

## **A Cheyenne Odyssey** History to Know Before You Play

*Before the class begins playing MISSION US: “A Cheyenne Odyssey” your students should be familiar with five important pieces of historical context. If you have not already taught this material in your class, introduce it to your students before they make their way through life on the Plains as Little Fox.*

1. **In the early 1800s, whites and Plains Indians traded peacefully.** Trade between the Plains Indians and Europeans dates back to the early 1700s, when British and French fur traders traveled from the Hudson Bay into what is now North Dakota. By the late 1700s, trading posts were established on Native American lands on the Missouri River. After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the United States expanded into the Great Plains. Plains Indians traded buffalo hides and fur in exchange for a variety of goods. They also strengthened ties with white traders through marriage. Because both sides benefited from trade, the relationship between whites and Northern Cheyenne was mostly friendly and cooperative until the 1860s.
2. **The US government forced many Eastern Native American tribes to move west to the Great Plains.** From the earliest European settlement in North America, whites came into conflict with Native Americans who already occupied the land. Native Americans who did not convert to Christianity and assimilate (become “American”) were pushed further west. With the founding of the United States, the new nation developed a powerful and rapidly growing economy that ran counter to many Native American cultures.

The 1830 Indian Removal Act offered reservations west of the Mississippi to the Cherokee, Choctaws, Creek, Chickasaws, and Seminole tribes in exchange for their current lands in the Southeast. Under threat of military intervention, many tribal leaders signed away their territory. The rest were forced to move by US troops. Some 15,000 Native Americans were herded on an 800-mile trek to Oklahoma that became known as the Trail of Tears.

3. **The Cheyenne were allied with some Plains tribes, and fought wars against other Plains tribes.** The Cheyenne were one of the smaller tribes on the Plains. So they formed alliances with other tribes in the region through trade, and social and military relationships. From the 1860s to the 1880s, the Cheyenne worked closely with the Lakota and Arapahoe, sharing campsites, trading goods, aiding one another in skirmishes or battles, and intermarrying. Interactions with the Crow, Shoshone, and Pawnee tribes tended to be more hostile, with frequent horse raids and competition over hunting grounds.
4. **Many US leaders believed that the United States had a God-given mission to expand west across the continent, spreading American government and culture.** Called “Manifest Destiny”, this view was used to justify the human and financial costs of settling the entire continent. The United States more than tripled in size between 1800 and 1860. The country expanded by making treaties, purchasing land, and fighting wars

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with nations that already controlled the land, including Native American tribes, Great Britain, France, Spain, and Mexico. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 further increased the push westward, as did the construction of the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869. Hundreds of thousands of people from the eastern United States and other areas moved west, while the native population fell by more than 100,000. Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans and Mexicans were pushed off their land.

5. **White Americans disagreed about how to deal with Plains Indians, and vice versa.** After the Civil War, conflicts between whites and Plains Indians greatly increased. Plains Indians' nomadic way of life was threatened by the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the encroachment of thousands of settlers, miners, and ranchers. Some Native Americans responded by attacking white settlers, their livestock, and their property. Others negotiated with the United States in an effort to minimize violence. White people also had different approaches to the conflict. Some whites, including many northern reformers who had opposed slavery, sympathized with the American Indian perspective. They believed that the United States should gradually assimilate Native Americans into American society through education, Christianity, and farming. Soldiers, miners, and settlers, who were often in direct contact with American Indians, often took a much more aggressive position. Some even believed that the army should try to exterminate all of the Native Americans.