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Medium for Cultural
Heritage, Language
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Printing the Fight: The *Biskinik* Newspaper as a Medium for Cultural Heritage, Language Revitalization, and Environmental Advocacy

Introduction

In the ever-changing terrain of Indigenous representation and resistance, Indigenous periodicals have become one of the most vibrant ways in which Indigenous people preserve cultural heritage, assert sovereignty, and determine their futures. One such example of Indigenous periodicals is Indigenous newspaper *Biskinik*, the official newspaper of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Positioned at the crossroads between tradition and modernity, *Biskinik* illustrates the vital function that Indigenous media plays in ensuring cultural resilience and challenging settler-colonial narratives. Indeed, *Biskinik* does not solely serve as a news outlet, but it also transcends this function and constitutes one of the remaining cultural bastions, as it fosters Choctaw identity and sovereignty. The latter point is reflected in the portrayal of a mixture of Choctaw tradition, values, stories and cultural heritage via modern media techniques, formats and the address of contemporary issues such as environmental protection.

Indeed, *Biskinik* actively engages with framing and multimodality to shape the way Choctaw identity, culture, and contemporary issues are framed for presentation to its readership. Through framing, the newspaper foregrounds certain values—such as community, tradition, and environmental protection—by placing them in the background of its news stories and captions. The newspaper does not merely report news but frames them in a way that they reinforce persistence and collective power. Simultaneously, *Biskinik* utilizes multimodal elements—like photographs, layout design, traditional symbols, and choice of Choctaw language—to generate layered meaning. The modes work together to engage readers on a visual, emotional, and cultural level, confirming the newspaper as a source of news and as a cultural affirmation space. While there is a growing body of scholarship on Indigenous media and its role in cultural preservation, much of this work has thus far either focused on earlier Indigenous newspapers published before 1950s or focused on broadcast television or Indigenous activism, overlooking contemporary tribal newspapers like *Biskinik*. This is, of course, not to say that numerous studies and critics have not made contributions in that field. For example, in her 2023 article, “Little Chahta News Bird: Indigenous Periodicals and the Performance of Nationhood,” Bethany Hughes analyzes how “tribal newspapers such as the *Biskinik* are active sites of nations performing themselves” (172). While Bethany provides an insightful analysis of the *Biskinik* as a “performance of Choctaw-ness,” her analysis is firmly rooted in performance theory and nationhood (172). Hughes is concerned with what the essay portrays as actions, but less with how the actions are presented rhetorically and visually. Furthermore, the intersection of framing theory and multimodal analysis of local community-based newspapers is underresearched, particularly where such devices are utilized to frame tribal sovereignty, language revitalization and environmental stewardship. In fact, little attention is paid to the question of how tribal newspapers such as the

Biskinik serve as a medium of Indigenous cultural preservation, language revitalization and environmental advocacy.

In their informative 2024 article, “Native American Periodicals: The Art and Politics of Early Twentieth-Century Indigenous Printscapes,” Oliver Scheiding and Frank Newton claim that Native American Periodicals, including the *Biskinik*, “adopt Indigenous ways of communicating their content and mobilize audiences” (112). Scheiding’s and Newton’s statement skillfully offers promising ground for a fruitful investigation of how Indigenous newspapers namely the *Biskinik*, is utilized as a tool of mobilizing readership toward cultural preservation, language revitalization, environmental advocacy, and Indigenous sovereignty. With that being said, this essay builds on and extends the conversation of the aforementioned scholarship by looking at how framing and multimodality work in tandem with the construction of meaning in the *Biskinik*. Against this backdrop, I would like to argue that the *Biskinik* does not merely serve as a news outlet but as an arena for cultural preservation, language revitalization and environmental advocacy. In this way, Choctaw sovereignty, identity, and resilience are articulated through the entanglement of traditional narrative and visual design. I will apply multimodal analysis and framing theory. To this end, it is imperative to first briefly introduce the *Biskinik*, which is followed by an introduction to the theoretical framework. Thereafter, I will look at the *Biskinik* as a “little archive.” Finally, I will analyze the *Biskinik* to demonstrate how it features as an arena for cultural preservation, language revitalization and environmental advocacy respectively.

About the *Biskinik*— Choctaw Nation

The Choctaw Nation is the “third-largest Indian nation in the United States, with over 225,000 tribal members and 12,000-plus associates.” Considered to be the first tribe on the Trail of Tears, its historical borders are in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma. The Choctaw Nation’s vision, “Living out the Chahta Spirit of faith, family and culture,” evident in its ongoing dedication to the promotion of “growth and prosperity” to its members.¹ The Choctaw Nation enjoys a significant and rich history of tribal journalism. It is considered one of the earliest Native nations to utilize print media as a political communication tool, a means of preserving culture, and a source of community cohesion.

Interestingly, the *Biskinik*, as stated in August 2010 issue, is named after a bird in Choctaw legend—a small woodpecker—which delivered messages and gave notice of danger to come, and was dubbed “the little Chahta news bird.” The legend has it that the *Biskinik* accompanied one man on a raft during the great flood. *Biskinik* helped and guided him and from that became a holy bird with the Choctaw. From that, the *Biskinik* was reported to bear good news, predict danger, and guide hunters and warriors. Moreover, the article further informs the readership that the newspaper was originally titled *Bishinik* in the 1970s, but the name was short one letter. In July of 2000, the Tribal Council spelled it correctly to *Biskinik* to honor the proper

¹ Choctaw Nation Oklahoma: <https://www.choctawnation.com/about/>.

Choctaw word. In terms of subscription and distribution, the newspaper has always been free to tribal members and is distributed as one copy per household. The official site of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma clearly states the distribution policy of the *Biskinik*.²

Tracing the history of tribal newspapers, we find that the *Biskinik* extends a long Choctaw tradition of newspaper publication in Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The Choctaw is one of three other tribal newspapers, including Cherokee, and Minnesota Chippewas, that were issued up to 1924. There was then the first tribal paper for the Choctaw nation, the *Choctaw News* 1878, followed by the *Indian Champion* (1884–85) and the *Choctaw Telegraph* (1848– 49) (Hughes 175). This tradition of printed newspapers was followed by several other newspapers serving the Choctaw people including the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, *Star-Vindicator*, *Indian Citizen*, and *Tushkahomman: The Red Warrior*, several of which included both English and Chahta Anumpa content (176). Yet, the *Biskinik* exists today as a contemporary form of tribal newspaper that empowers the community of the Choctaw nation of Oklahoma.

Considered to be the focal point of the Choctaw nation, the *Biskinik* is “funded, staffed, produced, and mailed by the [Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma]” (Hughes 176). Currently it comes on a twelve/fourteen-page every month and there are also digital versions that could be accessed online via the *Biskinik* official website. The newspaper follows the same structure for each of its issues. Taking a closer look at one of the *Biskinik*’s issues, namely September, Hoponi Hvshi Siptimba 2024, the issue exemplifies a rich and multilayered newspaper that celebrates the news of the community, culture and activism. The issue opens with a full-page article on the “Together We’re More Campaign,” which uses multimodal technique—such as images and storytelling—to frame the Choctaw Nation as a collaborative and culturally-rooted community. The second page Faith, Family, Culture or Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa is followed by messages from tribal leaders Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr., as well as an article by Pastor Olin Williams, Employee Chaplain. Other events, updates and advertisements are also included on that page. Yet there is an important message by tribal leader Chief Gary Batton that places sovereignty not merely as a legal concept, but as a lived reality of cultural continuity and intertribal cooperation—particularly evident in the Five Tribe Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement discussed in his article, wherein the leader emphasizes that “together, we are asserting our tribal sovereignty” (Batton). On page three, environmental sovereignty is the focus of the article against the planned pumped-storage hydroelectric facility along the Kiamichi River. By utilizing legal statements, environmental data, community witness account, and pictures of the river, this article employs framing and multimodal storytelling to place the Choctaw Nation as a committed protector of its territory and heritage. On the next pages, language classes, youth achievements, cultural part exemplified in “Iti Fabvssa” page— which will be discussed in detail below—, elder awards, and community events come together to affirm unity, inform readers, and show that sovereignty is lived daily through cultural practice and communal cooperation. One

² *Biskinik* aug-2010-biskinik (5).pdf.

interesting page of the newspaper is the obituary page wherein Choctaw people who passed away are remembered, placing their pictures and documenting their ancestors. By controlling how Choctaw people are remembered and honored, the Nation is exercising its cultural sovereignty. The obituary page furthermore gives the Choctaw Nation control over its own stories. By listing full names of the dead individuals along with parents, grandparents, and sometimes ancestors, the *Biskinik* helps document and pass down important family lineages.



Together We're More Campaign highlights Choctaw spirit and impact

By Christian Toews

Faith, family and culture are the driving forces behind the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Generations of Choctaw resilience and achievement shape these core tenets, made possible

This feedback led their teams and The Richards Group, the outside agency that helped with the campaign, to the fourth and most successful version, Together We're More 4.0.

"We consistently see engagement from audiences throughout Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas," said Charlotte R.

been the multimedia department.

According to Trevor Rogers, a Senior Digital Content Producer at Choctaw Nation, even with a small team, they have been able to do big things.

Rogers has experience in the film industry and freelancing

FIGURE 1. Page 1, September 2024. Hoponi Hvshi Siptimba. Image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.



FIGURE 2. Page 2, September 2024. Hoponi Hvshi Siptimba. Image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Theoretical Framework

A good starting point to understand framing is referring to the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, whose book *Frame Analysis* (1974) provides the foundation for the idea of people interpreting the world through what he calls “schemata of interpretation” (21). These “primary frameworks,” Goffman describes, help people “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (21). Goffman goes on noting that “any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swath or a narrow one” (8). Here, Goffman highlights how creating meaning is flexible and constructed. Put differently, how people interpret and consequently understand an event primarily depends on what is highlighted for them or what is left out. This focus will be determined by the frame through which the event is presented. Yet, it should go unnoticed by the readers. Frames then are interpretive tools that guide attention and build perception. More importantly, sometimes frames are not chosen by the people themselves, but rather they are often externally created by external powers such as the media, institutions, or society itself. If there is a frame employed—be it through the choice of words, how events follow each other or what visual elements to place where, the readers perspective is consequently influenced and controlled.

Other scholars have developed Goffman’s theory. Robert M. Entman, for example, in his groundbreaking article: “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm” (1993), sets forth a definition of framing as “*select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient . . . to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*” (emphasis original; 52). For Entman, framing does not merely revolve around sharing specific information but rather selecting what is important, highlighting it and therefore shaping how people perceive this information. Building on Goffman’s and Entman’s works, scholar Sunday Olasunkanmi Arowolo states that “framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context” (1). That is, not only does media decide what to cover, but also, they determine how that message will be understood. This is an understanding, Arowolo explains, in congruence with the idea of “second

level agenda-setting” as proposed by scholars such as Iso, Weaver, Ghanem and McCombs (1). Iso and Weaver further argue that media not only educate people on “what to think” but also “how to think” (qtd. in Arowolo 1). Interestingly, the striking aspect of framing in media context, which is the focal point of this essay, is that it often works in tandem with multimodal strategies such as the selection of an image, design on a page, and symbolic signs. Multimodality, as Scheiding explains it, is when periodicals “combine text, photos, illustrations, infographics, data visuals, and typographic design to communicate with their audiences” (185). These factors together influence the reception and interpretation of a message.

It must be noted that my use of the word “framing” in this analysis does not entail any negative connotation. I have tried to provide a working definition of the concept, nevertheless the intended use of the word framing differs from its traditional use. While framing in media is commonly linked with manipulation or bias, in this essay I am using it as an intentional act of meaning-making and affirming unity. In the case of *Biskinik*, framing is a way whereby the Choctaw Nation can express its values and priorities. Instead of distorting reality, framing is used here to place community narratives at the fore that might otherwise be forgotten, marginalized or misrepresented in mainstream media or history. By placing certain stories, cultural events, heritage, traditions and visual symbols in the foreground, the *Biskinik* provides a lens through which readers can approach a cohesive and reliable representation of Choctaw identity and history. Thus, framing functions simultaneously as a means of communication as well as a tool for fusing and codifying communal remembrance.

With that being said, a thorough analysis of the *Biskinik* is due and will be carried out by applying Goffman’s framing theory as well as multimodal analysis as defined by Oliver Scheiding.

The *Biskinik* as a “Little Archive”

Gustav Frank and Madleen Podewski in their article “The Object of Periodical Studies” (2022) argue that periodicals function as a “‘little archive’; they ensure that knowledge produced anywhere in society is stored for a median period and can be further processed or eventually forgotten” (32). This is precisely what the *Biskinik* does. The newspaper preserves and transmits cultural heritage in its occasional documentation of tradition, language, and historical narrative. In this sense, periodicals, or more precisely the *Biskinik*, as stated by Frank and Podewski, serve as mediators between fleeting news and the permanent historical record by aggregating and negotiating knowledge from diverse sources. This is evident as the *Biskinik* records oral history, tribal affairs news, and successes at the community level, so that Choctaw identity is constantly reaffirmed.

By examining the *Biskinik* as a “little archive,” we can understand how it serves to preserve culture beyond documentation. It is a site for affirming identity, where Choctaw members are able to access their heritage through issues of the month. This aligns with Frank and Podewski’s argument that “periodicals do not only popularize the brilliant scientist’s specialized

theories, but also temporarily archive progress and repeatedly circulate compilations from different people, places, and sources” (31). Through stories of elders, linguistic revitalization efforts, and ceremonial practices, the *Biskinik* ensures that traditional knowledge is not lost but continuously reintroduced and adapted.

Looking at the *Biskinik* as a “little archive” reminds us of its contribution to the construction of Choctaw identity in an ever-changing cultural environment. It also underscores the significance of periodicals in preserving knowledge, connecting past and present stories. This view invites researchers to see Indigenous periodicals as primary drivers of cultural resilience, rather than sources of historical data. This point has been addressed by scholars analyzing the importance of Indigenous mass media. For instance, Kelly Wisecup maintains that US newspapers set an example of “colonial archives,” for they are “sites that white settlers envisioned as ‘places for stabilizing and authorizing their interpretations of Indigenous literatures and histories’” (qtd. in Zuck 122). Therefore, Indigenous editors, Rochelle Raineri Zuck opines, found Indigenous periodicals and newspapers “a way to disseminate information and to intervene in a media landscape in which Indigenous people were either absent . . . or represented in stereotypical and often derogatory ways that contributed to political and economic dispossession” (121, 122). While Zuck does not explicitly analyze contemporary Indigenous periodicals, under his premise the *Biskinik* sets an example of Indigenous media that challenges settlers’ misrepresentation and debunks misinformation. While the *Biskinik*’s role as an archive is currently secondary, as the older generation that has experienced colonial oppression is still able to pass on their experience to the newer generations directly, one can expect a shift in the future. As time passes, the older generation will pass away, making the *Biskinik* an increasingly valuable source.

The *Biskinik*’s Role in Cultural Preservation

Storytelling has historically been at the center of Choctaw cultural heritage transmission and remembrance, functioning as a vehicle for passing along history, values, and identity from generation to generation. In this tradition, the *Biskinik* is practically engaged in the perseverance of Choctaw heritage and the formation of their identity. One of its best contributions to this effort is the “Iti Fabvssa” section, a regular monthly feature introduced in July 2009 and devoted to responding to readers’ queries about Choctaw culture, history, and tradition.³ In this way, the *Biskinik* includes numerous other voices in the pages and thus enacts the kind of gathering together that the newspaper promises at the outset. Megan Baker is the editor and frequent author of “Iti Fabvssa,” she is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Research Associate for its Historic Preservation department (2019-2023) and PhD holder in Anthropology at UCLA.⁴ As the staff members of Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation explain, “[t]hrough this column, we

³ Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/iti-fabvssa/2009>.

⁴ Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences; <https://anthropology.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/megan-baker.html>.

ultimately hope to create a conversation through which, Choctaws can increase our knowledge about the past, strengthen our Choctaw, and develop a more informed and culturally grounded understanding of where we are headed as a people in the future.”⁵ Interestingly, the name “Iti Fabvssa,” “pole” or “long, slender piece of wood” in Choctaw, is deeply symbolic. According to Choctaw oral tradition, a sacred pole guided the Choctaw nation to their homeland, pointing backward at its base and forward at its top.⁶ This image simply reflects the section’s function: to connect readers to their heritage while guiding them toward a greater, more unified future. As the authors note, “[i]t is hoped that through the traditional information presented and shared in this column, Choctaw people will be able to connect with our Choctaw pasts and together create a uniquely Choctaw future.”⁷ The *Biskinik*’s dedication to storytelling and remembrance of history fits into the broader concept of Indigenous identity formation. Whether on recorded history, oral history, or collective expression, the “Iti Fabvssa” and the *Biskinik* demonstrate that storytelling is not just a means of recording history but rather a living exercise in cultural sovereignty.

The *Biskinik* illustrates the power of narratives and storytelling to solidify the Choctaw community and help construct identity. For that, the newspaper utilizes multimodal storytelling, with text, historical photographs, and images working together to construct and sustain Choctaw identity and heritage. In “The Semiotic Work Design Can Do: A Multimodal Approach to Visual Storytelling,” Wibke Weber and Hans-Martin Rall assert that “the meaning of a story is not only communicated by the text in itself, but by its entire visuality” (188). This is rightly demonstrated in February 2024 Watonlak Hvsh article in “Iti Fabvssa” titled: “The Length of Our Story: History of Long Hair in Choctaw Culture.” The article uses text narration alongside archival photographs and design elements to create meaning, exemplifying what Per Ledin and David Machin term “integrated design,” where language co-functions as “semiotic material” (qtd. in Weber and Rall 190). The combination of the centered title, old photographs and written description, such as the photograph with caption “Two Typical Choctaw Indians, Talihina, Oklahoma,” amplifies the narration of long hair as an element of historical consciousness.

Not only does the placement of different elements—e.g., words, pictures, and design—on a page matter in building meaning, but so does the placement of words within a sentence. Since effect and meaning depend on careful composition, text placement and image placement are significant aspects of how people read the message. As Robert Waller explains, the “spatial relationship [among images and text] may be every bit as intentional, essential, and effective as the order of words in sentences” (qtd. in Weber and Rall 188). In the *Biskinik*, this semiotic organization is employed to ensure that long hair is not only described but experienced as a powerful cultural symbol. The use of historical photographs—like the one captioned “Two Typical Choctaw Indians, Talihina, Oklahoma”—along with written text in the article supports the framing of long hair as a component of Choctaw historical consciousness. This visual

⁵ <https://choctawnationculture.com/choctaw-culture/iti-fabvssa.aspx>.

⁶ Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/iti-fabvssa/>

⁷ *Biskinik* July 2009: [july-2009-biskinik.pdf](#).

arrangement is best examined in relation to what Weber and Rall term the “compositional . . . metafunction,” where image and text work together to guide the reader’s interpretation (191). So, carefully positioned images along with their verbal text create a visual hierarchy, reinforcing meaning through the “multimodal interplay between verbal and visual elements” (187). Multimodal framing is effective in historical narrative, where photographs are not just illustrative but also evidence for the visual continuation of culture.

Indeed, the newspaper focuses on highlighting traditions, personal narratives and historical contexts, illustrating how framing is important in preserving and transmitting values from generation to generation. In February 2024 Watonlak Hvsh “Iti Fabvssa” article, the *Biskinik* frames long hair as sacred marker of Choctaw identity, linking it with ancestral practice, colonial disruption, and contemporary resurgence. The article states, “[a]s a longstanding tradition, Choctaw people have worn their hair long for generations,” which validates the significant role of the tale and speaks of persistence of culture. Here, I would suggest that placing these stories about Choctaw traditions alongside Choctaw news makes these topics part of an urgent discussion of Choctaw sovereignty in present and future, which challenges the colonial archiving of assimilation written in US newspapers and periodicals. Effectively, the *Biskinik* resists colonial erasure and offers a tale of confirming Indigenous identity as persistent. In highlighting tradition, personal histories, and historical contexts, it reinforces the association of long hair with Choctaw culture. Here, the newspaper serves as a channel for preserving and transmitting such values from generation to generation so that the symbolic value of long hair remains known and respected. It becomes evident that the newspaper maintains the status of long hair as a powerful symbol of survival and cultural pride.

More importantly, the *Biskinik* transforms historical trauma into stories of today’s resilience. The article states, “[t]he practice of cutting long hair upon entrance to boarding school was one of many tactics aimed to strip students of their own culture.” This disturbing frame, demonstrating the forced shaving of hair in boarding school, serves as a historical rupture, shedding light on the impact of assimilation policies. Additionally, the article reinscribes long hair as a project of cultural renewal and defiance rather than leaving this as an open frame of mourning: “Many Choctaw men and women today make a choice to wear their hair long,” “Our hair carries our life story.” Moreover, “[w]e recognize that its length connects us to our ancestors through distant generations and its length is a reminder of our resilient spirit.” Evidently, the newspaper assumes long hair as an endless story instead of fixed tradition, the *Biskinik* makes communal memory stronger, that tradition is not just remembered but lived. This multimodal storytelling approach actively contributes to Indigenous sovereignty, as it not only tells the past, but it makes it part of their present, in which the combination of words and images ensure that Choctaw heritage is not merely preserved, but lived, enacted, and reclaimed by contemporary storytelling.

ITI FABVSSA

The Length of Our Story: History of Long Hair in Choctaw Culture

Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) the Choctaw Nation has the authority to work with institutions around the United States for the respectful return of our ancestors and their funerary belongings.

This year, we were contacted by the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University (PMAE) for a unique case - hair clippings of known Choctaw ancestors. During the early 1930s, hair clippings were collected from three Choctaw students at the Chilocco Indian Agricultural Boarding School located in Kay County, Oklahoma. They were later donated to the Peabody Museum in 1935. We were able to locate the students' descendent families and ask them their wishes. Each family let us know that they would like to have these clippings returned to them.

This January, Chief Gary Batten welcomed the families, a Peabody Museum representative, and the Historic Preservation Department staff to a quiet repatriation at the Headquarters in Durant.

As a longstanding tradition, Choctaw people have worn their hair long for generations. The earliest European accounts from the Choctaw homeland (1540-1720) indicate that neighboring tribes called us Pashi Falaya, or the Long Hairs (Rangel 1993[1557]:296; Adair 1775:192).

Choctaw people were given this name because, while unusual among the other Southeastern tribes, it was common for Choctaw men to wear their hair long. Many men wore their hair to their shoulders with a longer lock of hair in front of their right ear. When traveling, this hairstyle aided in identifying the man as being Choctaw.



Top Left: Kùt-tee-o-tib-bee, How Did He Kill?, a Noted Brave, 1834. George Catlin. Smithsonian American Art Museum.
Top Right: Anouel was sketched on April 6, 1830, in Memphis. Charles Alexandre Lesueur. Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre.

Bottom Left: Tahanny, A Choctaw Man, 1833. Karl Bodmer. Joslyn Art Museum.
Bottom Right: Sauvages, Tuhakias Machez en Guerriers qui portent des cheveux, 1735. Alexander de Batz. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology.

Choctaw people have adopted new hairstyles as our culture has changed through time. By the late 1700s, some Choctaw men had started wearing their hair shaved on the sides, with a longer part in the middle (Romans 1775:82). It was common for Choctaw women to have their hair extend as far down as their calves; however, it was generally worn as a bun, see Figure 2.

Choctaw men and women used bear fat to oil their hair.



David Bushnell. Ancient Method of Wearing the Hair-Photograph of Heleema (Louisa), 1909. National Anthropological Archives.

An old tradition for Choctaw men and women is shaving, cutting, or clipping a lock of hair when a loved one passes away (Halbert 1900:365).

After the loved one passed, Choctaw women were known to wear their hair down throughout their mourning process (ibid).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, paintings and drawings by European artists depicted Choctaw men and a few Choctaw women with long hair. Examples of this can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The tradition of wearing long hair continued well after removal to Indian Territory in the 1830s and later.

Many pictures of Choctaw people in Oklahoma, Mississippi and Louisiana show Choctaws having long hair up into the 20th century.



Two Typical Choctaw Indians, Talihina, Oklahoma, Oklahoma Historical Society.

Unfortunately, with the systematic deployment of boarding schools by the US Government, the tradition of long hair was taken, often without the consent of the family. The practice of cutting long hair upon entrance to boarding school was one of many tactics aimed to strip students of their own culture. In addition, some Choctaw people wanted to prove we could assimilate into American culture as "civilized" citizens capable of managing our own affairs. This assault on Choctaw identity would bring lasting consequences to our community.

Many Choctaw men and women today make a choice to wear their hair long. The association of the length and care we give to our hair was not lost in our community. Modern Choctaw people have led their communities on a journey of healing by embracing the sacredness of their own hair. Our hair carries our life story. We recognize that its length connects us to our ancestors through distant generations and its length is a reminder of our resilient spirit.

Adair, James. *The History of the American Indians*. United Kingdom, E. & C. Dilly, 1775.

Bushnell, David Ives. *The Choctaw of Bayou LaCombe*. St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana: United States, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1909.

Halbert, Henry S. *Funeral Customs of the Mississippi Choctaw*. Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, Volume 3, edited by Franklin Lafayette Riley, United States, 1901.

Rangel, Rodrigo. *The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America in 1539-1543*. United States: University of Alabama Press, 1993.

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

GROUPS & TOURS

BRING YOUR GROUP TO THE CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER!

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Jordan Grots

Less is more when it comes to maintaining your garden or yard to benefit wildlife and pollinators during the winter. Although it can be tempting to clean up your yard in preparation for spring, appreciating the beauty of a natural yard can benefit wildlife and plants in the winter and prepare it for spring. Leaving your leaves and other plant material to decompose will add necessary nutrients to the soil, retain moisture, and provide shelter for small animals and beneficial insects during winter months.

Two of these insects are fireflies and the luna moth, which are well-loved species in the reservation. Fireflies will spend 90% of their life as larvae in leaf litter, logs, and other moist, protected areas. The luna moth, a bright, pale-green moth that can have a wingspan of up to 4.5 inches, is one of 1,809 species of moth that can be found in Oklahoma. This species requires leaf litter to create a cocoon, inside which they will spend the winter. However, they are very well camouflaged and may be missed when tidying up your yard.

Additionally, now is the ideal time to plant native milkweed in your garden because their seeds require fluctuating freezing temperatures to soften and bloom in the warmer months. Milkweed will benefit many butterfly species, such as the Monarch, which has a declining population. A great resource for native seeds is the Tribal Alliance for Pollinators (TAP) website, <https://tribalallianceforpollinators.com/>, which can send seeds or seedlings of over 100 locally sourced plants to tribal members at no cost and is a wealth of information.

It's also beneficial to leave parts of wildflowers that remain until spring because the seeds will provide a food source for wintering birds. You can supplement a bird's natural diet by placing a bird feeder in an open area of your yard. The best bird feeders for winter will have a mix of mealworms, fruits, and cracked corn because these foods are calorically dense and will help birds retain weight during the season. By placing bird feeders, you can expect to see Northern Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, and Dark-eyed Juncos, among many others. It's recommended that feeders be thoroughly cleaned between refills to avoid perpetuating any diseases that may be spread by different species congregating.

Winter can be a harsh season for wildlife, and we hope that you're feeling inspired to help attract native wildlife and insects to thrive and establish in your own backyard.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

FIGURE 3. Page 6, February 2024. Watonlak Hvshi. Image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The *Biskinik*'s Role in Language Revitalization

According to Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, the Choctaw language is currently classified as “Threatened,” with reported “10,000 fluent speakers” (qtd. in Brixey et al. 2746). This decline in speakers represents an ongoing loss of language use among the people. In Oklahoma, for instance, the majority of those who speak Choctaw use it as their second language (qtd. in Brixey et al. 2746). This decline in language use comes as no surprise because early in the 20th century, government-funded programs were inherently designed to prevent Indigenous languages and force assimilation into Euro-American. As a result, Native Americans neither taught their native language nor learned it. This language disruption has had a massive impact on language use that still has its mark on native communities today. This, in turn, has led to revitalization efforts carried out by Indigenous communities and exemplified in exposing language classes in the local schools and colleges (2746). Deriving from this, tribal newspapers, specifically, the *Biskinik* have played a crucial role in the process. Language revitalization in the *Biskinik* is composed of two constituent tactics: cultural engagement and official instructional language lessons.

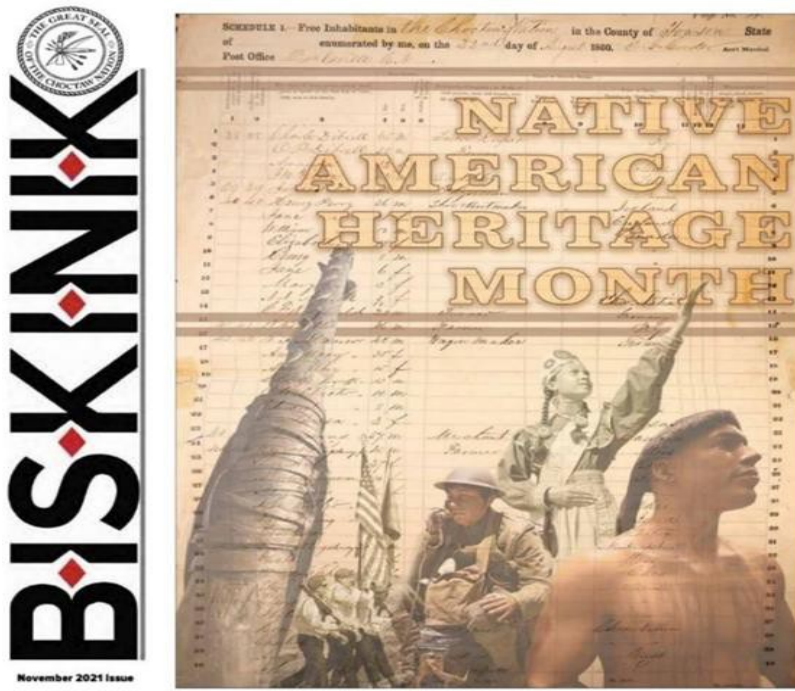
Language is celebrated as a source of identity confirmation and pride. The former point is epitomized by the Native American Heritage Month cover page of November 2021, Hohchvffo Chito Hvshi, which highlights the importance of language for the Choctaw nation. The cover page of the issue utilizes multimodal elements such as images from the past and present as well as text encompassing culture, language and history, which symbolically intertwine the past with the present. By situating the language within the cultural and historical contexts, this article entrenches the notion of Choctaw as a vibrant, living language that defines and perpetuates the community's identity. The latter point is fortified by the article, which postulates that “[t]he language sets us apart from other tribes; we don't want to lose our unique sounds and our emphasis. We want to be good stewards of our language to pass on to the next generation. The language is used to pass on our traditions and oral stories” (Germany-Wall). As it stands, the *Biskinik* frames language as a core part of their uniqueness, connecting it to their distinguished identity. Additionally, The *Biskinik* fortifies the sense of community by emphasizing group learning. As the article states, “[c]ommunity classes are free of charge and are open to the public,” framing language revitalization as a collective task (Germany-Wall). This corresponds with the affective nature of periodicals, which Sabina Fazli describes as “affect generators” (205). In characterizing learning a language as a community task, the newspaper enhances affective participation with the process of revitalization. This communal solidarity is further reinforced by shared practical values to provide a common sense of self. The *Biskinik* celebrates one of its members as “First Language Speaker of the Month.” In July 2024 issue, Chulai-Kvfi Hvshi, the newspaper honors one Choctaw member for her dedication in Choctaw language teaching “to many people for many years.”⁸ By placing her image with the certificate of honor, the *Biskinik*

⁸ *Biskinik* July 2024: july2024-biskinik.pdf.

frames language revitalization as a foster for community and pride, affirming the value of the language and the members who preserve it. This act, in turn, encourages others to learn, consolidating a common cultural identity founded on shared goals. This way, language becomes not only a form of communication but a powerful symbol of collective pride and resilience.

Scheiding claims that “[p]eriodicals are distinct multimodal (print) objects. They combine text, photos, illustrations, infographics, data visuals, and typographic design to communicate with their audiences” (185). The *Biskinik* makes use of multimodal methods to make language learning engaging. Turning to official language lessons, the November 2021 Hohchvffo Chito Hvshi lesson in Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna (School of Choctaw Language) is an outstanding example for this approach. The lesson presents the Choctaw verb *atvpa* in a number of sentence structures, demonstrating its usage through bolding, side-by-side English translations and examples that place meaning in context. This, too, once again, aligns with the claim of Wibke Weber and Hans-Martin Rall that “the meaning of a story is not only conveyed by the text in itself, but by its whole visuality” (188). The positioning, which enables a parallel placement of Choctaw sentences and their translation, makes intuitive learning process possible.

Yet, multimodal strategies create a space for learning that is not merely passive. Since multimodal magazines serve as “semiotic-imaginary artifacts” that engage “our organ senses,” sensory stimulation plays a significant role in language acquisition because it links the reading with oral exercise (Scheiding 185, 186). For instance, the deliberate repetition of the new word in Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna provokes active engagement. By providing several variations of *atvpa* in different contexts, the lesson encourages practice of pronunciation. Furthermore, structuring lessons around everyday talk Evidently, language revitalization in the *Biskinik* is framed as both an act of sovereignty and identity preservation. Here, the *Biskinik* selects success stories, resilience, and collective responsibility, which encourages readers to perceive language revitalization as a good, collective activity. encourages readers to integrate Choctaw into everyday speech.



Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

By Kendra Germany-Wall

Every November is recognized as National Native American Heritage Month. This month's issue of the *Blackhawk* is dedicated to the accomplishments and milestones of Choctaw tribal members around the world. In this issue, we will spotlight only a few of the thousands of Choctaws who are making a positive change in the world and living out their dreams.

History

Native American Heritage Month is a time to celebrate Native cultural heritage and educate others of tribal history. Native American Heritage Month began as a week-long celebration during November 30, 1988. In 1990, a joint resolution was approved by President George H.W. Bush, which called for November to be named National American Indian Heritage Month. Similar proclamations have been issued by every president since 1994, designating the entire month of November as National Native American Heritage Month.

The month is a time to celebrate rich and diverse cultures, traditions and histories and to acknowledge the important contributions of Native people.

There are more than 200 federally recognized tribes in the United States, and Oklahoma itself is home to 39 federally recognized sovereign nations.

Native culture, traditions and language are intertwined into the fabric of life in America.

Native American Heritage Month is also an opportunity to educate the public about tribes and raise general awareness about Indigenous people's unique challenges throughout history.

It is also a time to celebrate how Native Americans have worked to overcome those challenges. One way to celebrate Native American Heritage Month is to be a cultural keeper.

According to Choctaw Cultural Services, culture keepers are those who carry traditional knowledge, teachings, and stories and share them with the community to ensure cultural continuity.

Language

Another vital factor in preserving culture is protecting Native languages. "When our ancestors began interacting with European and American settlers, we learned to speak their languages in order to be successful in trade and government relations. Over time, fewer and fewer people spoke Choctaw fluently. Our children were even forbidden from speaking their native language in schools and in some Choctaw homes," explained Gary Ration, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. "Today, we are strengthening our language through the Aantoka Aukh-via school. Our language experts and fluent speakers teach the Choctaw language to students in communities and public schools across our reservation."

The Choctaw Language Program started with three public schools during its pilot. Now, it employs 21 teachers and serves approximately 3,000 people weekly through its website, community classes, public schools, colleges, online classes, early childhood and elementary classes.

Choctaw language is taught by distance learning, which allows the language instructor and students to interact in real-time. An estimated 1,000 students are currently learning the Choctaw language daily through the 14 Head Start centers, two elementary classrooms and 42 Oklahoma public high schools served within the Choctaw Nation's boundaries.

Classes are offered in college students enrolled at East Albert State College and Southeastern Oklahoma State University as well.

Community classes are available at 30 sites both within and outside of the boundaries of the Choctaw Nation. Community classes are free of charge and are open to the public.

Historian Curtis Billy states, "The language sets us apart from other tribes, we don't want to lose our unique sounds and our emphasis. We want to be good stewards of our language to pass on to the next generation. The language is used to pass on our traditions and oral stories."

You can also learn a bit about the Choctaw Language by reading the monthly language lesson in the *Blackhawk*. For more information about the School of Choctaw Language, visit <https://www.choctawschool.com>, or call 1-800-422-4170.

Culture

Choctaw cultural traditions and history are also preserved through the efforts of the Choctaw Nation's Cultural Services department.

Services include classes for the community and tribal employees, educational presentations, storytelling, cultural exhibits and demonstrations, and educational and resource materials related to culture.

The Historic Preservation department also works to assist the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma community in preserving its living heritage by protecting sacred sites and historic sites and aiding community efforts to maintain and revitalize Choctaw traditional culture.

Anyone interested in learning more about the history and culture of the Choctaw people should visit the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant, Oklahoma.

The Choctaw Cultural Center is dedicated to exploring, preserving and highlighting the culture and history of the Choctaw people. The exhibits are immersive and told from the Choctaw perspective - honoring the physical and spiritual journey of the Choctaw people, or the "Choctaw Nowvt Ajay." The Cultural Center includes over 100,000 square feet of rich, engaging exhibitions, a vast Living Village, classrooms, a theater, a cafe and a gift shop.

The Choctaw Cultural Center offers tours, classes, demonstrations and films on a daily basis. Hours of operation are Wednesday-Friday 10 a.m. through 2 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. through 7 p.m., and Sunday 11 a.m. through 5 p.m.

Site tours begin at 2 p.m. daily (or by request, based on educator availability). The Choctaw Nation wants to know how you intend to celebrate Native American Heritage Month. Share your story by using #togetherWeMove on social media or by visiting <https://www.choctawnation.com/together-we-move>.

For more ways to stay up to date on what is happening in the Choctaw Nation, visit <https://choctawnation.com>, or follow the Nation on all social media platforms.



Photo by Choctaw Nation

The Choctaw Cultural Center includes over 100,000 square feet of rich, engaging exhibitions, a vast Living Village, classrooms, a theater, cafe and retail that bring the Choctaw spirit of faith, family and culture to life.



Photo by Choctaw Nation

The Choctaw Cultural Center features breathtaking artwork and scenic views.



Photo by Rylee Tollet

Cultural Keepers are those who carry traditional knowledge, teachings and stories and share them with the community to ensure cultural continuity. Above: The Cultural Keeper's statue located near the stadium field.

FIGURE 4. Page 1, November 2021. Hohchvffo Chito Hvshi. Photo illustration from top by Chris Jennings, Choctaw Nation and Rylee Tollet respectively.

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna

November Language Lesson

Atvpa

Uses of a commonly used verb: atvpa – v. to be an over-plus; exaggeration; excess; to overgo; to superabound.

In today's speaking it is used for emphasis, as in 'too much'.

Anumpuli kvt atvpa.

He/She talks too much.

Impat kvt atvpa.

He/She eats too much.

Lvshpa kvt atvpa.

It's too hot.

Tuksvliit atvpa.

He/She works too much.

Vlla mvt atvpa.

That child is too much/
out of hand (Behaviorally
'acting up').

Placing 'ont' in front of 'atvpa' denotes 'beyond the place of origin'.

Anumpuli kvt ont atvpa.

His/Her talk is getting out
of hand.

Impa kvt ont atvpa.

He eats way too much.

Lvshpa kvt ont atvpa.

It's just way too hot.

Kaa yali yvt ont atvpa.

The price of a car is way
too much.

I shulush vt falaya kvt ont
atvpa.

His shoes are way too long.

www.choctawschool.com

FIGURE 5. Page 5, November 2021. Hohchvffo Chito Hvshi. Image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Wickson is First Language Speaker of the Month

The School of Choctaw Language would like to congratulate Dora Wickson for being recognized as District Nine's Choctaw Language First Speaker for June.

Dora has taught the Choctaw Language to many people for many years! E chi yakoke Dora for having a passion to teach Chahta Anumpa. Achukma fehna hoke!



Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

On July 15, 2015, the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (HACNO) was the only tribal nation selected by the President of the United States and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to participate as one of 28 ConnectHome Pilot communities. The goal of the ConnectHome Program was to "Bridge the Digital Divide" that existed within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's service area. This program was created to offer (HACNO) tenants residing in Affordable Rental units, Independent Elder and 202 PRAC elder units access to the internet and training services. The objective is to give them the ability to better their lives by taking advantage online searching for jobs as well as exploring all that the

DURANT, Okla. (June 4, 2024) – Choctaw Nation Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. recently graduated with a master's degree in biblical/theological studies from Southwestern Assemblies of God University. It took Austin about two years to complete the course, but he feels the time put in is worth it for his faith journey.

"Anyone that knows me, knows my faith is very important to me," Austin said. "I don't make any big decision without first getting counsel from our Creator. It is my faith that helps guide my life and the direction I need to serve God and people."

The Assistant Chief always knew that his life's calling was in service to others, and he believes that completing his master's degree further helps him along in his journey as he continually works to serve the Choctaw people. The Chahta Spirit of Faith, Family and Culture directly aligns with the elements that are most important in Assistant Chief's life. Even as a young boy, Austin would tag along with his mom or dad as they delivered services to Choctaw families within their jobs. Through the many opportunities with his parents' example of commitment he learned

FIGURE 6. Page 4, July 2024. Kvfi Hvshi. Image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The *Biskinik*'s Role in Environmental Advocacy

As I have previously mentioned, the *Biskinik* emphasizes two Choctaw inherently intertwined principles which are essential to Indigenous people: cultural continuity and collective responsibility. For example, the December 2024 Koi Chito Hvshi article “The Fight to Protect Native Rivercane,” is more than a mere environmental report. It is rather a case study of how the Choctaw nation utilizes media to assert ecological and cultural sovereignty. One can also argue that this article can be read as a public agent that not only shapes public knowledge but also fosters communal responsibility. Looking at the title that includes the word “fight,” the article does not merely report on environmental issues; it features Indigenous advocacy. Additionally, rivercane is framed as a “symbol” of both ecological necessity and Choctaw identity (Keaton). The article places rivercane not only as a plant but as a cultural icon. Early in the article, the author makes the strong historical place of rivercane in Choctaw art, claiming that “rivercane baskets are made, including how the materials are gathered, the techniques and motifs artists have used for generations” (Keaton). This anecdotal history is a narrative hook, linking environmental degradation to a larger story of cultural continuity and old tradition. The article then shifts to environmental necessity, the statement, “these canebrakes are less abundant than our ancestors would enjoyed,” turns an environmental fact into a cultural problem (Keaton). Here, rivercane is not just a plant anymore—it is a living witness to colonial disruption and an icon of Indigenous resurgence.

To better enlighten readers' knowledge, the article employs multimodal storytelling. Visual images, claims Susan Midalia, “offer not a mirror of the world, but an interpretation of it” (qtd. in Blanco-Gómez and Gómez-Ortiz 172). In the article, images play an especially crucial role, depicting both the natural environment of the rivercane and the conservation collective efforts of the Choctaw community. More importantly are the captions under these photographs: “The hard work, time and research put into the preservation efforts of Native rivercane, has resulted in education for future generations” (Keaton). Both the images as well as the captions are twofold. Firstly, they are tangible proof, reminding readers of the reality of the loss of the environment and grounding the narrative on hard imagery. Secondly, the caption positions readers as engaged actors and not merely passive witnesses, invested emotionally and intellectually in the issue.

Framing rivercane not as “property” but rather as being part of an ancestral ecosystem instills a radically different vision for the land that prioritizes care, reciprocity, and interdependence. Not only does the *Biskinik*'s rivercane article function as an environmental report, but it also features a strategic political and cultural intervention, which is in congruence with Zuck who considers “the newspaper as a tool of both communication and intervention” (123). It is worth mentioning that the article is framed as a disruption to colonial narratives that see the land as a mere commodity rather than claiming Indigenous sovereignty. By centering on the importance of rivercane, the *Biskinik* disrupts the colonial narrative that states that the land is extractive.

The fight to protect native rivercane

Historic Preservation, scientist and artists unite to conserve a staple food of southeastern Oklahoma ecology

By Tashita Keaton

In previous Biskinik and Hi Fabvosa articles, we highlighted how rivercane baskets are made, including how the materials are gathered, the techniques and motifs artists have used for generations, and the purposes those baskets serve in everyday life. It is a cultural keystone species with a rich history of traditional uses, including arrows, baskets, blowguns, fishing spears, knives, traps, pottery tools and medicine.

Chief Gary Batten made rivercane the star of his February 2023 Chief's Blog, stating, "The river cane is a symbol of the Choctaw Nation. The native basketry grass is represented at the Choctaw Nation headquarters in its design in numerous areas of the building for its historical significance. Via, as a nation, honor our faith, family, and culture by remembering where we come from and how our early Choctaw family relied on the river cane for survival. River cane is not only important to the Choctaw Nation, but to the stability it brings to the soil and the home it provides for animals."

For this month's Biskinik article, we wanted to highlight the life of rivercane and its importance to the environment.

The science of rivercane
Rivercane is a native species of bamboo that is endemic to the eastern United States and can be found growing around the Choctaw Nation reservation, as well as in our ancestral homelands of Mississippi and Alabama. Canebrakes are typically found along or near creeks and rivers but never in the water. They can grow, on average, 10 feet tall.

When asked about her role at the Choctaw Nation, Jamie Smith says she "seemingly finds canebrakes."

As an Environmental Coordinator, she conducts site visits to different properties around the reservation. In the process, she finds canebrakes. Once she locates a canebrake, like any good scientist, she measures the diameter of the trunk and notes its location and features, such as its proximity to a water source. Inside how the surrounding land is used and its potential impact on the canebrake. She takes a picture as part of its record system, which she will look at under a microscope to determine its genus. Once she has that data, she records it in our private GIS mapping system."

Mapping existing canebrakes provides future rivercane research opportunities while allowing our natural ecosystem to heal. Ac-

cess to our map and associated data is heavily restricted and protected.

Unfortunately, these canebrakes are less abundant than our ancestors would have enjoyed. Among other factors, the conversion of wild spaces for agricultural use has led to a detrimental reduction in this species, and it is estimated that less than 2% of historic canebrakes remain.

Not only does the severe reduction of rivercane impact our cultural practices, it also impacts our environment. Rivercane is essential to the health of our environment.

The ecological benefits of rivercane include water filtration, stream bank stabilization, enhanced air quality, natural fire breaks, wildlife habitat, black bear habitation and is a larval host for several butterfly species.

The lifecycle of rivercane is slow to progress, and little research is available on what triggers the flowering cycle - a process that may take up to 40 years for a single plant.

Rivercane is a grass, and a single plant can be several acres long.

After a canebrake flowers, it dies. If the resulting rivercane takes root in a similar location, we can retain that canebrake.

University of Alabama Water Institute researchers are sequencing the rivercane genome. Extracting rivercane DNA and mapping its genetic history will allow us to document the best growing conditions for each strain of rivercane, increasing our ability to ensure its survival.

This is one of the most critical plants to me, my ancestors, and the region, and it truly signs our cultural and environmental practices," says Smith.

A partnership of scientists, Historic Preservation, artists, and community

Smith's work does not stop after she locates and collects data on the canebrake. Once all the information is recorded, she contacts Ryan Spring, Research Coordinator and GIS Specialist in Historic Preservation, and together, they work to bring in more people who know how to work and harvest the rivercane.

"We bring in a blended group of artists, handworkers and managers, traditional and academic scientists, and anyone who wants to learn more about rivercane to restore and work these canebrakes. We are building a community around this rivercane," says Spring.

Rivercane conservation includes active engagement and use of the canebrakes. These artistic practices that connect scientists and artists are an effective conservation method to ensure the longevity of this species.



Rivercane is critically threatened. Choctaw Nation has been involved in the River Cane Alliance, a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the River Cane Gathering, a partnership with the U.S. Forestry Service.

"Canebrakes like to be worked on. If left alone, canebrakes can become overgrown and invasive species can take over, resulting in it not growing as strong," says Smith.

Basket weavers play a critical role in this process because they carry important traditional ecological knowledge. In their article,

"The basketry that these baskets carry - A rivercane reflection," Michael P. Pedersen and Ms. Rose Polner of the Rivercane Restoration Alliance state that "a skilled Choctaw artist can identify the right time of year, correct age class, appropriate stem diameter, stand health, and harvest technique to gather the right cane for the right basket."

In his blog post, Chief Batten outlines how and why tribal members should get involved in rivercane restoration efforts. "You can help by seeking out river cane restoration efforts and help with transplanting or giving to groups who are working to preserve the native grass. This river cane has provided both comfort and food for early Choctaws and, with our help, can continue to provide well into the future."

"I want people to understand how important rivercane is not only to us, but to the environment as well. We have to respect the rivercane again, like our ancestors did. We must future generations to know rivercane and have the ability to go out and harvest it responsibly," says Spring.

Individuals can share possible rivercane locations with Smith's office by going to <https://www.choctawnation.com/river-cane-observatory-program/> or scanning the QR code located in the main image of this story.

Smith assures private property owners who have canebrakes on their property that "we are not claiming ownership. We only want to partner in efforts to conserve and protect rivercane as a keystone species. Rivercane can be an important ally in your land management practices."

An essential element of conservation is education. Several resources are available to learn about rivercane conservation and restoration efforts, including CONSERVE's Rivercane Restoration Alliance (conservegroup.org/rivercane) and the Rivercane Gathering Project (rivercane-gathering.org).

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Forestry, in partnership with the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, held the first annual Rivercane Gathering, which brought together tribal communities, federal employees, and university researchers to discuss rivercane's cultural significance and conservation best practices.

Since 2011, the River Cane Initiative has been actively identifying and mapping existing canebrakes on tribal land here in northwestern Oklahoma. You can keep up with their efforts on their Facebook group, River Cane Initiative.

"We want the younger generations to learn about it, how it grows, how to harvest while protecting it, and what to make with it," says Jamie. "If we lose these efforts, we lose the ability to continue important culturally relevant practices. Scientists, historic preservation, artists, and community members must unite to protect this cultural and ecological keystone species."



The hard work, time and research put into the preservation efforts of Native rivercane has resulted in education for future generations to harvest, grow and protect the precious plant. Check out the word search below to learn terms associated with rivercane.

RIVER CANE

N	Q	V	Q	G	F	L	V	Q	B	J	B
U	S	X	O	S	K	I	S	B	V	I	A
C	Y	N	W	R	O	O	B	B	P	M	R
O	K	Q	W	P	M	B	X	S	O	B	R
N	R	I	Z	B	F	L	P	A	S	G	O
S	R	U	F	U	M	M	E	F	S	Z	O
E	E	J	I	T	A	C	Y	L	Q	K	P
R	T	B	S	T	T	G	Z	B	T	N	E
V	A	D	H	E	S	Q	O	H	R	U	W
A	W	K	I	R	L	E	Z	K	G	S	R
T	H	S	N	F	O	Q	K	J	A	W	M
I	Y	I	G	L	O	M	G	W	C	O	E
O	B	L	N	Y	T	G	I	O	D	L	L
N	W	W	P	Z	U	I	T	R	T	L	T
O	S	P	Y	L	D	Q	E	U	B	X	B

bamboo

basketry

fishing

blowgun

oka

oski

butterfly

cane

conservation

tools

ecosystem

water



BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma • TOGETHER WE'RE MORE •

Tisimba (December) 2024

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The Youth Advisory Board celebrates 20 years.

Page 3

Veterans Day celebration held at Tishka Homma.

Page 11

Scholarships awarded to Choctaw students.

Bookinik
Alison Stewart
To serve as the source of information for Choctaw Nation tribal members by delivering community news through a variety of communication channels.

Stay Connected to the Nation
CHOCTAWNATION.COM

FIGURE 7. Page 12, July 2024. Kvfi Hvshi. Photo by Louise Vaughn, User Support for the Southeast Blueprint. Nature image courtesy of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Conclusion

This study looks beyond the traditional and conventional ways of reading Indigenous newspapers by examining the *Biskinik* not as a mere news outlet, but rather as a dynamic site of cultural assertion, sovereignty and identity formation. The multi-layered approach of utilizing multimodal analysis and framing theory in reading the newspaper has helped uncover the significant role that the *Biskinik* plays in the construction of Indigenous heritage, language revitalization and environmental advocacy. Through visual layout, imagery, narrative structure, and framing, the *Biskinik* reclaims Indigenous knowledge while resisting settler-colonial narratives and misrepresentation. As I have tried to demonstrate, the *Biskinik* functions as a “little archive,” weaving collective memory and sovereignty through narrating heritage tales.

It should further be noted that periodicals like the *Biskinik* are important means for transferring intergenerational knowledge and preserving language, land stewardship, and identity. So, it is fair to say that the *Biskinik* offers valuable insights into how to challenge settler-narrative, engages its readership with political, cultural, health, economic issues, offers health tips, sheds light on youth achievements as well as facilitates a platform for different advertisements. At first glance, the *Biskinik* invites readers to read about the Indigenous community of Choctaw. However, the newspaper weaves many other narratives either explicitly or implicitly that help the present generation as well as future generation to be part of the Choctaw community. It further forces the Choctaw people and non-Indigenous people to reevaluate the stories surrounding the Choctaw nation in particular and Indigenous people in general. This revision of Indigenous history will continue to unsettle deeply-held beliefs about Indigenous culture and history.

While I have analyzed the *Biskinik*, utilizing an unexplored analytical approach, the work is never complete. Therefore, further analysis of Indigenous periodicals is warranted to yield greater understanding of the subject. Future researchers could further investigate other areas of Indigenous cultural and heritage here not investigated, especially with regard to contemporary Indigenous periodicals.

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