

Removal of American Indians, 1830–1838

Teacher Pages

Overview

Referring to a map showing migration routes after the Indian Removal Act of 1830, students gain an understanding of the distance tribes were forced to move and the terrain they covered. Students speculate what these journeys might have been like, then write paragraphs based on their speculations, their prior knowledge, and the map.

Time Required

30–50 minutes

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical comprehension

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical analysis and interpretation

United States Era 4, Standard 1: United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans

National Geography Standards

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

Standard 8: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human population on Earth's surface

Standard 9: How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past

Enduring Understanding

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 led the United States government to force several eastern Native American tribes into signing treaties that required them to relocate to Indian Territory in the West; these involuntary removals involved lengthy and dangerous journeys.

Essential Question

What might the forced removals of Native Americans from their eastern homelands (e.g., the Trail of Tears) have been like for the people who had to make the journeys?

Procedure

Note: The following directions are for doing this lesson as a whole-class activity. If you wish, you may instead use the student handout and have students work individually or in groups on the activity.

1. Using a whiteboard, projector, or another display device, show the class the “Removal of American Indians, 1830–1838” map with all the layers turned off except the “State,” “Forest,” “Ocean,” and “Gulf” layers.
2. Ask students if they can name the five Native American tribes that were forced to move from their homes in the southeastern United States as a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. (They might identify the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, and Seminole.) Do they know where these groups lived before removal? Ask if anyone can identify these areas on the map.
3. Turn on the “Indian tribes’ home territories” layer to show the tribes’ locations before removal. Students should notice each tribe’s location. They’ll also notice the home regions of the Fox and the Sauk, along the Mississippi River in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.
4. Have students shade and label these home territories on their maps.
5. Read the “Historical Context” section to the class. Make sure students understand the words and terms in bold.
6. Have a volunteer point out the Mississippi River on the map, and ask students to label this river on their maps. Ask if anyone can identify how far west of the Mississippi River the tribes had to travel to reach Indian Territory. To which present-day states did they go?
7. Turn on the “Land granted” and “Buffalo range” layers. Students will see that the Indian Territory was located in the present-day states of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska.
8. Have students shade this territory on their maps and label the relocation areas of the seven tribes whose home territories they’ve seen on the eastern parts of the map.
9. Ask students to look carefully at the map and at the areas where the tribes were forced to settle. Have them use very light pencil lines to draw their guesses as to which routes each of the seven tribes would have taken to Indian Territory.
10. Turn on the “Dates of removal” and “Route of removal” layers to show the actual routes. Ask students to compare this layer to what they’ve drawn on their maps. How closely did their predictions match the actual routes? What surprises them about the actual routes? In particular, ask them to notice and describe the routes of the Seminole and the Cherokee.
11. Have students correct their maps to show the actual routes.

12. Ask students which of the eastern tribes was the last to move west. By what name is this tribe's journey commonly known? (Make sure they recognize that the Cherokee were the last to be removed, along the infamous Trail of Tears in 1838.)
13. Inform the class that the Trail of Tears involved forced removal during an unusually cold winter. Ask students to describe the climate in this part of the country—would it have been cold or mild in this area in the wintertime?
14. What major body of water did all of the tribes have to cross? They should recognize that the tribes had to cross the Mississippi River. Inform the class that the Mississippi River is more than a mile wide at several points. What might it have been like to cross such a huge river? What might it have been like in the winter, when the Trail of Tears took place? Inform them that the river is typically too large to freeze completely, but passage across the river can be impeded by large chunks of ice, and the water gets very cold.
15. Tell the class that you're about to turn on a layer showing military forts established by the United States government. In what parts of the map would they expect to see the forts? Why?
16. Turn on the "Fort" layer to reveal the forts' locations. Discuss the reasons these forts would have been placed in these areas.

Historical Context

As the United States grew during the early 19th century, white settlers came into increasing conflict with Native American nations. Settlers placed pressure on the federal government to acquire Native American territory and allow more white settlement on that land. In 1830, Congress passed the **Indian Removal Act**, permitting President **Andrew Jackson** to negotiate removal treaties with Native American tribes. These "negotiations" were typically one-sided, resulting in the forced removal of eastern tribes from their homelands west into **Indian Territory**.

Assessment

Have students write paragraphs answering the following questions:

Why did these Native American groups have to move, where did they go, and what might their journeys have been like?

Extensions

1. Ask students to research the Trail of Tears and write journal entries or letters from the perspective of a Cherokee individual on this journey.
2. Have students conduct research and write essays or create presentations answering the question "In what ways did Native Americans resist the Indian Removal Act of 1830?"