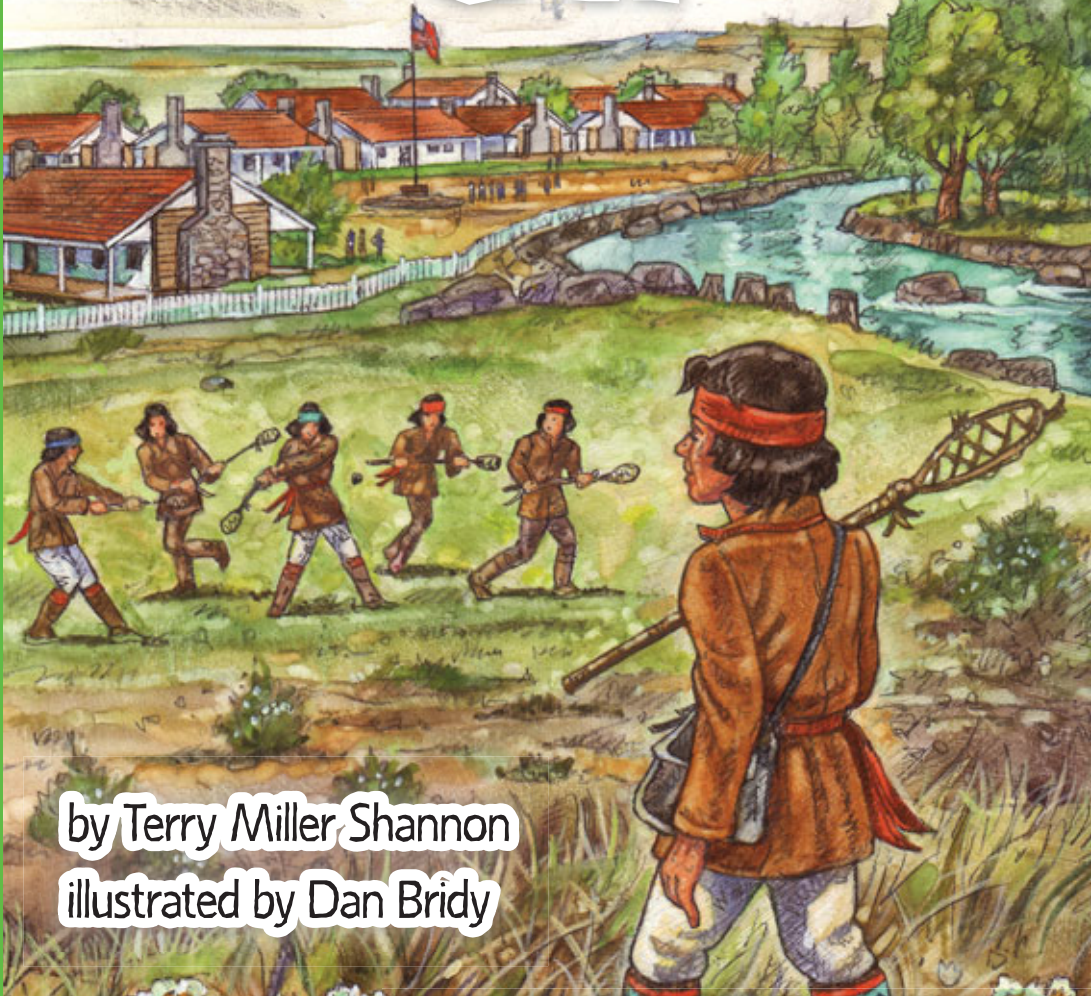


Historical  
Fiction

# Continuing On



by Terry Miller Shannon  
illustrated by Dan Bridy

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PAIRED  
READ

Behind the Trail of Tears

# STRATEGIES & SKILLS

## Comprehension

**Strategy:** Reread

**Skill:** Theme

## Vocabulary

ancestors, despise, endurance,  
forfeit, honor, intensity,  
irritating, retreated

## Vocabulary Strategy

Connotation and Denotation

## Content Standards

**Social Studies**

History

Word Count: 2,503\*\*

\*\*The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.



## Education

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## Essential Question

How do traditions connect people?

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## Chapter 1

# Making a Home

“It’s pretty good for a log cabin,” John’s father said.

The family looked at their new home. It was small and not at all like the large farmhouse they’d left behind in Georgia—the house they had been forced to forfeit. Now, a year after they’d arrived in this new land, they’d finally finished building their house.

“How can you be happy?” John asked. “We’ve lost everything, including our farm and our house. We’ve had to start over again, and we don’t even know how to farm in this strange new land. I despise Oklahoma!”

“It’s no use complaining,” his father said.

John stared at the woods behind the cabin and pictured the well-tended fields back home. This place that they had been forced to move to would never be home.



“We even lost the crops we worked so hard to sow last spring,” John continued.

His father sifted a clump of soil through his fingers.

“Yes, that was terrible,” he said, “but we had no way of knowing that the river would flood and wash away the plants.” He shrugged. “We won’t make that mistake again. We’ll learn to live with the land, just as we did back home.”

John didn’t mind hard work. He and his family had always worked hard, and they’d enjoyed living and working on their farm back home. They had known every inch of the land and had understood the seasons and the weather patterns.

“We haven’t lost everything,” John’s father said. “You’ll see. We have endurance. The long, miserable journey and hard times will make us stronger in the end.”

John looked away, not speaking.

“We are fortunate to have a home at all and not be living in that fort with everyone else,” his father continued. “Why don’t you go and find your friends and play some stickball? I’m sure you can remember how to play,” he said with a wink.

John knew his father was offering him a gift they could scarcely afford. There was still a great deal to be done on their new home, and his parents needed his help. If he wasn't working on the house, he could help in other ways, such as going fishing to bring home some food for the family. John also knew that refusing the offer would insult his father's generosity. He reached up to touch his father's hand.

"Thank you," he replied.

John started walking toward the fort. He guessed his friends would be playing in the field nearby. They usually played stickball in the afternoon. Other children would be throwing darts through moving hoops. This required great skill, something John prided himself on having, since he almost never missed. These were the games they had played in Georgia when they were at school or at community gatherings.

In Oklahoma, though, John wasn't interested in the competitions he had once enjoyed. All he seemed to do here was remember the past, hate the present, and dread the future. How could his friends move on with their lives?





John suspected he wasn't the only one who was still angry about the forced move. Yet most of his people had stopped talking about their anger and were working on getting settled.

The shouts and laughter of his friends got louder as John got closer to the fort. He stood and watched as a girl hit the ball hard, skillfully knocking it into the wooden fish on the top of a pole.

As he drew nearer, John slowed down and finally he stopped. He was so overcome with the intensity of his sadness that he didn't want to laugh and play with his friends. There was no way he could forget the horror they had lived through.

John turned away from the playing field and retreated down the path to the river. He avoided the men fishing along the bank and found a secluded place where he could sit down and think and remember. Maybe by remembering, he could put the past behind him and start looking forward to the future.





## Chapter 2

# Leaving

John remembered what had happened the day everything changed. He had been playing with his friends when some white men in uniforms arrived.

“We’re moving everyone west,” the leader said. “You must leave your homes and make new ones.”

Heart thumping, John had run home. What the soldier had said didn’t make sense; he was certain his parents would reassure him that it was all a mistake. How could they be told to just leave the land his family had lived on for generations?

“Pack your things,” his mother told him, “and bring some of the farm tools too.”

The packing was a waste of time, however. The soldiers didn’t let them take anything with them. They forced everyone in the village to follow them empty-handed.

John walked with the others until finally, high in the mountains, they came to a large fenced camp where they joined other Cherokee people. At night, it was so cold John couldn’t feel his feet. They had very few blankets, so everyone huddled together to keep warm.



Although they were given food, it wasn't food they were used to eating, and some of it was spoiled. What's more, there was never enough food, and John was always hungry. He daydreamed about the meals his mother used to cook on their farm.

At night, John's parents kept him close to them, but during the day, they encouraged him to play with his friends. This would have been a good way to pass the time, but John didn't have much energy or enthusiasm for the games he had enjoyed before they left home.

John spent a lot of time just sitting and staring. One day, he overheard two soldiers talking.



“We treat these people like animals,” the soldier said. His name was Smith, and he had hair as red as fire and kind blue eyes. “It’s not right.”

“We have to follow orders,” the other soldier replied.

“Yes,” Smith continued, “but is it right that we have plenty of food and a warm place to sleep, while they are cold and hungry? Why don’t we share our food with them?”

“Forget it, Smith,” the other soldier said. “Our job is to follow orders, not to question authority. Talking about it will only get us into trouble. Let’s just do our jobs.”

Smith didn’t say anything more, but later that day, he slipped John an apple, and later still, he managed to give John’s mother and a few others some hot beans and corn bread. Over the next weeks, John saw several soldiers giving Cherokee people extra food—even the soldier who had protested that they were just doing their jobs.

Months passed, and summer turned to fall. The nights grew colder, and sometimes when John woke up, the ground was white with frost. Other times, it rained, creating giant muddy puddles that soaked anyone who stepped in them.

Time dragged by, so when the soldiers finally announced that it was time to move on, John was relieved. He believed that anything would be better than their imprisonment at the camp.

He soon found out that he was wrong. As unpleasant as the camp was, the march was much worse.



## Chapter 3

# Marching

John walked beside his mother and father. Although the soldiers watched them and frequently told them to be quiet, people still managed to talk.

“White men have moved into our homes,” Ben said. “We will never be allowed to return.”

John didn’t want to believe his friend’s gossip. He wanted to tell Ben not to spread irritating lies. Their farm would be waiting for them, and somehow John and his family would go home again. He was convinced that this was a giant mistake and that the soldiers would soon realize they couldn’t make people leave their homes and walk great distances to build new ones.

But as they continued to walk, his hope leaked away until there was none left.



They walked west. The ground under John's feet was frozen. The frigid air cut through his clothes, making him shiver constantly.

He didn't believe he would ever feel warm again. He thought of lying in his bed in their farmhouse, listening to his mother working in the kitchen. It seemed more like a dream than a memory. Had that ever really happened, or did he just wish it had?

Day after day passed by, and still they marched. Winter came, and snow began to fall, but still they walked.

John knew that some of the people couldn't endure the cold and the constant walking. They coughed and burned with fever, and some of them died.

One day, they reached a river filled with floating chunks of ice. Some of the soldiers were angry because there was no way to cross it. The Cherokee set up camp and waited, shivering in the snow. Eventually they crossed to the other side in rowboats. It took two days to ferry everyone to the other side.

Once they were across the river, they continued walking. Along the way, white people gathered to stare. At first, John watched them, but after a while, he didn't even bother to look anymore.

The white people were silent as the Cherokee trudged past. They looked warm in their heavy wool clothing, but many also looked sad, and some gave the Cherokee food. John was grateful for anything to fill his belly, although it was never enough. Every day, they continued on, walking in the cold.



Then one day the soldiers announced, "Here we are! We have arrived."

John followed the others to a large wooden fort.

Smith, the kind soldier, said, "You will live in this fort until you have built new homes."

There was no rejoicing. It felt to John as if they were still marching through unknown lands. The only difference was that they had quit walking.



## Chapter 4

# Legends Living On

As John sat by the river remembering the walk and their arrival at the fort, he realized he didn't need to keep going over it in his mind. He knew he would never forget it. Strangely, he felt as if he had let go of a heavy burden.

John watched the river swirl and eddy past the rocks. He realized that the lives of his people flowed like the river. Like the gushing water, they came across barriers and had to move around and past them. The important thing was to keep going and not let anything or anyone stop them. Continuing on was the only way to honor the lives of those who hadn't made it.

John heard footsteps approaching. It was his good friend George.

"Your father sent me," George said. "There is a gathering tonight. There will be food, stories, and games."

The skin between George's eyes puckered as he looked at John. "You will come with me; won't you?" he asked anxiously. "You haven't been yourself since we arrived here. I've missed you."

John said, "Yes, I'll come." He smiled at George. "I've missed you, too. I have been very sad since we left home, but maybe a gathering is just what I need."

George looked relieved to see his old friend smile. He chattered about the games and his family's plans as he led the way to the gathering. John listened quietly, grateful that his friend didn't expect him to talk.

The smoky smell of the fire greeted them long before they glimpsed the golden flames leaping over the logs in the fire pit. John and George sat by John's parents, who smiled at them and then turned their attention back to an elder who was just beginning to tell a story.

It was a story John had listened to many times, one he had grown up hearing. It was the story of the very first strawberry ever eaten.

The elder said, "There was once, very long ago, a married couple who had quarreled. The woman walked away and didn't return, leaving her husband worried. The sun decided to help by finding the woman and enticing her to return home."

John smiled and settled back to listen.

The elder continued. "The sun made juicy, ripe blackberries grow near the woman," he said, "but the woman wasn't tempted to stop and eat the fruit. So the sun made plump, tasty blueberries grow in her path, but again she ignored them. The sun became desperate, so he created a new fruit more beautiful than any other that had ever grown."

The elder said, “The woman couldn’t resist tasting the large, red berry, and after she did, her anger completely vanished. The berry was so delicious! She gathered up huge handfuls of strawberries and returned to her husband. They ate the sweet fruit together.”

As John listened to the old tale, he suddenly experienced an odd sensation. He was aware of how connected he was to the elder and to the people surrounding him. It made him remember those who had died on the long journey, as well as his ancestors, who had told the same story.

That tight knot inside him, the one that had loosened at the river, now let go almost entirely. The traditions of his people would always connect them to each other. Some things would be different here, but his people would forever be Cherokee.

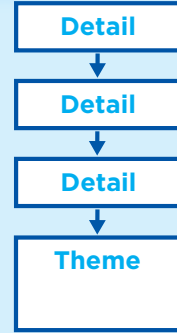




# Respond to Reading

## Summarize

Summarize how the main character's traditions help him feel connected to others in *Continuing On*. Details from your graphic organizer may help you.



## Text Evidence

1. How can you tell this story is historical fiction? **GENRE**
2. What traditions help John stay connected to his people and their ancestors? **THEME**
3. On page 9, the soldier “slipped John an apple.” What does *slipped* mean here? What other words could the author have used instead of *slipped*?  
**CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION**
4. Write about what home means to John in the story. How does his idea of home change? Use details from the story in your answer. **WRITE ABOUT READING**

## Compare Texts

Read about how the Cherokee people were forced to leave their land.

# Behind the Trail of Tears

The Cherokee people were living in the southeastern United States long before European settlers arrived. The Cherokee farmed, hunted, and fished in the Appalachian Mountains. Over time, many of them built houses and farms similar to those of the white people. However, in the 1830s, they were taken from their homes, marched into camps, and then forced to walk to an unfamiliar land in the west.



In 1829, European settlers discovered gold on Cherokee land. The settlers demanded that the government turn over the Cherokee land to the states. President Andrew Jackson supported this demand.

In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This allowed the President to negotiate with eastern tribes, convincing them to give up their land and move west of the Mississippi River. Some white people protested this treatment of Native Americans, but their objections made no difference.

In time, most tribes agreed to move. However, the Cherokee resisted. In 1831, they tried to sue the state of Georgia, believing that they could prove the land was theirs. Their attempt failed.



The Cherokee were forced to march to Oklahoma. Today the route is a National Historic Trail.

The military began forcing the Cherokee from their homes in 1838. Many walked to Oklahoma for months through bitterly cold weather. Their journey is now known as the Trail of Tears because the Cherokee suffered exhaustion, disease, and hunger along the way. About 4,000 Cherokee died during the journey.

Many of their descendants are still in Oklahoma today. The Cherokee learned to live on their new land and adapted their gardens and farms to suit the terrain. They still maintain their culture and identity through things such as storytelling and ceremonies.



## Make Connections

Where did the Cherokee come from, and where did they go? How did their traditions help them adjust to a new land? **ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

What part of Cherokee history does *Continuing On* highlight? **TEXT TO TEXT**



# Focus on Genre

**Historical Fiction** Historical fiction tells a story that is set in the past. It often gives information about a real event and can show real people who were living at the time. Historical fiction gives the reader an understanding of life in the past.

**Read and Find** *Continuing On* is based on real events. It tells the story of the Cherokee, who were moved from their home in the east to land west of the Mississippi River. The characters in the story are made up, but the story is based on facts.

## Your Turn

Native Americans have a tradition of telling familiar stories aloud. The stories teach about the past and keep the culture alive.

Choose a person or an event in your family that you could tell a story about. You can make up some details to add interest, but base your story on facts that are real. Practice telling your story until it sounds and feels right and then share it with others in your group or class.

## Literature Circles

### Fiction

# Thinkmark

### Characters

How would you describe the character of John in *Continuing On*?

### Setting

Where did *Continuing On* take place?

When did it take place?

### Conclusions

What conclusions can you draw about the importance of storytelling to Native Americans?

### Author's Purpose

Why do you think the author wrote *Continuing On*?

### Make Connections

What connections can you make with other stories you've read or heard about people who had to leave their homes?

Old and New

GR U • Benchmark 50 • Lexile TK

Grade 4 • Unit 6 Week 1

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