

American Indians and How Their Lives Changed

It was early one morning. The class was waiting for Ms. Johnson to arrive. Everyone was excited to learn more about the first European explorers. Many came to North America in the 1700s.

Just then, the door opened. Ms. Johnson was carrying a box of old items.

“Let us help with that,” said Natalia, and she rushed over to help Ms. Johnson.

Natalia helped their teacher place the box on the front desk as the class gathered around.

“Good morning, students,” Ms. Johnson said. “As you can see, I have with me a box of items today. These are all examples of things traded between the settlers and American Indians.”

“But why did the American Indians trade with colonists?” asked Steven.

“Well,” the teacher began, “in those days, there were no stores. You could not go buy food and clothes. People often traded what they had with others who had something they needed. For instance, if a colonist mother needed a blanket for her new baby, and there was an American Indian woman who spent many hours making beautiful blankets, she could trade something like beans to the American Indian for a blanket. These types of trades were fairly common.”

Natalia spoke, “My grandfather told me stories of how diseases like smallpox spread. Many American Indian communities vanished as a result. How did that happen?”

“Well,” said Ms. Johnson, “when the white settlers came, they brought illnesses with them from Europe. The American Indians had never had diseases like smallpox. Since it was a new disease to them, they had no immunity. Smallpox would spread throughout the tribe. Many died before anyone knew what was going on. This is one of the sad ways that the American Indian culture changed.”

The kids went back to looking through the box. “What are these engravings?” asked Steven. “Are these American Indian writings?”

Just then, Natalia noticed a powder horn. “Oh, look! I know what this is.”

She and Steven touched the powder horn at the same time. Suddenly, a mist surrounded them, and their class faded away. They looked at their new surroundings attempting to find their bearings. They saw that they stood in the middle of a big forest.

“Wow!” Steven said. “I wonder where we are.”

Before Natalia could answer, a man rode up on horseback. He was dressed

like an American Indian but seemed different to her. He reigned his horse to a stop and then slid down from the saddle, leading the horse into a grove of trees.

“Who’s that?” Natalia whispered a little too loudly to Steven.

“I don’t know,” Steven whispered back a little more quietly, “Let’s see if we can find out.”

The two children tiptoed over to the grove of trees to follow the man as quietly as they could. When they caught up to him, there was another man in the trees. Steven and Natalia crouched behind a large rock and watched the two men shake hands.

“My name is Joseph Brant. My Mohawk name is Thayendanegea,” the man dressed as an Indian said. “I work for the British army.”

“How did that happen?” asked the other man.

“A Christian missionary taught me to speak English. Now I help the army understand what the Indians are saying. I also help them to make peace with the Indians.”

“His work sounds very important,” Steven whispered. Natalia shushed him to try and hear better.

“I understand you’ve gone all the way to the top to try and make peace between whites and Indians?”

“Yes, I have,” Brant replied. “I’ve traveled to England to speak to King George III. I told him that the Indians could help the white men.”

Just then, the four of them could hear the sounds of soldiers coming on horseback. The two men tensed.

Natalia pulled on Steven’s sleeve, “We should get back to our classroom,” she whispered. Steven nodded and pulled the powder horn back out. The two kids touched the horn together and disappeared. In a flash, they were back in class with Ms. Johnson.

Natalia and Steven decided to do more research on Joseph Brant. They learned that he tried to make peace between the American Indians and settlers. Brant wanted to make sure that the American Indians could stay on their land. He knew that many more colonists might come. Colonists were now building houses and planting crops on Indian land.

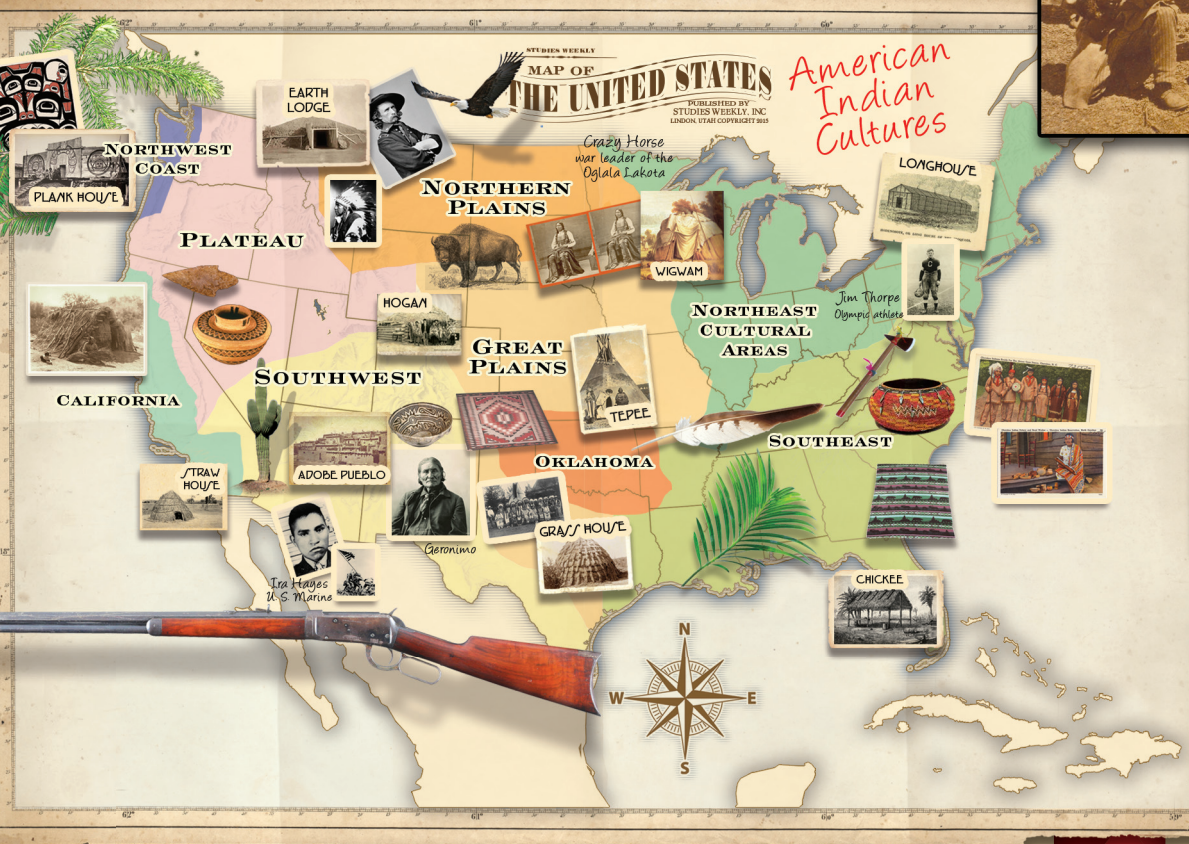
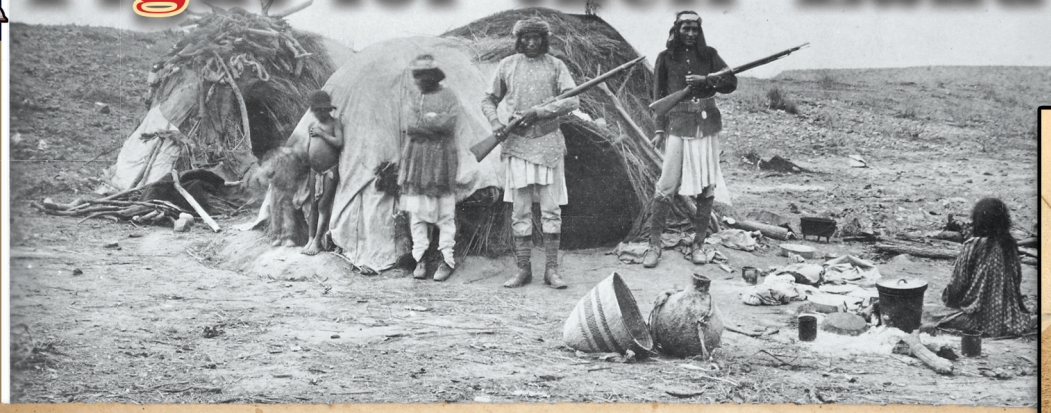
U.S. Army soldiers came, too. They fought to make the Indian tribes leave. The colonists were afraid of the American Indians.





Tennessee Lesson

American Indians Fight for their Land



After school one day, Natalia and Steven were talking about seeing Mohawk Indian, Joseph Brant, as they walked home.

“He looked Indian but spoke like the British captains,” Steven said.

“Yes, he was well-educated,” Natalia said. “I wish we’d had more time to hear more about his life.”

“Yeah,” said Steven. “But it just so happens that Ms. Johnson let me borrow the powder horn that she brought to class a few days ago. Maybe if we both touch it, we can go back to the forest and find Brant again.”

As soon as they got to Natalia’s house, they sat down on the porch. “I asked Ms. Johnson if I could bring this home to show my father,” said Steven, pulling the powder horn from his jacket.

Natalia reached to touch it and suddenly, a mist surrounded the two of them. When they opened their eyes, they expected to be in the forest again. Instead, they were standing on a dirt road in a city.

“Where are we?” asked Natalia.

Steven pointed to a sign at the end of the street. “I ... think we’re in New York City.”

The children walked along the dirt road looking around at the strange buildings and stores. They walked past a dry goods store, and on the next corner, there stood Joseph Brant.

“Look! There he is!” Natalia said excitedly.

“Shh! Keep your voice down!” Steven pulled Natalia into a doorway out of sight.

“Sorry,” Natalia said sheepishly.

“That’s okay. Come on, let’s follow him before we lose him.”

The two checked to make sure the coast was clear and then darted across the road to the next corner.

They saw Brant talking to two other men in front of a restaurant. Brant gestured to the two men and then all three of them went into the restaurant.

“Come on, I bet we can sneak in and find a place to sit and listen in,” Steven said, pulling Natalia’s arm. The kids followed closely behind the

three men and sat down at a table nearby.

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with us for an interview, Mr. Brant,” the first man said.

“Of course,” the Indian said.



The three of them sat down at a small table to talk.

“So, first off, there were a lot more Indians than white people back in 1770,” one of the men said. “Why didn’t the Indians win the war?”

“Good question,” Brant replied. “It was sad, really. There were many Indian tribes all over America. They were fine warriors and hunters. But when the Europeans came, they could not band together. Instead of coming together to fight them, the Indian tribes fought each other.”

“I wonder why,” Natalia murmured.

“Why do you think that was?” the second man asked.

Brant scratched his head, “I think it’s because they had always fought amongst themselves. They just didn’t realize that the white men were a much bigger threat to their survival.”

“Is it true that you went to England in 1777 to meet with the king?” the first man asked.

“Yes, that is true. I went to England several times, actually. I met with King George III and spoke to other leaders. I

tried to get everyone to sign a peace treaty. I also met with Indian tribal leaders.”

“What did you talk to them about?”

“I tried to make them see that their world was changing. They would now have to share their land. But they would not listen.”

“That’s very noble of you. How very sad they wouldn’t heed your counsel,” the second man said.

The three men got up. “I really enjoyed talking to you gentlemen,” Brant said. “Let’s get together again sometime.”

Natalia and Steven took this as their cue to leave. They quietly snuck out of the restaurant and disappeared down a side alley. In the alley, they joined hands and touched the powder horn together. In a flash, they found themselves back on Natalia’s front porch.

Joseph Brant Negotiates for the Indian Tribes

The Age of Exploration (period of time between the 1400s and 1600s) was an amazing time for people from Europe. They sent explorers to the New World to learn more about the land. They came here searching for new trade routes. America was a land of great new ideas. It was also home to many American Indian tribes.

The American Indians lived in America for a long time before the Europeans came. While they got along with these new settlers in some instances, there were territorial disputes that would happen as well. The more Europeans came over, the more frequently these disputes would happen. The American Indians were not willing to give up their rights to the land. They got mad when they saw people from England living on their land. They fought the European soldiers for years. They knew the land better than the new settlers and were very good hunters and fighters.

Joseph Brant was a Mohawk Indian War Chief. He worked with the new American settlers. He went to schools run by Christians. He spoke English as well as many other tribal languages. He helped the English understand what the American Indians were saying. He could see how the war was hurting everyone. He wanted the people to stop fighting. He tried to get them to live in peace.

Brant went to England several times. He met with King George III. He spoke to many English leaders. He tried to get everyone to sign a peace treaty. A treaty is a written agreement that, when signed, is a promise to stop fighting. He also met with tribal leaders. He tried to make them see that their world was changing. They would now have to share their land. But many of these tribal leaders would not listen.

Instead, they kept fighting with the U.S. Army. As the conflicts continued and it became apparent that the new European settlers weren’t going to be leaving, Brant tried to broker peace agreements between the new U.S. government and the American Indians. But there were many Indian tribes led by people who wanted war. He could not get all of them to agree. Eventually, Most American Indian territory had been taken over by the U.S. government, and they had to leave their ancestral homelands. Lots of American Indians died from hunger and sickness.



Bison or Buffalo

You may know this animal as a buffalo, but it’s not really a true buffalo at all! The first explorers and settlers mistakenly called these animals buffalo, and the name stuck. The American buffalo is actually a bison. It belongs to the Bovidae family of mammals just like the common cow.

Once, about 20 million of these shaggy beasts roamed around the Great Plains. The bison was sacred to many American Indian tribes. They depended on it for food and many other things such as clothing, shoes, tools, soap, glue and even snow toboggans.

In the late 1800s, hunters began killing millions of bison for their hides and for sport. It is believed that more than 10 million bison were killed between 1870 and 1885. These hunters took only the animals’ hides and left the carcasses to rot where they fell. This was not how the American Indians hunted the bison. They believed that one must use every part of the bison to honor its sacrifice. Leaving the carcasses to rot was considered sacrilegious to the American Indians.

By 1889, only about 540 bison were left in the entire United States. Laws were made to prevent the bison from being killed, and luckily, they did not become extinct.

Today, there are more than 500,000 bison in the northern United States and Canada. Bison feed mainly on

grass and can live to be 20 years old. The mother bison has one calf each year in May or June. Their populations have bounced back since the time they were hunted to near extinction. However, you won’t find many bison roaming the plains anymore. They can still be seen on land preserves and on some farms and ranches.



The Trail of Tears

About 125,000 American Indians lived on millions of acres of land in North America. A lot of this land was in Georgia and Tennessee. Some of the land was also in Alabama, North Carolina and Florida. They had lived there for thousands of years. Then the Age of Exploration brought European explorers and settlers to America.

At first, the American Indians were friendly to the colonists. They welcomed them to America. But over time, things changed. The colonists brought diseases like smallpox to America. They began moving west and building farms. They wanted to grow cotton and tobacco on Indian land. Cotton was used to make cloth and other things.

The Indians fought hard for many years. But they couldn’t win against the Europeans. The white armies had guns and other weapons. The Indians only had bows and arrows. The war went on. The new leaders of the United States got stronger.

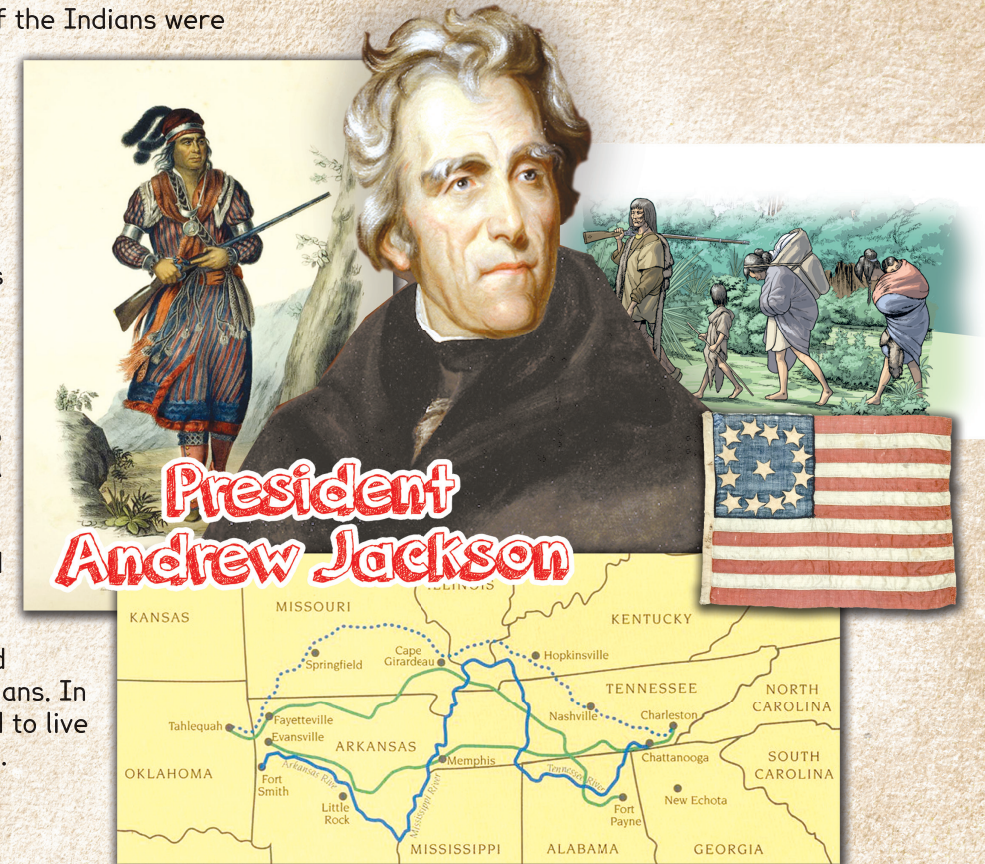
Many American Indians died due to hunger and sickness. In 1830, Andrew Jackson signed a special Act. This Act said that the army had to treat the Indians fairly. Sometimes the U.S. army ignored

the Act though. They would be mean to the Indians. They gave the Indians blankets from sick people to make them sick.

Eventually, all of the Indians were forced to leave. They had to walk all the way from their homelands to Oklahoma. It was a long trip. Many American Indians died on the way. As they were walking, they would cry. They were sad to leave their homes. This is why the trip was called the Trail of Tears.

Today, most Indians live on land the U.S. leaders gave them. The U.S. army promised not to hurt the Indians. In exchange, they had to live on this special land.

Did You Know?



Name _____

ACROSS

5. Joseph Brant's Mohawk name was _____.

6. American Indians got sick due to a disease called _____.

7. White settlers wanted to grow tobacco and _____ on Indian land.

8. The Indians got much of their food and clothing from _____.
2. In 1777, Joseph Brant went to London to meet with _____.

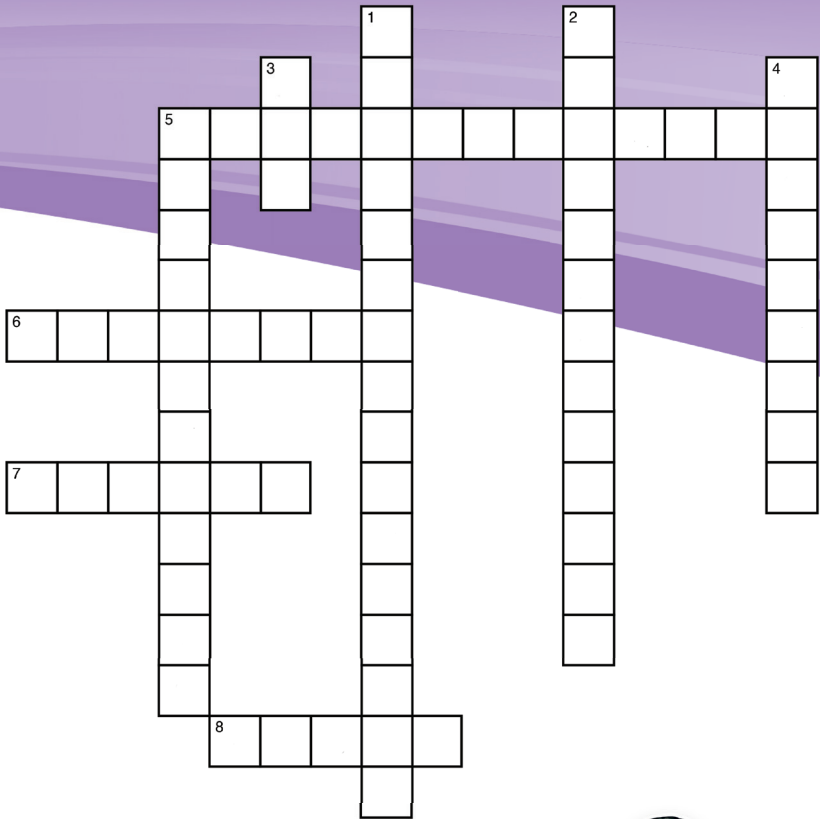
3. The dispute over the ownership of land in America was often settled with _____.

4. The American Indians lost the war because they would not come together and fight as one. Instead, they fought _____.

5. The _____ is the name of the journey the American Indians took in the mid-1800s when they walked to Oklahoma.

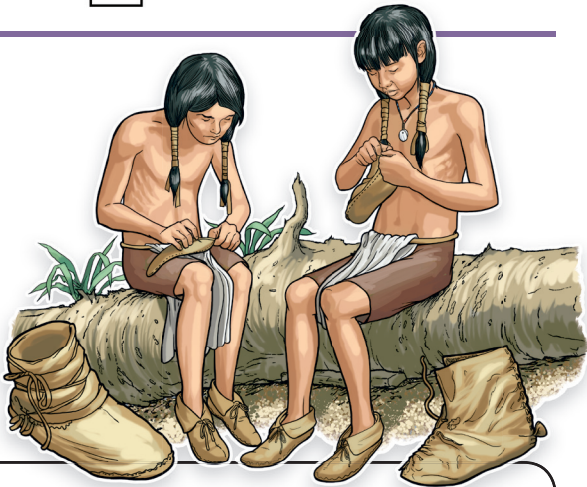
DOWN

1. Known as the _____, Europeans sent explorers to America to find and settle new land.



American Indians

Match the following statements with the correct vocabulary. Put the correct letter on the line after the statement that defines that word.



1. Trail of Tears _____
2. Who did Joseph Brant meet in London? _____
3. Age of Exploration _____
4. Made American Indians sick _____
5. Joseph Brant's Mohawk name _____

- A. Europeans sent to America to settle
- B. Thayendanega
- C. King George III
- D. Journey American Indians took
- E. Smallpox

Let's Write

Imagine you are a Mohawk Indian. You have a family and winter is coming. How will you feed your family? The new European settlers have killed many of the bison and the land is not growing crops anymore. Should you fight for the right to hunt on new lands? Should you stay put and see if you can trade or work for supplies? Or should you move to a new area? Explain what you think would be the best course of action and support your reasons.

Think&Review

1. Describe the part that European settlers played in the American Indians losing their land.

2. Why didn't the Indian tribes win the wars with early settlers?
3. How did Joseph Brant help the American Indians?

4. Why did so many American Indians die when the settlers first came?