Osage Place Names - Teachers Guide

Background - Discuss:

Q; What were the names of all the places in our region when the Osage lived here? What kinds of things would they have named?

Lost Place Names:

The Osage people lived their lives primarily in the out-of-doors and were connected in every way to the land and nature.

As a result, they created beautiful names for the many places they traveled and lived over the centuries within their ancestral lands in the areas of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

They named rivers, creeks, crossings, springs, trails, campsites, valleys, large landforms, etc. These Osage names could include a description of the landform, important events that occurred there, or its special spiritual significance.

How were the Osage names lost?

Unfortunately, many of these names have been lost as the Osage were removed, or places were re-named by white settlers, but some have been preserved.

Osage history books contain records of some of these names. Exact locations today are not always known.

They stand as a reminder of the deep connection between the Osage and the land upon which they lived.

How do we name places today that is different from the Osage names? Do they show a real connection to the land and place?

Compare to modern culture: Our place names often have nothing to do with the actual land, i.e. streets are random names made up by housing developers. Or pasture names may only reflect ownership - even long past owners - are *disconnected to the natural place*.

Current Place Names Derived from Osage Language:

Have students read the provided **Osage Place Names - Fact Sheet** with some names used today that come from the Osage culture. (There may be more Osage place names.)

As students read, have them note these names that they fall into **three categories**:

1. Actual **Osage words** with meanings that described the place.
2. Names of **Osage people** - famous chiefs
3. **French or English translations** of the original Osage descriptive names.

Then have students answer the **Review Questions** interpreting the list.