



**The Chickasaw Nation**  
*Secondary Student Curriculum*

**Unit 3: Lesson 2**

**Overton James and the Chickasaw Constitution  
(Teacher Edition)**

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## Overview

*Chokma* (Hello),

Thank you for your interest in the Chickasaw Nation Student Curriculum. We are pleased to offer this curriculum that explores our deep history, culture and traditions. Started in 2010 with the development of the Chickasaw Cultural Center, the curricula are designed to inform and educate individuals about the dynamic history of our Chickasaw leaders, monumental events and culture. Chickasaw historians, researchers, archaeologists and other educators, as well as tribal elders, have worked tirelessly to develop this curriculum to share our story.

We are excited to offer Unit 3. Each lesson focuses on a specific event and/or individual throughout the Chickasaw Nation's history and is complete with its own lesson plan, reading material, discussion questions, student activity, student quiz and reference list for convenience. All provided materials have been reviewed and approved by the Chickasaw Nation Department of Culture & Humanities and the Chickasaw Nation Department of Communications & Community Development.

The Chickasaw Nation would like to thank you for your support. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Cooke, special assistant to the secretary of the Chickasaw Nation Department of Culture & Humanities, at (580) 436-7258 or [michelle.cooke@chickasaw.net](mailto:michelle.cooke@chickasaw.net).

*The following Oklahoma Academic Standards, as outlined in the Oklahoma State Department of Education's 2014 Social Studies guide, are to be used only as a basic guide. Other standards may be applicable that could be based on a teacher's own interpretation of the lesson material or ability/need to make a conceptual connection:*

### Grades 9-12

- ✓ **Oklahoma History and Government: *The Foundation, Formation and Transformation of Oklahoma*, Content Standard 3.1:** Compare and contrast the development of governments among the Native American tribes, the movement for the state of Sequoyah, the proposal for an all-Black state and the impact of the *Enabling Act* on single statehood.

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- ✓ **United States Government: *Freedom for All: Securing Rights and Defining Responsibilities*, Content Standard 3.4:** Summarize and explain the relationships and the responsibilities between national and state governments including tribal and local governments.
- ✓ **Oklahoma History and Government: *The Foundation, Formation and Transformation of Oklahoma*, Content Standard 5.5:** Analyze the evolving relationship between state and tribal governments impacting tribal self-determination and control over Native American lands and resources including issues of joint jurisdiction, taxation, and gaming.

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## Lesson Plan

Oklahoma Academic Standards: Grades 9-12

- ✓ **Oklahoma History and Government: *The Foundation, Formation and Transformation of Oklahoma*, Content Standard 3.1.**
- ✓ **United States Government: *Freedom for All: Securing Rights and Defining Responsibilities*, Content Standard 3.4.**
- ✓ **Oklahoma History and Government: *The Foundation, Formation and Transformation of Oklahoma*, Content Standard 5.5.**

### INTRODUCTION

*Note: The following is a suggested script for you, the teacher, to reference while discussing this lesson plan. Based on a number of factors, such as your students' ages or maturity levels, you may choose to deviate from the script as appropriate.*

“Government is an important part of our American society. Do you recall the branches of the U.S. government? [*Pause for responses.*] That’s right! There are three: the executive, the judicial and the legislative branches, and each one serves a specific purpose to keep our country functioning as a democratic society. The executive branch consists of our president, vice president and cabinet; the legislative is the Congress, Senate and House of Representatives; and the judicial is the Supreme Court and federal courts.

“Federally recognized tribes in the United States are unique because the United States Constitution recognizes them as sovereign governments. What do you think sovereignty means, and how would this be beneficial for a federal tribe? [*The teacher may wish to explain sovereignty. Sovereignty is defined as the right to self-govern. Responses from the class will vary.*]

“Those are all good responses. There were tribes living in North America that were independent political communities before explorers ever arrived. In fact, when the colonists decided to establish their independence from the British Empire, they were heavily influenced by some tribal ideas on democracy, governmental structure and

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individual rights. Can you think of any Constitutional concepts that may have been based on tribal ideas? [*The students may or may not be familiar with the Iroquois Confederacy or their Great Law of Peace. If they are not, a brief overview may be beneficial for the class. For more information on the Iroquois Confederacy visit: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Iroquois-Confederacy>*]

“When the Chickasaws were forced to leave their Homeland in 1837, they traveled to Indian Territory (which is now Oklahoma). They decided that a restructured form of government had become necessary, so their Council met to develop their own Constitution. Let’s look at the important role one of their governors played in history and how sovereignty has been influential in the development of their tribal government.”

#### OBJECTIVES

1. The students will read the reference material out loud.
2. The students will interact with the reading by answering discussion questions.
3. The students will complete the student activity and quiz.

#### READING PROCEDURE

The teacher will read the first paragraph of the material out loud to the students. Then the teacher will ask students to take turns reading each paragraph.

*If the students are uncomfortable with oral reading, the teacher may wish to consider reading the entire passage to model good reading habits. For students who already display great comfort with oral reading, the teacher may wish to have the students read the entire passage. Teachers should feel free to stop the reading and pose knowledge questions about the text—e.g., asking students to define words or explain more. Similarly, the discussion questions may be answered in discussion, as intended, or the teacher may use them to make a free response worksheet for the students.*

#### MATERIALS

1. Reading text (provided)
2. Discussion questions (provided)
3. Quiz (provided)

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#### EVALUATION

The teacher will grade students based on some combination of the following: oral reading, participation in discussion and any comments made that the teacher considers particularly insightful. These grades may be evaluative or for completion, at the teacher's discretion.

#### ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

- a. The teacher will introduce the activity to the students: "Now that you have learned a little about the Chickasaw government, here is a cryptogram for you to solve." The student activity can be used as an individual activity or the students can work together, at the teacher's discretion.
- b. The teacher will supervise the students as they complete the cryptogram.
- c. At the end of the period, the teacher will ask the students to share their solutions to the cryptogram, and students will have the opportunity to explain where this quote came from and why it is important.

#### MATERIALS

1. Cryptogram (provided)
2. Pencils/pens

#### EVALUATION

The teacher may grade students' activities based on correctness or for completion, at the teacher's discretion.

#### CLOSURE

"So, what have we learned today? Government is an important part of our democratic society, and federally recognized tribes in the United States are sovereign and have the right to determine their own government structures. They can even pass laws and enforce them through tribal constitutions, laws, police and courts.

"Governor Overton James was the first elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation after Oklahoma became a state, and he accomplished many goals while he was in office. What do you think were some of the most important achievements that occurred during

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his tenure? [*Allow time for various responses and expect students to elaborate.*] Good job! All of those responses are correct. Tribal leadership and governmental structure is vital to the Chickasaw Nation, just like it is to the United States. Great leaders can make great changes!”



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#### Reference Material

Tribal leadership has always been an essential part of Chickasaw history, and it has adapted to the ever-changing needs of the tribe over time. Since first contact with the Europeans, the Chickasaw's traditional governmental structure of clan systems had been shifting. By the time of Removal in 1837, the Chickasaw people had developed, and were operating under, a code of written laws. However, these laws changed when the Chickasaw Nation became a district in the Choctaw Nation in Indian Territory, where they had to follow the Choctaw Nation's laws. Unhappy with this arrangement, Chickasaw leadership campaigned for separation. This was granted with the signing of the Treaty of 1855.

In 1856, the Chickasaw people gathered at Good Spring (known today as Tishomingo, Oklahoma) on Pennington Creek to draft their own constitution. It provided for a three-branch system of government—executive, legislative and judicial. With minor changes over the years, this document served the Chickasaw people well until its dissolution in 1906 in preparation for Oklahoma statehood. From 1906 until 1971, through federal legislation, U.S. presidents appointed Chickasaw Nation governors. These governors were charged with the oversight of tribal land and the closing out of remaining business interests.



Figure 1: Gov. James being sworn in at Seeley Chapel in October of 1963

More than 100 Chickasaws gathered at Seeley Chapel, a small church outside of Tishomingo, Oklahoma, in October of 1960 in an effort to re-establish control of tribal government. Soon, Seeley Chapel became a meeting place for Chickasaws to gather, discuss their political future and share their culture through language, food and song. It is only fitting that when President John Kennedy appointed Overton James governor of the

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Chickasaw Nation in 1963 he take his oath of office there, at Seeley Chapel, where the grassroots movement had begun.



Figure 2: The Chickasaw Motor Inn in Sulphur, Oklahoma.

Through the self-determination policies of the Nixon administration, the Chickasaws could once again hold official tribal elections. President Nixon believed that the federal government needed to recognize the capacities and insights of American Indians. After much debate, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975.

In 1971, Overton James became the first elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation since Oklahoma statehood in 1907. This was

a crucial time period for the Chickasaw people, and his leadership was vital to the political and cultural resurgence that continues to transform the Chickasaw Nation today. When James became governor, he was the tribe's only employee, and the tribe did not have any of the programs or services that is offered to their citizens today. But that was all about to change.

Governor James lobbied the Indian Health Service (IHS) and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Carl Albert for better health care, and in 1968, IHS opened a clinic in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, the first health care facility of any kind in the Chickasaw Nation. In 1972, he was instrumental in the purchase of what was then known as the Artesian Hotel. Renamed the Chickasaw Motor Inn, it was the first tribal business owned and operated by the tribe. With appropriate renovations and a new business plan, the Motor Inn quickly became a profit-making venture for the Chickasaw Nation, earning approximately \$100,000 for the tribe in its first year of operation. In the course of his tenure as elected governor, the number of tribal employees grew from about 30 to nearly 200, and tribal revenues increased from \$750,000 in 1963 to approximately \$11 million in 1987.

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During Gov. James' administration, the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations began work with Cherokee colleagues to pursue legal rights to the Arkansas riverbed—rights which extended to revenues derived from oil and gas development of those lands. That struggle culminated in a U.S. Supreme Court victory in 1970 and—after three more decades of negotiation—a congressionally approved trust settlement.

Gov. James combined service to his own tribe with service to all American Indians. He served five terms as president of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes. He also served as president of the Choctaw-Chickasaw Confederation, chairman of the State Indian Affairs Commission and trustee of the National Indian Athletic Hall of Fame. Additionally, he was a member of the Indian Education Subcommittee of the National Council on Indian Opportunity and a member of the National Congress of American Indians.

During Overton James' time in office, a draft of a new constitution began to be developed in 1979 based on the 1856 constitution. In the four years that followed, tribal officials worked tirelessly to revise, update and formulate a constitution to fit the needs of a modern Chickasaw society. This was accomplished with the ratification of an official tribal constitution in August of 1983. Like the original document, the new constitution established a three-branch system of government. The executive department, which is the governor and lieutenant governor; a legislature, which is comprised of 13 people called legislators; and a judicial department, which is comprised of a supreme court and a district court.

The new constitution did, however, include seven fundamental differences. These were: the length of the governor's term, term limits for elected and appointed positions, the creation of the position of lieutenant governor, if salaries should be set by the legislature or governor, blood quantum requirements for the executive department, the location of the seat of government and the election of tribal judges. With the implementation of the new constitution, Chickasaw sovereignty was taken to a higher level, and the tribe continues to be self-governed today.

Overton James served as governor of the Chickasaw Nation from 1963 to 1987. He passed away on September 16, 2015 at the age of 90. He was the youngest man to

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serve as governor of the tribe, the first person inducted into the Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame, and he left an amazing legacy of Chickasaw history behind. The resounding “I bring you greetings from the great unconquered and unconquerable Chickasaw Nation” was his standard greeting at speeches and gatherings. This quote became a traditional greeting and continues to be used to this day.

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#### Discussion Questions

1. What impact did the Nixon administration have on the Chickasaw Nation? Be specific.

***Sample answer:** Through the self-determination policies of the Nixon administration, the Chickasaws could once again hold official tribal elections. President Richard Nixon believed that the federal government needed to recognize the capacities and insights of American Indians. After much debate, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975.*

2. Why do you think it was important for the 1856 version of the Chickasaw Constitution to be revised? List some reasons this revision might have been necessary.

***Sample answer:** The old Constitution was becoming outdated. The new one had seven fundamental differences. These were: the length of the governor's term, term limits for elected and appointed positions, whether to have a lieutenant governor and if salaries should be set by the legislature or governor, blood quantum requirements for the executive department, the location of the seat of government and the election of tribal judges.*

3. In the lesson, we discussed several tribal and governmental groups. Name some of them, and discuss what they are or were important. (This may take additional research.)

***Sample answer:** Some of the groups listed in the lesson are: Indian Health Service (IHS), Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, State Indian Affairs Commission, Indian Education Subcommittee of the National Council on Indian Opportunity and the National Congress of American Indians. It is up to the teacher if students should research these topics further.*

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4. Discuss the growth of the Chickasaw Nation during Gov. James' time in office. Examine areas such as tribal employment, revenues and anything else you feel is relevant.

*Sample answer: Gov. James was the only employee of the tribe at first. He helped open a health care center in Tishomingo, Oklahoma for tribal members. He also helped open the Motor Inn which was the first business the tribe owned. Students could discuss the amount of money the tribe made through the Motor Inn, or they could discuss employee growth.*

5. Why do you think it was important that the United States allow tribes to elect their own leaders as opposed to them being appointed by the President of the United States?

*Sample answer: Tribal sovereignty allows for self-government. This means tribes can elect their own leaders through their own democratic system which allows them to continue self-determination.*

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### Student Activity

Solve the cryptogram by discovering which letters in the table are represented by the letters below the lines. W and C have been given to you.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
		W	C																						

" \_\_\_\_\_  
 G N T G J V F D A V T Y Y S G J V Z R T D M  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 S K Y V T Y X S A J W D J L A Y T Y C X J C  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 C C C  
 A J W D J L A Y T X N O Y W K G W H X Z X P J X S G D  
 " \_\_\_\_\_  
 J P X Z V D I Y T J D T E X M Y Z Z S X J C X T C  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 C D  
 V T Y Y S G J V X S Z U Y Y W K Y Z X J C  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 W X S K Y T G J V Z

Created by [Puzzlemaker](http://Puzzlemaker) at [DiscoveryEducation.com](http://DiscoveryEducation.com)

*The solution to the cryptogram is: "I bring you greetings from the great unconquered and unconquerable Chickasaw Nation" was Gov. James' standard greeting at speeches and gatherings.*

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#### Student Quiz

1. What did the Treaty of 1855 do?
  - a. It authorized the removal of the Chickasaws from their Homeland.
  - b. It granted the Chickasaws a formal separation from the Choctaws.
  - c. It established Ft. Cobb.
  - d. It made it illegal for Native Americans to have tribal governors.
2. What document was drafted at Good Spring on Pennington Creek?
  - a. There was no document, it was a tribal gathering
  - b. The Indian Health Services Act
  - c. The Treaty of 1855
  - d. The Chickasaw Constitution of 1856
3. Between 1906 and 1971 who had the authority to appoint Chickasaw governors?
  - a. The President of the United States.
  - b. The Chickasaw people.
  - c. The Choctaw people.
  - d. The Oklahoma people after statehood.
4. Which president appointed Governor James?
  - a. Kennedy
  - b. Nixon
  - c. Albert
  - d. Regan
5. Who was the first person inducted into the Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame?
  - a. *Tishominko*
  - b. Overton James
  - c. Carl Albert
  - d. Richard Nixon
6. What tribal nation did the Chickasaws reside amongst after their Removal?
  - a. Choctaw
  - b. Shawnee
  - c. Kiowa
  - d. Cherokee



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7. What is Good Spring known as today?
  - a. Ada, Oklahoma
  - b. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
  - c. Pennington, Oklahoma
  - d. Tishomingo, Oklahoma
  
8. What year did Overton James become the first elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation since Oklahoma statehood?
  - a. 1971
  - b. 1963
  - c. 1907
  - d. 1968
  
9. What was the name of the first business the Chickasaw Nation owned and operated in Oklahoma?
  - a. The Chickasaw Cultural Center
  - b. Council House Museum
  - c. Chickasaw Motor Inn
  - d. Bedré Chocolates
  
10. What important piece of law was rewritten while Gov. James was in office?
  - a. The United States Constitution
  - b. The Chickasaw Constitution
  - c. There were no laws rewritten during this time.
  - d. Women were given the right to vote.

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#### Reference List

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