

# Crossing Bok Chitto

## Study Guide

### Reviews

*The New York Times* 8-13-06

“If history is meant to hold lessons for living, [*Crossing Bok Chitto*] offers a more complex moral, and hope, for personal and cultural survival. In *Crossing Bok Chitto*, Tim Tingle writes, ‘We do not deny that darkness exists, but we chose to walk in light . . . as long as our stories are told, we can be Choctaw forever.’”

*Starred Review, Publisher’s Weekly*

Ages 5-up. Bridges, a Cherokee artist making her children’s book debut, joins Tingle in 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. Many of the illustrations serve essentially as portraits, and they’re utterly mesmerizing—strong, solid figures gaze squarely out of the frame, beseeching readers to listen, empathize and wonder.

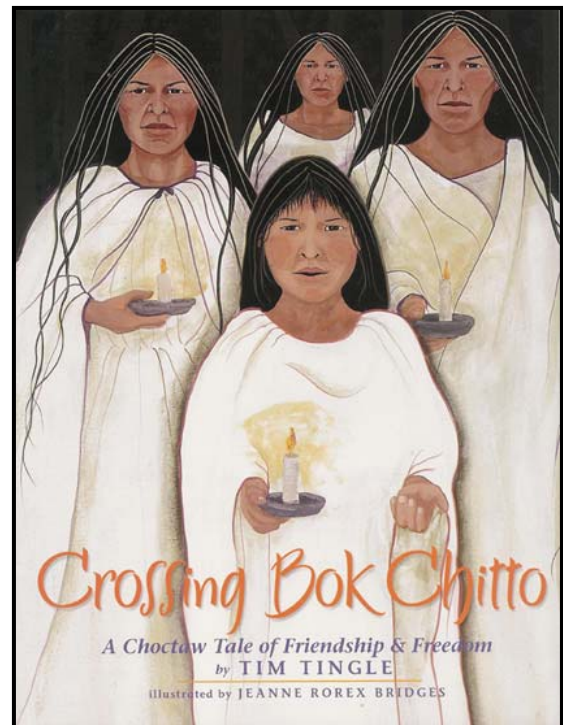
*Starred Review, Booklist*

*Midwest Book Review.*

*Crossing Bok Chitto* is very highly recommended for all young readers as a celebration of diversity, acceptance, and unity in a remarkable production of expert authorship and invaluable illustrations.

### Note from Tim Tingle

I hope you enjoy your reading of *Crossing Bok Chitto*. The deep and centuries-old friendship between American Indians and African-American people of bondage, as depicted in *Crossing Bok Chitto*, is very seldom discussed. Thousands of today’s African-American community members are actually mixed-blood Indians. I sincerely hope this story will empower and encourage people of all races to speak openly and proudly of their heritage, for our American story is one of mixed races and cultures.



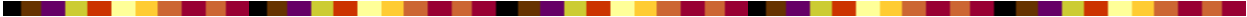


## Grades 3—5 Discussion Questions

1. Why did Martha Tom cross the river?
2. Why did her mother need blackberries?
3. Was Martha Tom an angel?
4. Who were the African-American churchgoers hiding from? Why?
5. What do you think Little Mo's house looked like? Martha Tom's?
6. How did the Choctaw wedding differ from weddings you have seen? What similarities can you name?
7. Describe Little Mo and his family five years after the story ends.
8. What language is "Bok Chitto"? What does the term mean?
9. What is the real miracle of *Crossing Bok Chitto*?
10. Did the story *Crossing Bok Chitto* take place before or after the American Civil War? How do you know?
11. Why did the men pursuing the slaves put down their weapons and allow them to escape?
12. In today's world, does a real Indian: (a) Drive a car? (b) Go to college? (c) Shop at the mall? (d) Play Nintendo? (e) Ride a horse?

## Advanced Level Discussion Questions

1. Were Martha Tom and Little Mo truly invisible to the people sitting on the front porch? Discuss ethnic invisibility.
2. What is the basic historical difference between the Mississippi Choctaws and the Oklahoma Choctaws? How are the two peoples alike?
3. Christianity was introduced to the Choctaws in the early 1800's. Were Martha Tom and her family Christian at the time of the story? How do you think the two families dealt with their different beliefs and ways of life?
4. Were the men chasing the slave family free?
5. Why did the father not tell his family of the sale of the mother until they finished their meal?

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6. What is the real miracle of *Crossing Bok Chitto*?
  7. What was the Trail of Tears?
  8. How did the election of Andrew Jackson, a southern president, affect the Choctaws and other southeastern Indians?
  9. Why would plantation owners fear an alliance between Indians and slaves?
  10. Explain the Biblical reference in L'il Mo's real name. What other Biblical references can be seen in *Crossing Bok Chitto*?
  11. Discuss racial stereotyping and how Hollywood depictions of Indians contribute to widespread misconceptions. For a more accurate depiction of today's Native American communities, see [www.choctawnation.com](http://www.choctawnation.com) and other tribally produced websites.
  12. There is a painting in *Crossing Bok Chitto* which depicts Southerners sitting on their plantation porch ignoring Martha Tom and Little Mo walking by, holding hands. How does this painting embody a powerful idea expressed by *Crossing Bok Chitto*?
  13. In light of this scene depicting invisibility in *Crossing Bok Chitto*, discuss *suspension of disbelief*. Give examples from other books and films that require *suspension of disbelief*. Does religious faith sometimes require *suspension of disbelief*? Give examples.

### **Writing exercise:**

Using an everyday situation from school, sports, or home, write a scene requiring *suspension of disbelief* on the part of the reader.

## Tim Tingle



Tim Tingle is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. His great-great grandfather, John Carnes, walked the Trail of Tears in 1835. In 2002, 2003, and again in 2004, Tingle performed a traditional Choctaw story before Chief Gregory Pyle's Annual State of the Nation Address at the tribal gathering in Tushkahoma, Oklahoma, a Choctaw reunion that attracts over thirty thousand people.

As a performer, Tingle brings the lore of Native American cultures to life in lively historical, personal, and traditional stories. He plays the Native American flute and often accompanies himself with rattles, deer and

whaleskin drums, and sings Native vocable songs and hymns in the Choctaw language. He has studied the native flute with R. Carlos Nakai, a Grammy winning flutist of Navajo and Ute descent.

In May of 2003, Tingle received his Master's Degree in English from the University of Oklahoma, where he focused on Native American Literature. *Walking The Choctaw Road* was conceived and written while Tingle was completing his studies in Norman. Dr. Geary Hobson provided the initial spark. Upon learning that Tingle had been tape recording interviews with Choctaw tribal members for ten years, he suggested a book based on those interviews. Tingle had been performing several pieces based on the interviews at storytelling concerts, and in 1998, he set about the task of creating written versions.

Tingle currently teaches two traveling classes for undergraduate credit through O.U.'s Department of Community Education. "The Santa Fe Storytelling Experience," is a week-long course exploring the Indian pueblos and colorful sites surrounding Santa Fe.

Learn more about Tim at his website! <http://www.choctawstoryteller.com/>