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Native American Languages in Oklahoma Schools

Recognizing that Native American Languages in Oklahoma are on the endangered list\(^1\), and how important these languages are to a people’s cultural identity, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) felt compelled to work with the tribes in our state to find an alternative pathway to certify instructors to teach these heritage languages in the public schools. The goal is to help revitalize the languages and cultures of the tribes before the opportunity is lost. Many of the tribes have launched efforts to pass the languages on through community classes, master apprentice programs, and tribal colleges. Native American Languages have long been recognized as an important legacy in our state. Legislation also intended to support the teaching of the tribal languages in our schools. After the Oklahoma educational reforms of 1990 and the passage of the Native American Language Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-477)\(^2\), the OSDE declared that Native American Languages (NAL) and American Sign Language (ASL) as well as foreign languages could be used to fulfill the world language requirement for graduation; however, the mechanism to certify instructors was what was missing.

After discussing the issues of offering instruction in our public schools with numerous stakeholders throughout Oklahoma, the OSDE invited interested parties to attend three meetings in the fall of 2012 in order to initiate a rule change in the administrative code which would allow an alternative route to certification. The process was explained to everyone involved, and committee members were asked to design a workable solution that would bring competent instructors with knowledge of the language and culture into the classroom with the tribes’ help in determining the language proficiency of the instructors. This was extremely important since it is the tribal officials who are the authoritative experts in determining an individual’s communicative ability. After much consideration and planning for instructor support through professional development requirements, the rule change was adopted in June of 2013 and the OSDE gives much thanks to all of the committee members and representatives of the tribes involved in the process.

As previously stated, language is a key element in a culture’s very existence. I would argue that the most important ingredient in expressing a culture’s perspective on the world is often understood through its language. After all, what is language? It is thought put into words. If you want to understand another person’s thinking, you must understand his/her language. Mere observation is not enough. Cultural misunderstandings can easily occur when you judge another person’s actions by your own standards and perspectives. Explanation, not just translation, is often necessary when dealing with someone who sees the world in a different way. That is why we must not lose the languages of the various tribes we have in Oklahoma. The revitalization effort is a worthy objective because we are a unique state with a unique heritage. I applaud the tribes’ endeavors to revive and reinvigorate language and culture, and it is with great pride that the OSDE offers its assistance.

Desa Dawson, Director of World Language Education
Oklahoma State Department of Education

\(^1\) http://www.livingtongues.org/
\(^2\) http://www.languagepolicy.net/archives/nala.htm
### 39 Tribes of Oklahoma

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The Chickasaw Nation

The Chickasaw Nation is one of the largest federally recognized tribes in the United States with more than 55,000 citizens. More than 32,000 of those citizens reside in Oklahoma.

Jurisdictional territory of the Chickasaw Nation includes more than 7,600 square miles of south-central Oklahoma. It encompasses all or parts of 13 Oklahoma counties, including Grady, McClain, Garvin, Pontotoc, Stephens, Carter, Murray, Johnston, Jefferson, Love, Marshall, Bryan and Coal.

The seat of the tribal government is located in Ada, Oklahoma, and is under the leadership of Bill Anoatubby, who has served as the Governor of the Chickasaw Nation since 1987. Successful economic development is an integral part of the effort to enhance the overall quality of life of the Chickasaw people.

The Chickasaw Nation employs nearly 13,000 individuals and operates more than 100 businesses, including hotels, restaurants, travel plazas, radio stations and a chocolate factory. The tribe invests much of its business revenue to fund more than 200 programs and services in areas of education, health care, youth and aging, housing and more that directly benefit Chickasaw families, Oklahomans and their communities.

Chickasaw Language

According to the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City, there are more languages spoken in Oklahoma than in all of Europe. Chickasaw is one of those spoken languages, and the Chickasaw Nation has placed a priority on preserving the language.

The Chickasaw language was the primary language of Chickasaw people for hundreds of years. Chickasaw is a Muskogean language, and Chickasaw and Choctaw together form the Western branch of the Muskogean language family. Chickasaw is also related to Alabama, Koasati, Mvskoke (Creek), Seminole, Hitchiti and Mikasuki.

The Chickasaw language has two main dialects or ways of speaking Chickasaw. These dialects are regional. One dialect is associated with the northern part of the Chickasaw Nation in communities like Kullihoma and Ada and the other dialect is spoken in the southern areas of the Chickasaw Nation in communities like Tishomingo, Fillmore and Ardmore.

One example is the word for “hello.” Northern speakers tend to say “Chokma” or “Chukma” while southern speakers may choose to say “Hallito.” For “thank you,” northern speakers tend to say “Chokma’shki” while southern speakers prefer to say “Yakookay.” Neither dialect is right or wrong, but simply reflects the speaking preferences of Chickasaw families within a certain geographic area.

Chickasaw Language Preservation

The Chickasaw Nation’s revitalization efforts include initiatives that are designed to preserve Chickasaw language, culture and traditions. Careful consideration is also given to offer opportunities for Chickasaws living outside of the tribal boundaries with at-large programs and services that sustain and promote language and culture.

Although it has been proven that the act of modernization has contributed to the decline in traditional cultural practices in Indian tribes across America, the Chickasaw Nation has embraced new technology bringing the Chickasaw people, no matter where they are located, closer together.

This new technology creates teaching avenues which allow Chickasaws to remain connected as a community. The tribe can reach more people than ever before.

The Chickasaw language, stories, songs and cultural belief systems can only be preserved if they are embraced and nurtured. Modern technology allows this to happen.
The Chickasaw language is an oral one, meaning it is transmitted through speaking from generation to generation. Chickasaw was not a formally written language until the 20th century, though Chickasaw speakers wrote it as they saw fit before that time. A Chickasaw Dictionary was published in 1973, written by the Reverend Jess J. Humes and his wife Vinnie May (James) Humes. Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary was published in 1994, written by linguist Pam Munro and Chickasaw speaker Catherine Willmond. Accompanying the dictionary is a CD that assists with hearing the pronunciation of the language. Let’s Speak Chickasaw: Chikashshanompa’ Kilanompoli’ published by the Chickasaw Press was the second book by linguist Pam Munro and Chickasaw speaker Catherine Willmond.

A Chickasaw Dictionary was compiled as a “list of Chickasaw words in a very simple manner. Disregarding all rules of orthography, we made an effort to spell the words as they sound, in the hope that anyone using the list could pronounce them.” In contrast, Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary uses a new spelling system that “represents tonal accent and the glottal stop, neither of which is shown in any previous dictionary on either Chickasaw or the closely related Muskogean language, Choctaw. In addition, vowel and consonant length, vowel nasalization, and other important distinctions are given.”

Let’s Speak Chickasaw: Chikashshanompa’ Kilanompoli’ is the first textbook of the Chickasaw language; it also is its first complete grammar study. Its 20 comprehensive units take students from beginning to intermediate stages of learning the Chickasaw language and feature a companion CD. An example of the differences between the two spelling systems is seen in the spelling of the Chickasaw word meaning “to be five in number,” talhlhā’pi (Munro-Willmond) and tulhapi (Humes). Humes spells the short a sound (like in the English word father) with a u, whereas Munro-Willmond uses a. Both systems use lh to represent a Chickasaw consonant sound that sounds something like Klondike pronounced without the initial K, or like ilth in the English word filthy, but without the t. Munro-Willmond indicates pitch accent of the final a with an accent mark, (talhlhā’pi). Munro-Willmond uses ’ (apostrophe) to represent the glottal stop, a stoppage of air in the throat, like the middle of the English word uh-uh, meaning “no.”

The Chickasaw Language Revitalization program uses both spelling systems. It is an oral language, so ultimately it is up to each Chickasaw person to determine how they spell (and speak) their language.

Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program

The Chickasaw language revitalization program began in 2007 and the department of Chickasaw language was formed in 2009. Chickasaws believe that the language was given to them by Chihoowa or Aba’ Binni’li’ (God), and it is an obligation to care for it: to learn it, speak it and teach it to children. The Chickasaw language is viewed as a gift from the ancestors for all Chickasaw people. The Chickasaw language revitalization program helps people access that gift. The value of speaking the language has been realized and several programs and services have been established over the years to revitalize the Chickasaw language. Tribal employees and Chickasaws of all ages participate in these programs.

Chickasaw culture has traditionally focused on family relationships and community responsibilities. The Chickasaw Nation has always taken family seriously and has designed a variety of programs and services aimed at promoting and preserving Chickasaw culture. Active language classes in several communities are helping preserve the Chickasaw language for future generations. Also, the tribe hosts a language family immersion camp, which provides families a time to come together in an environment conducive to becoming comfortable in conversational Chickasaw.

Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby - “Revitalization of the Chickasaw language is a high priority because it is an integral part of the culture and heritage which helps bind us together as a people. We offer a wide range of opportunities to learn the language, because we believe it is important for Chickasaws of all ages to become involved. One of the most gratifying aspects of our language initiative is seeing several generations of a family become involved in learning and teaching the language. It is inspiring to see parents and grandparents teaching children and grandchildren. This not only helps young people develop a greater appreciation for our language and culture, it also helps bring families closer together.”

Josh Hinson, Chickasaw Language Department Director - “Language is culture. When you’re talking about one, you’re really talking about the other. Language is the key that explains everything about the Chickasaw. Whether it’s traditional dances, food, songs or family terms, the way to really know it is to look at it through the language. Language is the key to understanding everything that makes us Chickasaw people.”

Lisa Johnson-Billy, Chickasaw citizen and Oklahoma State Representative - “I think language is a foundation. When you understand language and you can speak the language, then you understand who you are as a Native person. Our language is a beautiful spoken language. It is very important to me.”
Chickasaw Language Programs and Services

Chickasaw.tv
With the introduction of Chickasaw.tv, learning the Chickasaw language became more easily accessible. Chickasaw.tv has a channel dedicated to learning the Chickasaw language through lessons, songs, games and stories. Visit the Chikashshanompa' channel on Chickasaw.tv.

ChickasawKids.com
ChickasawKids.com is an interactive website designed for youth to learn the Chickasaw language, history, traditions and culture through games, activities, recipes and printable coloring pages.

Chickasaw Language Basics app
Chickasaw Language Basics app is one of the first of its kind to be developed by a tribe or nation. The app features hundreds of Chickasaw words, phrases, songs and videos. Chickasaw Language Basics can be downloaded for free at www.Apple.com/iTunes or accessed on an android mobile device or internet at www.Chickasaw.net/anompa.

Chickasaw community language classes
Chickasaw community language classes meet once a week in Ada, Ardmore, Oklahoma City, Purcell, Sulphur and Tishomingo. Each class is taught by a fluent speaker or fluent speaker with facilitator.

Chickasaw Press
Recognizing that sharing knowledge is critical to the tribe, the press publishes non-fiction works about Chickasaw history and culture. Chickasaw Press publications enable the tribe to share its rich history and culture with its citizens and non-Chickasaws, thus enhancing relationships with the greater community. The Chickasaw Press has published books in both Chickasaw and English languages.

Chickasaw language class for college and high school students
East Central University in Ada, Okla. offers four course levels and is taught in the fall and spring. In addition, Byng High School offers Chickasaw I and Chickasaw II daily. The courses are an accredited world language course for the purposes of graduation.

Chickasaw Word of the Day
Visitors of www.Chickasaw.net can learn the Chickasaw language through the Chickasaw word of the day. The written word or phrase and the audio file can be found on the homepage.

Chipota Chikashshanompoli (Children Speaking Chickasaw) language club
Chipota Chikashshanompoli (Children Speaking Chickasaw) language club meets once a month in Ada and Ardmore. Students learn the Chickasaw language through total physical response activities and song. Students compete each year at the annual Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair.

Chickasaw Language Flashcards
Chickasaw language flashcards created by the Chickasaw language department are used as a teaching tool to help children become familiar with the Chickasaw language.

Chickasaw Language Immersion Family Camp
The Chickasaw Language Immersion Family Camp is designed to promote the use of the Chickasaw language within Chickasaw families. Camp activities include kayaking, canoeing, swimming, fishing, hiking, sports, gardening, storytelling, stickball, capture the flag and various other games and activities, with primary instruction being through the Chickasaw language.

Himitta Alhiha Hochokoshkomo (The Youth are Playing)
Chickasaw Language Sports Camp
Himitta Alhiha Hochokoshkomo is designed to promote the use of the Chickasaw language in an interactive, athletic environment. Sports included in the camp are to’li’ (stickball), basketball, softball, volleyball, soccer, capture the flag and numerous other games and activities.

Chickasaw Language Committee
The Chickasaw Language Committee, comprised of 25 fluent Chickasaw speakers, meets once a month to develop new Chickasaw words and serve in an advisory capacity for the department of Chickasaw language.

The Chickasaw language master-apprentice program
The Chickasaw language master-apprentice program pairs an apprentice with a master/fluent Chickasaw speaker. The apprentice will learn the language through full immersion.

The Chickasaw Nation martial arts program
The Chickasaw Nation martial arts program is offered in Achille, Ada, Ardmore, Purcell and Tishomingo. The martial arts program provides a structured atmosphere, promoting healthy peer relations and interactions while incorporating Chickasaw language into each class.

The Chickasaw Nation Child Development Center
The Chickasaw Nation Child Development Center incorporates Chickasaw language daily by teaching numbers, animal names and colors. The center also utilizes the Chickasaw language basics web based app on smart boards in the classrooms. In addition, the center has incorporated the language throughout the facility. The classrooms are designed to resemble a town with streets named in Chickasaw.

Other services offered by the Chickasaw Language Department include a translation service which interested parties may use to translate Chickasaw documents. The department also provides language materials in the form of a packet of language information. Flashcards, CDs, and DVDs can be mailed upon request.
The Chickasaw Cultural Center, located in Sulphur, Oklahoma, was designed to reflect the heart and soul of the Chickasaw people. The cultural center is a place for all Chickasaw people to return home and see something of themselves reflected back. During the construction of the cultural center, every effort was made to incorporate the Chickasaw language at each level of exhibit development, including the creation and incorporation of Chickasaw place names.

The Oka' Abiniili' Water Pavilion is placed between the administrative building, the Holisso Center and the Aaholiitobli' Honor Garden. The pavilion sits directly on a large hayip, or pond. The name of the structure is descriptive of its purpose. Oka' means "water" and ab- indicates a place and biniili means "to sit down." Together the name translates to "a place for sitting on the water."
Native American Language and Cultural Preservation
Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma
Sauk Language Department

“The Sac and Fox culture is based upon respect for the life within themselves, their families, their communities, and all of creation. The Creator gave this way of life to the Sac and Fox people. The culture is the way things are done in relation to each other and all of creation.”
- Courtesy of www.sacandfoxnation-nsn.gov

Contained within the Sauk language is the history of the Sauk people. For example, the modern Sauk word for a policeman (mêmeshinyéha) has its root in the verb meshenêwa (he catches or grabs him). This Sauk name for a policeman refers to that historical period when the Sac and Fox Agency Police would come and take Sauk children away to attend boarding school.

“I was born in Oklahoma at the Kansas Sauk village soon after my parents moved from Kansas. I have a brother named Friar. We are members of the Potato Clan. I remember when I was too young to go to school I saw a white man coming to the village in a buggy. I heard that the parents were hiding their children, and I wondered why. On asking my mother, she said that the man was coming to take the children to school.”
- Osmond Franklin

Black Hawk, Indian name Makatêmeshikêhkêhkwa-, leader of the “British Band” of the Sauk people. One of the largest Indian villages in North America was Saukenuk located between the Rock and Mississippi rivers in Illinois. The Treaty of 1804 ceded all this land to the government and ultimately started the Black Hawk War in 1832. At this time it included approximately 4,000 Sac and Fox people. Black Hawk did not believe this treaty was valid and vowed not to give in to the government. His autobiography was published in 1872.

Black Hawk said, “How smooth must be the languages of the whites. When they can make right look like wrong and wrong like right.” (www.sacandfoxks.com)
Historical Background - How did we get here?

The Sac and Fox people have long been known for their cultural independence. Despite the many hardships that they have faced over the years, which included losing the majority of their land and people, they have remained a viable group who are proud of their ancestors and heritage.

By the time the Sauk people were removed to Oklahoma in 1869, they had experienced more than 200 years of migration, war, and disease. Despite all these changes and challenges, the Sauk people still had their language when they made this last forced removal to a new land. Ultimately it was not military conquest, disease, or forced relocation that threatened the language but rather a breaking of the spirit by disrupting the ability for the Sauk people to relate to one another.

The health of a language depends upon parents teaching it to their children, and children then grow up and teach it to their children. As long as children learn it, a language can thrive. This practice of sharing language was severely interrupted in 1871, when the United States government began removing Sauk children from their families. The children were taught through harsh treatment and shame that their language had no place in their lives and was inferior to English.

Mainstream American education forced upon the Sauk people after five decades of resistance by the United States government. As the introduction of mainstream American education increased, so did the decline of the Sauk language. Compulsory mainstream American education for Sauk children began in 1871 with 24 students at the mission school. It increased with placements in off-reservation boarding schools during that same period, and was essentially complete by the closing of the Sac and Fox Manual Labor Boarding School in 1917, when Sauk children were permanently sent to local public schools, or out of jurisdiction boarding schools.

By the 1930s all but a few Sac and Fox families stopped speaking Sauk at home. Within a span of 60 years Sauk went from being spoken by almost every tribal member to being spoken mostly by older people amongst themselves. Not a single tribal member born in the 1930s or beyond successfully passed on fluency to their children.

It has been over sixty years since a child has had the opportunity to become fluent in the Sauk language. The rate of language loss among the Sauk people in the past ten years has accelerated rapidly as many older speakers have passed away. Today there are only a handful of fluent Sauk speakers, and all are over the age of 80 years old.

The Sauk experience with forced removal and the American education system is not the sole cause of the decline of the Sauk language. From the 1870s through the 1920s the Sauk people faced aggressive efforts by the United States government, churches, and the non-Native population to eliminate their way of life. The United States government abolished the Sauk National Council in 1891, severely reducing the tribe’s control over its own affairs, and dividing the Sac and Fox reservation into allotments, breaking up the villages that had been the basis of the tribe’s social existence. The opening of the reservation brought a flood of non-Natives from the eastern United States into Sac and Fox tribal territory, irrevocably changing the Sac and Fox tribe’s way of life forever.

In the 21st century the historical legacy of the era of assimilation continues to create major challenges to the preservation and revitalization of the Sauk language. Prior to the introduction of the Sac and Fox Manual Labor Boarding School in 1871 there was no institution among the Sac and Fox people in which a child was removed from family, clan, and tribal relationships in order to learn. Today, there continues to be very little time, space, or resources within the American public education system for Native American youth to study the languages, histories, and cultures of their own tribes.

The Sac and Fox Nation, through the Sauk Language Department, has responded to this challenge by partnering with local schools to bring Sauk language into the daily learning environment of students through Sauk language courses, internships, and programs. While a great deal of work still needs to be done, these initial partnerships show that the Sac and Fox Nation and public schools can collaborate to positively impact the education and lives of American Indian students.

In the next section we will look at some of the common obstacles to developing an effective Native American language program and the Sac and Fox Nation response to these obstacles.

“I remember getting hit with a strap until there were blue streaks on my back (for speaking Sauk).”
- Robert John Falls on his boarding school experience
Challenge: Limited Resources
The amount of available discretionary federal funding, foundation funding, and public school education funds to support language revitalization programs is extremely limited, and highly competitive. Many language programs fail.

Response of the Sac and Fox Nation:
The Business Committee of the Sac and Fox Nation responded by:
• Recognizing in a Business Committee Resolution in 2005, “that central to our common heritage (is) the role of the Sauk language, and acknowledges the critically endangered state of the Sauk language and the need to secure its survival for the benefit of future generations.”

This Resolution:
• Created the Sauk Language Department “established as a priority for the Sac and Fox Nation the development, implementation, and continued expansion of Sauk language programs and projects.”
• “Committed to increases in the amount of core funding available to the Sauk Language Department, increases in level of staffing, and increases in other necessary resources for the continued expansion of development and implementation of Sauk Language programs, materials, and projects with a focus on the long term objective of creating a new generation of fluent Sauk speakers.”
• This commitment by the Sac and Fox Nation moved the Sauk Language Program from a limited supplemental, grant-based program to an established tribal governmental department.

Challenge: Establishing an effective Immersion Program that creates new, young conversationally fluent speakers and teachers.
• Create the space, materials, and situations for youth language learning to take place.
• Facing the facts: regardless of model, sustained immersion is the only effective method for creating new fluent speakers.
• Immersion is the only proven method for creating fluency in endangered languages. Immersion means learning through “whole language” acquisition focused on creating environments in which learning is primarily oral, experiential, and tied to real life situations.
• For immersion to be effective in creating fluency, there must be a minimum of 15-20 hours per week in a “NO ENGLISH” learning environment, plus opportunities to speak the language outside of the learning environment. You cannot effectively teach or learn your language by talking or explaining things in English.
• You cannot create fluency through writing or linguistic study.
• You cannot create fluency in a single class period.
• Learning native languages is not like what they taught us in school.
• As adults we also have to let go of everything that we were taught in school about language learning. Textbooks, grammar, the ABC approach, Dick and Jane books, vocabulary lists, etc. can be useful as supplemental material but they are not an effective core method for creating fluency in Sauk.
• In immersion settings little or no English and less emphasis on written material is used to teach and learn. The environment is designed to replicate how children would have learned if they were growing up in a family where the native language was the primary language spoken.

“We’re all sorry that we didn’t ask Dad to teach us our native Sac and Fox language.”
- Maxine Manatowa Pequano

“One of the things I do regret about is the fact that I didn’t follow all the ways of knowing my language more thoroughly than I do. I know a few words here and there. I can understand it but as far as having a conversation, I couldn’t ever do it.” - Jack Tiger
Response of the Sac and Fox Nation:
The Sac and Fox Nation, through the Sauk Language Department, has created a successful, nationally-recognized team-based language learning model:

• Teaming a small group of young adult Sauk language learners with the remaining conversationally fluent Sauk elder speakers in a total Sauk language immersion environment.
• This model of immersion language learning emphasizes a total “No English” environment for a minimum of 15 hours per week.

Challenge: Creating Language Learning opportunities that promote wellness, academic achievement, and sustainable fluency development.

• Limited access to culturally relevant learning opportunities in public schools.
• A sustainable link between tribal youth and the need to create a critical mass of young, conversationally fluent language teachers.

Response of the Sac and Fox Nation:
The Sac and Fox Nation, through the Sauk Language Department, has designed and implemented a multi-level program to attract and retain tribal youth, from beginning learners in high school through conversational fluency development and college graduation. These levels are:

• Immersion Sauk language learning through public high school courses
• The Sauk Language Summer Youth Internship Program, providing youth the opportunity to become more involved in the Sauk Language in incremental, progressives steps.

• A Tribal Languages Program, developed in conjunction with Bacone College, that:
  • Allows students to earn college credit while learning their own Native Language in an immersion language learning environment within their own language communities.
  • Concentrates on the acquisition of higher levels of language proficiency while simultaneously engaging in intensive specialized courses in Tribal Language Teaching Methodologies, Tribal Language Linguistics, and Tribal Language Curriculum Development, the special skill sets needed for graduates to teach their heritage languages in public school environments.

Looking to the Future: Public Education and Native Languages

Changes and revisions need to be made in Oklahoma educational laws and policies supporting increased opportunities for American Indian youth to learn tribal languages within the public schools. Potential areas of development include:

• Financial support for Native American language teacher training and certification programs.
• Allow rural school districts to support Native American Charter Schools.
• Allow rural school districts to support language immersion streams, where the Native language is the medium of classroom instruction for core academic subjects, not restricted to Native Language classes.
• Flexible, customized degree programs supporting intensive Native American language and teacher development within public higher education institutions.

“Fluency is the determining factor in language survival. Indigenous languages are dependent upon the ability of tribal people to pass the words, sounds, structures, thoughts, concepts, values, and feelings of the language to the next generation. No dictionary, database, audio recording, or other language documentation can match the importance of creating fluency. Indigenous languages do not survive in translation. They become fragments of their former selves, shadows of what they once were as living entities. The creation of even a single new fluent speaker of an endangered language extends the life of that language by decades. Each generation of fluency opens the door to sustaining the fragile connections that keep the language alive.”

- Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Director of the Sauk Language Department

On the Brink Article - Cultural Survival website

“If you grow up hearing and talking Indian, your will remember it all of your life. The language must be taught to young people. You have to start when they are little, before they go to school.” - Carl Butler
Why did you decide to become a Sauk teacher?

“I decided to teach Sauk because I want other people to speak as well, and I was given an opportunity to learn Sauk that other people didn’t have, so I feel like this is my contribute to my people. I believe it is our responsibility as Sauk people to share knowledge with each other. That is how our culture has survived for so long, because people took the time to teach others about our ways. And language is a key component to our culture.”

If you could sit down with a high school senior, and talk to them about the Sauk Language Department, being an Intern, and the Tribal Languages Program, what would you say?

“I would tell them go for it! It is a very rewarding experience to be able to speak Sauk.”

- Katie Grant, Sauk Language Instructor at Stroud High School and the Great-Granddaughter of Austin Grant, Sr. Katie is one of the first young adult Apprentices in the Sauk Language Master Apprentice Program to achieve rapid conversational fluency.

“The Sauk Language needs teachers. I decided to teach because its what is needed right now more than anything. I feel that there aren’t a whole lot of people in the United States that are trying or even able to help the Sauk bring their language back to the mouths of the youth. There are droves of people able to translate for the marines. I changed my college plans to fit where I believe my help is most needed.”

If you could sit down with a high school senior, and talk to them about the Sauk Language Department, being an Intern, and the Tribal Languages Program, what would you say?

“I would say, “The Sauk Language department needs you. The language needs You and the people need you. There will be a great multitude of youths Learning the language and finding their roles in the SLD that best suit them, and the well-oiled machine that is the department. If the thought of being part of a movement excites you, then this is that path for you. If being taken care of and finding guidance in one of the best world-renowned language departments fills your heart with hope for yourself and the future, then this path is for you. The language is going to come back just as strong as it used to be. It would be a beautiful thing to be apart of the new generation of Sauk speakers, don’t you think? As a high school senior you have this opportunity to join the warriors of today in the fight to preserve our language and our culture so that our Indian identity will remain, and become strong, as strong as it was for our great great grandparents.”

- Mosiah Bluecloud, Sauk Language Instructor at Shawnee High School, and one of the first young adult Apprentices in the Sauk Language Master Apprentice Program to achieve rapid conversational fluency.
Mission Statement of the School of Choctaw Language

The Language Program of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has taken its timely place in the journey of preserving and perpetuating our language and culture. We will instill and encourage the desire to learn the Choctaw language in the old, young, tribal, and non-tribal people. We will provide the highest quality educational environment for first language speakers, teachers, and learners. We will promote and enhance cultural awareness by teaching traditional customs and historical facts.

We envision future language educators having one vision and goal; that their support and contributions will not cease.

We believe that with spiritual guidance and faith, this never-ending journey will continue.

We are honored and proud to serve the Choctaw people.

Colors in Choctaw

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tohbi</td>
<td>toh•bi</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakna</td>
<td>lak•na</td>
<td>yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homma</td>
<td>hom•ma</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okchakko</td>
<td>ok•chak•ko</td>
<td>blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusakbi</td>
<td>lu•sak•bi</td>
<td>brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okhamali</td>
<td>ok•cha•ma•li</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakna huta</td>
<td>lak•na h•u•ta</td>
<td>orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homakbi</td>
<td>ho•mak•bi</td>
<td>purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusa</td>
<td>lu•sa</td>
<td>black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DID YOU KNOW?

- “Oklahoma” is a Choctaw word, with “Okla” meaning “people” and “Homma” meaning “red.”
- Many town and city names are actually Choctaw words too! See the section on Choctaw locations to learn more.
- World War I Code Talkers were the first to use their Choctaw language as a means to confuse the enemy.
- Choctaw language was the first native language taught in public high schools of Oklahoma for a credit in a world language. Additionally, it is taught at various sites in the state and in locations across the nation to more than 10,000 people each week!

By the Numbers...

Language students reached on a weekly basis
A. Public Schools .......... 700
B. University ................. 70
C. Internet .................. 240
D. Head Start .............. 330
E. Community ............ 400
F. Employees .............. 70

Daily
G. Word of the Day – All employees – 5,000
H. Word of the Day – non-employees – 2,300
I. 3,000 hits per month on the website

Approximate Total per week – 10,000 people served
During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Indian boarding schools were established with the purpose of educating Native American children, including many Choctaws.

In numerous ways, the children were encouraged or forced to abandon their Native American identities and cultures. In fact, legislation mandated English as the language of instruction for school children on reservations or at Indian boarding schools in the 19th century. The children who attended the schools were usually immersed in European-American culture, and most were forbidden to speak their native languages. This was not only challenging because the children did not know English but they were also mixed in with children of other Indian tribes who also only knew their own unique language. The children began to forget the language of their people.

Lillie Roberts, who is an instructor at the School of Choctaw Language and the first instructor to teach the classes online, was one of those children who was sent to the boarding schools at a young age.

“I attended a boarding school for four years, from 1950 to 1954,” she says. “I was six years old and only knew how to speak Choctaw when I was sent there. I had no choice but to learn English; we weren’t allowed to speak our own language. We were immersed in the English language and overtime I had to come to understand it.

“It was total immersion because the people who were teaching us only knew English so we had to learn,” she continues. “I didn’t realize it then but by the time I was in the second grade I was already starting to lose my language.”

Eventually, even her parents began mixing English and Choctaw when they spoke.

It wasn’t until she reached adulthood that it really stuck her that “something is gone,” she says. “I began to want to hear the language again. I missed it.”

Revival of Traditional Language

The Choctaw Language has been a written language for more than 180 years. The Choctaw language is at the core of tribal culture, tradition, and identity.

“Knowing the history and the culture are good but the language is something that defines us as a people,” says Curtis Billy, another “first speaker” and an instructor at the Choctaw School of Language. “With the culture you can reinvent yourself and still stay with contemporary times. Fortunately, our language has stayed intact fairly well up until this point, but the revitalization will ensure that it stays that way for future generations. We’re standardizing the language here at the school in an effort to maintain that.”

The revitalization really began to take off after President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Native American Languages Act of 1992. The law established a program to help preserve and ensure the survival and continuing vitality of Native American languages. “Traditional languages are an important part of this Nation’s culture and history and can help provide Native Americans with a sense of identity and pride in their heritage,” President Bush said in a statement upon signing the bill.

That same year the Oklahoma State Board of Education stated that public schools, in teaching world languages, could teach language awareness and tribal heritage languages starting at lower elementary up to the high school level, novice to advanced. “They were recognizing it and that opened it up,” for native languages to be taught in public schools,” says Teresa Billy, the assistant director of the School of Choctaw Language.

This bill sent tribes into a “scramble” to create a language curriculum to be taught to those wanting to learn the language, according to Teresa, who is also a “first speaker” of the Choctaw language and an instructor at the school.

“We’ve developed curriculum for all levels,” she says. “We wanted to create the educational materials to put in the hands of teachers in the public schools.”

A program of study was developed in 1995 to teach beginner Choctaw lessons to young children and the Choctaw Nation began teaching formal community classes to adults in 1998.

With the success of these classes the program began to grow, and in 2003 the Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna, or the School of Choctaw Language, was established to promote and preserve the language, history and culture of the Choctaw people.

The goal of the School of Choctaw Language is to revitalize and perpetuate the language by utilizing a sequential curriculum and making it accessible through the use of technology and traditional classroom settings to anyone desiring to learn the language.
Challenges to Preserving the Language

The Choctaw Dictionary Committee was established in the summer of 2000 to ensure consistency and accuracy of the language.

“We want it to stay consistent, to be accurate to the language,” says Curtis. “We have a dictionary that was written in the 1800s that we still use today and that shows that we are staying consistent. If we can maintain that pattern in the future then that will ensure the language stays true. We don’t want to lose our unique sounds and our emphasis. We want to be good stewards to our language to pass on to the next generation.”

“The language sets us apart from even other tribes,” he continues. “It’s unique to us. It’s the language that we use to pass on our traditions or oral stories.”

“We try to maintain the standardization of the language, the formalism, recognize the colloquialisms and teach proper speech, the sentence structure, the sounds and tones,” says Curtis. “Our unique sounds have not changed.”

A challenge in revitalizing the language is the generational disconnect that exists.

Lillie goes on to say that there is a generational language disconnect because of the way many Native American children were forced to learn English as children. “There would be that generational disconnect between my children and me because of what I went through,” she says. “I wasn’t able to teach them. They didn’t grow up speaking the language. They know words and sentences, and they could probably understand some but they couldn’t carry on a conversation. Choctaw wasn’t their first language the way it was mine.”

Shame was another reason for a disconnect, Teresa says. To fit in with society, Native Americans would often deny knowing their language, even though they grew up in Choctaw homes. “That’s how it was back then, for whatever reason,” she says. “I suppose it was a societal thing, or peer pressure.

“Also, some parents told children, ‘I’m not going to teach you Choctaw because I want you to do well in school. I don’t want you to be hindered the way I was’,” Teresa says.

“There was also a disconnect that no one really knew who we were,” she continues. “We were definitely bi-cultural. A lot of the kids I graduated with never knew my side of life...the food, the songs, the church. They never saw us as being different and I realized that early on. My family didn’t live the way that dominant society lived, yet the people I went to school with never saw that. It was like I only belonged if I acted like [them.] We played that dual role to the hilt.

“In a sense, we were almost treated invisibly,” she continues. “It was like ‘I know you’re here but you don’t know enough about what we’re talking about’ and so we learned to play that role. I’d just listen and learn.”

“Things have changed though,” she says. “It’s acceptable to be different today.”
Currently, the School of Choctaw Language has 13 teachers on staff certified by the Oklahoma State Department of Education with teaching credentials. These Language instructors have developed the Choctaw language curriculum, based on standards established by the Oklahoma State Board of Education, which is taught in the public schools and colleges.

The Choctaw Language classes are taught through the distance learning OneNet system to 38 public schools, five colleges and carry a foreign language credit.

“Every day we have 66 classes ongoing, taught at the high schools through distance learning,” says Teresa.

Choctaw language was the first to be offered as a minor at the college level. The school partners with Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant to offer 18 hours of Choctaw language courses, which are credited as a world language.

The Choctaw Language is also taught to students at 13 Head Start Centers. The children are taught basic words and even begin learning short sentences.

Additionally, classes are taught in the communities throughout the Choctaw Nation’s 10½ counties and at locations across the nation. The AVAcast (Audio Visual Architecture) System is an easy-to-use interface that allows the teachers to interact with students using chat rooms, video conferencing and other convenient measures to teach the Choctaw Language online as well.

The school recently moved to a new energy efficient LEED-certified building, which is highly conducive to the technology-based teaching methods utilized by the Choctaw language instructors. The building houses distance learning equipment, an interactive meeting center, training and private teaching areas, as well as a bookstore.

The School of Choctaw Language has developed and published a definer, a history book, a social history book, several children’s books, a Choctaw Christmas CD, and traditional hymns CD, all of which can be found at the school’s bookstore at the school or online at choctawschool.com.

News, information, helpful links, Choctaw lessons and the Choctaw “Word of the Day” are all also available on the school’s website, choctawschool.com, 24 hours a day.
Choctaw Place Names in Oklahoma

The connection that Choctaws, as Indigenous people, have with our land has always been a very close one. The form of agriculture that our ancestors developed, their methods of hunting and gathering, and their practices of walking on footpaths and traveling by streams in canoes, all made them intimately familiar with every feature on the landscape of their Homeland. They gave names to many of its places. The names that they chose often literally describe a notable characteristic of a particular spot, convey the type of natural resources to be found there, give the specific use to which the land was put, or refer to a historical event that took place there.

Still today, ancient Choctaw names dot the map in Mississippi, western Alabama, northern Florida, and eastern Louisiana, even in spots that have had no Choctaw settlements now for 200 years. These names, many of them woven in to Choctaw oral traditions, continue to give us some idea of the significance that these particular spots had to our ancestors.

Beginning in the early 1830s, the Trail of Tears forcibly separated many of our Choctaw ancestors from their sacred Homeland and brought them to what is now southeastern Oklahoma. Accounts written at the time period describe weeping Choctaws touching the trees and telling them goodbye as they set out on the Trail. Once in their new land, they immediately began establishing connections with the landscape and naming its features, just as they had done in Mississippi.

Many of these Oklahoma Choctaw place names are still the official names used today. Those of us living here say some of these names all the time, whether or not we even realize that when we do we are speaking little bits of the Choctaw language that connect us with a deep heritage on the land.

What follows is a list of a few of these places, with literal English translations of their Choctaw names and when possible, brief histories of how they came to be so named.

The first Choctaw name that must be mentioned is “Oklahoma” itself. Choctaw delegate Rev. Allen Wright suggested naming it “Oklahumma.” In the Choctaw language “okla” means “people” and “humma” means “red.” Thus, the area would be named Oklahoma Territory, or literally “ Territory of the Red People.” Today “The State of Oklahoma” literally means “The state belonging to Red People.”

The town of Atoka is Choctaw in origin. It was named after Capt. Atoka, a Choctaw warrior who signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek and was well known for his prowess in stickball. His name probably came from the word “Hitoka,” or “Stickball-Playing Field.”

South of Atoka is the town of Tushka. Its name comes from the Choctaw word “tvshka” or “warrior.”

In Bryan County, east of Durant, is the town of Bokchito. This town’s name, which can be translated as “large stream,” comes from the Choctaw words “bok,” meaning “river” or “stream,” and “chito” meaning “big.”

Pushmataha County is named after one of the most influential Choctaw chiefs of all time. Coming from Oklahannali, the southernmost of the three Choctaw Districts in Mississippi, Pushmataha (1764-1824) served as a District Chief from 1800-1824. He helped the Choctaw tribe become a strong ally of the United States while also opposing the Choctaw’s eventual removal from Mississippi to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears. Pushmataha’s name probably comes from the Choctaw phrase “apushi mvt taha,” meaning literally “early childhood is gone.”

Tuska is a small town whose name comes from the compounding of the Choctaw words “tvshka” meaning “warrior” and “humma” meaning “red.” Its name literally means “red warrior.”

South of Tuska is the town of Nashoba. Its name means, “wolf” in the Choctaw language. The town derives its name from a no-longer existent county that was a part of Choctaw Nation before statehood.

The community of Lukfata is located just west of Broken Bow. Its name is created from a combination of the Choctaw words “lukfi” or “dirt” and “hvta” meaning “light-colored.” Some local resident translate its name as “white clay.”

Talihina was founded as a railroad town, and it derives its name from the Choctaw words “tvli” meaning rock or metal and “hina” meaning “red.” Its name literally means “red warrior.”

Skullyville is located north of Poteau and was one of the first Choctaw towns established in Oklahoma. Its cemetery is the resting place for a number of Choctaw Trail of Tears survivors. “Skully” comes from the Choctaw word “iskulli” meaning “money.” The town’s name literally means “Moneyville.” This was given because it was here that Choctaw residents would come to be paid annuities.

Pocola is located north of Poteau. Its name is a corruption of the Choctaw word “pokoli” meaning ten. It was thus named because the town is roughly 10 miles southwest from the old part of Fort Smith.

Yanush is a small town located in Latimer County. Its name comes from the Choctaw word “pvnuwh,” meaning buffalo. It is likely that buffalo could be found in the area when Choctaw settlers first arrived.

Also, in Latimer County is the town of Panola, which derives its name from the Choctaw word “ponola,” meaning cotton.
The Muscogee Creeks locate their original homelands across millions of acres of land in the Southeastern part of the United States, more specifically, Alabama and Georgia. Our ancestors were woodlands people whose communities changed and thrived under the rise of the Mississippian era. These communities became very sophisticated and organized societies. They formed Chiefdoms, participated in political discourse, formed complex ceremonies and systems based on religion, and left behind the mounds that were the epicenters of their society as a whole. In the Southeast, this era lasted for approximately 300 years, ending in the year 1500 CE, around the time of their first European contact with Spain.

After European contact, everything changed for the people of the Southeast. Even the Creek language suffered under the impact of foreign contact. For example, after Spanish contact in the mid-1500s, linguists noted the addition of Spanish-derived words into the Creek vocabulary. But, of course, this would make sense, as the Muscogee Creek people would need to find a way to talk about and categorize people and objects new to them, or not found in their own societies. Such additions to the language would also occur after the Creek people encountered the English colonizers in the 1600s—English terms were also added to Creek vocabulary.

The Creek language, however, has a very strong base and was able to withstand the changes to the vocabulary, adapting and evolving to incorporate these new words, rather than disappearing.

**Este Maskoke em oponvkv – The Creek Language**

As noted earlier, the Creek people locate their homelands in the Southeastern region of the United States, specifically from the areas of Alabama and Georgia. The Este Maskoke em oponvkv, or the Creek Language originates from the same region. The language itself comes from the Muskogean family, along with the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alabama, Koasati, Hitchiti-Mikasuki, and Apalachee languages, all tribes who inhabited lands from Georgia to Louisiana. Linguistic anthropologists consider this language family to be the most important one in the South. According to linguists Jack B. Martin and Margaret McKane Mauldin, 400 years ago the Creek language was used as the regional language, spoken to conduct business and diplomacy, even by groups who spoke their own languages at home. And, while these tribal languages are derived from the same linguistic family, you must not expect them to sound the same. They have evolved into different languages (except the Chickasaw and Choctaw which are very similar), owing to what linguists believe to be a 3,000-year existence. With our language, some people prefer the term 'Creek', and some prefer the term 'Muscogee'. The word in Creek is Maskoke. It has no other meaning. The term 'Creek' is slightly broader and is used here to include dialects spoken by Seminoles.

The Muscogee Creek language endured the rise and decline of the Mississippian Era. Post-Chiefdom era, Este Maskoke em oponvkv was spoken in the etvlwv (small towns/bands) in our homelands of Alabama and Georgia. And while the language withstood the changes wrought by European contact, tribal relations with the Europeans were changing. Europeans began treaty making with Creeks in 1733, which started as a process of recognizing the Muscogee Creeks as sovereigns with title to their lands, but swiftly deteriorated, especially after U.S. won their independence from Europe. Treaties were no longer about friendship and sovereignty, and rather more to do with extensive land cession, with non-Indians encroaching farther and farther into the homelands.

In order to escape conflict, to gain some autonomy, or to find more fertile lands, some bands of Creek speakers migrated to Florida in the 1700’s, where they became known as Seminoles (a Creek word for “runaways”) and remain to this day. The Creeks that remained in the homelands were already divided by their ideological views. These differences culminated in the Red Stick Wars (1813-1814), which pitted Creek against Creek and resulted in a tremendous defeat at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. This historic battle led to the loss of 22 million acres of the homelands. Thereafter, until the Removal period, more treaties were signed with increasing amounts of land being lost to the United States. In the late 1820s and 1830s, after the loss of all of the Georgia homelands and most of the Alabama lands, most Creeks (and Seminoles) were forced to move to Indian Territory (Oklahoma), by President Andrew Jackson, who signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830. Initially many Creek people resisted this forced removal order and fought with the United States in what became known as the Second Creek War until the vast majority of Creek were finally removed, many in handcuffs and chains, to Indian Territory in 1837 and 1838. It is estimated that between 3,500 - 4,400 Creek people died during the crossing. This removal process is known as the Creek Trail of Tears. The Muscogee Creek people entered Indian Territory carrying with them only their traditions, language, and a strong sense of adaptation and survival.
Upon arriving in Indian Territory, the missionaries began to pressure the Creek people into adopting a system of education. Initially, there was some missionary interaction with the Lower Creeks, a faction of the tribe who arrived before forced removal. This contact, however, was short-lived. After the rest of the tribe arrived on the Trail of Tears, they refused missionary presence. The Creek people were against missionary education because many of them believed that the missionaries wanted to take away Creek language and traditions and impose Christianity. In fact, before removal, Superintendent Benjamin Hawkins tried to encourage the Creeks to allow the missionaries into their communities, but met with resistance from most Creek people. Eventually, however, the Creek saw the benefits that other tribes were reaping from education, and wanted their children to be prepared to deal with white society and the English language. In 1841, the tribe’s National Council contracted with Presbyterian missionaries to open a boarding school. The first Presbyterian missionary school opened in 1843. In all, the Creek Nation would run seven boarding schools for Indian children, three boarding schools for the descendants of Freedman, and sixty-five day schools. Educational efforts were interrupted by the Civil War, but resumed in the 1880s.

The missionaries began extensive work on the Creek language during this era of Creek education. In 1853, the Muscogee Creek Nation adopted an official orthography, and from this point, literacy continued to flourish. Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson made a substantial contribution to Creek literacy. She was the daughter of the noteworthy Congregationalist missionary Samuel A. Worcester, a missionary who lived among the Cherokee people. Her family came to Indian Territory on the Trail of Tears with the Cherokee. Ann was educated at the missionary schools and back in the East. She returned to Indian Territory as a teacher. She eventually married missionary teacher William Robertson. Together, along with their children, they taught their Creek students how to read and write in Creek, using the Creek alphabet system. During her work, Ann became so adept in the Creek language that she was able to translate numerous texts into the Creek language, including the Bible and some hymnals. It was during this era of literacy that Creek speakers published many of the Nation’s laws and other materials in Creek. It is estimated that by the early 1900s, the Creek language literacy rate (those who could read and write in Creek) was 95%.

Unfortunately, everything would change at the turn of the century. The Curtis Act, put in place in 1898, took control of Creek funding (and the control of its schools) from the Nation, placing it into the hands of the Department of the Interior. By the time Oklahoma became a State, in 1907, most of the Creek schools had closed their doors and the teaching of the Creek language in schools had ceased.

Could the actions of over one hundred years ago, continue to have a negative impact upon language usage today? Absolutely—if we let it. The twentieth century, especially the first half, was filled with federal and social policies that were intent upon disconnecting Native Peoples from their cultures, traditions, and languages. Unfortunately, the belief that Creek children needed to learn English to be successful persisted to the detriment the Creek language. It then becomes an inter-generation problem, as each subsequent generation moves farther away from the language and from primary speakers. As a result, the Creek language became endangered.

Today, most people who speak Creek are grandparents or great-grandparents. Some Oklahoma colleges and universities, such as the University of Oklahoma, are directly confronting Native language loss by offering classes in many different languages, including Creek. They also host an annual Native American Language Fair, where students of all ages create presentations in their own language and compete against other students. It is an exciting event where the languages come to life. And, within the Creek Nation boundaries, more and more students are afforded the opportunity to learn some of their language. Through programs and federal funds, some schools can provide cultural events and are able to bring in Creek language teachers to assist their students with the language portion of the Muscogee Creek Nation’s Challenge Bowl. The Nation’s Language Revitalization program hosts a summer language camp for its youth. They also teach Creek in the Muscogee Creek Nation’s daycare center. For the adults, the program’s language teachers hold free classes within some of the Nation’s communities and teach the language twice a week on the Creek Nation’s tribal complex for the employees. Today, the Muscogee Creek Nation has over 77,000 enrolled tribal citizens. As of 2007, it was estimated that approximately 4,000 Creek people (and 200 Florida Seminoles) speak the Creek language, which is a trend upwards from early statistics. But, the disparity between citizenry and Creek speakers is startling. Our Nation, the Muscogee Creek Nation, is working hard to turn the statistics around and help revitalize the language and encourage more children and adults to learn their native tongue.

Where is the Muskogee Creek Language Spoken Today?
The Creek Language is still a living language spoken in both Oklahoma and Florida, by three federally recognized tribes:
• The Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma
• The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma
• The Seminole Tribe of Florida
In 1853, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation adopted the written alphabet as the national alphabet (shown to the right). Prior to this official adoption, several systems had been in use.

**The Creek Alphabet**

Currently accepted Creek language orthography:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREEK PHRASE</th>
<th>MUSCOCREEK PHONETIC</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hes’ce</td>
<td>Hees-chee</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonko</td>
<td>Iss-tone-go</td>
<td>How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here mahhe</td>
<td>He-thlee-mah-he</td>
<td>I am good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______ cvhocefkv tos.</td>
<td>_______ Chuh-ho-jif-kuh-dose.</td>
<td>My name is (insert your name).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______ liki tos.</td>
<td>_______ lay-gay-dose.</td>
<td>I live in (your town).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvto</td>
<td>Muh-doe</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hvmken, hokkolen, tutcenen</td>
<td>Hum-gen, hoke-ko-lin, toot-chee-nin</td>
<td>One, two, three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hvse (Months)**

In Creek, the name of each month has meaning. They are points of reference created by a society of experienced hunters, gathers, and agriculturists. These descriptive terms aid the Creek people in planting, gathering, and harvesting.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryfo Cuse (Winter’s younger brother)</td>
<td>January</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotvle Hvse (Wind Month)</td>
<td>February</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasahcuce (Little Spring Month)</td>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasahce Rakko (Big Spring Month)</td>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ke Hvse (Mulberry month)</td>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvco Hvse (Blackberry Month)</td>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiyuce (Little harvest or heat/summer)</td>
<td>July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiyo Rakko (Big harvest or summer)</td>
<td>August</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otowoskuce (Little chestnut month)</td>
<td>September</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otowoskv Rakko (Big chestnut month)</td>
<td>October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehole (Frost month)</td>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryfo Rakko (Big Winter)</td>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Seasons:**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Tasahce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Meske</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Ryfo</td>
<td></td>
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*There is no fixed term for Autumn, but Ryfo Hakof (when it becomes winter) may be used. (Martin and Mauldin, 157)*

**Activity:**

1. Look at the Gregorian/Western calendar. Compare it to the Creek terms of each month.
2. Go online and explore the history of the Gregorian calendar. Do the names of their month have meaning, and if so what are the origins and meanings. Then, compare the meanings to the Creek terms.
   a. Are they as descriptive?
   b. Are they instructive in regards to growing and harvesting periods, like the Creek terms.
Language and Food

Food is a basic necessity to sustain life, and as such, it is heavily entwined into the fabric of tribal culture. As infants, one of our first forms of communication relates to food and our need for sustenance; thus, food is inextricably tied to communication, to language. Traditionally, Muscogee Creek people were hunters, gatherers, and agriculturalists; this was a labor-intensive way of life. Some of our people are still agriculturalists, hunter and gatherers, but to a lesser degree. Today, traditional practices are changing and some are dwindling, including our food ways, which includes the gathering and preparation of traditional Creek foods. The Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (MFSI) in Okmulgee is making great strides in re-introducing the practice of making and consuming traditional foods to our youth and other community members. They are also tying the language into their work.

Tafvmpuce (Wild Onions):

Muscogee Creek people know that tasulace (Spring) has arrived when tafvmpuce (pictured) are being cleaned and cooked for community dinners. Especially in Tashulte (Little Spring month, or March), when various community centers and churches organize tafvmpuce (wild onion) dinners where Muscogee Creek families, community leaders, and visitors gather to share in the feast. Tafvmpuce is a traditional Southeastern Native American food, that once gathered must be cleaned of roots and dirt, chopped, and slowly cooked, usually with eggs. These feasts, which highlight this seasonal vegetable, also include other foods that can be found at a traditional Creek table, such as sakkonepke, salt meat/pork, beans, corn, sour corn and fry bread, grape dumplings, and so much more. These dinners have become a new communal tradition called, “The Wild Onion Dinner.” The money that is raised by such efforts not only supports the churches and communities, but they also allow many people to take part in the consumption of this customary food, many of who would be otherwise unable to do so. People will drive for miles to attend these dinners and the lines for entrance tend to be very long. If you decide to go to such an event, plan to arrive early!

Historically, wild onions are a food that Muscogee Creek people ate when we lived in the homelands of Georgia and Alabama, and it is one of the traditional foods we were able to maintain in our diets upon our arrival in Oklahoma. It is a food, however, that is not easily accessible to most people. This vegetable is hunted for in the woods sometimes during the winter months (depending upon the length, harshness, and dampness of winter), but is most heartily harvested during the early spring months by people who know where to look for the plant and are physically capable of doing such digging and gathering. Often times, family members go out together to hunt and it is a good, fun family activity, but it is also a labor-intensive process. For this reason, many of our elders, who used to hunt, gather, and eat the onions as part of their seasonal diet, are unable to do so. Thus, these dinners provide a way for them to eat this food. It also offers an opportunity for relatives and old friends from near and far to share a meal and catch up with each other’s lives and for the old ones to speak the language with other Creek-speaking people.

Another traditional-food, and also a wild green, is osa (pokeweed). The harvesting of pokeweed is seasonal, and it is important to pick them early before the stalks get too big or too old and tough. Osa can be prepared in several ways. The leaves can be wilted with grease and seasoned, or the stalks can be cooked like wild onions, with eggs, or fried the same as you would okra, with cornmeal. Tender stalks are always the best to utilize, however, if the stalk is tough, you can strip the hard outer-surface and use the tender inner white layer.

Vce (Corn)

Traditionally, the Muscogee Creek people were agriculturalists, or farmers. Corn, beans, and squash, often referred to as “the Three Sisters,” are primary traditional foods. There are several forms of corn, but the form that we often use is vce-sakrofke (hominy). It is a white corn. For many generations, our people used corn that came from original seed that was brought from the homelands, almost 170 years ago, and cultivated on Oklahoma land. This corn, however, is becoming more and more difficult to find as fewer families are keeping the tradition of passing down the corn through the generations. Today, the corn can be commercially purchased, either in the dried-form or in prepared cans.

Vce is a great food source because it can be used and stored in many different forms. For example, it can be dried, and the dried corn can be pounded into meal for making bread. The whole kernels can be used for making stews and soups. One such soup is saklanepke (pictured) which is a corn soup cooked with meat.

Another vce-based food seen at traditional Creek meals is cvtvhakv (Blue Dumplings). The dumplings are made from blue corn, sometimes referred to as black corn. It is a flint corn that has to be boiled with ashes, dried, processed, and pounded into meal. The dumplings, made from combining the meal with cooked brown beans, take on a blue-ish color due to the color of the corn.

Osafke, or sofkey, as it is most often written these days, is also a food made from vce, and it is one that is heavily identified with the Muscogee Creek people. It is a sour corn drink or soup with a very distinct flavor. Traditionally, it is made from a white flint vce that was cracked into small pieces. The corn is cooked in a large pot of water with wood-ash hye for several hours.

At the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, we realize that language and our traditions identify us as distinctly and proudly Muscogee. The efforts put forth by our Cultural Preservation Office, Language Revitalization Program, and the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative are essential to maintaining our traditions, our culture. Their efforts to further our knowledge of our history and traditions, and the teaching and speaking of the Creek language go hand-in-hand. The Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative has been making opportunities for youth and other community members to learn about traditional food gathering by going on outings and teaching food preparation. They also teach them the words for these foods and processes. Food provides a perfect opportunity to teach our Creek language.

Other Creek Food Names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creek Name</th>
<th>English Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vce-crnmpy</td>
<td>sweet potato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tvlak-crpko</td>
<td>green bean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tvlak-cate</td>
<td>brown beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sakkonepke</td>
<td>hominy and meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vctvaklke</td>
<td>corn bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tafvmpuce</td>
<td>wild onion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ke</td>
<td>mulberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>osa</td>
<td>pokeweed</td>
</tr>
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</table>

and a few contemporary foods translated into Creek:

Chili: Meksekvlke enhompety
(Mexican food [that] hot one)

Crackers: tvlikvrvpce (little dried bread)

Activity:

1. Ask the elders in your family how much food gathering and preparation has changed over their lifetimes.
2. Ask your elders what foods they ate as children that they no longer eat due to scarcity or changes in the populations over all diet.
The Sac and Fox Nation is deeply committed to the survival and revitalization of the Sauk language.

Empowered by the commitment of the Sac and Fox Nation Business Committee to provide operational and programming funding, the Sauk Language Department and the Sauk Language Master Apprentice Program, continue to be proactive in the revitalization of the Sauk language.

For more information about programs offered through the Sauk Language Department

Call 918-968-0070 or 800-256-7552

Email: language@sacandfoxnation-nsn.gov
CHAHTA ANUMPA
AIIKHVNA

School of Choctaw Language

Official language website of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

800-522-6170

- Language lessons
- Class information
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Visit Okmulgee in June for the Annual MUSCOGEE NATION FESTIVAL.

Contact the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tourism & Recreation Department for more information.

918.732.7992 WWW.MUSCOGEENATION-NSN.GOV