



Discussion Guide

for the **Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma** Book for 2005

*Walking the Choctaw Road:
Stories from Red People Memory*
by Tim Tingle

In 2004, people from throughout the state went online to the Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma website to cast their votes for the one book they wanted all Oklahomans to read and discuss during 2005. The winner, by a wide margin, was Tim Tingle's critically-acclaimed book, *Walking the Choctaw Road: Stories from Red People Memory*.

The voters made a popular choice, as evidenced by the reviews *Walking the Choctaw Road* is receiving from readers, authors, and literary critics. Comments include, "... delightfully presented, inherently entertaining, and thoughtfully informative...will stay with you and lend you some of its strength... evocative language, expert pacing, and absorbing subject matter will rivet the reader."

Since its publication in 2003, *Walking the Choctaw Road* has garnered many awards, including *Storytelling World Magazine's* Best Anthology for 2004; the International Reader's

Association Notable Book for a Global Society, 2004; and *Alaska Reads!* Book of the Year for 2005.

Whether Choctaw or not, readers will find inspiration from each of the twelve stories. A mixture of historical accounts, traditional lore, and tales from everyday life, the stories are told in chronological order, from the days when most Choctaws were still living in Mississippi, to the Trail of Tears into Okla Homma, to modern day tales of Tingle's own family.

Each story invites the reader into a magical place where integrity, bravery, patience, human dignity, courage, tolerance, and faith resonate.

Walking the Choctaw Road is available through your local library or bookstore, as well as online through a variety of sources, including its publisher, Cinco Puntos Press.

Oklahoma  Oklahoma

A Statewide Reading and Discussion Program to Celebrate Oklahoma's Centennial

www.okreadsok.org

Walking the Choctaw Road

You Are Invited To...

- ✓ Read and discuss the book with your family and friends.
- ✓ Organize a book discussion group.
- ✓ Take part in a discussion sponsored by your local library or bookstore.
- ✓ Sponsor an event or program.
- ✓ Donate *Walking the Choctaw Road* to your local public or school library.
- ✓ Visit www.okreadsok.org to learn more about the program and to help select next year's book.

About Tim Tingle

Of Choctaw descent, Tim's reverence for stories began at an early age. On weekend visits to his grandmother's house, he would "be really quiet and find a shadowy place and a blanket and pretend to be half asleep" so that he could stay up and listen to the stories of his family. From these stories, he learned how his great-grandfather survived the Trail of Tears, why the rattlesnake is revered and the owl reviled in Choctaw culture, as well as other stories that have shaped his life.

Since 1988, Tim has expanded his collection of stories by interviewing members of the Choctaw

Tribe. He now shares these stories and teaches folklore at schools, universities and festivals nationally. For his work, he has garnered numerous state, national, and international awards. He was honored by the Wordcraft Circle of Native American Writers and Storytellers as "2001 Contemporary Storyteller of the Year," has received the John Henry Faulk Award (2003) for "outstanding contributions to the art of storytelling," and was a featured storyteller at the 2002 National Storytelling Festival in Jonesboro, Tennessee, just to name a few.

Tim is also known as an important folklorist, having received a master's degree in Native American studies from the University of Oklahoma. Through the University's College of Continuing Education, he teaches and leads annual week-long travel study courses titled "Storytelling: Jonesborough and the Blue Ridge Mountains" and "Storytelling in the Land of Enchantment."

Following the success of *Walking the Choctaw Road*, Tim has published *Texas Ghost Stories: Fifty for the Telling*, co-authored with his long-time friend and fellow storyteller, Doc Moore. Later this year, two illustrated children's books, *When Turtle Grew Feathers* and *Crossing Bok Chitto*, as well as a collection of ghost stories from the Five Civilized Tribes will be published.

Tim now resides in Canyon Lake, Texas.



Photo by Karen Arneson

"I would hope that Oklahomans, and other readers of my book, would make renewed efforts to strengthen family bonds, heeding the lesson learned in Archie's War."

—Tim Tingle

(From an article that appeared in *Humanities Interview*, a publication of the Oklahoma Humanities Council, Winter 2005)

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About this Discussion Guide

One of the greatest rewards of reading a good book is discussing it with others. These discussions may be formal or informal, and may take place while in the car, over the dinner table, in the break room at work, at a library, or a bookstore...almost anywhere. *Walking the Choctaw Road* lends itself well to discussion, especially within families.

This guide provides discussion questions for specific stories in the book, as well as general questions that relate to the overall theme. Questions are courtesy of *Alaska Reads!* and friends and colleagues of the author.

Questions on Specific Stories:

- **Crossing Bok Chitto**—How does the story demonstrate the Choctaw value of freedom? What secret did Martha Tom know that enabled her to cross the river? The author suggests that a story may have a different meaning for different tellers. What might be the meaning of the same story if told by one of the Anglos or one of the slaves?
- **The Beating of Wings**—Many cultures embrace the mystical and spiritual as part of their belief systems. In many Native cultures, one may hear tales of the Little People or of transformations that can happen after death. Shape-shifting is part of the Choctaw belief system. What is shape-shifting? In *The Beating of Wings*, what instructions did Jimmy Ben get for dealing with the one who pursued him?
- **Trail of Tears**—As they said good-bye to their home, the old people made a dramatic impact on the young boy. Why was it such a powerful image? The young boy is comforted by a shilom-bish after his mother's death. What is a shilom-bish?

- **Bones on the Brazos**—What type of man was Major Neighbors? What values do you think he demonstrated when it came to taking risks?
- **Caleb**—We encounter violence in life in many unexpected places. Where do Caleb and his parents find violence and how do each address it? The author adds a touch of humor at the tale's end: "Caleb can always be counted on to show up with a batch of good fresh meat?" What does that imply?
- **The Choctaw Way**—Willie was trying to teach Tobias "life lessons." What does the refrain "and the sun set and the night was cold and dark, but the sun rose again in the morning," teach us? Why wouldn't Willie run away when he had the chance?
- **Brothers**—How is looking/being different viewed by the townspeople? Is that type of response common today? Billy Hotabee delivers a sermon on the Biblical story Cain and Abel. Why did he choose this topic? Discuss incidents of sibling rivalry you have witnessed or experienced. How does "Brothers" differ from Cain and Abel?
- **Lizbeth and Madstone**—What does the story teach us about family?
- **Tony Byars**—Tony Byars had to go through the belt line. What helped him survive it? What lesson would he like us to carry with us? Why did Mr. Byars tell Tim his story?
- **Archie's War**—What was Archie's war? Discuss family conflict as it appears in this and other stories. Why did Archie invite the narrator to work with him? Have you seen families divided by political and social attitudes? On what grounds can reconciliation occur? What event changed the relationship between Tim Tingle and his father in *Archie's War*?
- **Saltypie**—When it comes to family, what does *Saltypie* teach us we could lose if we are always in a hurry to be on our way?

(continued)

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Questions for General Discussion:

- Which historical and cultural elements of the Choctaw experience came as no surprise to you?
- What new information did you receive?
- To whom do you listen to discover your story?
- Remembering that cultures are not always ethnically-based, describe incidents of cultural conflict in *Archie's War*, *Crossing Bok Chitto*, and *Caleb*, as well as stories of your own choosing.
- Many stories in *Walking the Choctaw Road* depict the loss of a family member; the mother in *Trail of Tears*, Major Neighbors in *Bones on the Brazos*, Tony's brother in *Tony Byars*, Robbie in *Caleb*, and the husband/father in *Lizabeth and the Madstone*. Consider the variety of responses and ways of coping with this loss.
- A common theme throughout *Walking the Choctaw Road* is that of removal from one's homeland. Discuss the reasons for leaving home in *Caleb*, *Crossing Bok Chitto*, *Saltypie*, and *Trail of Tears*. What unanticipated challenges are faced both on the journey and in the perceived Promised Land? What is your family and personal idea of home? How did your family settle in Oklahoma? In your present home?
- *Bones on the Brazos* and *Trail of Tears* both describe families forcibly removed from their homes. *Bones on the Brazos* is a third person narrative, while *Trail of Tears* is told first person, through the eyes of a ten-year old boy. How does the narrative voice affect the experience of the reader in these and other stories?
- *Tony Byars* begins as a third person narrative and shifts to first person in the telling of the story. Did this shift impact your understanding of the boarding school experience?
- Consider religious beliefs in *Walking the Choctaw Road* that differ from mainstream Christian ideology. *Caleb*, *The Beating of Wings*, and

Lizabeth and the Madstone are replete with examples. Locate and discuss the abundance of Christian elements. Consider also the presence of both elements in a single story. What role does faith play in *Walking the Choctaw Road*?

Public Appearances

Tim is scheduled to make public appearances throughout Oklahoma during 2005. Visit www.okreadsok.org to see a list of libraries planning to host Tim.

For more information

Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma
www.okreadsok.org

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