

Chickasaw

Student Curricula



Fort Washita

ELEMENTARY

Essential Questions:

- What is the historical significance of Fort Washita?
- What are the reasons for establishing military posts?
- What resources does a group of people need to start a new settlement?

Learning Goals/Objectives:

- To recognize and explain the historical significance of Fort Washita.
- To describe resources needed to start a new settlement.
- To understand the significance of a location being recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

Background Information for Teachers:

Fort Washita was built in 1842 as the southwestern-most military post of the United States. The mission of Fort Washita was to maintain peace for the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations within their new lands, pursuant to treaty obligations.

There were many outside threats to the new home of the Chickasaw people, including attacks by the Republic of Texas militia, interference by unscrupulous intruders, constant raids and unsettled disputes with some of the Plains tribes and the presence of traders and trappers.

Even though Fort Washita was a military post, Chickasaw people frequently visited it. It was home to the U.S. Indian agent office and a public post office. Chickasaws who lived nearby used services available there, such as blacksmithing. Chickasaw people used part of the fort as a burial ground.

Fort Washita operated as a U.S. military post until the start of the Civil War in 1861. It was then occupied by Confederate forces through 1865. The Confederates burned down the majority of the fort as they fled at the end of the Civil War.

After the war, the fort was left abandoned and was never occupied by the U.S. military again. In 1870, the U.S. War Department transferred the property to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Former Chickasaw and Choctaw agent and pardoned Confederate Brigadier Gen. Douglas H. Cooper lived at the fort until his death in 1879. Later, Charles and Abbie Davis Colbert selected the land that included the remains of Fort Washita for their allotment and used one of the barracks as their family home.

The Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) acquired Fort Washita in 1962 and restored it as a historic site and museum. In 2017, the Chickasaw Nation purchased the historic site from OHS and continued the restoration efforts. Today, the Chickasaw Nation assumes responsibility and management of Fort Washita. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated as a National Historic Landmark. National Historic Landmarks are historic properties that illustrate the heritage and history of the United States. In August 2023, Fort Washita was placed in trust for the Chickasaw Nation.

Visitors to Fort Washita can tour restored structures, witness Civil War reenactments and participate in the annual fur trade era rendezvous. At this event, guests can experience what life was like before and during the Civil War. Other events throughout the year include storytelling, outdoor movies and special seasonal and holiday events that the whole family can enjoy.

Materials/Resources:

- Online video: [Arrival in Indian Territory – Fort Washita | Winter Fire S1, E3](#)
- Online video: [Fort Washita Virtual Tour](#)
- Online map: [Indian Territory in 1883](#)
- Fort Washita soldier letters
- Online WPA interviews about Fort Washita ghosts
 - Mrs. M.P. McMinn
 - Richard Morgan

Vocabulary:

Indian Removal Act of 1830	Indian Territory	military post/fort	treaty
National Historic Landmark	mean temperature	provisions	Removal
calico			

Lesson Plan

Engage:

Activity 1: “Meet Fort Washita Through Video”

To introduce Fort Washita to students, the teacher should first share the video, “[Arrival In Indian Territory – Fort Washita | Winter Fire S1, E3](#)” (14:50).

The video will introduce students to the origin, historical place, significance and structure of the fort as well as briefly describe the Treaty with the U.S., Choctaw and Chickasaw of 1837 (Treaty of Doaksville), conflicts the Chickasaw Nation had with other tribal nations and intruders in Indian Territory.

After the video, the teacher should discuss the following questions with students:

1. Why did the Chickasaws leave their historic Homeland? (0:30)
2. What were some things Chickasaws lost by leaving their historic Homeland? (0:45)
3. What kinds of hardships did Chickasaws face upon Removal? (1:20)
4. What issues did Chickasaws have once they relocated? (2:55 – rebuilding, 3:03 – other tribes, 3:43 – issues with the Republic of Texas and intruders)
5. What was the purpose of Fort Washita? (4:44-6:04)
6. Which president visited the fort when it was just a camp? (6:03)
7. When was the fort established? (6:24)
8. What kinds of products were traded at the fort? (6:40)
9. What is their water source? What are the nearby rivers? (7:42)
10. What did the daily lives of the soldiers consist of? (7:58)

Explain:

Activity 2: “Have Water, Will Settle”

In this activity, students will explore the significance of the location of Fort Washita. They will examine a map of Fort Washita and will locate the water sources and settlements nearby.

Students will research other civilizations and identify the necessary resources for a successful human settlement. The following video will provide information about two other civilizations and the importance of water in their development.

After watching the video, the students should complete a three-part Venn diagram comparing and contrasting different water control systems such as irrigation, reservoirs and rainwater collection.

[“Water and Classical Civilizations: Crash Course World History 222”](#)

Explore:

Activity 3: “Chickasaw Clothing”

In this activity, students will analyze historical photos of Chickasaw people from the 1850s. After viewing the provided photographs, students will use the photo analysis document and answer the questions. This activity can also be completed in groups or by the whole class.

After completing the worksheet, have students read the Fort Washita soldier letter dated April 5, 1856, that includes a description of the clothing worn by Chickasaw people living near and visiting Fort Washita.

Teachers can extend this activity by having students compare their clothing to clothing from the 1850s or by having students create their own calico print design.

Activity 4: “Weather Alert!”

In this activity, students will represent weather data collected at Fort Washita in tables and graphs.

The teacher can read and present relevant parts of [History of Weather Observing at Fort Washita, Oklahoma 1842 - 1861](#).

Students can use the data below to create a single bar graph that represents the monthly mean temperature at Fort Washita for 1843. Data for 1848 has been included as well. Seasonal precipitation totals for 1844 and/or 1848 can be used to create a pictograph.

After graphs are completed, teachers should engage with students to discuss patterns and predictions that can be made about the weather at Fort Washita by studying the graphs. Students can be assessed by completed work and discussion engagement.

Data for bar graphs:

1843 monthly mean temperatures (numbers have been rounded to the nearest half degree):

Jan.: 47.5 F	Feb.: 42 F	Mar.: 36.5 F	Apr.: 65 F
May: 70 F	Jun.: 77 F	Jul.: 80 F	Aug.: 77 F

Sep.: 75 F	Oct.: 59 F	Nov.: 52 F	Dec.: 47 F
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1848 monthly mean temperatures (numbers have been rounded to the nearest half degree):

Jan.: 47.5 F	Feb.: 52 F	Mar.: 56 F	Apr.: 58.5 F
May: 75 F	Jun.: 75 F	Jul.: 80 F	Aug.: 81 F
Sep.: 73.5 F	Oct.: 63.5 F	Nov.: 45 F	Dec.: 32 F

Data for pictograph:

Seasonal rain totals in inches for 1844 (numbers have been rounded to nearest half inch):

Spring – 14	Summer – 9	Fall – 8.5	Winter – 5
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Seasonal rain totals in inches for 1848 (numbers have been rounded to nearest half inch):

Spring – 11.5	Summer – 8.5	Fall – 10	Winter – 5.5
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Data from *Army Meteorological Register, for Twelve Year, from 1843 to 1854, Inclusive, Compiled from Observations Made by the Officers of the Medical Department of the Army at the Military Posts of the United States*. Prepared by Brevet Brigadier Gen. Thomas Lawson. Washington, D.C.: A.O.P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1855. [Available online at Internet Archive.]

Extend:

Activity 5: “Writer’s Workshop”

In this activity, students will write a narrative that incorporates setting, plot, characters and characterization. Teachers can choose between letters written by a Fort Washita soldier or Works Progress Administration interviews that mention ghosts at Fort Washita. Teachers may also allow students to choose.

Teachers discuss primary sources and their importance in research. As a class, read and study the letters/interviews and complete the National Archive’s “Analyze a Written Document” worksheet.

Option 1: After reading and studying the letters written by the Fort Washita soldiers, students should write a short story about a day in the life of a Fort Washita soldier.

Option 2: After reading and analyzing the interviews, students will write a ghost story set at Fort Washita.

Activity 6: “That’s all You Get, So Don’t Throw a Fit”

Soldiers at Fort Washita were allocated 8 ounces of bread a day. The teacher should lead students in a discussion as to why this was the rule and the reason for it. Students should also discuss how they would feel if this rule was applied to them.

In this lesson, students will engage in a hands-on cooking activity that will allow them to visualize the daily necessity of making bread and butter at Fort Washita.

Ingredients for butter:

- 1 pint heavy whipping cream
- Large bowl of ice water
- Salt to taste (optional)
- Stand mixer, hand mixer, blender or jar with a tight-fitting lid

Ingredients for hardtack bread: BreadDad.com/Hardtack-Recipe/

After making the bread and butter, the teacher should engage students in a discussion as to the daily difficulties that might be encountered by the inhabitants of Fort Washita.

Evaluate:

Teachers will use informal observations to assess students' products, performances during activities and their understanding of concepts. For example, teachers may observe students, listen to the conversations students are having and examine their finished products.

Questions for Discussion and Assessment

1. What is the significance of Fort Washita?
2. Why was this a good location to establish a fort?
3. What were the living conditions of the soldiers?
4. How was Fort Washita used before and during the Civil War?

Additional resources teachers may find useful:

- Chickasaw.tv
- Oklahoma Historical Society (OKHistory.org)
- Chickasaw Nation Curriculum (Chickasaw.net/Curriculum)
- U.S. National Archives Document Analysis Worksheets (Archives.gov/Education/Lessons/Worksheets)
- U.S. Library of Congress Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tool for Primary Source Analysis (Loc.gov/Programs/Teachers/Getting-Started-With-Primary-Sources/Guides/)

Alignment to the Oklahoma Academic Standards for the Social Studies

Grades 3-4 Content Standards

- 3.1.2.** Explain that tribal governments in Oklahoma have a right to self-government, known as sovereignty.
- 3.3.1.** Understand and describe the relationship between historic events and chronology through the creation of basic timelines.
- 3.3.2.** Read and interpret primary sources related to key events in Oklahoma's past.
- 3.3.4.** Identify cultural similarities and differences of the existing sovereign tribal nations in Oklahoma, especially those near the tribal community.
- 3.3.6.** Describe the migrations, settlements, relocations and forced removals of First Americans.
- 4.1.1.** Describe the concepts of democracy and representative government, including the rule of law, equality, the common good and individual rights.
- 4.1.1.B.** Understand the necessity of respect for diversity of the individual and diversity of groups comprising American society.
- 4.1.2.** Describe the concept of federalism by comparing powers exercised by the local, state and national levels of governments, recognizing tribal sovereignty as a tribal nation's inherent right to self-govern.
- 4.3.1.B** Identify major First American groups and their ways of life in each region, including economic activities, customs and viewpoints on land usage and ownership.

Social Studies Practices

- 3.A.2-3.1** Explain the difference between a primary and secondary source of information and gather basic information from such sources.
- 3.A.2-3.6** Explain and give examples of how individuals and groups have shaped significant historical changes in the community and state.
- 3.B.2-3.2** Create and use maps, graphs and other simple geographic models to describe the physical and human features of the community and state.
- 3.B.2-3.4** Identify and describe how humans modify and adapt to their physical environment, using its natural and human resources.
- 3.B.2-3.5** Describe how the physical environment impacts our daily lives and affects human activities in the past and present.
- 4.A.2-3.3** Acquire new academic vocabulary; relate new words to prior knowledge and apply vocabulary in social studies.
- 4.B.2-3.1** Identify the author's purpose, including what the author wants to answer, explain or describe in primary and secondary informational texts.
- 4.B.2-3.2** Locate facts (e.g., who, what, where, when, why and how) to demonstrate an understanding of key details in a text.

4.B.2-3.3 Ask and answer questions to clarify information and engage in collaborative discussions about appropriate topics in social studies.

5.A.2-3.3 Express an opinion about a topic by composing a written product and providing logical reasons as support.

Alignment to the Oklahoma Academic Standards for Science

Grades 3-4 Content Standards

3.ESS2.1 Represent data in tables and graphical displays to describe typical weather conditions expected during a particular season.

Have you used this lesson plan in your classroom or have feedback? We would love to know!

Please email us at HistoryInquiries@Chickasaw.net.