

Day 3

Mr. Franklin
Grade 8
Lesson 5

Language Arts

Sequoyah (~1770-1843)

Inventor, teacher

1 What was Sequoyah up to? He had been working on a strange project for years. Many Cherokee wondered why he listened so carefully to what they said and why he was making odd marks on scraps of paper and chips of wood. Some laughed at him. Others thought he was wasting time. Still, more feared he was playing with evil spirits. Sequoyah's workshop was even burned to the ground, but he kept working. He was doing something no one had ever tried before. Sequoyah was inventing a way to write the Cherokee language.

2 It was a hard time for the Cherokee Nation. In 1818, Sequoyah and more than 300 of his tribe had moved west across the Mississippi River to the Arkansas Territory. They had traded their land in the east for new land in the west in hope of keeping their old way of life. Other Cherokee had married white and black Americans and adopted some of their customs. However, more Cherokee continued to live together and hold on to their land in the southeastern United States. Sequoyah feared the Cherokee were splitting apart, and he realized that the one thing they still had in common was their language. If they could write in their own language, they could stay in touch even though they lived apart.

3 Sequoyah began to develop different marks for Cherokee words, but his system got very complicated to remember. Then Sequoyah realized that a mark could stand for a sound instead of a word. However, he saw that it took white children a long time to go from learning an alphabet to learning to read and write. Instead of using symbol-for-sound methods, Sequoyah invented a system where each mark stood for a whole syllable of sound. This system is called a syllabary instead of an alphabet. It took him 12 years of careful listening, but Sequoyah discovered 85 different syllables in spoken Cherokee and created a mark for each one.



Example of Cherokee characters. The first three characters spell Tsalagi, which means "Cherokee."

4 One of the first people Sequoyah taught to write in Cherokee was his daughter, Ahyokeh. She was only about six years old when she and her father demonstrated writing to a large group of Cherokee in 1821. Sequoyah stood far away while someone spoke a word to Ahyokeh. She wrote it down and walked away, leaving the writing behind. Sequoyah was motioned to return. He looked at the writing and spoke the same word! The demonstration was repeated. No matter who said what, Sequoyah or Ahyokeh could write it, and the other could read it back exactly the

same. People were amazed. Some thought it was a trick. Others were excited by the invention. Sequoyah saw his invention as a gift to be shared, and it proved easy to learn. Some Cherokee learned to read and write in less than a week.

- 5 They began to record their religious ceremonies, their ways of healing and their games. They published the *Cherokee Phoenix*, a tribal newspaper. They wrote letters, or “talking leaves” as they called them. The Cherokee could now put “talk” to paper and send it many miles where it could be understood by others, just as the white man did.
- 6 Sequoyah never gave up trying to unify the Cherokee people. In 1838, most Cherokee who lived east of the Mississippi River were forced to give up their land and move to the Oklahoma Territory. So many died along the way that this journey became known as the “Trail of Tears.” Some Cherokee already living in Oklahoma did not welcome the newcomers, but Sequoyah kept urging them to work together. In 1843, even though he was already in his 70s, Sequoyah set out on a difficult journey to find a band of Cherokee who had gone to Mexico. On the way, he became ill and died.
- 7 Many educated people around the world were impressed by what Sequoyah had done. Never before or since has a person who could not read or write any language invented a whole writing system. That kind of original idea and the determination to make it happen is called initiative. A species of giant redwood tree was named after Sequoyah to honor his towering achievement.

Sequoyah

1) Identify each statement as fact or opinion.
Write F for fact and O for opinion.

- ___ Sequoyah was the greatest Cherokee.
- ___ Sequoyah developed a system of writing for the Cherokee language.
- ___ Sequoyah should be better known than he is.

2) What was Sequoyah "up to" when he was watching and listening to his fellow Cherokee?

- A. He was playing with evil spirits.
- B. He was inventing a way to write the Cherokee language.
- C. He was moving his tribe west.
- D. Nothing – he was wasting time.

3) In paragraph 3, what does the underlined word syllabary mean?

- A. a system where marks stand for whole syllables of sounds
- B. a system where marks stand for letters
- C. a system where marks stand for words
- D. a system where the Cherokee split apart

4) Why did Sequoyah want the Cherokee to learn a writing system?

- A. Sequoyah wanted his daughter to learn to write.
- B. Sequoyah wanted the Cherokee to communicate with each other while on the Trail of Tears.
- C. Sequoyah saw that the Cherokee were splitting apart, and a writing system would help them stay in touch.
- D. Sequoyah wanted a giant redwood tree to be named after him.

5) The main idea of this passage is:

- A. Sequoyah was a very fine person.
- B. Sequoyah devoted his life to unifying the Cherokee.
- C. Sequoyah should be recognized as the greatest Native American warrior.
- D. The death of Sequoyah led to the Trail of Tears.

6) What does Tsalagi mean?

- A. Letter
- B. Language
- C. Sequoyah
- D. Cherokee

7) Why was the trail the Cherokee took to the Oklahoma Territory called the "Trail of Tears"?

- A. The Cherokee cried when they had to leave their land east of the Mississippi River.
- B. The Cherokee already living in the Oklahoma Territory did not welcome the new Cherokee to Oklahoma.
- C. Sequoyah died traveling to the Oklahoma Territory.
- D. During their travel to the Oklahoma Territory, many Cherokee died.

Short Answer

Respond in two or three complete sentences.

How did Sequoyah demonstrate to the Cherokee people that his system worked?

Extended Response

Respond in four or five complete sentences.

Reading changed life for the Cherokee in many ways. In your opinion, which change was most important? Support your opinion with details.

Writing Prompts

- 1) Sequoyah's goal was to unify his people. Analyze the different ways he worked toward his goal.
- 2)) In your opinion, did Sequoyah demonstrate initiative? Use facts from the essay to support your opinion.