

Land, Loss, and the Making of Illinois: What were the consequences of the Chicago Treaties for Indigenous peoples and the development of Illinois?

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Suggested Grade Level Range: 7-11

Connections to U.S. History Curriculum

This lesson fits within U.S. history units focused on westward expansion, Native American displacement, or 19th-century American Indian policy. It connects to themes such as land acquisition, treaty-making, settler colonialism, and the transformation of the Midwest. The lesson uses the Chicago Treaties of 1821 and 1833 to explore how Illinois' development was tied to the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Students engage with maps, primary treaty texts, and modern analysis to understand the local and national implications of these treaties, aligning with national narratives of U.S. expansion and Indigenous resistance.

Local Context

The Chicago Treaties, particularly those of 1821 and 1833, were pivotal agreements in which the U.S. government secured land from the Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwe tribes in northern Illinois and southern Michigan. These treaties directly enabled the development of Chicago and surrounding areas by opening land for white settlement and infrastructure projects. The treaties were marked by imbalance in power and resources, reflecting broader trends of coercion and forced removal. Teachers should understand that while the treaties were legal documents, their fairness and the methods of negotiation remain historically contested.

Student Learning Objectives

- *I can identify and describe the Indigenous tribes affected by the Chicago Treaties.*
- *I can analyze the geographic and economic motivations behind U.S. land acquisition in Illinois.*
- *I can evaluate the consequences of the 1821 and 1833 Chicago Treaties for Native peoples and Illinois development.*

Standards Addressed

- SS.H.2.6-8.MdC: Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.
- SS.G.3.6-8.MdC: Analyze the effects of environmental and cultural characteristics on the distribution and movement of people, goods, and ideas.
- SS.H.3.9-12: Evaluate the methods used by people and institutions to promote change and achieve goals.

Materials Used

Sources for Supporting Question 1	Sources for Supporting Question 2	Sources for Supporting Question 3
- Source A: Chicago Treaty Map - Source B: Chicago Treaty of 1821	- Source A: Treaty with the Potawatomi, 1833 - Source B: Chicago Tribune - Source B (PDF): Chicago Tribune PDF	- Source A: Silver Cross from a Michigamea Illinois Indian Village (1752-1765) - Previous Sources

Procedure

Anticipatory Set/ Staging the Compelling Question

- Introduce the compelling question and ask students what they know about treaties and land ownership. Show an image or animation of land transfers around the Great Lakes and invite hypotheses about consequences for Indigenous peoples.
- Option: Display the Felt Chicago Treaty Map on the SHC PSR website: *North American Colonization*

Supporting Question/Activity 1: What Indigenous tribes were affected by the Chicago Treaties, and what lands were involved?

- Source Analysis: Students will explore the Felt Maps interactive "Chicago Treaty Map" and analyze spatial data.
- Performance Task: Students work in pairs to document which tribes were impacted, identify ceded lands, and discuss how this shaped the development of Illinois.

Supporting Question/Activity 2: How did the Chicago Treaties change life for Native communities and open land for Illinois' development?

- Source Analysis: Students will read excerpts from the 1833 treaty and secondary analyses to compare perspectives.
- Performance Task: Create a digital or physical timeline showing events leading to and following the 1833 treaty with annotated captions and a historical summary.

Supporting Question/Activity 3: What are the ethical implications of the Chicago Treaties in the broader context of U.S. expansion?

- Source Analysis: Using the Peoria artifact and student-created resources, reflect on the legacy and consequences of these treaties.
- Performance Task: Students write a reflective paragraph or participate in a Socratic seminar discussing fairness, coercion, and historical memory.

Assessment

- Construct an argument: Students may write an argumentative essay or design a visual presentation (poster, digital media) answering the compelling question. They must use evidence from at least three different sources and consider multiple perspectives.
- Extension: Students explore how current Native land rights issues reflect unresolved historical injustices. They may write a letter to a museum or historical society proposing how to better present Indigenous histories.

Informed Action

- Students create a public exhibit (physical or digital) explaining the significance of the Chicago Treaties and share it with the school or local community, connecting the past to current Native issues and advocacy.