

CHICKASAW  
*Heritage Series*



**BEARER OF  
THE MORNING**

TE ATA — THE ENDURING LEGACY OF A  
TRADITIONAL NATIVE STORYTELLER

E L E M E N T A R Y

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Why is Te Ata considered an important figure, not only to the citizens of the Chickasaw Nation, but to the rest of the world as well?
- Why is storytelling an important part of history?
- How did specific mentors or role models help Te Ata to become a polished performer who later became known as “Oklahoma’s First State Treasure?”



## LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

- To recognize Te Ata as an important figure in Chickasaw, Oklahoma and American history
- To demonstrate the art of storytelling and to recognize its importance in literature and history
- To demonstrate an understanding of the necessity of respect for the diversity of groups comprising American society as well as the need to preserve the culture and language of each specific group

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **TE ATA**

Te Ata, also known as Mary Frances Thompson Fisher, was a Chickasaw storyteller and performer who shared the history and culture of the Chickasaw people to audiences around the world. Born and raised in Emet, Oklahoma, near Tishomingo, Te Ata was influenced by teachers and mentors who encouraged her to perfect her talents in drama, dance and music. As a performer, she had the opportunity to perform for American presidents, and kings and queens, providing the world with insight into the culture and history of the Chickasaw Nation. Te Ata died in 1995 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, at the age of 99.

### **THE INDIAN REMOVAL ACT OF 1830**

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson pursued a policy of Indian removal, forcing American Indians living in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi to give up their homelands and move hundreds of miles to territory in present-day Oklahoma. The forced migration of the Indians to the new territory became known as the Trail of Tears. The policy of Indian removal was devastating to Native Americans, their culture and their ways of life. Chickasaw families were met with hardship and death along the Removal, traveling hundreds of miles in extreme cold and heat.

### **THE CODE OF INDIAN OFFENSES, 1883**

In 1883, the United States government adopted laws to keep Native American citizens from continuing their cultural practices such as dances, songs, language and other cultural traditions. The government wanted Native Americans to assume the ways of the white man and to give up their traditional ways. If they did not, Native Americans ran the risk of being arrested. The practice of giving up one's own culture and taking on the culture of a more dominant culture is called assimilation.

### **CHAUTAUQUA**

In the early 1900s, there was no television, no social media and no internet access. People looked for other ways to find entertainment. One movement that swept across America during this time was the Chautauqua Circuit. Chautauqua programs began in the state of New York and quickly spread throughout the United States. A Chautauqua was similar to a talent show that we might have today. However, the shows often included speeches, religious programs and educational entries. To hold a Chautauqua, tents were set up outside of town, and the performers spent several days in one location holding shows for townspeople who would come to listen to music and poetry, to learn about other cultures and to be entertained. Te Ata became a very popular part of the Chautauqua movement because people wanted to listen to her share her stories about her Chickasaw and other Native American culture.

## MATERIALS/RESOURCES:

1. *Bearer of the Morning* blu-ray or DVD
2. *Te Ata* blu-ray or DVD
3. Device for filming storytelling presentations
4. Classroom set of primary source documents and/or photographs
5. Map pencils
6. Highlighters (30)
7. Southeast section of the United States map
8. Classroom set of Oklahoma road maps
9. Rubric template
10. Chickasaw trade books (native storytelling)

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY:

assimilation	Oklahoma Historical Society
documentary	tradition
native storyteller	Indian Removal Act
mentor	prejudice
culture	Code of Indian Offenses
Chickasaw Nation	racism
primary source document	stereotype
Chautauqua Circuit	Ofi Tohbi (white dog)
legacy	

# LESSON PLAN

## ENGAGE:

The teacher should post essential questions and introduce the topic and learning objectives of the lesson. To engage students, the teacher should distribute photographs of Te Ata and provide the opportunity for students to discuss what they feel the photographs portray. The teacher should then present biographical information about Te Ata, the Indian Removal Act and the Code of Indian Offenses and share background information about the documentary, including when and why it was made. Academic Vocabulary should be introduced.

## EXPLORE:

The following activities have been designed to strengthen students' background knowledge of The Indian Removal Act of 1830 and locations in Indian Territory that impacted Te Ata's life:

### Student Activity 1: "Map Quest"

*Before viewing the film or documentary, the teacher should provide background information as to why the Chickasaws settled in Indian Territory. This will require the teacher to introduce students to the Trail of Tears and Removal of the Chickasaws from their Homeland in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee.*

Part I of the "Map Quest" activity will provide students the opportunity to trace the Chickasaw's journey from their Homeland to Indian Territory.

Students should use map pencils to:

- trace a path that a Chickasaw family might have taken from Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee to Indian Territory
- indicate the approximate location of the Mississippi River
- indicate the approximate location of the Arkansas River
- indicate the approximate location of the Red River
- mark the city of Memphis, Tennessee
- mark the city of Little Rock, Arkansas
- mark the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas

Part II of the “Map Quest” activity will provide students with the opportunity to work with a current Oklahoma map to identify the current boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation and locate the cities that played an important role in the life of Te Ata.

Students should use a highlighter to:

- outline the boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation
- highlight the town of Emet, Oklahoma, the birthplace of Te Ata
- highlight the city of Tishomingo, Oklahoma, the capital of the Chickasaw Nation
- highlight the city of Chickasha, Oklahoma, where Te Ata attended college
- highlight the city of Ada, Oklahoma, the headquarters of the Chickasaw Nation
- highlight Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the capital of Oklahoma and the city in which Te Ata died in 1995

*After students have been provided background information about the Trail of Tears and the Indian Removal Act and upon the completion of the map work in Activity 1, the teacher should shift the focus to a more personal level. Ask students to consider what it might have been like to have been part of a family that was forced to move to a new place.*

- How would you feel if you found out the Indian Removal Act was going to require your family to move to Indian Territory/Oklahoma?
- What effect would this have on your family’s home life?
- What personal items might it be important for you take with you to your new home?
- What family/cultural items and keepsakes might be important for you to take?

## Student Activity 2: “You Can’t Take It With You”

*Students should use the template provided to develop a list of only 10 items they feel would be important for them to take to Indian Territory. These may be items they would need on a daily basis or keepsake items they wish to have with them as they start a new life. They should then be prepared to share their lists of items and explain “why” it would be important to take those items with them. To enhance the lesson, students could be required to develop a Prezi or a Powerpoint presentation to illustrate their chosen items. After Activity 2, the students should view, *Te Ata* (Bearer of the Morning).*

For optimal viewing, the movie could be broken into separate segments for younger students.

Suggested segments:

Part I--From Early Life to College

Part II--From College to New York

Part III--From New York to Notoriety

## EXPLAIN:

The teacher should present background information on the Chautauqua Circuit and the history of native storytelling.

## Student Activity 3: “Classroom Chautauqua”

*One week prior to viewing the movie *Te Ata*, the teacher should incorporate the term “chautauqua” and its definition into daily conversation, familiarizing students with the term. Students should then view the movie *Te Ata* with the challenge to identify the Chautauqua segment of the film and be ready to respond to it through “turn and talk,” group discussion or student “Question and Answer.”*

To introduce the activity, the teacher should present his/her own life story, modeling the Chautauqua method perfected by *Te Ata*. The teacher’s presentation should follow the provided template.

Students may use three sources to create their presentations: 1) a friend (who may help them recall an event that they shared), 2) a parent or 3) themselves

To earn additional credit, props may be used. The props should be items that provide meaning to the presentation, i.e. a football, dance shoes, photographs, etc.

The student's performance should begin just as Te Ata's did, "I am \_\_\_\_\_." To prepare the presentation, the student should use the Chautauqua Format Template that has been provided and should first write the presentation, being sure to follow grade level appropriate writing mechanics. If recording devices are available, devices could be used to film presentations for later use.

## EXTEND:

Many possibilities exist as to how best to extend the lesson plan. One example would be to provide a writing assignment that would illustrate the differences between informal and formal writing.

### Activity 4: "Text Me!"

*Part I of Extension Activity 4 is designed to provide the opportunity for students to use informal language in the form of a text message to provide information. For this activity, the teacher should provide each student with a text message template, then ask the student to assume the role of Te Ata and write a text message home from college.*

The text message should:

- tell her mother how she feels about college
- include at least two examples of experiences she has had
- let her mother know when she will see her again

*Part II of Extension Activity 4 is designed to illustrate the importance of beautiful, formal language. For this activity, ask students to assume the role of Te Ata and write a letter home to her mother during her time away from home (college, auditions, New York City.) Discuss the advantages/disadvantages of honesty versus protecting parents from the truth.*

The letter should:

- use descriptive language such as strong adjectives and vivid verbs
- include figurative language such as similes and metaphors
- be comprised of complete sentences and be punctuated correctly
- allow the reader to get a true picture of what Te Ata is experiencing

## EVALUATE:

The teacher may choose to use formative assessments such as "Think, Pair, Share," "Three-Way Summaries," or "Strategic Questioning," etc. Summative assessments might also be developed to bring the lesson to a close and to demonstrate student understanding.

# ALIGNMENT TO OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

## 4TH GRADE CONTENT STANDARDS

4.1.2 Describe the concept of federalism by comparing powers exercised by local, state and national levels of government recognizing tribal sovereignty as a tribal nation’s inherent right to self-govern.

4.2.1 Use maps and other geographic representations (such as globes and graphs), tools and technologies to acquire, process and report information from a spatial perspective.

4.3.1.B. Identify major Native American groups and their ways of life in each region, including economic activities, customs and viewpoints on land usage and ownership.

4.1.W.1 Tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences at an appropriate pace.

4.3.2.A. Identify the characteristics of culture (language, customs, beliefs, food, clothing, shelter) and compare the cultural characteristics of different regions of the United States.

4.3.2.B. Explain how the characteristics of culture affect the ways in which people live.

4.4.2.A. Identify and locate on a map the major cities of the United States, including their relative location to natural resources and transportation routes.

## SOCIAL STUDIES PRACTICES

### *3. Acquire, Apply and Evaluate Evidence*

Understanding and using strategies to analyze evidence in the social studies. Students will evaluate historical, geographic and economic information. Students will draw conclusions from primary and secondary sources to formulate informed decisions.

### *4. Read Critically and Interpret Information and Sources*

Understanding the purpose of engaging with text. Students will evaluate factual information and points of view as presented in text. Students will read historical and contemporary texts to engage in collaborative discussion.

### *5. Engage in Evidence-Based Writing*

Understanding the multiple purposes of the writing process. Students will develop written products designed for a variety of social studies related investigations. Students will use and integrate evidence to present knowledge and support opinion.

## VIEWING GUIDE

**1. How was Te Ata's role different from the traditional woman at that time and from the traditional Native American during the time of the Code of Indian Offenses of 1883?**

*POSSIBLE ANSWERS:* Te Ata challenged norms as a woman because she did things on her own like going to college and going to New York City. She shared the culture and stories of native peoples with worldwide audiences during a challenging time for Native Americans. She brought history to her audiences by wearing tribal clothing, performing tribal dances, playing tribal music and telling tribal stories/history.

**2. Why do you think Dr. Davis encouraged Te Ata to incorporate storytelling into her performances?**

*POSSIBLE ANSWERS:* Dr. Davis recognized that Te Ata had a natural talent for storytelling and sharing her heritage with others.

**3. What was the most interesting part of the documentary or the movie, Te Ata? What was the most memorable part of Te Ata's life to you?**

*POSSIBLE ANSWERS:* Answers will vary.



## HISTORY

From migration to what is now Mississippi, Kentucky, Alabama and Tennessee in prehistoric times to the purchase of the new homeland in south-central Oklahoma in the mid 1800's, the Chickasaw culture and heritage have always had roots in nature and the elements.

Revered in ancient times as “Spartans of the Lower Mississippi Valley,” the first contact with Europeans was with Hernando de Soto in 1540. Living in sophisticated town sites, the Chickasaws possessed a highly developed ruling system complete with laws and religion. They conducted a successful trade business with other tribes and with the French and English, and lived largely an agrarian lifestyle, but were quick to go to battle if necessary. They allied with the English during the French and Indian War. Some historians give the Chickasaws credit for the United States being an English-speaking country.

The Chickasaw people moved to Indian Territory during the “Great Removal,” on what was called the “Trail of Tears.” Other tribes forced to relocate were the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole, called the “Five Civilized Tribes” because of their highly developed ruling systems. The Chickasaws were one of the last to move. In 1837, the Treaty of Doaksville called for the resettlement of the Chickasaws among the Choctaw tribe in Indian Territory. In 1856, the Chickasaws, in order to restore direct authority over their governmental affairs, separated from the Choctaws and formed their own government.

Tribal leaders established the capital at Tishomingo, adopted a constitution and organized executive, legislative and judicial departments of government with the offices filled by popular election. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Chickasaws signed an alliance with the South and raised troops to fight with the Confederacy. The respected Choctaw/Chickasaw Mounted Regiment, headquartered at Fort Washita, fought some of the last battles of the Civil War. Although suffering hardships after the defeat of the Confederacy, the tribe regained prosperity. Many Chickasaws became successful farmers and ranchers. Chickasaws built some of the first schools, banks, and businesses in Indian Territory.

After Oklahoma statehood in 1907, the President of the United States appointed the principal officers of the Chickasaw Nation. In 1970, Congress enacted legislation allowing the Five Civilized Tribes to elect their principal officers. In 1983, a new Chickasaw constitution was adopted.

## REMOVAL

Chickasaw Removal is the most traumatic chapter in Chickasaw history. As a result of Congress' Indian Removal Act, Chickasaw people were forced to remove to Indian Territory. The foresight and skilled negotiating practices of Chickasaw leaders led to favorable sales of Chickasaw lands in Mississippi. This allowed the Chickasaw Nation, unlike other tribes, to pay for their own removal.

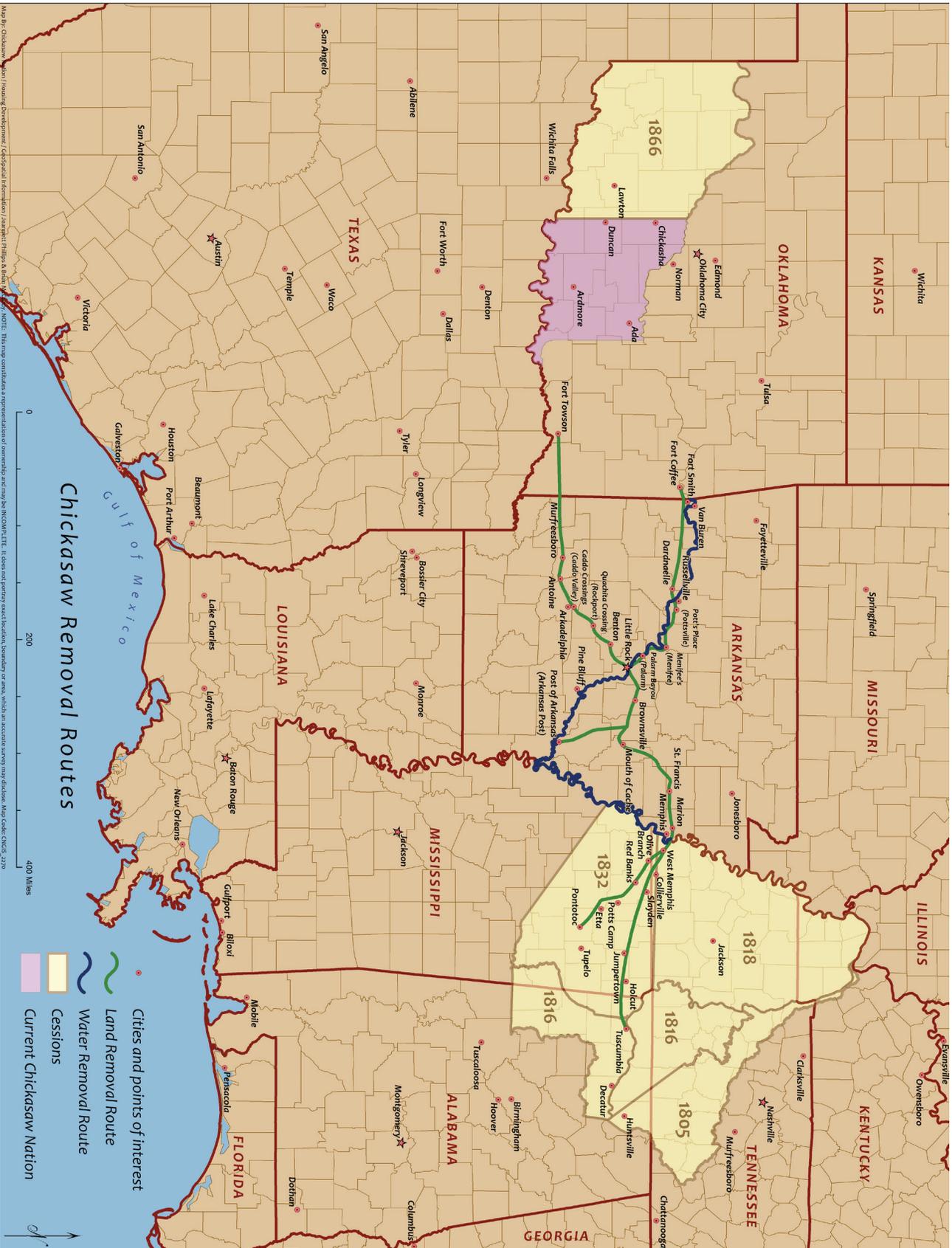
Chickasaw families were met with hardship and death along the Removal, traveling hundreds of miles in extreme cold and heat; however, Chickasaws suffered less than other tribes because they controlled their departures and chose favorable seasons to travel. This undoubtedly saved many lives that otherwise could have been lost.

Other tribes removed to Indian Territory were the Cherokee, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole. The Chickasaws were one of the last to remove. In 1837, the Chickasaw Nation signed the Treaty of Doaksville with the Choctaw Nation and purchased the right for the settlement of Chickasaw people in their own district within Choctaw Territory. Most Chickasaws removed to Indian Territory from 1837-1851. However, Chickasaw families continued to arrive in Indian Territory up to the 1890s, as evidenced by Chickasaw tribal enrollment in the Dawes Rolls.

As Chickasaws began to move into their district, they discovered Plains Indian tribes roaming freely across the lands. These tribes still lived a migratory lifestyle and made frequent raids on Chickasaw homesteads. They did not understand the United States removing other tribes onto their historic homeland. To fulfill the treaty promise to protect the removed Southeastern tribes, the federal government built Fort Washita and Fort Arbuckle to maintain peace between the various tribes. Chickasaws still desired their own separate territory to restore governmental authority for their people and separate affairs from the Choctaws. In 1856, the Chickasaw Nation separated from the Choctaws and created their own constitution for their own separate lands.

# TE ATA

## ACTIVITY 1 MAP QUEST PART I (TEACHER)



**TEATA**

**ACTIVITY 1**  
MAP QUEST  
PART 1 (STUDENT)





ACTIVITY 2  
YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

\_\_\_\_\_ 'S 10 IMPORTANT

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

# TEXT ME

