

Cherokee in the United States

by ReadWorks



William Penn Adair, Cherokee delegate to U.S. Congress, 1866

A very long time ago, before the United States even existed, the land was already home to a wide variety of different American Indian tribes. You may have also heard people belonging to these tribes called "Indian" and "Native American." While some people may think of American Indians as one group of people who are all similar to one other, there are actually big differences between the American Indian ethnic groups and the tribes formed within them. Each of the different ethnic groups has a unique culture and language, and each tribe has its own system of government. Each tribe also has a unique history of interaction with early European settlers and the United States.

One example of an American Indian ethnic group is the Cherokee. Within this group, the Cherokee people formed tribes, or communities whose members shared a language, customs, and beliefs. Currently, there are three "federally recognized" Cherokee tribes in the United States, which means they get special programs and services from the government, and also have certain legal rights. In addition to these three recognized tribes, there are more than 200 other groups who identify themselves as Cherokee tribes.

The Cherokee originally lived in what we now know as the southeastern United States. This includes modern-day Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. They lived by farming, hunting, and gathering on the land. In the 1700s, they first started to interact with the Europeans. The Cherokee traded deerskins with the Europeans, and the two groups generally had a good relationship with each other. However, as more European settlers began to move onto land the Cherokee needed for hunting or gathering, the Europeans and the Cherokee came into conflict. This led to many battles, and the Cherokee lost a lot of land to the Europeans. After the American Revolution, the Cherokee lost even more of their land as the Americans began to build new settlements in Cherokee territory.

Over the next few decades, the Cherokee people started to change. As they spent more time with the Americans, they started to adopt some parts of American culture and technology. For example, Cherokee tribes used to grow their food on communal farms. This means that the entire tribe shared the same land, farming it together and sharing the crops among themselves. The Americans encouraged them to switch to growing their food on individual farmsteads. This practice is similar to what we think of as farming today. Each farmer owns a piece of land, and grows his or her own crops on it. They also raised pigs and cattle on the land instead of hunting deer. The new United States government also gave the Cherokee spinning wheels and taught them how to spin cotton. In the 1800s, the Cherokee even began to adopt some of the structures of the United States government for their own society. They even had their own Constitution!

However, as the United States grew, the government wanted more land for new settlers. This led to the government and army pushing Cherokee off their land. At first, some of the Cherokee voluntarily relocated, but a lot of them were forced to move even though they didn't want to. In the 1830s, in an infamous event known as the Trail of Tears, the United States Army forced the Cherokee to march to Oklahoma. More than 4,000 Cherokee died during this march.

Today, most Cherokee live in Oklahoma, North Carolina, or on the West Coast. In the decades following the Trail of Tears and forced removal of the Cherokee, the United States government has worked hard to improve its relationship with the Cherokee and other American Indian groups. The government passed laws to let some tribes maintain their own governments and govern themselves legally within the United States. The Cherokee Nation is the largest federally recognized Cherokee tribe, and it has more than 300,000 members today.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. When did the Cherokee people first start to interact with Europeans?

- A. the 1500s
- B. the 1600s
- C. the 1700s
- D. the 1800s

2. What does this passage describe?

- A. This passage describes the historical background of the Cherokee in the United States.
- B. This passage describes the different tribes of American Indians, including the Cherokee.
- C. This passage describes the different places that the Cherokee have lived.
- D. This passage describes how the Cherokee farm their land.

3. The Cherokee were not always treated fairly by the United States government. What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A. "The Americans encouraged [the Cherokee] to switch to growing their food on individual farmsteads."
- B. "[A]s the United States grew, the government . . . and army push[ed] the Cherokee off their land."
- C. "The Cherokee Nation is the largest federally recognized Cherokee tribe, and it has more than 300,000 members today."
- D. "In the 1800s, the Cherokee even began to adopt some of the structures of the United States government for their own society."

4. What has been the main reason for conflict between the Cherokee and the United States?

- A. The United States wanted the land on which the Cherokee lived.
- B. The Cherokee live in tribes, while most people in the United States do not.
- C. The Cherokee adopted some parts of American culture and technology.
- D. Americans farmed differently than the Cherokee.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Since the Trail of Tears, the United States has worked hard to improve its relationship with the Cherokee.
- B. After interacting with Americans, Cherokee farmers began raising their own crops, pigs, and cattle.
- C. The governments of Cherokee tribes are very different from the government of the United States of America.
- D. The Cherokee's relationship with the United States government has changed with their interactions.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

[The Cherokee] lived by farming, hunting, and gathering on the land. In the 1700s, they first started to interact with the Europeans. The Cherokee traded deerskins with the Europeans, and the two groups generally had a good relationship with each other.

Based on these sentences, what does the word "interact" mean?

- A. to compete
- B. to dislike
- C. to come into contact
- D. to teach skills

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_____, the Cherokee had a good relationship with early European settlers.

- A. Initially
- B. Instead
- C. Finally
- D. Obviously

8. What was the Trail of Tears?

9. How has the United States tried to improve its relationship with the Cherokee?

10. How has the relationship between the Cherokee and the United States changed over time? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
