

Text 9 Who was Sequoyah?

Sequoyah

Imagine a man who cannot read or write. Now imagine that same man creating a brand new alphabet from scratch. It sounds next to impossible, doesn't it? Yet that is exactly what one man did—a man named Sequoyah.

Born around 1770 in Tennessee, Sequoyah was a Cherokee. Like other Native Americans of that time, he could neither read nor write. He couldn't help noticing, though, how white people wrote to one another on sheets of paper. They often used these "talking leaves," as some Native Americans called them, to communicate.

Back then, the Cherokee had no way to write down words in their own language. Sequoyah believed it was important for the Cherokee to have a system of writing. So, in 1809, he set out to create an alphabet that the Cherokee could use to do just that.

Sequoyah started by drawing pictures, with each one representing a different word or idea. He soon realized that writing sentences using pictures would be much too difficult. There were too many words. No one would ever be able to remember that many pictures.

Sequoyah decided to try a different approach. He began to develop symbols to stand for the sounds, or syllables, that made up words. Twelve years later, he completed a system of writing with 86 different symbols. Each one stood for a different syllable in the Cherokee language. The symbols could easily be put together to form words. Soon thousands of Cherokee were able to read and write in their own language.

Sequoyah's work did not end there, however. He helped to establish a print shop and began publishing a bilingual newspaper in both Cherokee and English. The shop also printed books translated from English into Cherokee. In later years, Sequoyah also became a political leader among the Cherokee.



Sequoyah died in 1843, but many Cherokee of today still use the alphabet he invented. Thanks to him, the Cherokee now have a written history that will never be forgotten. In honor of his achievements, Sequoyah's name was given to the giant redwood trees of California and the Sequoia National Park. The name of Sequoyah will never be forgotten either.

1. Sequoyah is best remembered for —

- Ⓐ not being able to read or write.
- Ⓑ being raised as a Cherokee.
- Ⓒ drawing pictures to represent words or ideas.
- Ⓓ inventing a written language for the Cherokee.

2. White people used “talking leaves” to communicate. What were “talking leaves”?

3. Which did Sequoyah do just after he completed the set of symbols for the Cherokee language?

- Ⓕ He drew pictures to represent words and ideas.
- Ⓖ He began growing giant redwood trees.
- Ⓗ He helped to start a printing press and a newspaper.
- Ⓙ He became a political leader.

4. Give one reason why Sequoyah's invention was important to the Cherokee.

5. What did the people of the United States do to honor Sequoyah?

