.

1805 – Cherokee Population Below 12,000

Disease, warfare, and displacement reduced the Cherokee population significantly. Decline weakened resistance capacity and intensified urgency for political and cultural adaptation.

1806 – Revolt of the Young Chiefs Begins

Younger Cherokee leaders opposed land cessions and accommodation policies of older chiefs, sparking internal political conflict over strategy for survival amid U.S. expansion.

1809 – Death of Doublehead; Slavery Counted; Western Movement Explored

Doublehead was assassinated for unauthorized land deals. Records show hundreds of enslaved people held by Cherokees. Some communities began considering relocation west to avoid encroachment.

1810 – Blood Law Modified; James Vann Dies

Cherokee law ended clan revenge killings for accidental deaths, reflecting legal reform. The death of James Vann removed a powerful, controversial figure during a time of transition.

1811 – New Madrid Earthquake and Religious Revival

The massive earthquakes prompted spiritual reflection and revival movements among the Cherokee, reinforcing traditional beliefs amid social upheaval.

1812–1814 – Creek War; Tecumseh’s Influence

Tecumseh inspired pan-Indian resistance. Some Cherokee joined the Red Stick faction, while others opposed them, deepening internal divisions during regional conflict.

1814 – Cherokee Aid Jackson at Horseshoe Bend

Cherokee warriors allied with Andrew Jackson to defeat the Creeks. Despite assistance, Cherokee later faced continued land loss, showing limits of alliance benefits.

1815 – Sequoyah Marries Sally Waters

Sequoyah married Sally Waters of the Bird Clan, a personal milestone during his ongoing work developing the Cherokee writing system.

1817 – Treaty of Turkey Town

The treaty ceded Cherokee lands in exchange for territory west of the Mississippi, formalizing division between eastern Cherokee and “Old Settlers” who relocated west.

1818/19 – More Land Concessions; First Council House

Additional treaties ceded land to Georgia. The Cherokee built a council house at New Echota, strengthening centralized governance amid territorial loss.

1820 – Dwight Mission Established

A mission near present-day Arkansas expanded education and Christian instruction among western Cherokee, reinforcing cultural transformation in relocated communities.

1821 – Sequoyah Introduces Syllabary

Sequoyah unveiled a written system enabling rapid literacy. Within a decade, most Cherokees could read and write, strengthening national identity and communication.

1822 – Cherokee Supreme Court Established

The Cherokee Nation formed a judicial system, reflecting adoption of constitutional governance and rule of law modeled partly on the United States.

1824 – Slaveholding; Shoe Boots Controversy

Roughly 1,300 enslaved people were held by Cherokees. Conflict arose between Shoe Boots and the council over citizenship rights for his mixed-race children, highlighting tensions over race and law.

1825 – New Echota Becomes Capital

New Echota was established as the Cherokee national capital, symbolizing political centralization and nation-building efforts.

1827 – John Ross Elected; Constitution Adopted

John Ross became chief under a written constitution asserting sovereignty, modeled on U.S. governance, to resist removal pressures.

1828 – Cherokee Phoenix; Gold Discovered

The Cherokee Phoenix newspaper began publication, promoting literacy and unity. Gold discovery in Georgia intensified settler invasion and pressure to remove the Cherokee.

1828–1830 – Georgia Outlaws Cherokee Government

Georgia laws abolished Cherokee sovereignty, seized lands, and extended state authority into Cherokee territory, escalating conflict and setting the stage for forced removal.

1830s: Indian Removal and Trail of Tears

1829 – Jackson Announces Indian Removal Policy

Andrew Jackson declared support for removing southeastern tribes west of the Mississippi. The policy framed removal as voluntary but signaled federal commitment to clearing Native lands for expansion.

1830 – Indian Removal Act Passed; Georgia Oath Required

Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, authorizing treaties for western relocation. Georgia required non-Indians in Cherokee territory to swear allegiance to the state, undermining Cherokee sovereignty and increasing pressure on residents and missionaries.

1831 – Cherokee Nation v. Georgia

In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the Court ruled the Cherokee Nation a “domestic dependent nation,” denying it standing as a foreign nation while acknowledging a limited sovereign status.

1832 – Worcester v. Georgia

Worcester v. Georgia held that Georgia laws had no force in Cherokee territory, affirming tribal sovereignty. The decision theoretically protected Cherokee rights but relied on federal enforcement.

1832 – Jackson Ignores Court; Georgia Lotteries

Despite the ruling, Andrew Jackson did not enforce it. Georgia proceeded with land and gold lotteries, distributing Cherokee territory to settlers and accelerating dispossession.

1833 – Council Meets at Red Clay

The Cherokee government relocated meetings to Red Clay, Tennessee, the last free Cherokee council ground, as Georgia asserted control. It became a center of resistance and governance under increasing pressure.

1834 – Georgia Guard Seizes Phoenix Press

State forces shut down the Cherokee Phoenix printing press, silencing the nation's primary newspaper and limiting communication, political advocacy, and resistance messaging.

1835 – Census of Cherokee Society

A census showed most Cherokees were small farmers working their own land; about 7% owned enslaved people. The data countered stereotypes and demonstrated an established, agrarian society.

1836 – Treaty of New Echota Ratified

The U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of New Echota by one vote. Signed by a minority faction, it ceded all Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi without broad national consent.

1837 – Council Meets at Red Clay Again

Cherokee leaders reconvened at Red Clay, continuing efforts to resist removal and assert sovereignty despite increasing federal and state enforcement actions.

1838 – U.S. Army Ordered to Remove Cherokee

Winfield Scott led federal troops to enforce removal under presidential orders, marking the shift from policy and treaties to military action.

1838–1839 – Forced Removal (Trail of Tears)

The U.S. Army rounded up Cherokees into camps, then forced them on an ~800-mile march to present-day Oklahoma. Disease, exposure, and starvation caused over 4,000 deaths in what became known as the Trail of Tears.

Mid-1800s: Rebuilding in Indian Territory

1842 – The Cherokee Slave Revolt

Enslaved African Americans in the Cherokee Nation revolted, killing a slaveholder and fleeing west toward Mexico. Cherokee authorities, aided by slave catchers, suppressed the uprising. The event exposed internal tensions over slavery within the Nation.

1843 – Treaty of Bird's Fort

The Cherokee and other tribes signed the Treaty of Bird's Fort with the Republic of Texas, seeking peace after frontier conflict. It aimed to reduce raids and stabilize relations between Native groups and Texan settlers.

1846 – Treaty of Washington

The Treaty of Washington resolved factional disputes between rival Cherokee groups

following removal. It reestablished a unified government and attempted to end years of internal political violence.

1853 – East/West Railroad Surveyed

U.S. surveys mapped potential east–west railroad routes through Indian Territory. The project foreshadowed increased federal interest, economic development, and future encroachment on Cherokee lands.

1862 – Cherokee Civil War (Ross vs. Watie)

John Ross supported the Union, while Stand Watie aligned with the Confederacy. The split led to violent internal conflict, mirroring the broader U.S. Civil War and devastating the Nation.

1865 – Treaty of Fort Smith

Post–Civil War negotiations at Treaty of Fort Smith recognized Union-aligned leadership under John Ross and required new treaties. It marginalized Confederate Cherokee leaders like Stand Watie.

1866 – Treaty of Tahlequah

The Treaty of Tahlequah ended internal hostilities, abolished slavery within the Nation, and formally reunited Cherokee factions after the Civil War.

1867 – Railroad Construction Begins

North–south and east–west railroad routes began construction through Indian Territory, accelerating economic change, migration, and outside influence on Cherokee lands.

1868 – Second Treaty of Washington

A supplemental Treaty of Washington clarified and reinforced terms from 1866, addressing governance, land, and citizenship issues in the postwar Cherokee Nation.

1871 – KATY Railroad First Spike

Construction of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad reached Indian Territory, symbolizing industrial expansion and increased non-Native access to Cherokee lands.

1872 – Going Snake Massacre

Violence erupted at Going Snake District court during a legal dispute tied to lingering Civil War divisions. U.S. troops and Cherokee citizens clashed, resulting in multiple deaths and renewed tensions.

1873 – Commercial Coal Mining Begins

Coal mining operations started in Cherokee territory, marking a shift toward resource extraction economies and increasing outside economic involvement in the Nation.

Late 1800s: Continued political and cultural change

1881 – Coal Production Reaches 150,000 Tons

Coal mining expanded rapidly in Cherokee lands, reaching significant output. This growth brought outside investment, labor influx, and deeper U.S. economic penetration, increasing pressure on tribal control of natural resources.

1885 – Federal Government Opens Indian Territory to Railroads

Congress allowed all railroads access through Indian Territory, ending earlier tribal

control over routes. This accelerated non-Native settlement, commerce, and federal influence across Cherokee lands.

1887 – Dawes Act; Coal Output 600,000 Tons

The Dawes Act authorized division of tribal lands into individual allotments, undermining communal ownership. Simultaneously, booming coal production intensified outside economic interests and land pressures.

1898 – Curtis Act Abolishes Tribal Governments

The Curtis Act dismantled Cherokee and other tribal governments, courts, and laws to prepare Indian Territory for Oklahoma statehood, sharply ending sovereignty.

1900 – Railroads Crisscross Oklahoma

By 1900, extensive rail networks spanned former Indian Territory, enabling rapid settlement, resource extraction, and integration into the U.S. economy, effectively eroding remaining Cherokee autonomy.

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.