

Trails and Interstates: Pathways toward *Progress*?

Using contemporary examples to understand the historical consequences of land development and the forced relocation of Native tribes



Presented by
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Conference Presentation

I. Introduction

II. Purpose

To introduce teachers to a creative strategy for effectively integrating geographic concepts/skills into their existing World History and United States History lessons.

III. Objectives

Teachers will . . .

- Use cardinal directions and street names to locate places on a map of a Michigan community.
- List 10 potential consequences of a land development project.
- Take a position regarding the development project and defend their position using three arguments borrowed from their list of potential consequences.
- Describe similarities between (1) the circumstances surrounding the proposed road construction project and (2) significant events/developments in the history of the United States and the world.

IV. Procedure

1. Locate private homes, businesses, and landmarks using a map of a Michigan community.
2. Describe the details of a proposed road construction project that will directly affect the spotlighted Michigan community.
3. List and discuss potential positive and negative consequences of the proposed project.
4. Highlight similarities between the circumstances and consequences of this contemporary construction project and a significant development/event in history.

V. Closure

Audience questions, comments, and suggestions.

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Using contemporary examples to understand the historical consequences of land development and the forced relocation of Native tribes

Presenter: Amy Perkins
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Grade Level: Middle School and High School

Grade Level Curriculum Expectations

- K1.6 Analyze event and circumstances from diverse perspectives
- P1.2 Analyze point of view, context, and bias to interpret primary and secondary sources
- P1.3 Understand that diversity of interpretation arises from frame of reference
- P3.2 Deeply examine policy issues in group discussions and debates to make reasoned informed decisions
- V2.1 Distinguish value judgments in historical and geographic information, weigh evidence, synthesize information, apply knowledge, make judgments, formulate generalizations and draw conclusions

Lesson Overview

Using a road map and Google Earth, students will (1) list, analyze and debate the positive and negative consequences of a prospective road construction project in their local area, (2) collectively determine if the proposed project is a worthwhile endeavor given its expected consequences and (3) identify and examine a similar historical situation in which a minority group was forcefully relocated to benefit (financially, politically, or otherwise) a larger, dominant community.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify at least 10 consequences (environmental, economic, etc.) of land development as it relates to a contemporary situation
- Identify historical reasons for disputes involving land development/usage
- Locate local landmarks, businesses, residences using cardinal directions and cross streets
- Use prior knowledge and historical evidence to determine if they would support or oppose a legislative proposal

Materials

Map of local area using MapQuest

Google Earth

Descriptions of key concepts: Eminent domain, Trail of Tears

Student worksheets: (a) Caution: Construction Zone, (b) Indian Removal Act, and (c) In the Name of Progress

Physical map of the United States

National Geographic map of “Indian Country”

Lesson Overview

Students will list, analyze and debate the positive and negative consequences of a prospective road construction project in their local. They will examine reasons why the forced relocation/demolition of a few residences, businesses, and other landmarks may anger a few people while promising economic growth and prosperity to the larger community. Secondly, they will review their list of consequences and determine if they would support the proposed road construction project. Thirdly, students will identify and examine similar historical situations in which a minority group has been forcefully relocated to benefit (financially, politically, or otherwise) a larger, dominant community. Finally, students will discuss the larger question of “progress”: How do we justify certain sacrifices in the name of progress? Are there some historical sacrifices that are only justifiable from the perspective of the dominant group?

Procedure for Activity

1. Project map of a local area onto large screen/wall at the front of the classroom. Make sure your map (A) includes the names of major streets and cardinal directions and (B) spotlights a residential area located near an existing interstate.
2. Ask students to identify the roads featured in the map and the buildings (churches, businesses, etc) and landmarks (e.g. cemeteries, parks, etc.) that are located within the area included on the map.
3. Ask students if their homes or the homes of their relatives are located within the area featured on the map. Have students draw an “X” at the approximate location of their houses or the houses of their relatives.
4. After students have finished marking the location of their families’ homes, draw a box that represents a ½ mile square section that surrounds the interstate and includes a residential community.
5. Describe the “road construction project” that is being considered by the state legislature.
 - *Construction of additional on/off ramps to connect the existing interstate with the local area.*
 - *Construction of ramps will necessitate the destruction of buildings located within the ½ mile square section.*
 - *Discuss eminent domain and how the government can use this power to gain possession of the land needed to construct the on/off ramps.*
6. Use satellite imagery from Google Earth to illustrate the area and buildings that will be affected by the proposed construction project.
7. Divide students into small groups (approximately 4-5 students per group). Within small groups, students should complete the worksheet, “Weighing the Pros and Cons of Ramp Construction.” Students will need 15-20 minutes, depending on skill level, to complete the worksheet.
8. After every group has completed the worksheet, facilitate a class discussion of students’ list of consequences and their groups’ positions regarding the construction project.
9. Revelation: After students have collectively reviewed the pros and cons of the construction project and have discussed at length their reasons for supporting/opposing the proposal, explain that the “proposed construction project” is not under consideration in the state legislature. In fact, the project was fabricated purely for the purposes of this class.

10. Ask the students to describe similar *historical* situations discussed recently in class in which a minority group of people was forcefully relocated for the [financial, political] benefit of a dominant majority. If this lesson is presented within the context of a unit on the Trail of Tears, students should be able to make comparisons between the Natives' experiences and the likely experiences of the residents living near the site of the proposed construction project.

11. Distribute "Indian Removal Act" article, a physical map of the United States, and "In the Name of Progress" worksheet to students. Depending on the time limitations of the class, this assignment may need to be completed as homework and discussed the next day.

12. As a class, discuss students' individual responses to the questions detailed on the "In the Name of Progress" worksheet. Focus on the following fundamental themes:

- *What are the similarities between the possible fate of local residents who live within the proposed construction zone and the documented fates of the Native Americans who were forcefully relocated in the 1830s? What are the differences?*
- *How have dominant groups throughout history used the "promise of progress" as justification for the forced relocation of minority groups or the confiscation of inhabited lands.*
- *Who ultimately decides if a particular action is "progressive" or "regressive"?*
- *How has the location of key natural resources led to heated land disputes between/among diverse human populations?*

Assessment

Students' lists of positive and negative consequences of the proposed road construction project and their "In the Name of Progress" question sheet can be collected and graded for assessment.

Ideas for lesson extensions:

Students research the specific resources available in the region originally occupied by the Cherokee Nation. Examine how and to what extent Native Americans utilized these resources. Compare and contrast Natives' use of resources with the white settlers' use of the land.

Local history: Research the native tribes that once occupied the lands within/surrounding the school district. Which European nations ultimately settled in the area, why were they interested in the land, and how did they gain possession of the land?

Invite a leader of a local Native American tribe to meet with the students and discuss forced relocations and the current status of natives' relationship with the U.S. government.

Examine why Andrew Jackson and white settlers thought that Indian removal was a necessary part of westward expansion. How did "Manifest Destiny" provide a justification (in the minds of many U.S. citizens) for the forced relocation of Native Americans?

References

Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (1993).

John Ehle, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (1988).

William L. Anderson, *Cherokee Removal: Before and After* (1992).

Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal* (1982)

Caution: Construction Zone

Weighing the Pros and Cons of the Proposed Project

Group Members: _____

A. Using prior knowledge from class discussions and lived experiences list and describe at least 10 possible consequences of the proposed road construction project.

Positive Consequences

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Negative Consequences

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

B. Within your small group review and discuss the possible consequences you listed in the columns above and decide if you would support or oppose the proposed road construction policy.

C. Paragraph Response: Using the lines below, identify your group's position as it relates to the construction project and describe three main reasons why your group chose to support/oppose the project.

Indian Removal Act

In 1830 President Andrew Jackson successfully persuaded the U.S. Congress to pass the Indian Removal Act, a law that necessitated the relocation of native tribes from the Southeast to the Southwest. President Andrew Jackson was convinced that this action was the only solution to the Indian 'problem' (i.e. persistent conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers). His proposed plan proved consequential, even fatal for the Cherokee people.

In the early nineteenth century the Cherokees lived on the Georgia-Tennessee border. They were the richest and most advanced of all Indian tribes in North America. They were productive farmers, cultivating 40,000 acres of crops, while caring for 22,000 cattle and 7200 horses. They also owned several African/African-American slaves who operated the natives' ten sawmills. The Cherokee lived in log homes and frame houses, established the first Indian alphabet, read books, published their own newspaper, and abided by their nation's constitution. Obviously, the Cherokee people were not the "savages" described by many white settlers. In fact, the Cherokee people were highly civilized and their communities exhibited some of the same attributes characteristic of white settlements.

The Cherokees endeavored to coexist peacefully with their white neighbors, but their attempts to avoid violence were frustrated by white settlers' desire to expand westward. Inspired by the rhetoric of "Manifest Destiny," U.S. citizens set out to gain possession of the land and resources west of the Atlantic seaboard. The Cherokee occupied a region located along the western boundary of United States and a territory rich with natural resources, especially fertile soil and gold mines. White settlers, recognizing the financial potential of the natives' land, attempted to take possession of the region. The Cherokees resisted in a novel way: they took their case to the United States Supreme Court. That Court declared in 1831 that the Cherokee were a people of a 'domestic, dependant nation' and that the state of Georgia had no right to extend its laws over them. The Indians had won their case, but enforcing the decision was another story entirely.

In 1835, 500 Cherokees were pressured into signing a treaty that sold all of their lands for just five million dollars plus an entitlement of seven million acres out west. The 500 who had signed the treaty were not chiefs and had no authority to sign for the people. The Cherokee people immediately circulated a petition repudiating the treaty. But President Jackson ignored the petition. He set a deadline for the complete removal of the Cherokee – May 23rd, 1838. Many of the army top brass sent in to enforce the decision were ashamed of the whole affair. General John Wool stated that the only good involved in the removal of the Cherokees would be that it would get the Indians 'beyond the reaches of the white men who, like vultures, are watching, ready to pounce on their prey and strip them of everything they have.'

General Winfield Scott told his 7000 men, who were to act as escorts, to show every kindness to the 16,000 Cherokees. Scott vowed that any injury done to a Cherokee would be dealt with swiftly. Although Jackson wanted the Cherokees quickly removed, General Scott waited until the weather was more conducive to travel. Over the summer the Cherokees were forced off their land and penned up in prison camps. The crowded, unsanitary conditions of the prison camps enabled the spread of deadly diseases, including dysentary and fevers. Finally, in the fall of 1838, the Cherokees began their tumultuous trek to Oklahoma, a thousand mile journey across inhospitable terrain. Ultimately, an estimated 4,000 Cherokees died on the path that was later appropriately named, "The Trail of Tears."

Note: The Cherokees had been preceded to Oklahoma by the Choctaws, the Creeks and the Chickasaws. The Seminoles were not so willing to be uprooted, however. It took two wars to get them to follow their neighboring tribes in the drive west.

In the Name of *Progress*?

Student name: _____

Read the article, “Indian Removal Act.” Use the article to answer questions #1-3. Use the National Geographic “Indian Country” map to answer questions, and the physical map of the United States to answer the questions.

1. Describe the ways in which the Cherokee Nation utilized the land they occupied in the southeast region of North America.

2. Why did the white settlers want possession of Native lands in the Southeast?

3. Why were the Cherokee Indians reluctant to leave their land?

4. Review the construction project discussed in class. What are the similarities between the Cherokees’ attachment to their land and the local residents’ attachment to their homes/property?

5. Using the National Geographic map of “Indian Country” and the physical map of the United States, locate the region originally occupied by the Cherokee and the territory “reserved” for them in Oklahoma.

A. *The Cherokees’ homeland included which present-day states?* _____

B. *This fort marked the end point for the “Trail of Tears.”* _____

C. *Compare and contrast the physical features of the two regions. Why would the planting and harvesting of corn be difficult for the relocated Cherokees?*

6. Propose a different plan of action in the case of the Cherokee nation: In your opinion, what could the US government have done to resolve its land dispute with the Natives more peacefully and cooperatively?

7. What are some other examples from U.S History and World History in which powerful groups/nations/leaders have, in an attempt to gain access to valuable natural resources, invaded a region and conquered or forcefully removed the local residents?

In the Name of *Progress*? (KEY)

Read the article, “Indian Removal Act.” Use the article to answer questions #1-3. Use the National Geographic “Indian Country” map to answer questions, and the physical map of the United States to answer the questions.

1. Describe the ways in which the Cherokee Nation utilized the land they occupied in the southwest region of North America.

- *Extensive farming (40,000 acres), grazing, domestication of animals*
- *Construction and operation of sawmills*
- *Construction of log homes and frame houses*

2. Why did the white settlers want possession of Native lands in the Southwest?

- *Westward expansion*
- *Fertile soil for farming*
- *Access to gold mines*

3. Why were the Cherokee Indians reluctant to leave their land?

- *Sentimental attachment to the land*
- *Familiarity with homeland; lack of knowledge about Oklahoma*
- *Investment in homeland: sawmills, crops, homes, etc.*

4. What are the similarities between the Cherokees’ attachment to their land and the local residents (reference construction project discussed in class) attachment to their homes/property?

Students’ answers will vary.

5. Using the National Geographic “Indian Country” map and physical map of the United States, locate the region originally occupied by the Cherokee and the territory “reserved” for them in Oklahoma.

A. *The Cherokees’ homeland included which present-day states? __Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama_____*

B. *This fort marked the end point for the “Trail of Tears.” __Fort Gibson_____*

C. *Compare and contrast the physical features of the two regions. Why would the planting and harvesting of corn be difficult for the relocated Cherokees?*

_____Oklahoma receives only 20-40 inches of rainfall annually (the Southeast receives 40-80 inches of rainfall annually) and its climate is more conducive to growing grain and cotton_____

6. Propose a different plan of action in the case of the Cherokee nation: In your opinion, what could the US government have done to resolve its land dispute with the Natives more peacefully and cooperatively?

Students’ answers will vary.

7. What are some other examples from U.S History and World History in which powerful groups/nations/leaders have, in an attempt to gain access to valuable natural resources, invaded a region and conquered or forcefully removed the local residents?

Students’ answers will vary.