

Lesson 3: Community

A Taste of Home

Oklahoma's tribal nations create a mosaic of American Indian cultures that originate from points all across the U.S. As a result of the Indian Removal Act, most tribes arrived in Oklahoma with little more than the clothes on their backs, forced to leave most of their material possessions and their homelands behind. The one thing that many Native people were able to bring to Oklahoma, however, were the memories and knowledge of how to prepare traditional foods. This was important because as tribes started the difficult process of reestablishing their communities here in Oklahoma, foodways often played a powerful role in helping them preserve their culture. Foodways is a term that defines the food-related practices and beliefs of a people that share a common heritage.



Creek women pound corn, circa 1890-1916, in Oklahoma.
Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society

For tribes fortunate enough to have access to their traditional foods in Oklahoma in the early years after removal, preparing, cooking and eating these foods became a tangible experience that transcended time and place. The preparation, smells and tastes of traditional foods proved to be the only taste of home many people had to symbolically take them back to their homelands and remind them of ancestral places many would never see again.

As time passed, tribes began hosting community meals where people gathered to prepare traditional foods like Choctaw banaha, Apache fried rabbit (gah) and Cherokee hickory nut soup (kanuchi). The practice of holding community meals and gatherings continues to perpetuate tribal traditions and values. Today, traditional foods are an important part of tribal identity and culture. The regard and reverence many Oklahoma tribes have for their food traditions instills new generations with cultural pride and a powerful connection to tribal origins.

Activity:

Choose a tribe currently located in Oklahoma and research where their original homelands are located. Expand what you learn by researching what traditional foods the tribe grew and hunted in their homelands. Today, how has the tribe maintained or reconnected with their food traditions? Be sure to address if the tribe has modified any foods to reflect a traditional dish, and how modern transportation and shipping have played a role in this reconnection. Reference the tribe's website for information.

 **THE OKLAHOMAN**

**AMERICAN INDIAN
CULTURAL CENTER & MUSEUM**

A project of the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority

Newspapers for this educational
program provided by:



the
**Chickasaw
Nation**