



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2

### Analyzing a Primary Source: George Catlin's Letter

George Catlin was an American artist who spent eight years (1832-1839) traveling among the Native American tribes with the goal of recording their culture. Below is an excerpt from one of his letters detailing one of his many experiences.

**Directions:** Read the following primary source (an eyewitness account), which contains Catlin's description of a toli match between Choctaw tribes, which he attended and thoroughly enjoyed. (See also this chapter's "Signs of the Times.") When you have finished reading, answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.

*It is no uncommon occurrence for six or eight hundred or a thousand of these young men to engage in a game of ball, with five or six times that number of spectators, of men, women, and children, surrounding the ground, and looking on.*

*Each party had their goal made with two upright posts, about 25 feet high and six feet apart, set firm in the ground, with a pole across at the top. These goals were about forty or fifty rods [220 to 275 yards] apart; and ... half way between, was another small stake, driven down, where the ball was to be thrown up at the firing of a gun, to be struggled for by the players. The sticks with which this tribe play, are bent into an oblong hoop at the end, with a sort of slight web of small thongs tied across, to prevent the ball from passing through. The players hold one of these in each hand, and by leaping into the air, they catch the ball between the two nettings and throw it, without being allowed to strike it, or catch it in their hands.*

*In the morning ... the game commenced, by the judges throwing up the ball ... when an instant struggle ensued between the players, who were some six or seven hundred in numbers, and were mutually endeavoring to catch the ball in their sticks, and throw it ... between their respective stakes; which, whenever successfully done, counts one [point] for [the] game. For each time that the ball was passed between the stakes ... [there was a] halt of about one minute; when it was again started by the judges of the play, and a similar struggle ensued; and so on until the successful party [scored] ... 100 [points], which was the limit of the game.*

Source: George Catlin. *North American Indians*. Philadelphia, PA: Leary, Stuart and Company, 1913.

1. How was George Catlin able to write about the toli match?
2. Who is the subject of Catlin's letter?
3. Who is the audience? (For whom is Catlin writing?)
4. Why is this description a primary source?
5. What does this document tell you about the culture of the Choctaw?
6. Write a list of five to seven rules for the game of toli based on Catlin's description.