

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

3-5

Subject

**Social Studies
& Reading**

Lesson Title

**Sequoyah's Talking Leaves: The
Cherokee Alphabet**

Activity Description: Sequoyah (1765-1843) was a Cherokee man known for inventing the Cherokee syllabary that brought a written language to his people. He was always fascinated by how white people could read "talking leaves" to communicate. He became the only Native American to create a whole alphabet for his own language. The Cherokee alphabet has 86 syllables. Sequoyah used the alphabet to record the history of his tribe and the Cherokee still use it today. This activity will introduce young people to Sequoyah and the Cherokee language.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi (recommended)
- Pencil and paper
- Printed or digital version of [Who Was Sequoyah?](#) by Scholastic Teaching Resources
- Printed or digital version of [Cherokee Language: Word Code Activity](#)
- (optional) ["Sequoyah" Youtube Video](#)
- (optional) [The Sound of the Cherokee language \(Numbers, Greetings, Conversations and Genesis\) YouTube video](#)

STEPS

Sequoyah (1765-1843) was a Cherokee man who created a system of writing for his people. Even though he could not read or write in any language, he was always interested in the way that the white people could make words by looking at a paper, something he called "talking leaves." He became the only Native American to create a whole alphabet for his own language. The Cherokee alphabet has 86 syllables. Sequoyah used the alphabet to record the history of his tribe. The Cherokee used the alphabet to communicate in writing and still use it today. Sequoyah was such an important person that they named the Sequoia tree and forest in California after him. He is also featured in the Cherokee Hall of Fame and has statues in places such as Washington D.C.

Learn About Sequoyah:

1. First, let's learn about Sequoyah's life and how he created the Cherokee Alphabet. Watch the [YouTube video "Sequoyah."](#)
 - a. Why is Sequoyah so important to the Cherokee people?
2. Read this short text "[Who Was Sequoyah?](#)" Then, answer the questions on the next page. Share your answers with a parent or elder.

Learn about the Cherokee Alphabet:

1. First, watch this YouTube video [The Sound of the Cherokee language \(Numbers, Greetings, Conversations and Genesis\)](#). Listen to the sounds of the Cherokee language and practice some of the words you hear.
 - a. Do you speak your Native language? If so, how is your language similar to or different from Cherokee?
 - b. If you do not know your Native language, ask your family or elders how you can learn it.
 - c. Practice one of the Cherokee sentences you heard in the video and use it with your family. See if they can figure out what you are saying.
2. For more fun, try this activity-[Cherokee Language: Word Code Activity](#). You can print it or view it online.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: Many tribes work continue working to keep their language alive. Many times schools do not teach Native languages and the community has to find ways to teach the language to their young people. To learn more about the Cherokee language history, your family can watch this YouTube video "[Cherokee Language Technology](#)" in the Cherokee language with English subtitles. This shares the invention of the Cherokee alphabet and more interesting information about the Cherokee printing press.

Many tribes are working to keep their Native language alive today. Sometimes the language is almost gone and the tribes have to bring it back by teaching the language to the young people. If your family is interested in learning Cherokee, here are two sites that can help:

- [Beginner Cherokee lessons](#) with audio pronunciations
- [Native American Vocabulary: Cherokee Words](#) (includes a pronunciation guide)

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and educators: The story of Sequoyah is very powerful and had changed the course of history for the Cherokee people and inspired other tribes to use a written language. It is important to help young people understand how having a written language increases the spread and use of communication as well as the sustainability of the language. For more learning activities and lessons on Sequoyah and the Cherokee alphabet, visit the sites below:

- Scholastic Teacher Resources has a [printable page of the 86 syllables that Sequoyah invented](#).
- The Tennessee State Library has lessons for using primary sources about [Sequoyah and the Cherokee Alphabet](#).
- PBS Learning Media features video lessons including "[The Cherokee Alphabet](#)" and other related topics.

Activity Resources:

- "Sequoyah" YouTube video posted by mrsagbarton1981 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGG1ZHur3g4&t=2s>
- "Who Was Sequoyah?" from Scholastic Teaching Resources <https://hccany.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Sequoyah-Writing-System-Worksheet.pdf>
- "The Sound of the Cherokee language (Numbers, Greetings, Conversations and Genesis)" YouTube video by ILoveLanguages! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1hk33-84Ks>
- Cherokee language Word Code Activity by K12 Reader <https://www.k12reader.com/worksheet/ Cherokee-language-word-code-activity/view/>

Additional Resources:

- Beginning Cherokee lessons by Kituwah Preservation and Education Program <https://ebcikep.com/ Cherokee-language-lessons-beginning/>
- Native American Vocabulary: Cherokee Words (Tsalagi) by Native Languages of the Americas http://www.native-languages.org/ Cherokee_words.htm
- "The Cherokee Alphabet: A Syllabary" a printable by the Public Broadcasting Station <http://sharpsocialstudies.weebly.com/uploads/7/7/3/2/7732433/ Cherokeealphabet.pdf>
- "Sequoyah and the Cherokee Alphabet" lesson plan from The Tennessee State Library http://sostngovbuckets.s3.amazonaws.com/tsla/education/LessonPlans/Sequoyah_and_the_Cherokee.pdf
- "The Cherokee Alphabet" video lessons from PBS Learning Media <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/midlit11.soc.ush.cheralph/the-Cherokee-alphabet/>