

## Protecting What Is Sacred Discussion Questions

1. Archaeologists have been digging up the remains of indigenous people for years to better understand their history and cultural practices. Why are Chickasaws opposed to people digging up the remains of their ancestors?

**Sample answer:** *Chickasaws oppose people digging up burial sites because their ancestors were human beings deserving of respect and dignity.*

2. If it was important for Chickasaws to protect their ancestors, why did they leave their homelands?

**Sample answer:** *On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law giving the federal government the right to force Native American tribes from their indigenous lands. This included the Chickasaws and other tribes located in the southeastern United States. Leaders representing the Chickasaw Nation voiced concern for the burials of their ancestors. Unfortunately, the federal government made no provisions for the protecting of tribal cemeteries and/or sacred places. On July 4, 1837, federal troops escorted the first group of Chickasaws out of their homelands during Removal to Indian Territory.*

3. Why was it important for the Chickasaws to have a good relationship with the National Park Service and the Natchez Trace Parkway? What was gained?

**Sample answer:** *Much of the early history of the Chickasaw people centers around the trade route known as the Natchez Trace. Chickasaws established and occupied tribal towns and settlements throughout the area for hundreds of years. On May 18, 1938 the Natchez Trace Parkway was created as a unit of the National Park Service. Its modern interstate road construction followed many of the old Native American traces and historic sites. As an inevitable consequence of this construction, many Chickasaw burials sites were unearthed and/or deliberately excavated. There was no law regulating the discovery of human remains and/or funerary objects until the passage of Public Law 89-665 in 1966, aka The National Historic Preservation Act directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish a National Tribal Preservation Program. Administered by the National Park Service (NPS), the program is dedicated to working with Native American tribes, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and national organizations, to preserve and protect resources and traditions that are of importance to Native Americans. The Natchez Trace Parkway maintains a good working relationship with the Chickasaw Nation to insure the preservation and*

*protection of those sites most important to Native American people. They do this in accordance with the law.*

4. What does the Chickasaw Nation do with human remains and objects they repatriate?

**Sample answer:** *With very few exceptions, the Chickasaw Nation reburies all human remains that have been repatriated as well as the associated funerary objects. Unassociated funerary objects (when no human remains are found with the object) are sent to the Chickasaw Cultural Center for curation.*

5. What are some of the more important sites on the Natchez Trace? How are they protected?

**Sample answer:** *Important sites located on the Natchez Trace Parkway include the following:*

- *Chickasaw Village Site*
- *Grand Village of the Natchez*
- *Emerald Mound*
- *Tupelo Visitor Mound*
- *Pharr Mounds*
- *Bear Creek Mound*
- *Colbert's Ferry*
- *Rock Spring*
- *Bynum Mounds*
- *Cave Spring*
- *Chickasaw Agency*
- *Monroe Mission*
- *Chickasaw Council House*
- *Old Town Overlook*
- *Tishomingo State Park*
- *Buzzard Roost Spring*

*Conservation and protection planning at the Natchez Trace Parkway involves planning for resource protection, facilitating public input on decisions impacting the Parkway, conducting environmental assessments and guiding policy on environmental compliance.*

*Specific functions include:*

- *Formulation of policy recommendations and establishment of procedures, methods and standards for all aspects of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).*

- *Gathering technical assistance and providing training for Parkway personnel regarding environmental compliance activities and federal laws.*
- *Coordination of environmental compliance activities with other federal agencies whose actions affect Parkway resources.*
- *Technical assistance on environmental assessments and impact statements.*
- *Project management for environmental analysis efforts.*

6. How did the Columbian Exchange affect the Chickasaws and their cultural beliefs?

**Sample answer:** *The Columbian Exchange refers to the exchange of ideas, food crops, populations and diseases between the New World and the Old World following the voyage of Christopher Columbus and other Europeans in the conquest of the Americas in 1492 and continuing well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the Chickasaws, the effects of the Columbian Exchange began with contact made with the Hernando De Soto expedition in 1540. However, great change did not take place until the Charleston-based English traders arrived in the tribe's settlements in the late 1600s. This led to an influx of Europeans leading horse trains packed with Limburg cloth, guns, powder and shot, beads, knives, hatchets, hoes, scissors, vermilion, axes, brass wire, Bengal silk and brass kettles, flood into the Chickasaw homelands. The tribe began to embrace the new technologies and goods brought to them thus eventually replacing hunting game for trade rather than hunting game for food. In addition, Chickasaw women began to marry the traders. These unions created a new social order that had far-reaching effects on the tribe's economic, social and political life. More and more, the avenues to tribal leadership shifted from clan association based on wisdom and bravery to mixed-blood parentage based on accommodation with the emerging order. Christianity replaced traditional ceremonial practices in many of the mixed-blood families.*

7. Why did the federal government want to separate Chickasaws from their ancestral lands?

**Sample answer:** *Expansion westward seemed perfectly natural to many Americans in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. They believed that America had a divine obligation to stretch the boundaries of their noble republic to the Pacific Ocean. Independence had been won in the Revolution and reaffirmed in the War of 1812. As a spirit of nationalism swept the nation, most citizens believed American Indians to be heathens incapable of using the land properly. Expanding the boundaries of the United States was in many ways a cultural war fought in the halls of Congress. The desire of non-natives to control business and industry in areas belonging*

*to Native people fueled the federal government's policy to remove tribes west of the Mississippi River. This was achieved with the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As a consequence, in 1837 the Chickasaw Nation signed the Treaty of Doaksville with the Choctaws, and purchased the right for the settlement of its people in their own district within Choctaw Territory.*

8. What happens when the origin of an object or human remains cannot be determined? Does a Native American tribe still repatriate it?

**Sample answer:** *On March 25, 2010, the Department of Interior issued a final rule regarding the Disposition of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains based upon the recommendations of the Review Committee. Pursuant to these regulations, a museum or federal agency must offer to return any "culturally unaffiliated" human remains in its possession that were originally removed from land that is currently tribal land or the aboriginal land of a particular tribe. Before these remains are returned, there must be a consultation process involving all such tribes which must start within 90 days of a request for repatriation by a tribe or an offer by the museum or agency to return culturally unaffiliated human remains. Aboriginal land includes lands recognized by a final judgment of the Indian Claims Commission of the United States Court of Claims, a treaty, Act of Congress or Executive Order. (Most land in the United States has been recognized as aboriginal land through one of these legal mechanisms.) In some cases, the consultation may result in a finding of cultural affiliation. Where this does not happen, it is anticipated that tribes will agree upon a disposition in most cases. If tribes cannot agree, the regulations provide that claims from a tribe from whose tribal land the remains were removed would have the first priority, followed by claims from tribes that are aboriginal to the area. This is similar to the way in which the statute treats human remains discovered and unearthed on tribal or federal land after 1990. The regulations acknowledge that some of the so-called "culturally unaffiliated remains" may be culturally affiliated with tribes not recognized by the federal government – for example, state-recognized tribes. The regulations permit repatriations to be made to such groups, but do not require them. The regulations also permit museum and federal agencies to rebury the human remains under state or other law if no tribe agrees to accept control. Both of these dispositions may take place only if, after consultation, no federally recognized tribe that could make a claim objects and the Secretary of Interior or his designee so recommends. Finally, the regulations recommend, but do not require, repatriation of culturally unaffiliated funerary objects on the same basis as human remains.*

9. Why did so many Chickasaws live along the Natchez Trace prior to the 1830s?

**Sample answer:** *The Natchez Trace was originally an important road for Choctaws, Chickasaws, Natchez and other Native American tribes. With the development of Middle Tennessee in the late 1700s and the establishment of the Mississippi Territory in 1798, the Natchez Trace became a vital link between these tribes and outposts created by traders and the U.S. government. Its importance as a trade route encouraged the Chickasaws to establish travel and trade related business including ferries, travel stands, shipping depots and mercantile stores.*

10. Why do Chickasaw citizens today feel connected to the Mississippian homelands?

**Sample answer:** *The Chickasaws' connection to their homelands goes beyond the physical boundaries that make up the area. The homelands have always been, and will always be, a spiritual base for tribal citizens. It is the place given to them by Aba'binni'li', the creator. Chickasaw people who travel from Oklahoma to the homelands in the southeast (Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky) feel a connection to the woods, the parks and trails. They know, on a deeper level, "this is Chickasaw land."*