

## Crossing Bok Chitto

written by Tim Tingle

illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges

### About the Book

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Format:** 40 pages, 8-1/2" x 11"

**ISBN:** 9781933693200

**Reading Level:** Grade 5

**Interest Level:** Grades 1-8

**Guided Reading Level:** T

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
4.4/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** AD640L

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Courage, Discrimination, Friendship, History, Native American Interest,

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/crossing-bok-chitto](http://leeandlow.com/books/crossing-bok-chitto)

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

### SYNOPSIS

*There is a river called Bok Chitto that cuts through Mississippi. In the days before the War Between the States, in the days before the Trail of Tears, Bok Chitto was a boundary. On one side of the river lived the Choctaws. On the other side lived the plantation owners and their slaves. If a slave escaped and made his way across Bok Chitto, the slave was free.*

Thus begins *Crossing Bok Chitto*, told by award-winning Choctaw storyteller Tim Tingle and brought to life with the rich illustrations of Jeanne Rorex Bridges.

Martha Tom, a young Choctaw girl, knows better than to cross Bok Chitto, but one day—in search of blackberries—she disobeys her mother and finds herself on the other side. A tall slave discovers Martha Tom. A friendship begins between Martha Tom and the slave's family, most particularly his young son, Little Mo. Soon afterwards, Little Mo's mother finds out that she is going to be sold. The situation seems hopeless, except that Martha Tom teaches Little Mo's family how to walk on water to their freedom.

### Awards

- Texas Bluebonnet Masterlist, Texas Library Association (TLA)
- Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honor Book, American Library Association (ALA)
- Notable Children's Book, American Library Association (ALA)
- Paterson Prize for Books for Young People, The Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College
- Prairie Pasque Nominee, South Dakota State Library
- Skipping Stones Honor Award, Skipping Stones Magazine

## BACKGROUND

### Author's Note from Tim Tingle

"Following the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in September 1830, the government forced thousands of Choctaws from their homes in Mississippi. The Choctaws began the trek to Indian Territory, thus becoming the first travelers on the Trail of Tears. Today the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma numbers more than 160,000, the third largest Native American population in the United States. Choctaw land stretches over a ten-and-a-half county area in southeastern Oklahoma, with the nation's capitol in Durant.

Choctaws who chose to remain in Mississippi were the forefathers of the current Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, now residing in and around Neshoba County. Tribal membership is more than nine thousand, with 85% of Mississippi Choctaws speaking Choctaw as their first language and English as their second. While these Choctaws still weave baskets by hand from Mississippi swamp cane, they also weave wiring systems for the Ford Motor Company and the Chrysler Corporation, both with factories on tribal lands. Modern business and traditional culture live comfortably side-by-side.

While the Mississippi and Oklahoma Choctaws are similar in many regards—for instance, both are predominately Christian—one important historical distinction clearly separates the two nations. The narrative of the Mississippi Choctaws is a southern story, a remarkable story of refusing to leave home in spite of enormous pressures. The Oklahoma Choctaw story is one of tragedy and death on the Trail of Tears. However, in one common thread of narrative flow, in the celebration of the miracle of being, in the heroics of survival, both the Mississippi and Oklahoma Choctaws are seeds of a common thistle."

### A Note on Choctaw Storytelling from Tim Tingle

"*Crossing Bok Chitto* began as a song. In September 1992, I made my first trip to visit the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Archie Mingo, a tribal elder, sang a song for me, the old Choctaw wedding chant. He was nestled in a caneback chair in the backyard of his home, facing the piney woods a few miles from Nainah Waiyah, the Choctaw Mother Mound. I later drove him to the mound and he stood on the crest of black earth, singing and recounting old stories.

On the return drive home, Mister Mingo pointed to a small home built of painted pine planks, now graying and warping with age. The structure sat a hundred yards or so from the road and was surrounded by oak and elm trees. Their branches hung thick with kudzu and red trumpet flowers.

"Those folks used to help runaway slaves," Mingo said, pointing to the now dilapidated Choctaw home.

I slowed my truck to a crawl and the trees seemed to part, allowing me a glimpse of a clearing where a wedding was taking place—a wedding from the past. Women in white linked arms and moved in an inner circle; men moved counter to the women in bright shirts and sashes, and the longing

tone of the wedding chant smoked its way through yellowing autumn branches. Not far from the wedding clearing flowed the river Bok Chitto, where Choctaws once built stepping-stones to cross unseen, according to the storytellers, keepers of the history.

Steeped in modern times of internet communication, with the razor edge of printed fact separating truth from untruth, it is difficult to imagine a world where the human voice reigns supreme. Yet Native Americans live in a world that tends to accept the spoken word as the authority. Even today, many Choctaws are likely to trust a story told to them by another Choctaw more than anything they read on the printed page.

We Choctaws live by our stories.

Thus Martha Tom was born, and Little Mo, and the story *Crossing Bok Chitto*, a story about the spirit of freedom, a concept woven tightly within the fabric of this new country, this America we know and love. *Crossing Bok Chitto* is a tribute to the Choctaws—and Cherokees and Creeks and Chickasaws and Seminoles—and Indians of every nation who aided the runaway people of bondage.

Set in the old south, *Crossing Bok Chitto* is an Indian book, written by Indian voices and painted by an Indian artist. The story is documented the Indian way, told and retold and then passed on by uncles and grandmothers. *Crossing Bok Chitto*, in this new format—of language and painting, this book way of telling—is for both the Indian and the non-Indian. We Indians need to continue recounting our past and, from this book, non-Indians might realize the sweet and secret fire that drives the Indian heart. We are proud of who we are. We are determined that our way, shared by many of all races, a way of respect for others and the land we live on, will prevail.

We are people of the earth. Our faith and our stories are down to earth.  
We are a working people who will never feel comfortable far from the earth.  
When allowed our own plot of earth, we are at our best.

We will remain as close as possible to our rivers,  
For they are intertwined with our faith.  
We love the clean waters of our rivers.  
We renew our strength by returning to our rivers.  
We are baptized in our rivers.

We do not deny that darkness exists, but we chose to walk in light,  
As a people, and for this choice we are rewarded with miracles in our lives.  
To stay the darkness, we laugh at our frailties, and to stay the needs of others,  
We reach out—and we give.  
Our stories tell us this is the way it has been.  
The telling of our stories assures us this is the way it will be.  
You listen and you tell and you become.  
As long as our stories are told,  
We can be Choctaw forever."

### Note about Terminology

When using this guide, teachers are encouraged to incorporate local Indigenous histories into the discussions. We acknowledge that terms may vary by region when discussing Indigenous communities. For example, discussions may include a specific tribe name and/or may use more general terms such as Native American, American Indian, Indigenous, or First Nations that are neither intended to minimize nor elevate any one tribe. Furthermore, the term Native is used to identify Indigenous people, as this is a commonly used term in some Indigenous communities. Teachers are encouraged to speak about Native Americans in present tense and acknowledge that all Native Americans carry rich cultures and traditions. A Native American's identity is not tied to the United State of America's recognition as people.

### Choctaw

It is important to note that a tribe may have multiple bands, each with potentially distinct cultures and traditions. *Crossing Bok Chitto* is specific to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. There are three federally-recognized Choctaw bands: Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, and Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. It should not be assumed that all three are exactly the same. Teachers are encouraged to visit the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian's website to learn more information about the tribe's history, culture, traditions, current events, and many other elements that make up their community at: <https://www.choctaw.org/index.html>.

### Native American Oral Storytelling

Oral storytelling is a way people from a variety of backgrounds may share traditional stories and songs across generations. Prior to colonization in the present-day United States of America, storytelling existed. Oral storytelling remains a way that Native American communities share wisdom and preserve rich cultures and traditions. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians indicate that many of the stories they share are folktales (known as Shokka annopa). Animal characters are noted in many of the stories. The aim of some stories was to teach a lesson. (<https://www.choctaw.org/culture/ihinoshi.html>).

Thomas King's book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* is an additional reference when thinking about the role of storytelling in our daily lives. Although King's book is not necessarily appropriate for students in grades 1 to 7, it is a recommended book for teachers to gain a deeper understanding about storytelling from a Native American perspective. (<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-truth-about-stories>)

### Treaties

Treaties are a controversial issue in what is known as Indian Country. In *Crossing Bok Chitto*, the first page reads "In the days before the War Between the States, in the days before the Trail of Tears, Bok Chitto was a boundary." Although years are not mentioned in the text, events are mentioned which necessitate further inquiry. The discussion of treaties and subsequent treaty rights deserves attention in understanding the political nature of being Native American, sovereignty rights, and agreements between two sovereign nations (in this case, the United States of American and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians). It is suggested that primary source treaty documents are shared with students to better understand the intentions and implications of treaties on Native American people. The following website is a resource for primary source treaty documents: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nationtonation/>

## Afro-Indigeneity

The book, *Crossing Bok Chitto*, involves an introduction to human trafficking/slaves that were sold and moved to New Orleans. In addition to unpacking what it means for a human being to be sold and forcibly relocated (which are both very important points) the relocation to New Orleans is salient in understanding Afro-Indigeneity and peoplehood. It is recommended for teachers to read the book *Louisiana Creole Peoplehood: Afro-Indigeneity and Community* to better understand the complexity of Afro-Indigeneity and how such concepts as the peoplehood matrix (see Holm, Pearson, & Chavis, 2003, *Peoplehood: A model for the extension of sovereignty in American Indian studies*) can be integrated into classroom learning. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to consider William Apess' writings to lean on first-person narratives that can help guide discussions on race, racism, and using one's voice to be an agent of change (see William Apess' book titled *On our own ground: The complete writings of William Apess*, a Pequot).

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Think of relationships to language, place/territory, sacred history, and ceremonial cycle (see Holm, Pearson, & Chavis, 2003, *Peoplehood: A model for the extension of sovereignty in American Indian studies*). Identify how you connect to language, place/territory, sacred history, and ceremonial cycle in your own life. Do not culturally appropriate, but consider how language and place (for example) are connected to your identity.
- Retell a family story. This might be a funny story or one with a lesson learned.
- Look at the cover of *Crossing Bok Chitto* and predict what story you think will be shared. Justify your response with any context clues from the cover.
- Create a class KWL about one of the following topics: Native American histories, Afro-Indigeneity, treaties, or Native American storytelling.
- Use the interact map at <https://native-land.ca/> to explore the importance of place in storytelling and our lived experiences.

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

- Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, illustrations, and “Choctaws Today” and “A Note on Choctaw Storytelling” from author Tim Tingle in the back of the book.
- Point out that this book uses the Choctaw language. Ask students why a book might be written this way. Why does it matter what language an author uses? How does a language change how a story is told or who hears it?

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- the culture and traditions of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
- the impact of colonization on traditions and ways of life
- the role of storytelling in honoring and sustaining cultures and traditions across generations
- how friendships are valued in different cultures

Encourage students to consider why the author, Tim Tingle, would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Content Specific

descendants, forefathers, Indian (the word needs to be understood in the context of the story.)

### Academic

amongst, approaching, beneath, boundary, cackle, ceremony, chanting, clearing, coo, disappeared, drought, emerging, escaped, forbidden, friendship, gliding, grabbed, guards, halo, heartbeat, invisible, journey, lanterns, outstretched, peace, plantation, runaway, skimmed, slave, whispering



## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Where is the river, Bok Chitto, located?
2. What happened if a slave escaped the plantation side of Bok Chitto to the Choctaw's side of the river?
3. What fruit did Martha Tom's mother ask to her go collect?
4. Who built the stone path Martha Tom used to cross Bok Chitto?
5. On what side of the river, Bok Chitto, does Martha Tom live?
6. Where does Little Mo live in the story?
7. Who was "...bound for the Promised Land!"?
8. Little Mo's father told him "It's like you're invisible. You move not too fast, not too slow, eyes to the ground, away you go!" What valuable purpose did this advice serve Little Mo?
9. What did Little Mo describe as the "heartbeat of the earth"?
10. What did Little Mo's father mean when he told his family that their mother had been sold?
11. What plan Little Mo suggest to his father so the family could stay together after his mother was sold?
12. What is Little Mo's real name and why is this important to the story?
13. What men were chasing Little Mo when he entered Martha Tom's home?
14. Who did Martha Tom's mother gather for ceremony to cross Bok Chitto?
15. Where did Martha Tom learn the song that she sang to the guards as they stood on the slave side of the river, Bok Chitto?
16. Which perspective tells the story of *Crossing Bok Chitto* as a "night their forefathers witnessed seven black spirits, walking on the water – to their freedom"?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Would the story be different if Little Mo was the one to cross Bok Chitto first instead of Martha Tom? If yes, then how?
2. The imagery of Martha Tom and Little Mo in *Crossing Bok Chitto* shows their steps across the water. On the left side of the book, we see Martha Tom's skirt and moccasins. On the right side of the book, we see Little Mo's pant leg and barefoot. Why is this imagery important? What cultural significance do we see in the Choctaw clothing/regalia? Martha Tom, for instance, is wearing a certain type of moccasin. Her skirt, for instance, has diamonds in the design. What value do diamond designs have for Choctaw people?
3. The concept of ceremony is discussed in the book. One example is the moment when Martha Tom's mother calls the women to put on their white dresses, get a candle, and meet at the river. Explain a ceremony you or your family have been involved in at some point. How is it similar and different from one of the ceremonies described in the book?
4. Describe the imagery that comes to mind when you read the lines "Martha Tom knew her mother could cackle like a mad crow on the outside, while inside she would coo like a dove with love for her daughter." How are the words cackle and coo used to help in your imagery?
5. The book includes a scene concerning slave sales and moving to New Orleans. Consider how place/territory, language, ceremonial cycle, and sacred history (also known as the peoplehood matrix) is impacted by the forced relocation. How might this scene help us understand the term peoplehood?
6. The book has a number of examples of colonization. Define the word colonization using examples from the text to justify your response.
7. The terms friendship and freedom are part of the book's title and themes in the book. However, friendship and freedom can mean different things for people. Compare and contrast your definitions of friendship and freedom to what you infer they mean to the author Tim Tingle in his book.
8. How does *Crossing Bok Chitto* compare to other books you have read that discuss Native Americans past, present, or future?
9. Compare your life to any of the characters in the book. How does your selected character compare to your lived experiences?
10. At the banks of Bok Chitto, Little Mo's father reminds him that Moses is Little Mo's real name. This comes at a time in the book where freedom is possible. At the same time, a religious reference of Moses is used. Why is it important to understand the name Moses at this point in the book?
11. How is the name Moses significant to understanding Choctaw experiences with assimilation? (Note that the religious reference is made with Little Mo and not Martha Tom in a book that can lean into exploring Afro-Indigeneity. Later in the book, Martha Tom sings a song she learned at the slave church, which is another discussion point about assimilation. Describing



the Choctaw women as angels is another opportunity to discuss settler colonial language.)

12. Toward the end of the book, the author writes "The black people talk about the faith of that little boy, Moses. But maybe the white people tell it best." Why would the author make this distinction in the book?
13. Explain what the author means in the section titled "Choctaws Today: Two Prosperous Nations, One Strong People", when he writes: "...both the Mississippi and Oklahoma Choctaws are seeds of a common thistle."

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Select one of the characters from the book, and analyze the character. How does this character contribute to the story? What characteristics do they have? Students may select Martha Tom, Little Mo, or any of the characters (regardless of their real or perceived importance to the storyline).
2. Imagine you were hired to write a "what happens next" book about one of the main characters in the book. Write a draft of your ideas, including a graphic organizer to help outline your ideas.
3. Pretend you are planning to move to the Bok Chitto area. Write some interview questions that you would ask your potential neighbors.
4. Identify at least one cultural connection you found in the book and compare it to something in your life.
5. Write a friendly letter to the author, Tim Tingle, asking him about his involvement with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The section of the book titled "A Note on Choctaw Storytelling" may help you craft your letter.

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each

page, first orally, then in writing.

- Have students work in pairs to tell what they learned about one of the spreads. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about a character of their choosing from the book.
  5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. In a moment of needing strength and encouragement, Little Mo's father reminded him that Mo's real name was Moses. Name a time when you found yourself needing strength and encouragement and what helped you through this moment.
2. Choose a scene from *Crossing Bok Chitto* and use silent acting to act out the emotion that go along with the scene. Have students guess the emotion you portray, the character it is attributed to, and the related scene. Discuss other possible emotions related to the particular scene.
3. Select one illustration for each of the following emotions from *Crossing Bok Chitto*: happy, scared, and proud. Describe why you selected each illustration.
4. How did Martha Tom show strength when the guards approached her?
5. Describe the relationship Martha Tom has with her mother compared to Little Mo's relationship with his father. What are the similarities? What are the differences? How does their relationships affect Martha Tom?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Language might be viewed as an element of culture.** Think about the languages noticed in your classroom and discuss how the languages help us better understand the related culture. In *Crossing Bok Chitto*, there are instances of Choctaw language used. How does the inclusion of the Choctaw language help us understand culture and story? (<https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/language/about-choctaw-language>)
- **At the end of *Crossing Bok Chitto*, the author included a page titled “A Note on Choctaw Storytelling.”** Have students read the page. Once students read the page, have them reflect on how they tell story. What are some key elements of storytelling? Have students explore the website <https://storynet.org/what-is-storytelling/> and make connections between the telling of *Crossing Bok Chitto*, how the student tells stories, and the website’s suggestions on storytelling.
- **Seek out culturally sustaining/revitalizing texts for students below:**
  - Find books that feature Native People in the present. Lee & Low titles include *This Land is My Land* by George Littlechild (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/this-land-is-my-land>), *Kiki’s Journey* by Kristy Orona-Ramirez (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/kiki-s-journey>), *When the Shadbush Blooms* by Carla Messinger (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/when-the-shadbush-blooms>), *The Blue Roses* by Linda Boyden (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-blue-roses>), *All Around Us* by Xelena González (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/all-around-us>), and *Where Wonder Grows* by Xelena González (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/where-wonder-grows>).
  - Find books that present Native People accurately such as *Buffalo Song* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/buffalo-song>), *Crazy Horse’s Vision* by Joseph Bruchac (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/crazy-horse-s-vision>), *Blessing’s Bead* by Debby Dahl Edwardson (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/blessing-s-bead>), *Sky Dancers* by Connie Ann Kirk (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sky-dancers>), *Giving Thanks* by Chief Jake Swamp (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/giving-thanks>), *The People Shall Continue* by Simon J. Ortiz (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-people-shall-continue>), and *Indian No More* by Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/indian-no-more>).
  - Find biographies of Native People, such as *Jim Thorpe’s Bright Path* by Joseph Bruchac

(<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/jim-thorpe-s-bright-path>), *Bowman's Store* by Joseph Bruchac (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/bowman-s-store>), *Quiet Hero* by S.D. Nelson (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/quiet-hero>), and *Louis Sockalexis* by Bill Wise (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/louis-sockalexis>).

- **After reading *Crossing Bok Chitto*, read Tim Tingle's chapter book version of the story, *Stone River Crossing* ([leeandlow.com/books/stone-river-crossing](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/stone-river-crossing)).** In a graphic organizer, have students identify the similarities and differences between reading the picture book versus the novel. What was it like to see the illustrations in *Crossing Bok Chitto*? What more were they able to learn about the characters in *Stone River Crossing*? Students can elaborate on their findings in a critical essay. Lastly, students can think about a beloved picture book and think about how they would create a longer novel version. What would they write about? Why? What would they want to learn more about in a longer version of the picture book?

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Think of your cultures and traditions in your own home.** Compare and contrast the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians culture and traditions to your own, both from what they learn in the book and from other reputable resources, including Choctaw.org.
- **Interview a family member about family history.** Create a web that documents your family's physical moving. This may be moving within the same town/city or moving to different states or countries.
- **Food is a part of the story *Crossing Bok Chitto*.** Have students consider how blackberries (like Martha Tom was sent to gather) or other berries may be used in their cultural foods. Encourage innovative food combinations to emphasize culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies.
- **The book includes a scene about the slave trade which can create a deeper study into human trafficking and forced relocation.** Teachers can discuss these topics directly or can approach them by discussing the impact of colonization and assimilation in today's society, referring to how the people living on the plantation and forcibly moved to New Orleans have narratives that should not be erased. For more information, consult Learning for Justice's "Teaching Hard History: American Slavery" for lesson plans, units, and more (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery>).
- **Encourage students to learn more about how some Native Americans, including Choctaws, helped enslaved people escape slavery.** Students can consult online resources and other texts to help them learn about how some Native Americans were critical in helping enslaved people into their territories where they would be free, resembling how Martha Tom helped Lil Mo and his family (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ancestry-of-african-native-americans-7986049/>) (<https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/responses/history2.html>).

- **Have students research the importance of rivers and bodies of water in cultures around the world.** How are rivers important to groups of people? Why are they critical in certain communities? Have students share their findings in a visual presentation format of their choosing with a partner, small group, or the whole class (<https://www.americanrivers.org/threats-solutions/protecting-rivers/the-value-of-wild-river/>).
- **The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians value the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** (<https://www.choctaw.org/robotics/culture/index.html>). They honor the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake in their regalia and basketry with diamond designs. Research the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake and its importance to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. After conducting research, relate your new understanding of the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to the character Martha Tom. Look at the imagery in the book and try to find where diamonds are used with Martha Tom.

### Art & Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **The color - white - plays a role in the telling of *Crossing Bok Chitto*.** It is noted in the clothing of the Choctaw women and in how the author explains the perspective of who tells the story. Think about the use of color in the illustrations and describe the intent of the selected colors.
- **Watch the interview with illustrator, Jeanne Rorex Bridges:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11X1Mn\\_JcIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11X1Mn_JcIQ). Draw connections from the interview to the illustrations in *Crossing Bok Chitto*.
- **Find different spirituals and analyze the meaning of the spirituals.** *Crossing Bok Chitto* includes spirituals. Have students define spirituals. Some spirituals may have secret meanings. For example, the spiritual “Wade in the Water” (not included in *Crossing Bok Chitto*) served a specific purpose for slaves attempting to escape. What spirituals are evident in *Stone River Crossing*, and how are spirituals meaningful to people in the book? The Library of Congress has more information about African American Spirituals for further learning (<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/>) (<http://www.pbs.org/mercy-street/blogs/mercystreet-revealed/songs-of-survival-and-songs-of-freedom-during-slavery/>).

### School-Home Connection

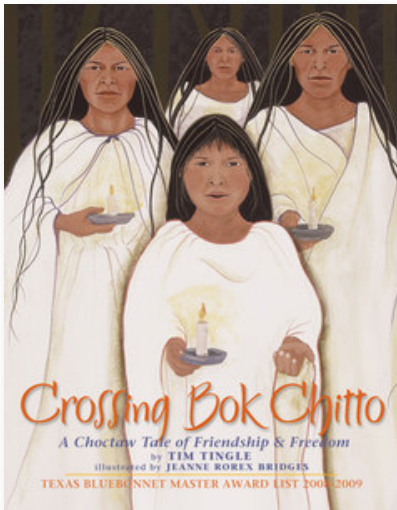
(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Interview a family member about family history.** Create a web that documents your family's physical moving. This may be moving within the same town/city or moving to different states or countries. What did students learn about their family?
- **Provide students and families with resources to learn more about the Mississippi Band of Choctaw.** Students and families can consult the Choctaw Nation Map (<https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/history/choctaw-nation-map>), learn about traditions (<https://www.choctaw.org/culture/traditions.html>), and more.
- **If possible, lend a copy of *Crossing Bok Chitto*** ([https://www.cincopuntos.com/products\\_detail.sstg?id=100](https://www.cincopuntos.com/products_detail.sstg?id=100)) **to families to read and discuss with their children.** What did they learn from the story?





## Ordering Information

### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/crossing-bok-chitto](https://leeandlow.com/books/crossing-bok-chitto)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Tim Tingle** is an Oklahoma Choctaw and an award-winning author and storyteller. He travels all over the US doing school visits and storytelling festivals. As a visiting author and performer, Tingle reaches audiences numbering over 200,000 annually. He has completed numerous speaking tours for the U.S. Department of Defense, performing stories to children of military personnel stationed in Germany. In 1993, he retraced the Trail of Tears to Choctaw homelands in Mississippi and began recording stories of tribal elders. From talks with Archie Mingo emerged *Crossing Bok Chitto*, Tingle's first illustrated children's book. This history-based tale is the inspiration for *Stone River Crossing*. The plot is filled with elements of Choctaw culture, plus a colorful dash of Choctaw magic realism. Tingle lives in Texas.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Jeanne Rorex Bridges** traces her heritage back to her Cherokee ancestors. Born in Oklahoma, the artists' work is nationally known and has won many awards in Native American art shows, including the 2005 Best of Show at the Five Civilized Tribes Museum. *Crossing Bok Chitto* is her first fully illustrated book.

## REVIEWS

"In a picture book that highlights rarely discussed intersections between Native Americans in the South and African Americans in bondage, a noted Choctaw storyteller and Cherokee artist join forces with stirring results... the story [has a] powerful impact on young readers." –*Booklist*, **starred review**

"Tingle is a performing storyteller, and his text has the rhythm and grace of that oral tradition. It will be easily and effectively read aloud. The paintings are dark and solemn, and the artist has done a wonderful job of depicting all of the characters as individuals, with many of them looking out of the page right at readers." –*School Library Journal*

"A moving and wholly original story about the intersection of cultures... Bridges creates mural-like paintings with a rock-solid spirituality and stripped-down graphic sensibility, the ideal match for the down-to-earth cadences and poetic drama of the text." –*Publishers Weekly*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com).