

Many Trails of Tears

The Era of Indian Removal

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Grade Level	9th – 10th Grade	**Time Frame**	4 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	200 minutes
Course	Oklahoma History		

Essential Question

What prompted the United States government to remove southeastern Native American tribes from their ancestral lands? How did the tribes react to the forced removal?

Summary

This lesson examines the systemic removal of the southeastern United States Native American tribes from their ancestral homes and each tribe's reaction to removal and relocation. Students will gain an understanding of how the policies of the American government about Native Americans changed over time, particularly with the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This lesson requires student access to internet-enabled devices and websites for research.

Snapshot

Engage

Students hypothesize what they would take if they were forced to leave their homes without advanced notice.

Explore

Students watch a brief video clip about the Cherokee removal from Georgia and examine the United States government's attitude toward Native Americans during the Jacksonian Era.

Explain

Students read, research, and analyze primary and secondary sources to contribute to an in-depth narrative of the relocation of southeastern United States Native American tribes to Indian territory and the governmental attitudes and policies that contributed to these removals.

Extend

Students present their findings about Native American removal and relocation of their assigned topics to the class.

Evaluate

Students reflect on the lesson by writing a short summary response using the Two-Minute Paper strategy.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

CLR401: Locate important details in somewhat challenging passages
CLR402: Draw logical conclusions in somewhat challenging passages
IDT402: Identify a clear central idea or theme in somewhat challenging passages or their paragraphs
REL403: Identify clear cause-effect relationships in somewhat challenging passages

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: Oklahoma History (9th through 12th grade))

OKH.2.3: Analyze the motivations for removal of American Indians and the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830; trace the forced removal of American Indian nations, including the impact on the tribal nations removed to present-day Oklahoma and tribal resistance to the forced relocations.

Attachments

- Group Research Notes—Many Trails of Tears.docx
- Group Research Notes—Many Trails of Tears.pdf
- Group Research Sample Responses—Many Trail of Tears.docx
- Group Research Sample Responses—Many Trail of Tears.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Many Trails of Tears.pptx
- Presentation Rubric—Many Trails of Tears.docx
- Presentation Rubric—Many Trails of Tears.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Group Research Notes handout (attached; one per student)
- Group Research Notes Sample Responses (attached)
- Presentation Rubric (attached; one per student)
- Sticky notes or small pieces of paper (one per student)
- Student devices with internet
- Poster paper
- Markers

10 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the lesson. Pass out a sticky note or a small piece of paper to each student. Display **slide 3** and introduce the scenario on the slide. Ask students to consider what they would take with them if the government told them they had 24 hours to leave their homes. Have students write down their answers and their reasonings on slips of paper. Display **slide 4** and introduce students to the Commit and Toss strategy. Have students crumple their answers and toss them into a basket or box. Mix up the responses, then have students select a random paper from the box and read it aloud.

Once a variety of answers have been shared, transition through **slides 5–6** to go over the essential questions and learning objectives.

10 minutes

Explore

Move to **slide 7** and tell students they will view a short video. As they watch, they should consider how the government's attitude toward Native Americans changed after Andrew Jackson was elected president. Play the video: *Trail of Tears | American Experience*.

After the video, tell students that while the video only depicted the Cherokee removal, all tribes experienced some form of forced removal from their ancestral homes in the southeastern United States. There were many "Trails of Tears," not just one. Display **slide 8**, which depicts the paths tribes took from their homes during Indian Removal.

90 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

The attached **Group Research Notes** handout consists of four research topics. Print the number of copies necessary for class size, and organize the handouts by research topic. The attached **Group Research Sample Responses** provides examples of what each group might find when researching one of the four topics.

Place students into groups of four and display **slide 9**. Provide each group with one document from the Group Research Notes handout so that each group has one of the four topics. Depending on class size, there might be multiple groups researching the same topic. Topics include the experiences of the removal of various tribes, the government's attitude toward Native Americans during this era of removal, and the tribes' responses to removal, including appeals to the Supreme Court.

Explain that the handout has guiding questions for the group's research topic. Slide 9 provides a link with a collection of web resources for each topic. Have students navigate to the link via their personal devices. Emphasize the need to divide up the work, to share information with each other, and to investigate their topics thoroughly.

Teacher's Note: Additional Sources

Remind students that they are free to search for and use documents in addition to those listed on provided link. Encourage them to find photographs, images, and original documents to support their research writing.

After providing time for students to learn about their topic, display **slide 10**. Tell students to create either a paper poster or a three-slide presentation over their topic. Pass out the attached Presentation Rubric to each student and move to **slide 11**. Review the rubric with students. Let students know that groups should be prepared to present their slides or posters to the class. Answer any questions students may have.

Allot one class period for student research and another another class period for students to create their presentations.

Teacher's Note: Differentiation

In the interest of time or for students who may struggle with the scope of this project, consider having students create a group poster exclusively.

For the poster assignment, provide a chart tablet where students can write bullet points from their research. Have colored markers or other materials for them to use in creating the poster. Groups can use guiding questions to create their posters. Other modifications can include limiting the number of research links.

Optional Class Slide Deck

Consider creating a shared space using Google Sites where each group can upload their slides to one single class slide deck. Add divider slides between topics.

35 minutes

Extend

Have students present their group posters or slide decks to the class. Although the attached **Presentation Rubric** is provided for assessment purposes, you may prefer having students use the rubric for feedback as they present their research. To manage the presentation times, determine in advance how much time each group is allowed. Have groups present their slides or posters to the whole class.

5 minutes

Evaluate

Move to **slide 12** and introduce the Two-Minute Paper strategy to students. Tell students they will have two minutes to respond to the prompt on the slide:

Explain why the United States passed the Indian Removal Act and describe how tribes were affected. Consider the impact of this legislation on the lifestyle and development of the Native American tribes.

Collect the handouts to review and check for student understanding of the lesson content.

Resources

- American Experience. (2026, April 29). Trail of Tears: American experience: Grades 9-12 social studies teaching and Lesson Resources. PBS LearningMedia. https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/akh10.socst.ush.exp.trail/trail-of-tears/
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Commit and t
  oss. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/119
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Google sites. Tech Tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/631
- K20 Center. (n.d.). *Many Trails of Tears: research*. https://k20.ou.edu/lz
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Two-minute paper. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/152