Who Decides Here?

History and authority in Alabama tribal government

SS24.USG.14 "Analyze and interpret the concept of tribal sovereignty, its historical background, and its significance for Native American tribes in the United States, with a particular focus on tribes from Alabama."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show where tribal authority comes from, circle two events that affected Creek people in Alabama, and number two examples of what sovereignty means today. Use your marks to explain how history connects to present-day decisions.

A Clinic, a County, and a Tribal Government

1. At a meeting in southern Alabama, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians considers where to place a new health clinic. A nearby county also plans roads and emergency services. Who gets to decide? Tribal sovereignty means a Native nation has inherent authority to govern its people and territory, subject to limits imposed by federal law. That authority did not begin when the United States recognized a tribe. The Poarch Band has its own elected government and makes decisions about services and tribal trust land. A county and a tribe can therefore have overlapping concerns without being the same government.

2. The history behind this authority reaches back before Alabama became a state. Creek communities governed themselves long before the United States existed. In 1832, the Treaty of Cusseta ceded Creek lands in Alabama to the United States and reserved parcels for individual Creek people. During the 1830s, federal removal policies forced many Creek people west, while ancestors of the Poarch Band remained in Alabama. The Poarch Band received federal recognition in 1984. Recognition confirmed a government-to-government relationship with the United States. It did not invent the tribe's political authority or erase the history of removal.

3. Today, sovereignty matters when the Poarch Band funds a clinic, sets priorities for its services, or makes choices about land held in trust for the tribe. Federal law limits some tribal powers, and state, county, tribal, and federal governments may all have responsibilities connected to a project. For example, a clinic and nearby county emergency crews could plan together for a storm. Cooperation does not make the county the tribe's supervisor, nor does sovereignty mean the tribe can ignore every other law. Understanding whose authority is involved helps officials negotiate rather than assume that one government speaks for everyone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would it be inaccurate to say that federal recognition in 1984 first gave the Poarch Band its authority to govern?

2. How do the Treaty of Cusseta and removal help explain why the tribe's land decisions today involve sovereignty, not just property management?

3. A county official says the county should make all decisions about the proposed clinic because it provides nearby emergency services. What does the passage suggest instead, and why?

4. Why is the claim that sovereignty lets the tribe ignore every other law an incorrect reading of the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your county is planning an evacuation drill that includes tribal trust land. Write a 75 to 100 word memo to a county planner explaining why the Poarch Band should be treated as a government partner, how history supports that position, and one practical step for planning together. Do not claim that either government has unlimited authority.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.14

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show where tribal authority comes from, circle two events that affected Creek people in Alabama, and number two examples of what sovereignty means today. Use your marks to explain how history connects to present-day decisions. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why would it be inaccurate to say that federal recognition in 1984 first gave the Poarch Band its authority to govern?	**Creek communities governed themselves before the United States existed. Recognition confirmed a government-to-government relationship; it did not create the tribe's inherent authority.**
2	How do the Treaty of Cusseta and removal help explain why the tribe's land decisions today involve sovereignty, not just property management?	**The treaty ceded Creek lands, and removal forced many Creek people west, though ancestors of the Poarch Band remained. Today's decisions about tribal trust land are made by a government whose authority and history continued through those events.**
3	A county official says the county should make all decisions about the proposed clinic because it provides nearby emergency services. What does the passage suggest instead, and why?	**The Poarch Band makes decisions about its services and tribal trust land. The county and tribe may plan emergency services together, but overlapping concerns do not make the county the tribe's supervisor.**
4	Why is the claim that sovereignty lets the tribe ignore every other law an incorrect reading of the passage?	**Federal law limits some tribal powers, and other governments may have responsibilities connected to a project. Sovereignty does not give the tribe unlimited authority.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

County planner: Please invite the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to plan the evacuation drill as a government partner, not just as a group of residents. Creek communities governed themselves before Alabama existed, and ancestors of the Poarch Band remained after federal removal forced many others west. Federal recognition in 1984 confirmed a government-to-government relationship; it did not create the tribe's authority. Ask tribal officials to help identify evacuation routes and agree on a shared contact plan with county crews. Federal law limits some tribal powers, so neither government should assume it controls every decision.

Accept historically grounded explanations that distinguish inherent sovereignty from federal recognition. For the memo, look for a specific cooperative step and an accurate acknowledgment that authority is not unlimited.