

Plows on the Hunting Grounds

The Indian Allotment Act of 1887

Skills: Social Studies, Language Arts

Objective: The student will read about the Indian Allotment Act of 1887 and discuss its impact on Oklahoma’s Native American tribes and agriculture.

Background

The 1880s in American history saw the end of the American frontier. By then, all the best farmland had already been taken by homesteaders. Prospective settlers left with no land looked around and saw what looked like unused land in Indian Territory. What they were seeing had for many years been hunting grounds for several tribes. Tribes from all over the continent had been migrating to this area for many years to hunt the bison herds. These tribes had developed traditions around the bison hunt. Their homes were made from bison hides. The food they were accustomed to eating came from the bison.

Most of the tribes had no idea what it meant to own land. They believed the land belonged to everyone. Most had long histories of moving from place to place, all over the continent. Some had permanent homes along river bottoms where they grew crops when they weren’t hunting bison. Others had homes they could easily pack up and move as they followed the herds.

By the 1880s, there were very few bison left to hunt. The US government decided it would be best for the Indians to be assimilated into the culture that was steadily surrounding them. They hoped they would learn to farm by watching their new neighbors, the settlers who were allowed to move in after the land had been divided among tribal members.

Many of the tribes were unhappy with the government’s plans for them. They had traditions that taught them to look upon manual labor as degrading. For some who did have farming traditions, the farming had always been done by the women and was not considered suitable work for men. Many ended up leasing or selling their land to non-Indian farmers.

Activities

ACTIVITY 1

1. Write the words “communal” and “private” on the chalkboard.
 - Ask students to use prior knowledge to give definitions.
 - Explain that your classroom can serve as an example of communally held property because every student in the class shares the resources.
2. Lead a discussion based on the following questions:

P.A.S.S.

GRADE 6

Reading— 1.1a;

3.1b,2a,3ab; 5.1b

Writing— 1.2; 2.2b,7,8

Oral Language— 1.2

Visual Literacy— 3

Social Studies— 1.1; 3.2,3

GRADE 7

Reading— 1.1; 3.1a,2a,3ad;
5.1b

Writing— 1.2;

2.2ab,4b,8,9

Oral Language— 1.2

Visual Literacy— 3.2

Social Studies— 1.1; 2.2,4;
4.1,4

GRADE 8

Reading— 1.1; 3.1a,2ab,3b;
5.1a

Writing— 1.2;

2.2b,3b,5a,8,9

Oral Language— 1.2

Visual Literacy— 3.2

Social Studies— 1.1,2; 2,2;
7.4; 9.8,9

- What resources do you all share in the classroom? (books, classroom space, chalkboard, the teacher).
- What resources in the classroom are private resources.
- What are other contemporary examples of communally-held property (parks, schools, libraries, national forests).

ACTIVITY 2

1. Hand out the reading page: “Indian Allotment Act,” included with this lesson.
 - Students will read and discuss the information about the Indian Allotment Act.
 - Students will read the information and complete the activities on the map of Indian Territory included with this lesson.
2. Read and discuss background material.
 - Students will define the problem(s) the Indian Allotment Act was designed to solve.
3. Write the word “assimilate” on the chalkboard and discuss its meaning in relation to Oklahoma’s tribes.
 - Ask: Why was the Indian Allotment Act helpful for some tribes but not for others? (Some tribes were traditionally agricultural; others were not. Most tribes traditionally held land in common and objected to individual ownership. Much tribal land was lost through sales to non-Indians.)

Resources Needed

library/internet access

journal/notebook

ACTIVITY 3

1. Each student will select a different tribe from the list of Oklahoma Indian Tribes included with this lesson.
 - Students will research to find information about the tribes they select by writing letters to the tribal headquarters and by using internet sources, encyclopedias, library books and magazines
 - Students will look for answers to the following questions as they conduct their research:
 - Were tribal members traditional farmers, hunters or both?
 - If they were farmers, what crops did they raise?
 - If they were hunters, what were some of their hunting traditions?
 - Students will also research tribal history, culture, language group, associations with other tribes, place of origin, government, current population and current tribal enterprises, particularly agricultural enterprises.
 - Students will compile the information gathered into reports.
 - Students will illustrate their reports with drawings.
 - Students will compile their reports in a class book.

EXTENSIONS

1. Students will research online for contemporary examples of agricultural land held in common (e.g., Israeli kibbutzim).
2. Many of the Native American groups no longer are listed as tribes but instead as nations.
 - Discuss possible reasons for the change.

—Students will research to find the reason or include the question in their letters to tribal headquarters.

—Review the definitions of tribe and nation.

3. Use online and library resources to research Native American farming methods as compared with those of European homesteaders. Students will answer these questions:

—What was planted? How was it planted? What was the method of care for the crops?

Extra Reading

Brandenburg, Jim, *An American Safari: Adventures on the North*

American Prairie, Walker Books for Young Readers, 1996.

Calloway, Colin G., *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indians Views of How the West Was Lost*, Macmillan, 1996.

Englar, Mary, *The Great Plains Indians*, Capstone, 2005

Gregory, Kristina, *The Legend of Jimmy Spoon*, Odyssey, 1993.

Katz, William Loren, *Black Women of the Old West*, Simon Pulse, 2007.

Lowie, Robert H., *Indians of the Plains*, Bison, 1982.

McCall, Edith, *Adventures of Pioneering on the Plains*, Royal Fireworks, 2000.

Miller, Brandon Marie, *Buffalo Gals, Women of the Old West*, Lerner, 1997.

Meyer, Carolyn, *Where the Broken Heart Still Beats: The Story of Cynthia Ann Parker*, Gulliver/Harcourt, 1992.

St. Antoine, Sara, *Stories of Where We Live: The Great North American Prairie*, Milkweed Editions, 2001.

Vocabulary

assimilate—to absorb a culturally distinct group into the prevailing culture

bison—a large hairy animal resembling an ox but with a massive head and shoulders and a humped back; native to North America and Europe.

communal—of, belonging to, or shared by the people of a community; public

culture—the socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought of a particular group of people

flourish—to be strong and healthy or grow well, especially because conditions are right

frontier—the margin between the occupied land and the wilderness in the settlement of the US

homestead—land claimed by a settler or squatter, especially under the Homestead Act

nation—a community of people who share a common ethnic origin, culture, historical tradition, and, frequently, language, whether or not they live together in one territory or have their own government.

private—not available for public use, control, or participation

tradition—A mode of thought or behavior followed by a people continuously from generation to generation.

tribe—a society or division of a society whose members have ancestry, customs, beliefs, and leadership in common.

The Indian Allotment Act

Oklahoma's Native American population is the largest in the United States. Up to 67 different tribes are represented here. At least three tribes, the Caddo, Wichita, and Osage, were growing corn, beans and squash along Oklahoma's river bottoms as many as 400 years ago. Others started migrating here on horseback about 200 years later to hunt bison. Many of the tribes came here because European settlers were moving into their ancestral homes on land east of the Mississippi River.

During this time in American history, people from all parts of Europe were moving to America. They had heard there was unlimited farm land available for people willing to take risks and work hard. After all the land east of the Mississippi had been settled, settlers began looking for land in areas the US government had promised to the Indians. Many felt the Indians had more land than they needed. They asked the government to open some of that land for non-Indians.

In 1887, Senator Henry Laurens Dawes introduced the Indian Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, in Congress. This law divided tribal lands into allotments of 40-160 acres for individual tribal members. All land remaining after the allotment would be opened to homesteaders.

Some of the people supporting this Act felt it would encourage the Indians to become farmers. Some of the tribes had been farming for several generations and had no problem with this. However, most tribes had no concept of land ownership and objected to dividing it among themselves. Other tribes came from hunting traditions. They lived by moving from place to place, following the bison herds. They did not know how to farm and saw no reason to learn. To make things worse, they soon discovered that the land where the bison had flourished was not very good farmland. The government tried to solve this problem by providing tribal members with cattle and encouraging them to be ranchers. Some were successful at this and continue to be prosperous ranchers to this day.

Allotment of the Indian lands in Indian Territory began on April 1, 1899, and was not completed until 1910. In the next few years, many Indians sold their allotments to non-Indians who wanted to farm. Within 50 years after the passage of the Dawes Act, the amount of land owned by Indians dropped from about 155 million acres to about 47 million acres. In 1934, Congress passed another Act which gave any Indian land that had not been sold or allotted back to the tribes. After that, any Indian wanting to sell his or her land had to sell it back to the tribe.

1. What was the problem the government was trying to solve with the Indian Allotment Act?
2. How did supporters of the Act think Indians would respond?
3. How did Indians respond? Why?

Oklahoma's Indian Tribes

Absentee Shawnee Tribe
2025 S. Gordon Cooper Dr.
Shawnee, OK 74801

Apache Tribe
PO Box 1220
Anadarko, OK 73005

Caddo Tribe (Hasinai Society)
PO Box 487
Binger, OK 73009

Cherokee Nation
22361 Bald Hill Rd.
Tahlequah, OK 74464

Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe
PO Box 38
Concho, OK 73022

Chickasaw Nation
530 E. Main
Ada, OK 74820

Choctaw Nation
PO Drawer 1210
Durant, OK 74702

Citizen Potawatomie Nation
1601 S. Gordon Cooper Dr.
Shawnee, OK 74801

Comanche Tribe & Nation
PO Box 908
Lawton, OK 73502

Delaware (Lenape) Tribe of Indians
170 N. Barbara
Bartlesville, OK 740036

Delaware Nation
PO Box 825
Anadarko, OK 73005

Eastern Shawnee Tribe
PO Box 350
Seneca, MO 64865

Fort Sill Apache Tribe
Rt. 2, Box 121
Apache, OK 73006

Iowa Tribe
RR 1, Box 721
Perkins, OK 74059

Kaw Nation of OK
PO Box 50
Kaw City, OK 74641

Kickapoo Tribe
PO Box 70
McCloud, OK 74851

Kiowa Tribe
PO Box 369
Carnegie, OK 73015

Miami Nation
202 Eight Tribes Trail
Miami, OK 74354

Modoc Tribe
515 "G" SE
Miami, OK 74354

Muscogee (Creek) Nation
PO Box 580
Okmulgee, OK 74447

Osage Nation
627 Grandview
Pawhuska, OK 74056

Ottawa Tribe
PO Box 110
Miami, OK 74355

Otoe-Missouria Tribe
8151 Hwy 177
Red Rock, OK 74651

Pawnee Nation of OK
PO Box 470
Pawnee, OK 74058

Peoria Tribe
118 S. Eight Tribes Trail
Miami, OK 74355

Ponca Tribe
20 White Eagle Dr.
Ponca City, OK 74601

Quapaw Tribe of OK
PO Box, 765
Quapaw, OK 74363

Sac and Fox Nation
Rt. 2, Box 246
Stroud, OK 74079

Seminole Nation
PO Box 1498
Wewoka, OK 74884

Seneca-Cayuga Tribes
24701 S. 655 Rd.
Grove, OK 74344

Shawnee Tribe
21 N. Eight Tribes Trail
Miami, OK 74354

Tonkawa Tribe
PO Box 70
Tonkawa, OK 74653

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees
2450 S. Muskogee Ave.
Tahlequah, OK 74464

Wichita and Affiliated Tribe
PO Box 729
Anadarko, OK 73005

Wyandotte Nation
PO Box 729
Wyandotte, OK 74370

Yuchi (Euchee) Tribe of Indians
PO Box 10
Sapulpa, OK 74067