



TRAIL OF TEARS



EMILY SCHLESINGER



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HOME

Imagine a land you know by heart. Your family calls it home. They've lived there for hundreds of years. Each mountain has a story. Rivers lead to special places. Your grandparents' grandparents named the birds and other animals. They learned what grows in the clay soil. You were born here. Your brothers and sisters were too. It's where your **ancestors** were buried. This is the only home you have ever known.

Going to Water

Many rivers flowed through the Cherokee homeland. These gave rise to stories. One was their creation story. In it, Earth was a flat disc of water that had an island in the middle. Earth was held from the sky by four cords. Good spirits lived above. Bad spirits lived below. Sometimes bad spirits came up through cracks in the ground. The Cherokee people had a way to stay free of them. Every morning, they bathed in rivers. The moving water washed away bad spirits. It also brought strength and life. This was an important ritual. It was called "going to water."



One day, soldiers come to your door. Some have **bayonets**. They tell you to leave. You have five minutes. That is only enough time to grab a few items. Your family is taken to camps.

Then you are all forced to march. The journey is long. It leads 1,000 miles away. Your house is left behind. Forget about your farm. Say goodbye to the animals. Abandon your **sacred** sites. It's all taken from you. You will never see your home again.

It was the 1830s. This happened to the Cherokee people. Their home was in the South. It included parts of Georgia. Other nearby states were part of it too. The U.S. took what remained of their land. About 16,000 Cherokee had to leave. This **tribe** was marched to a new place. About one in four died on this forced trip. The journey was called the Trail of Tears.

Cherokee words still dot their homeland. Many are river names. One is the Hiwassee. It comes from a Cherokee word that means “meadow.” Some town names in the South have Cherokee meaning. Mountain names do too. Yonah Mountain in Georgia is one. In Cherokee, yonah means “bear.”

Yonah Mountain, Georgia





Fast Fact

Ancestors of the Cherokee people may have been living in the region more than 1,000 years ago. They built giant mounds that can still be seen today.

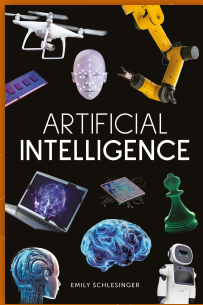
Sautee Nacoochee Indian Mound in Georgia

Still, something is missing. This is the Cherokee people. Their journey led them far from home. It has been called one of the most shameful events in U.S. history.

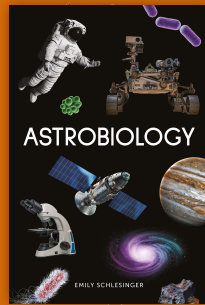


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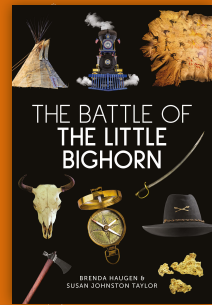
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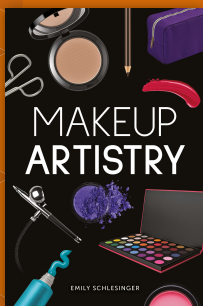
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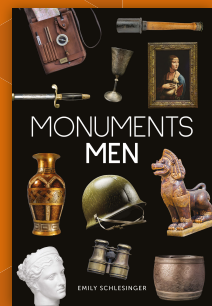
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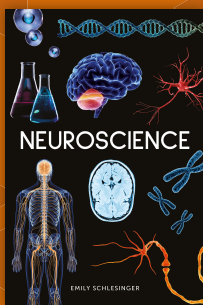
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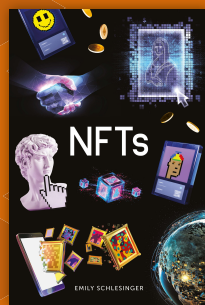
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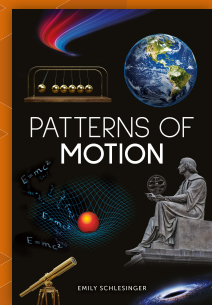
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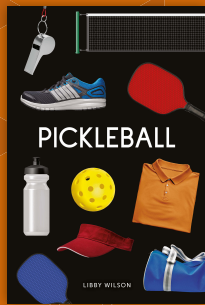
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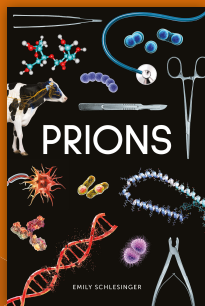
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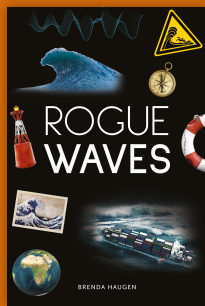
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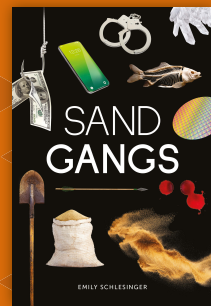
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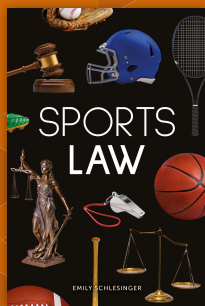
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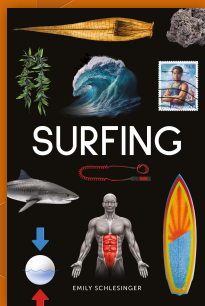
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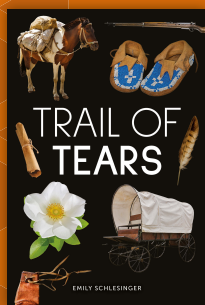
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HISTORY

TRAIL OF TEARS

In the 1830s, thousands of Native Americans were forced to walk hundreds of miles to a new home after their lands were taken. They had just minutes to grab what they could carry with them. Many died on the journey. It would be called the Trail of Tears.



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