

**An Adaption of Tim Tingle's *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship & Freedom*
by Beth Thames
March 2008**

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Voices: Narrator 1
Narrator 2
Narrator 3
Narrator 4
Martha Toms' mother
Martha Tom
Big Mo
Little Mo

Approximately: 4 minutes

Narrator 1: This reading presents a tale from both the African-American and the Choctaw traditions.

Narrator 2: It is told in the book *Crossing Bok Chitto* by Tim Tingle and illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges, both of whom are Native Americans.

Narrator 3: It tells of a river called Bok Chitto in Mississippi.

Narrator 4: It takes place before the Civil War and the Trail of Tears.

Narrator 1: On one side of Bok Chitto lived the Choctaws and on the other--the plantation owners and their slaves.

Narrator 2: The law said that if a slave escaped and crossed Bok Chitto, the slave was free.

Martha Tom's mother: Martha Tom, get up out of bed. I have to cook for a wedding today and I need you to pick blackberries.

Martha Tom: I know I am not to cross the river, but there are no blackberries on this side. I will look across Bok Chitto.

Narrator 3: Martha Tom knew the secret path of stones her people put across the river.

Narrator 4: When the river flooded, the tribe would build the stones up; during dry times, they built the stones down.

Narrator 1: In her search for berries, Martha Tom came to a clearing filled with logs for benches.

Narrator 2: A skinny black man stepped out of the trees. She heard first one voice singing, then many voices.

Narrator 3: (*chanting or sung*) Oh who will come and go with me?

All Narrators: (*chanting or sung*) We will come and go with you. We are bound for the Promised Land.

Narrator 4: It was the meeting of a slave church. Martha Tom listened and the sound of the music touched her deeply.

Big Mo: You must be a Choctaw from across the river. Since you are lost, I will have my son, Little Mo, show you the way back.

Little Mo: (*nervously*) But, Daddy, what if the men from the plantation see me near the river? They will punish me.

Big Mo: Son, you need to learn how to move among them without being seen. (*slowly and quietly*) You move not too fast, not too slow, eyes to the ground, away you go.

Narrator 1: And that is what they did. They moved:

Everyone: (*in unison*) Not too fast, not too slow, eyes to the ground and away you go.

Narrator 2: And just as if they were invisible, Little Mo and Martha Tom walked right past the plantation owners to the river.

Martha Tom: (*mischievously*) Now I am going to have fun playing this game with Little Mo. He will not be able to see the stones and will think I am walking on water.

Little Mo: (*in disbelief*) Are you a witch? How do you do that?

Narrator 3: Martha Tom showed him the secret stone path.

All Narrators: (*chanting*) “Way, hey ya hey ya. Way, hey ya hey ya.”

Narrator 4: The tribe was chanting music for the wedding ceremony. The sound of the music touched Little Mo deeply.

Narrator 1: Soon Martha Tom was crossing Bok Chitto each Sunday to sit in church with Little Mo’s family.

Narrator 2: Then one day, trouble came. Twenty slaves were sold, and Little Mo’s mother was on the list of slaves to be sold and sent away.

Big Mo: (*sadly*) How will I tell my family that this has happened? I will wait until we have had supper so we can enjoy this time together.

Narrator 3: After supper, Big Mo gave his family heart-breaking news.

Narrator 4: There was much crying.

Little Mo: (*excitedly*) Daddy, Martha Tom showed me how to cross Bok Chitto. We can get away.

Big Mo: The plantation owners will have dogs guarding the river tonight.

Little Mo: But Daddy, remember you told me how to be invisible.

Everyone: Not to fast, not too slow, eyes to the ground, away you go!

Big Mo: (*determinedly*) You are right, Little Mo. We must try.

Narrator 1: Did Little Mo and his family escape?

Narrator 2: Did they indeed become invisible?

Narrator 3: There's only one way to find out.

Narrator 4: Read *Crossing Bok Chitto* to see how this story ends.

Narrator 1: And remember--when you don't want to be seen you have to travel...

Everyone: Not too fast, not too slow, eyes to the ground and away you go.