Trail of Tears Lesson

Lesson written by Tina Lyons

UNITED STATES HISTORY STANDARDS:

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)
- Standard 1A – The student understands the international background and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine.
- Standard 1B – The student understands federal and state Indian policy and the strategies for survival forged by Native Americans.

LESSON:

Study the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Analyze historical maps to see where Native American lived prior to 1839, their migration along the Trail of Tears and Indian Territory during and after the removals.

Split the class into five groups. Have each group study one of the Five Civilized Tribes before, during and after their removal.

1. Choctaw, removed in 1831
2. Seminole, removed in 1832
3. Creek, removed in 1834
4. Chickasaw, removed in 1837
5. Cherokee, removed in 1838

Students should research the tribes within printed histories, online resources and historical documents. They should also read the treaties between the United States government and the Indian tribes that led to the Native American removals. Digital copies of original treaties are available on Fold3.com.

Search Ancestry.com for historical documents about the Five Civilized Tribes. Specifice databases to search within include:
- U.S. Native American Enrollment Cards for the Five Civilized Tribes, 1898-1914
- U.S. Native American Applications for Enrollment in Five Civilized Tribes, 1896
- U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940
- Dawes Commission Index, 1896
- Census records and Cherokee muster rolls
- The removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia

Discussion:
- Why did the United States government want to remove the Native Americans?
- Why was it called the Trail of Tears?
- What were the lasting effects of the Trail of Tears on the Native American population in the United States?
- Compare and contrast the removal of each of the Five Civilized Tribes.
- How did the culture of the different Native American tribes change after relocation?