

NATIVE AMERICAN FOODWAYS



Newspapers for this educational program provided by:



AMERICAN INDIAN
CULTURAL CENTER & MUSEUM

A project of the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority



the
**Chickasaw
Nation**

The American Indian Cultural Center and Museum (AICCM) is honored to present, in partnership with Newspapers In Education at *The Oklahoman*, the Native American Heritage educational workbook. The Native American Heritage educational programs focus on the cultures, histories and governments of the American Indian tribes of Oklahoma. The programs are published twice a year, around November and April. Each workbook is organized into four core thematic areas: Origins, Native Knowledge, Community and Governance. Because it is impossible to cover every aspect of the topics featured in each edition, we hope the workbooks will comprehensively introduce students to a variety of new subjects and ideas. We hope you will be inspired to research and find out more information with the help of your teachers and parents as well as through your own independent research.

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- Choctaw Nation
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- Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes
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- Tom Fields, Muscogee Creek/Cherokee
- Lee Bement, Oklahoma Archaeological Survey



Yakoke! (Thank you!)
Gena Timberman, Executive Director
Native American Cultural and Educational Authority



Painting of a Choctaw dinner called "Dinner on the Ground"
Painting by Norma Howard, Choctaw and Chickasaw

About the cover art: The title of the painting on the cover is "Act, Don't React." The seedling is a sunflower, which Cherokee artist America Meredith chose because it is indigenous to the Americas and cultivated for food and fuel from ancient times onward. This painting is part of a series called "The Plants Are Our Allies."

Halito! The Native American Cultural and Educational Authority (NACEA) was created to build an American Indian Cultural Center and Museum (AICCM) to serve as a living center for cultural expression promoting awareness and understanding for all people regarding Oklahoma's American Indian cultures and heritage. We have a goal to bring people together to share in learning about Oklahoma's history and culture. Although the AICCM is currently under construction at the intersection of Interstates 35 and 40 in Oklahoma City, we had the unique opportunity, in developing this supplement, to share in Cultural Center experiences by attending community gatherings and exploring culture, tradition and history through food. The AICCM would like thank the tribes, individuals and communities that have welcomed us to share with them the food, stories and fun in producing this supplement. We have enjoyed this special opportunity to learn more about Oklahoma's diverse American Indian cultures through something important and enjoyable to all people - food!

Understanding Native American foodways is vital to understanding our rich cultures and promoting the health and wellness of our communities. We hope you will be motivated to explore Oklahoma's cultures by trying new foods and meeting the people who do so much to keep the traditions relative to Native American foodways alive.



Theme Introduction

Food is a necessity that we all need to survive. Healthy food gives us the nutrition and energy we need to play, to work and to think – but have you ever thought about the other roles food plays in everyday life? Think about gathering at a relative's house for Thanksgiving, blowing out the candles on a birthday cake, or enjoying a backyard barbeque on the fourth of July. It is hard to imagine these events without the foods that are traditionally present – the turkey and stuffing, the cake and ice cream, or the ribs and potato salad. These traditions are known as foodways. Sometimes during these experiences, unique utensils are used, special words are said, or perhaps a dance or song is even included. These practices are known as foodways. Foodways is a term that defines the food-related practices and beliefs of a people that share a common heritage.

One of the best ways to learn about another culture and its traditions is through its food! This edition will feed you valuable information about Oklahoma's diverse American Indian cultures through their unique foodways. From the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes' great roaming buffalo herds to the bountiful gardens of the Chickasaw Nation horticulture programs, you will learn how Oklahoma's tribal peoples' understanding of food goes far beyond simply enjoying a meal; it is a complex and integral part of their culture.

Notice the banner across the top of the pages; the words mean "Let's eat!" in Oklahoma's Native languages. For many tribes, the phrase "let's eat" means far more than just eating a meal; it is an invitation to share in camaraderie, to share stories with one another and to give thanks for the meal. So now let's get started – Hompvksci! ("Let's eat!")

Note: We encourage you and your family to visit the locations and events featured in this workbook – experience Oklahoma's foodways firsthand. You, too, can have an authentic experience and get a taste of Oklahoma's Native cultures!

Native foods are often shared at community gatherings such as this Muscogee Creek family reunion.
Photo by Tom Fields



Creek woman prepares food using traditional cooking methods.
Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society

Origins

Since the end of the last ice age 15,000 years ago, Native people have been cultivating and engineering plants to create “super foods” that are rich enough in nutritional value to sustain large populations. These “super foods” supported large Native communities that over time grew into some of history’s greatest civilizations.

When Columbus arrived on the coast of Hispaniola (now Haiti), he thought he had found a more efficient route to India, when in fact he found the key to unlocking many of the world’s hidden foods potential. As European explorers continued their exploration of the Americas over the next 200 years, they continued to return to their homelands with caches of foods and cooking techniques from the places and cultures they had visited. This revolutionized world cuisines forever. Foods like chili peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, cacao (chocolate), peanuts, vanilla and corn ultimately become synonymous with many countries’ national signature dishes like the Italian tomato sauce, spicy Asian stir-fry and countless Irish potato recipes. Today, it is estimated that 70 percent of the American diet and 60 percent of the world’s diet consist of foods that originally were introduced by Native American peoples.



Seven thousand years ago, one of the first engineered plants was the wild grass teosinte. In the heart of the Oaxaca Valley region of Mexico, Native people used an agricultural process known as selective breeding to transform teosinte into maize, or corn. Corn quickly took root among Aztecs and Mayans and was cultivated into hundreds of varieties. Because of its high yield, sweet taste and nutritional value, corn almost immediately became revered as a spiritual food given to the people by Chicomecoatl, the Aztec goddess of the corn harvest. Tribal royals shared corn and corn seed through trade with other tribes, and the plant quickly spread through the Americas.



Another Aztec and Mayan delicacy of the royals was xocoatl, or hot chocolate – yes, the same delicious beverage we enjoy today also came from Native people. Mayan people harvested the cocoa pods, extracted the inner beans and pounded them into a paste, then added water, honey, cinnamon and chili powder together and forced the liquid repeatedly through a sieve in order to make the drink frothy.

Hernan Cortez is credited with introducing the drink to Europeans, beginning with Spain’s King Charles V. The Spanish had difficulty pronouncing the Indian word xocoatl and changed the name of their new beverage to chocolat. Although chocolat quickly became popular across Spain, the Spanish managed to keep it secret from the rest of Europe for a hundred years. During those hundred years, many experiments in partially fermenting and then roasting the cocoa beans added increasing richness to its flavor. Chocolate soon was added to European confections like cakes and cookies.

Migration of Corn



Courtesy National Geographic Society



The direct ancestor of the tomatoes that you find in spaghetti sauces and on hamburgers date back to 500 B.C.E. The Incas cultivated a small yellow tomato that grew wild along the sharp cliffs of

the Andean mountains. The small tomato was transported into Mexico where Aztec people grew it into the cherry sized variety, the same as the ones often used in salads today. Ancient Aztec writings tell how Native people combined tomatoes, corn, salt and peppers to create the first salsa recipe. A similar poisonous variety of tomatoes grew in the Mediterranean region and caused people to be leery of the tomatoes at first, but people in Italy's southern region eventually began adding the fruit to their pasta dishes. The first European mention of the tomato was by Pietro Andrea Mattioli, an Italian physician and botanist, in 1544. The original yellow variety that crossed the Atlantic into Europe with explorers underwent another 100 years of changes before it started to resemble the familiar red and orange varieties.



For more than 2,000 years, Algonquin tribes like the Potawatomi and the Peoria of the northeastern region of the U.S. tapped maple trees to extract the maple sap and boil it down to make syrup. At the beginning of the spring thaw, tribes used stone tools to make V-shaped incisions in the trees, then inserted reeds or pieces of bark to drain the sap into buckets. The maple sap, already rich in sugar content, was concentrated by dropping hot cooking

stones into the buckets or by leaving the buckets exposed to cold temperatures overnight and disposing of the layer of ice that formed on top. These tribes used earthenware cooking pots to then boil the maple sap into syrup. The Algonquin people introduced maple syrup to French fur traders who benefited from the extra energy it gave them while hunting. It didn't take long for the recipe to become paired with French crepes, which later turned into the American tradition of pancakes and syrup.

These are just a few examples of the origins of Native foods and the many important food contributions Native people have made to the world's diet. It is difficult to imagine what our everyday diet would be like without some of the most common Native foods, listed to the right.

Activity:

Now that you have a basic understanding of Native American foodways, create a "KWL" chart. This chart will have three columns labeled Know, Want to Know, and Learned. Write down what you know (or think you know) about Native American foodway topics, and what you want to know. As you move through this workbook, write down what you have learned. At the end, if anything is listed under "Want to Know" that you haven't learned, research the answers independently.

Most Common Native Foods

- Avocado
- Beans
- Blueberries
- Buffalo
- Cacao (Chocolate)
- Cashews
- Chicle
- (Chewing gum)
- Corn Bread
- Cranberries
- Grits
- Hominy
- Maize (Corn)
- Maple Syrup
- Mint
- Onions
- Papaya
- Peanuts
- Pecans
- Peppers
- Pineapple
- Pine Nuts
- Popcorn
- Potato
- Pumpkins
- Raspberries
- Sage
- Salsa
- Squash
- Strawberries
- Sunflower Seeds
- Tomatillos
- Tomatoes
- Tortillas
- Turkey
- Vanilla
- Wild Rice

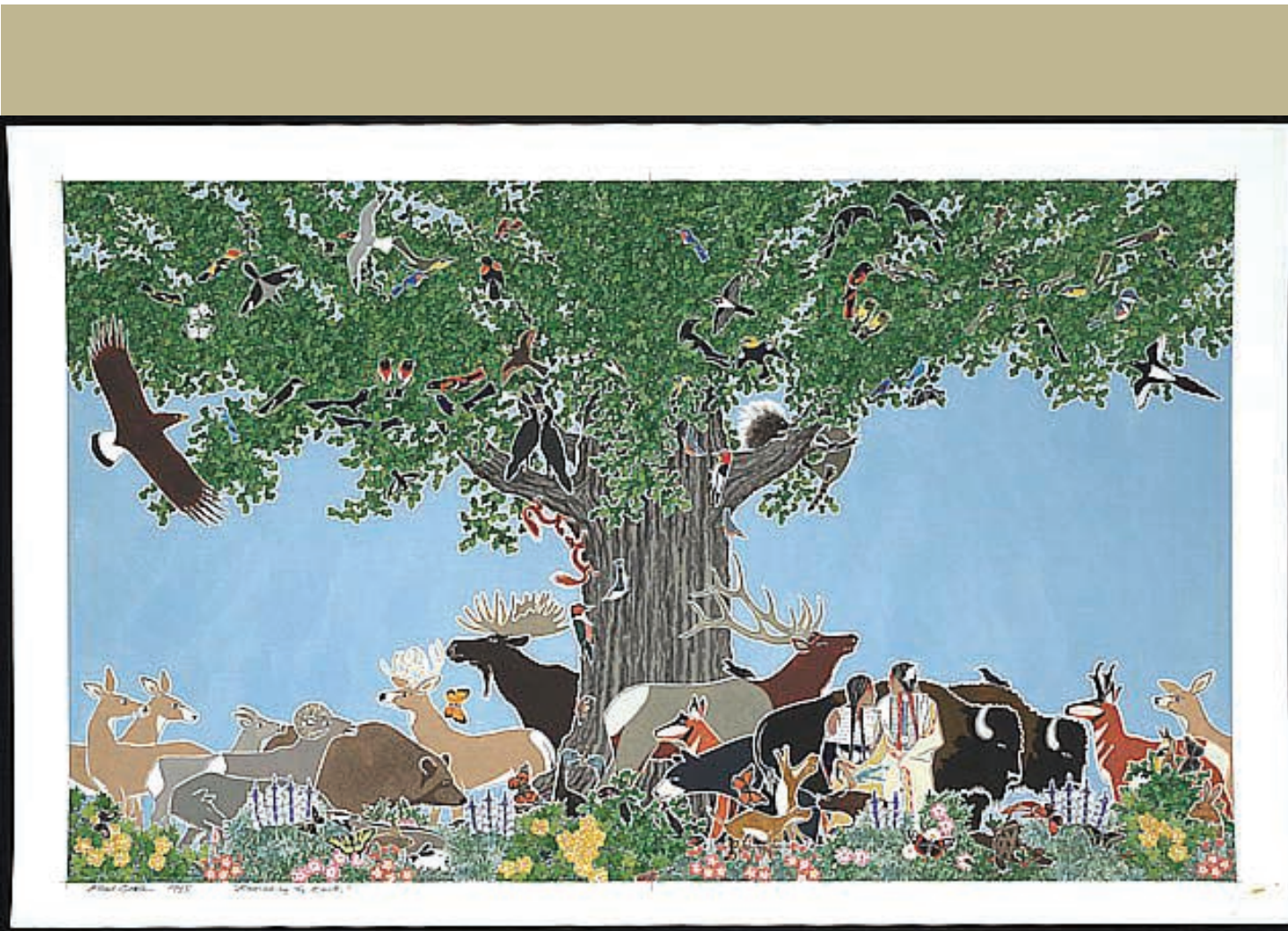


Origins continued

We have respect for the buffalo because they have kept their word to provide us with all things we need to live. They give us their meat to nourish ourselves. Their skins provide coverings for our protection. Their bones provide tools for our use. The buffalo made this commitment to us years ago in the hills north of here. They did this because of the outcome of a race between a young man and the buffalo. This was a great race in which all the animals took part. –The Great Race according to the Cheyenne.

One of the most fundamental and ancient aspects of any culture is its origin stories. These philosophies and beliefs of a people are woven into stories and explain where tribal people originally came from, why they came to live where they are, and what their unique purpose and responsibility is to each other and to the earth. Each tribe has a distinct origin story, but in many, Native people had or were provided by a Creator with foods or seeds. According to these stories, they also originated with the knowledge of how to hunt and harvest as a means to flourish on the earth. Many origin stories also speak strongly of how to care for humanity and the environment, many times warning of the consequences of overzealous planting and hunting. These stories share the universal messaging of being responsible stewards of earth's resources.

The Muscogee people, for instance, have a beautiful story about how corn came to people. According to “A Sacred Path, The Way of the Muscogee Creek,” they believe that a corn mother emerged out of the earth after the end of thunder and rain. She moved, but slow enough to instruct the people. Rays of light shimmered in waves, and rays of beauty surrounded her as she waved her hands. Corn mother gave the gift of corn to the people with instructions that if they are careful to nurture nature, they will never go hungry. As she climbed and reached the top of a rainbow, corn mother scattered seeds of multicolored corn on all sides of the rainbow. In her talk, she points out that like the multicolored corn seeds, there are many different kinds of humans, and that if they follow the rules, they too shall be fed.



Remaking the Earth. Painting by Paul Goble

Many tribes' origin stories are so interlinked with their primary food sources that the tribal members' lives revolved around the rhythms and cycles of the food. The Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes originated on the plains of the U.S. These tribes were known as master buffalo hunters and followed the migration of the free-roaming buffalo herds to allow them to continue to hunt and honor the animal. Cheyenne and Arapaho people set up camps near the grazing lands of the buffalo and as the herd moved on, so did the tribe. They hunted only the number of buffalo they needed to adequately feed and clothe their communities. They knew that killing too many buffalo ultimately would reduce the supply for future generations. This section opened with the origin story (*We have respect for the buffalo because...*) of how the buffalo came to the Cheyenne people and of its continued importance.

Origin stories of tribal people and their food resources remain integral to Native communities. They continue to inspire Native people and provide the guidelines and knowledge to sustain tribal communities in modern times.



Caddo creation story painted by Acee Blue Eagle. Courtesy Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Caroline Dorman Collection



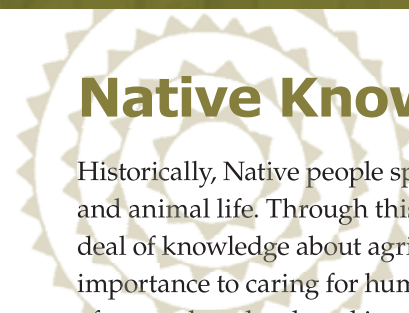
Buffalo, potatoes and relish prepared and photographed by Chef Loretta Barrett Oden.

Activity:

Ask a family member to prepare a family recipe with you that has been handed down for at least two generations. Make the following observations to answer these questions:

1. Is the recipe written down, or does the family member have it memorized?
2. How did your relative get the recipe? Was it inherited? Was it given to a bride after a marriage? Is it a recipe your relative learned by watching another family member prepare the dish?
3. Has the recipe changed over time? If so, what ingredients have been changed or added and why? What cooking methods have changed? For example, has a microwave replaced a stove? Have canned foods replaced fresh?
4. Where have you eaten the recipe? At home? At a family or cultural gatherings?
5. What does this recipe tell you about your family? What does it tell you about your culture?

Look for more **Origins** activities in Lesson 1 in the April 11 edition of *The Oklahoman*!



Native Knowledge

Historically, Native people spent a large amount of time observing plant and animal life. Through this study, Native people have aquired a great deal of knowledge about agriculture, hunting and fishing, and their importance to caring for humans and the environment. Over thousands of years, they developed ingenious techniques and specialized tools to assist them in obtaining and preparing food.

Agriculture

It all starts with a tiny seed. Healthy, well preserved seeds are the basis for bountiful crops. Native cultures designed innovative seed pots to store and protect seeds until planting times. Seed pots often were decorated with tribal designs and were passed down from generation to generation. In addition, seeds were traded and used as currency, and used to make things like jewelry and rattles.

In order to create sizeable fields for crops, many Native tribes intentionally ignited fires. This practice is called a controlled burn and serves to clear off large sections of land. This practice also controlled pest populations and overgrown areas. The ashes from the fire infuse the soil with the nitrogen that supports healthy crops.

Not only did Native people strive to understand the environment, but they also studied the cycles of the sky to learn about the seasons. Constellations and other astrological clues helped them know the best times to plant and harvest.

Hunting

Bows and arrows have long been synonymous with American Indians - and for good reason. Bows, arrows and spears are hunting tool staples used by Native people for thousands of years. They designed bows and arrows that operated with pinpoint accuracy and tremendous speed. Arrowheads came in various sizes, shapes and widths and were designed to suit the size of the game animal.

Another ancient hunting method is known as buffalo jumps. Buffalo

were chased until they ran over a cliff, which was called a buffalo jump. Buffalo usually were hunted after they drank water because they couldn't run as fast then. Native Americans prepared the meat on site and gave thanks to the Buffalo Nation for sacrificing one of



Shawnee Deer Calls. Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian

their own for them. Buffalo jumps were a routine form of hunting until the early 1900s. Native people also developed other methods of hunting that essentially brought the game to the hunters. One way that Native

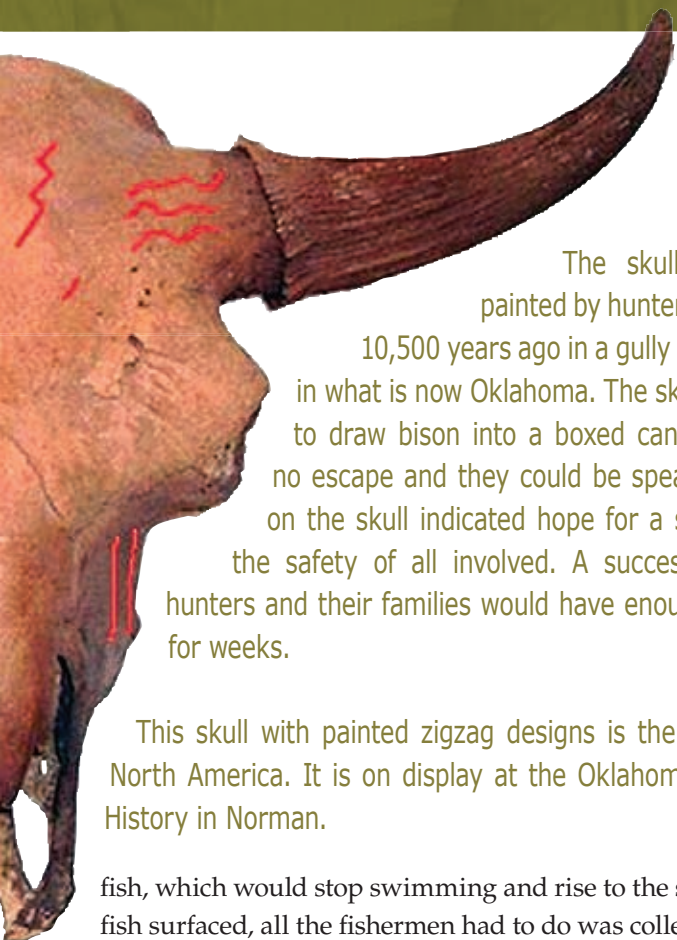
people would entice game to them was by mimicking the animal sounds; it was the Shawnee who designed the deer call (whistle) to attract the deer by sound.

Fishing

Many tribes that originated in the southeast U.S. like the Cherokees, Chickasaws and Creeks have a unique fishing technique that makes catching fish as easy as reaching in and pulling the fish right out of the water! Native people developed a method of fishing sometimes called "fish kills" in which they placed specific plants in the river, and the chemical properties of these plants would temporarily paralyze the



Creek Fish Kill, November 2, 1922. 1-Creek Indians putting the Devils Shoestring in the water. 2-Creek boys shooting fish. 3-



Ritual and the Hunt
By Leland Bement

The skull pictured here was painted by hunters that lived more than 10,500 years ago in a gully called the Cooper site, in what is now Oklahoma. The skull was part of a ritual to draw bison into a boxed canyon where there was no escape and they could be speared. Painting designs on the skull indicated hope for a successful kill and for the safety of all involved. A successful hunt meant the hunters and their families would have enough meat to live off of for weeks.

This skull with painted zigzag designs is the oldest painted art in North America. It is on display at the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History in Norman.

fish, which would stop swimming and rise to the surface. Once the fish surfaced, all the fishermen had to do was collect however many fish they needed. They then removed the plants from the water and the remaining fish swam away. The chemicals in the plants hurt neither the fish nor the safety of the water.

Environmental Care

Native people discovered that many of the plants they grew and ate contained medicinal properties. Overall, the diet most Native people consumed promoted a very healthy lifestyle free of modern sicknesses like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Some foods were

consumed exclusively for their medicinal properties. Salicylic acid, which can now be synthetically created in laboratories, is derived from willow tree bark and was traditionally prepared in tea to create a liquid aspirin used to treat fevers and pains, including headaches. Currently, 121 prescription drugs come from Native plant-derived sources.



Caddo seed pot. *Courtesy National Museum of the American Indian*

Through these examples, it is easy to see how Native people created efficient and environmentally conscious methods of harvesting and hunting that reflect a true respect and reverence for all living things. This approach has inspired non-tribal governments and organizations to credit Native people as the “original environmentalists.”

Activity:

Buffalo Brain Busters

Find 12 different people who know the answers to these questions! Have each person initial one box if they know the answer and can tell it to you out loud. Be the first person to get all the boxes initialed! (Or, if you don't think 12 different people already know the answers, write down your best guess in each box, and then see who got the most correct answers.)

Have you eaten buffalo?	What are the two types of buffalo?	What are two traditional uses of the buffalo?	How fast can a buffalo run?
Have you seen a buffalo?	A buffalo can live to be how old?	What is one thing you can do to help prevent diabetes?	What is the motto for buffalo cookery?
What is one nutritional benefit of eating buffalo meat?	How can you cook buffalo meat?	On average, how much does a Plains buffalo weigh?	What was one use of the buffalo's tail?



Look for more **Native Knowledge** activities in Lesson 2 in the April 20 edition of *The Oklahoman!*

3-Man holding caught fish. 4-Children taking fish to be cooked. 5-Creek woman cooking fish. *Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society*

Community

Nudah-Hongah eedtha oodah-ska-heh, kaw-geh-ho

"Leaders, War Dance Committee, cooks, everyone – we appreciate the meal. You have done good my friend, my brother."

– Ponca appreciation song, as pronounced and translated by Johnny Kembal, Ponca Tribal Elder

One of the first questions usually asked when entering a Native person's home is, "Would you like something to eat or drink?" This sentiment expresses the generous spirit that is customary throughout Indian country. Native people understand that in order for anything to flourish, it must first be nourished.

During many community gatherings, food is not only shared as a meal; it also is regarded as prayer and an expression of gratitude. At Osage dinners, plates are set with fruit, meat, a bowl and a food storage bag so that guests can take food home with them to enjoy later or share with other family. The hope is that the guest will enjoy the meal prepared for them at the gathering and have something to eat later that reminds them of the pleasant time shared with their host.



For several days during Green Corn ceremonies, community members participate in ceremonial songs and dances and enjoy a variety of corn dishes to celebrate the ripening of the sweet green corn. In the spring, Oklahoma's Iroquois tribes



Traditional Osage place setting at a community meal. *Photo by Tom Fields*

gather to honor the return of the wild strawberry. According to some Iroquois tribes' origin stories, the strawberry represents the promise from the Creator that the earth will provide food for humankind. Historically, the return of the sweet, juicy strawberry also breaks the bland winter diet.

Foodways also are integral in times of crises. Food can bring healing to a sick person, protect a community in danger and express sympathy to a grieving family. There are important foods that communities offer to the spirit of a person who has passed on. These foods are believed to help them along their journey in the afterlife. It is customary during community and family meals for many tribes to place small amounts of food on designated dishes, or even on a grave site, in honor of deceased loved ones.

For many southeastern tribes, the lack of food intensified the dire crisis of removal to Indian Territory, during which wild onions became a source of survival. During the Trail of Tears, many Native people had very little to eat along their long and arduous journey to Indian Territory. Parts of removal took place during the bitter cold winter months, and so Native people began eating wild onions that grew along creek and river banks during the cold weather to supplement their diets. Wild onions frequently were the only fresh vegetable they had to eat for long periods of time.

Prayer is given at the noon meal following an Osage Native American church meeting in Pawhuska in 2004. *Photo by Tom Fields*

Wild Onions

Once tribes arrived in Indian Territory, known today as Oklahoma, they still had few food resources and continued to rely on wild onions to nourish their families.

Native people created a recipe that involved mixing boiled wild onions with scrambled eggs, which added protein to the dish. Post-removal, many of these tribes continued to embrace wild onions and they eventually became a part of their seasonal diet. From generation to generation, the wild onion and egg dish has been passed down as a reminder of survival.

Now, for many southeastern tribes in Oklahoma, the end of winter leading into early spring signals the beginning of the long awaited wild onion dinner season. This is a cheerful time for communities to come together at community centers and churches across Oklahoma and share in wild onion dinner traditions, fellowship together and support the sponsoring organization.

At modern-day wild onion dinners, hundreds of people line up to purchase plates that usually consist of wild onions and eggs, salt pork, fried chicken, beans, boiled cabbage, potatoes, grape dumplings and a tribal-specific food like Choctaw banaha. Sometimes churches and organizations prepare and freeze packages of wild onions for sale so that people can cook their own wild onion meals at home.



A roomful of onions are cut in preparation for the Oklahoma Choctaw Alliance's February 27 wild onion dinner.



Oklahoma Choctaw Alliance president Phyllis Been, left, Native American Cultural and Educational Authority executive director Gena Timberman, and two youths, all Choctaw, at the Alliance's wild onion dinner in February.



Generations share in the wild onion dinner traditions together, such as Homer Noley, left, and his grandson Elijah, both Choctaw.

Activities:

1. Tribes throughout the U.S. and Canada refer to corn, beans and squash as the "three sisters." When planted together in a hill, these three plants create a perfect environment for each to flourish. The beans climb up the corn stalk to get more sun, but are protected from too much sun by the stalks leaves; the squash shades the ground and helps hold in moisture which prevents all three plants from getting parched; and the corn shades the squash so that it does not get scorched by the sun. The plants thus help each other the same way sisters do.

As a class, create this "Three Sisters Salsa" recipe. As you prepare and enjoy the salsa, discuss how foods and foodways play a role in the cultures represented by students at your school.

Three Sisters Salsa

By Steven Bond, Chickasaw Nation ethnobotanist

Recipe serves 4

- 1 can of diced tomatoes
- 1 can of yellow kernel corn (also try Mexican corn or white shoe peg corn)
- 1 precut diced or small cubed zucchini and yellow squash
- 1 can black beans (rinsed)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and mix well; season with salt and pepper to taste. Let salsa set for 10 minutes before serving to allow the flavors to blend together. Serve with corn tortilla chips.

2. Go online:
 - a. Visit nie.newsok.com to watch a video clip of a Choctaw member helping to prepare for a community-wide wild onion dinner, and sharing her childhood memories about the role of wild onions in shaping her heritage.
 - b. Wild Onion dinners are a wonderful opportunity to experience a Native American tradition that is unique to Oklahoma. The site www.powwows.com lists upcoming wild onion dinners; they are always open to the public.

Look for more **Community** activities in Lesson 3 in the April 27 edition of *The Oklahoman*!

Governance

Native people historically maintained healthy communities by tailoring their diet to reflect their values and cultural beliefs, until the 19th century. Relocation from their homelands interrupted this balance and caused Native people to lose access to traditional and healthy foods. This dietary change fueled a food crisis in Indian country that continues today. A prominent example of this dietary shift is the invention of frybread. Native Americans made frybread out of processed white flour that satisfied their hunger, even though it did not meet their nutritional needs. Over time, frybread has become an iconic staple food of many American Indian communities. Embracing these types of unhealthy foods has contributed to the poor health of many Native people. To resolve this, many tribal governments in Oklahoma have developed programs and resources to empower and assist their citizens in bettering their health.

Some Oklahoma tribes are taking a proactive approach to managing their own health. Some are planting gardens, some are harvesting seeds, and some tribes are raising meat such as buffalo, which was a staple food source prior to removal to Indian Territory. These programs strive to engage tribal youth in learning healthy food habits and learning how to grow healthy foods from an early age. They also teach everyone how to eat a nutritionally balanced diet while rekindling tribal practices. The hope is that students will in turn share this information with their families and help to establish health and wellness within their own homes.



Buffalo from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes' herd. (above)

Matt Blackowl, farm and ranch crew supervisor with the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes' buffalo herd. (right)

Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes: Bison for Health

The Cheyenne and Arapaho are traditional Plains tribes that have masterfully hunted buffalo for hundreds of years. Buffalo is one of the healthiest proteins available to humans. It is leaner than chicken and high in Omega 3 and 6 fats which promote a healthy heart. By the time the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes were relocated from their homelands to Oklahoma, most of the great American buffalo herds had dissipated. The Cheyenne and Arapaho people had to turn to cattle to substitute for buffalo. This transition, among other dietary adaptations and changes, caused tribal members to begin developing alarming health concerns.

In the 1930s, both tribal governments decided to bring buffalo back to Oklahoma and raise them on tribal lands. Buffalo from their homelands of Montana and Wyoming and from other tribes in Oklahoma were brought to Concho, where the tribe began sharing meat with tribal elders and diabetics. Today, about 350 head of buffalo graze on 2,000 acres of tribal land. The Buffalo Pilot Project, administered by the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Diabetes Wellness Program and Farm and Ranch Program, distributes about 4,500 pounds of buffalo meat to diabetics and members 55 and older. The program is tracking the positive affects the meat has had on the health of recipients. In addition, the return of the buffalo to the community has re-engaged these tribes in the traditional way that sustained them.



Chickasaw Nation: Growing Goodness

Under the direction of Governor Bill Anoatubby, the Chickasaw Nation has developed a successful garden program based in Ada that provides a number of community services. The food produced from these gardens and greenhouses provides an organic source of fruit and vegetables to the community. Each summer the Chickasaw Horticulture department sponsors a youth camp at which Chickasaw youth learn how to care for

gardens, tend to the plants and even grow vegetables using techniques like hydroponics, a method of growing plants without soil. The staff and youth workers even employ the use of ladybugs as a safe “insecticide.” During the winter months, high school students also have the opportunity to work after school in the greenhouses. This helps them appreciate the work it takes to produce the volume of vegetables necessary to feed the community now and in the historical times of their ancestors.

Taylor Rice, 16, has worked with the program for more than a year and sometimes volunteers at the tribe’s farmer’s market, where she sells vegetables that she and other youths have grown. “Many times elders comment on how they appreciate what we are doing. They have also become reliant on eating the vegetables we provide and get really upset when we run out of certain foods, like tomatoes,” Taylor says. “It is very rewarding to hold a seed in your hand, plant that seed, nurture it, watch it grow, harvest it and then eat it or share it with someone.”



Staff and youth workers employ the use of ladybugs as a safe “insecticide.”



This lettuce was grown by youth volunteers at the Chickasaw Nation gardens through hydroponics, meaning without soil.

Cherokee Nation: Sowing Sustenance

The Cherokee Nation is one example of how Native people are preserving heirloom seeds of traditional plants like the three sisters: corn, beans and squash. The Cherokee Nation established a seed bank where tribal citizens can acquire seeds to plant in their own gardens. The seed bank contains more than 20 plant varieties that are integral to Cherokee history and traditions. Through the seed bank exchange program, it has sent more than 6,000 seed packages of select varieties to Cherokees all around the world. Participants are encouraged to harvest their vegetables and redeposit seeds back to the program to replenish the seed bank for future use.

Activity:

Discuss or write a short essay about how starting a garden or similar project might change your appreciation for where food comes from, and the health of you and your family. Then brainstorm as a class how you could provide food for your families. Perhaps you can start a community garden with local support. Or, perhaps you can do something on a smaller level, such as growing a strawberry plant for each student in the classroom to grow fruit to be enjoyed at home. Did it have the effect that you had anticipated?

Governance continued

During the same time corn was being cultivated in Mexico, Incas in the highlands of Peru were developing more than 200 varieties of potatoes. It wasn't until 1550 that Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada introduced the potato to Europe and 1585 that Sir Walter Raleigh introduced the potato to the Irish. Potatoes connected the Irish with Native Americans again almost 300 years later, as retold here by Judy Allen, executive director of public relations for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

"One Nation Helping Another – The Choctaw and The Irish"

In 1831, the Choctaw Indians were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands in Mississippi to what is now known as Oklahoma. The winter of this particular Trail of Tears trek was the coldest on record. Many of the Choctaws did not survive the trip, and those that did not perish faced hardships establishing new homes, schools and churches.

A few years after this long, painful march, the Choctaws learned of people starving to death in Ireland. The Irish were suffering because all crops but the potato were marked for export by the British rulers. The poor among the Irish were not allowed any other sustenance than the potato, and from 1845 through 1849, crops of this vegetable were diseased.

Only 16 years had passed since the Choctaws themselves had faced hunger and death on the Trail of Tears, and they felt a great empathy when they heard such a similar story coming from across the ocean. Individual Choctaws, who still had meager resources themselves, gave all they could to send to assist the Irish. They collected \$170 to send in 1847, equivalent to \$4,500 today.

The people of Ireland still remember the kindness shown by the Choctaw Indians. The Irish have welcomed delegations from the Choctaw Nation and have visited the tribal lands in Oklahoma. In 1992, a plaque was unveiled at the Lord Mayor's Mansion in Dublin, Ireland, that reads: "Their humanity calls us to remember the millions of human beings throughout our world today who die of hunger and hunger-related illness in a world of plenty."

Activities:

1. Answer the following questions about the story.
 - a. How did the Irish and Choctaw experiences change each group of people forever?
 - b. Why is it significant that the Choctaw Nation gave aid to the Irish during the famine?

2. Answer the following questions about the painting pictured here.

- a. What are the first things that strike you about this painting?
- b. What do the postures and expressions of the people say about their experience or what they are feeling?
- c. Why do you think the artist placed a diseased potato plant in the top center of the painting?
- d. Why do you think the artist included the cartoon characters Chip and Dale in this artwork?

Look for more **Governance** activities in Lesson 4 in the May 4 edition of *The Oklahoman*!



The CHICKASAW NATION



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