Plows on the Hunting Grounds
The Indian Allotment Act of 1887

Objective
Students will read about the Indian Allotment Act of 1887, which divided tribal land among individuals. Students will discuss the reading and answer comprehension questions. Students will conduct short research projects related to the reading.

Procedure
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.
   Lead a discussion based on the following questions:
   — 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 examples of communally-held property (parks, schools, libraries, national forests).
2. Hand out the Reading Page, “Indian Allotment Act,” included with this lesson.
   — Students will read the information about the Indian Allotment Act and outline the passage.
   — Discuss unfamiliar words.
   — Lead a class discussion about the passage, based on the following questions:
     • What was the problem the government was trying to solve with the Indian Allotment Act?
     • How did supporters of the Act think Indians would respond?
     • How did Indians respond? Why?
   — Divide the class into groups for and against allotment of native lands.
   Students will research to find arguments for their assigned positions and write opinion papers. Students will present their arguments in a class debate.
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.).
4. Students will select one of the Oklahoma tribes on the list included with this lesson and research the tribe’s constitution. Compare with the Oklahoma constitution.
5. Students will use online or library resources to research some Native American farming methods as compared with those of European homesteaders.

Oklahoma Academic Standards
HIGH SCHOOL
Oklahoma History: 1.1,4; 2.7; 3.1; 4.1
Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,2,5; W.4,5.
Vocabulary: 1,3,5.
Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,2,3,4

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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. The people who populated the area around the ancient Spiro Mounds were also farmers. Other groups of people started migrating here on horseback about 200 years later to hunt bison. Many of the tribes were moved here forcibly from their ancestral homes east of the Mississippi River to make room for European settlers who were moving west.

After the Civil War, returning soldiers were looking for land to farm. By the end of the war, most of the land in the east had been settled, and people began looking for land in areas the government had promised to the Indians. Many felt the Indians had more land than they needed. In addition, some of the tribes had taken the side of the Confederacy during the war, so the government punished them by taking away some of their land. Non-Indian settlers put pressure on the government to open some of that land for non-Indians.

The 1880s in American history saw the end of the American frontier. By then, all the best farm land had already been taken by homesteaders. Prospective settlers, left with no land, looked around and saw what looked to them 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 (tipis) 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 the Indians 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.

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 didn’t need encouragement. However, they had their own ways of farming communally. Individual land ownership was not part of that custom, and they objected to dividing the land in that way.

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 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 became prosperous ranchers. Others lost their land by selling it to non-Indians.

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. 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 land back to the tribes if it had not been sold or allotted. After that, any Indian wanting to sell his or her land had to sell it back to the tribe.

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.
Indian Lands, Indian Territory, 1889
Oklahoma’s Indian Tribes

Absentee Shawnee Tribe
2025 S. Gordon Cooper Dr.
Shawnee, OK 74801
http://www.astribe.com/

Apache Tribe of Oklahoma
PO Box 1330
Anadarko, OK 73005
http://www.apachetribe.org/

Caddo Nation
PO Box 487
Binger, OK 73009
http://www.caddonation-nsn.gov/

Cherokee Nation
PO Box 948
Tahlequah, OK 74465
http://www.cherokee.org/

Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes
PO Box 38
Concho, OK 73022
http://www.c-a-tribes.org/

Citizen Potawatomi Nation
1601 S. Gordon Cooper Cr.
Shawnee, OK 74801
http://www.potawatomi.org/

Comanche Nation of Oklahoma
584 NW Bingo Rd.
Lawton, OK 73507
http://www.comanche-tribe.org/

Delaware (Lenape) Tribe of Indians
170 N. Barbara
Bartlesville, OK 74003
http://delawaretribe.org/

Delaware Nation
PO Box 825
Anadarko, OK 73005
http://www.delawarenation.com/

Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
PO Box 350
Seneca, MO 64865
http://www.east-otto-nsn.gov/

Fort Sill Apache
43187 US Hwy 281
Apache, OK 73006
http://www.fortsillapachensn.gov/

Iowa Tribe
33588 E. 750 Rd.
Perkins, OK 74059
http://www.iowanation.org/

Kaw Nation
698 Grandview Dr.
Kaw City, OK 74641
http://kawnation.com/

Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma
105673 Oklahoma 102
McCloud, OK 74851
http://www.kickapootribeofoklahoma.com/

Kiowa Tribe
PO Box 369
Carnegie, OK 73015
http://www.kiowatribal.org/

Miami Nation
202 Eight Tribes Trail
Miami, OK 74354
http://www.miamination.com/

Modoc Tribe
418 G Street SE
Miami, OK 74354
http://www.modoc-tribe.com/

Muscogee (Creek) Nation
PO Box 579
Okmulgee, OK 74447
http://www.muscogeenation-nsn.gov/index.html

Osage Nation
813 Grandview
Pawhuska, OK 74056
http://osagenation.co/

Ottawa Tribe
PO Box 110
Miami, OK 74354
http://www.ottawatribe.org/

Otoe-Missouria Tribe
8151 Hwy 177
Red Rock, OK 74651
http://www.omtribe.org/

Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma
861 Little D Street
Pawnee, OK 74058
http://www.pawneenation.org/

Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma
118 S. Eight Tribes Trail
Miami, OK 74355
http://www.peoriatribe.com/

Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma
20 White Eagle Dr.
Ponca City, OK 74601
http://www.ponca-tribe.com/

Quapaw Tribe of OK
5681 South 630 Rd
Quapaw, OK 74363
http://www.quapawtribe.com/

Sac and Fox Nation
920883 S. Hwy 99 Bldg A
Stroud, OK 74079
http://www.sacandfoxnation-nsn.gov/

Seneca-Cayuga Tribes
24701 S. 655 Rd.
Grove, OK 74344
http://www.sctribe.com/

Shawnee Tribe
29 S Hwy 69
Miami, OK 74355
http://www.shawnee-tribe.com/

Tonkawa Tribe
10951 Allen Dr.
Tonkawa, OK 74653
http://www.tonkawatribe.com/

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees
PO Box 746
Tahlequah, OK 74465
http://www.keetoowahcherokee.org/

Wichita and Affiliated Tribes
PO Box 729
Anadarko, OK 73005
http://www.wichitatribe.com/

Wyandotte Nation
6470 E. Highway 60
Wyandotte, OK 74370
http://www.wyandotte-nation.org/

Euchee (Yuchi) Tribe
804 E. Taft Ste H
Sapulpa, OK 74066
http://www.eucheetribe.com/