

Our group chose “Cherokee Nation” as our research topic. The initial search terms we came up with were: Cherokee Tribe, American Indians, Native Americans, Oklahoma, Trail of Tears, Andrew Jackson, reservations, "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," and sovereign nation.

The brick-and-mortar libraries we visited (individually) were the Seattle Public Library, the Camarillo Library, the MacKimmie Library at the University of Calgary, the Eugene Public Library, and the Brea Public Library. Some of these were academic and some were public libraries. We were able to find some good references at the libraries on a variety of topics relating to the Cherokee Nation. The main benefits of researching at a physical library were the authoritative resources (books, encyclopedias, government publications, etc.), the fact that the texts were available to read or photocopy, being able to browse a physical area where related books were shelved together, the results of our searches being focused and not extraneous, and having access to the library’s subscription databases. The drawbacks of the physical library were the limited number of resources (many of which were written for children), the fact that reference books are non-circulating, the layout of the libraries being potentially disorienting to a new patron, and the trouble of actually getting to the library and finding a place to park.

The number of results of a Google search dwarfed the results at the brick-and-mortar libraries. Depending on the search term, Google came up with 7,000 – 114,000,000 results. Most of the results were web pages, but Google also offers a couple of helpful features. Google Books

suggests book titles related to the search terms, some of which are available to read online, and specific titles can be saved to My Library (attached to a Google account). Google also offered a Timeline of Cherokee History, which provided an interesting visual aid. Some of the websites, such as the official site of the Cherokee Nation, seemed authoritative, and Wikipedia offers a lot of information that is probably accurate. The main benefits of a Google search were the immediate and numerous results, and the different Google functions. The drawbacks were the unreliability of most of the sources, the difficulty narrowing the search to a workable number of results, and the necessity of having access to a computer and Internet connection.

We had mixed success using the King Library OPAC. A current password is required for many areas of the catalog, and if the user doesn't already have the password, it can take over 30 minutes to acquire. Nevertheless, some of us were able to locate many relevant titles of books and microform documents, which were likely to be reliable sources of information since they had been vetted by an academic library. The main benefits of searching the King Library catalog were the number and quality of the results, the fact that subject headings in individual catalog entries linked to other relevant entries, the Save this Record feature, and the different databases and resources available through the catalog. There were serious drawbacks to this search, however: if the user didn't have a current password then many parts of the catalog were inaccessible, the vast majority of the books were located in the physical library and not available to view online, the catalog itself was expansive and sometimes difficult to navigate, and the number of results can be overwhelming.

Overall, we found the most authoritative and reliable sources of information at physical libraries and through the King Library OPAC. However, several of us noted that for casual research, a Google search was adequate (i.e., we would believe the information on Wikipedia, but not cite it in a paper) and extremely convenient. And for a successful search at a physical library or on the King Library catalog, more than 30 minutes is needed. Lastly, we found that we didn't need so many search terms—in fact, the extra terms only led to irrelevant results. The search terms that produced the best results were Cherokee Nation, Indians of North America, and Cherokee Indians.