

# Cherokee Tales

## Stories From the Cherokee People

The story of the Cherokee people goes back to time immemorial. Long before European colonialization, the Cherokee lived in what is now known as the southeastern United States.

*Cherokee Tales* is a 45 minute play featuring two actors who explore the culture and traditions of Cherokee people by sharing some of the interesting stories and folktales from the Cherokee.

Set in a modern day "elementary school," the play has just two actors playing "Jack" and "Mrs. Bigglesworth" who must give a presentation about Cherokee tales when all of the other students can't make it to class that day.

The play was developed in partnership with the Cherokee Historical Association of Cherokee, North Carolina, and with guidance from Cherokee tribal members from both the Eastern and Western bands.

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CHEROKEE SYLLABARY

## The Cherokee Language



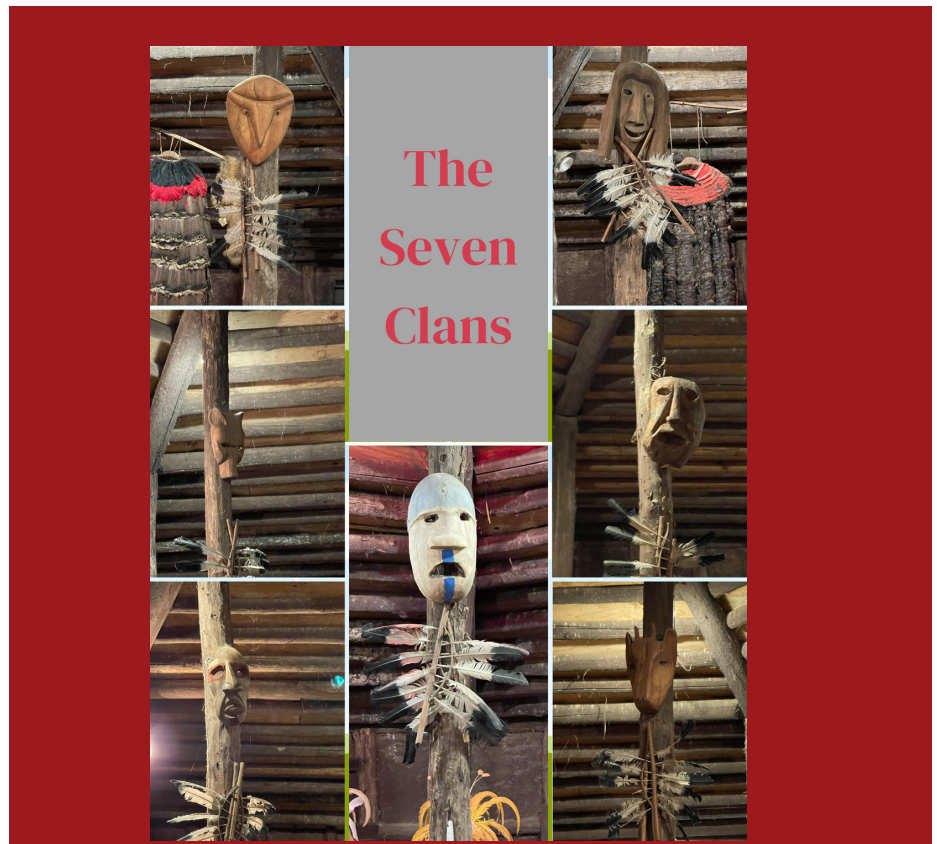
Sequoyah (1770-1843)

The Cherokee people have their own language. It belongs to a family of languages called "Iroquoian" and linguists believe the Cherokee people may have migrated to what is now known as the southeastern United States somewhere around 3000 years ago. Pictured above is the "Cherokee Syllabary." Somewhat like an alphabet, each symbol stands for a different syllable used to speak the Cherokee language. The Syllabary was developed by Sequoyah (pictured left) in the 1820s and by the 1850 most Cherokee people were able to read and write in their own language. However, from the time of the beginning of European colonization (1700s onward) efforts were made to force the Cherokee people to use English instead of their native language. This was particularly true in government operated boarding schools where students were forbidden from using the language. Today the language is considered severely endangered.

# The Seven Clans of the Cherokee People

Cherokee society was organized into seven clans and each clan was tasked with different roles within the community. A *matrilineal* society, children were born into the clan of their mother. If a man and woman were married, the man would join his wife's clan. The following were the clans of the Cherokee:

- **Blue** - the keepers of all children's medicine and of medicinal herb gardens. If children were orphaned or born without a clan, the Blue Clan would act as caretakers to those children.
- **Paint** - the tribe's medicine men, healers, and wise men. They were responsible for the health and wellbeing of the village's population.
- **Bird** - historians and storytellers, keepers of sacred feathers. Members of the Bird Clan were the only ones allowed to harvest feathers from the eagle.
- **Wild Potato** - farmers and gatherers in charge of agriculture and harvesting. They are considered to be the keepers and the protectors of the earth.



- **Deer** - the messengers of the Cherokee. When a message was sent to other villages, a runner would go from his village to the next. A message could be spread over a 100-mile radius within 24 hours.
- **Wolf** - is the largest and most prominent clan today. They were warriors, in charge of protecting the people.
- **Long Hair** - often negotiators for peace and diplomats. Peace chiefs usually came from the Long Hair Clan. They wore their hair in elaborate styles and presented themselves in a proud manner, twisting their shoulders as they walked. This led them to also be known as the "Twister Clan."

## Two Historic Cherokee Women



"Nanyehi (1738 - 1824) known in English as "Nancy Ward," she was a "Beloved Woman" and political leader of the Cherokee people. She was a strong advocate for peaceful relations with the Europeans,

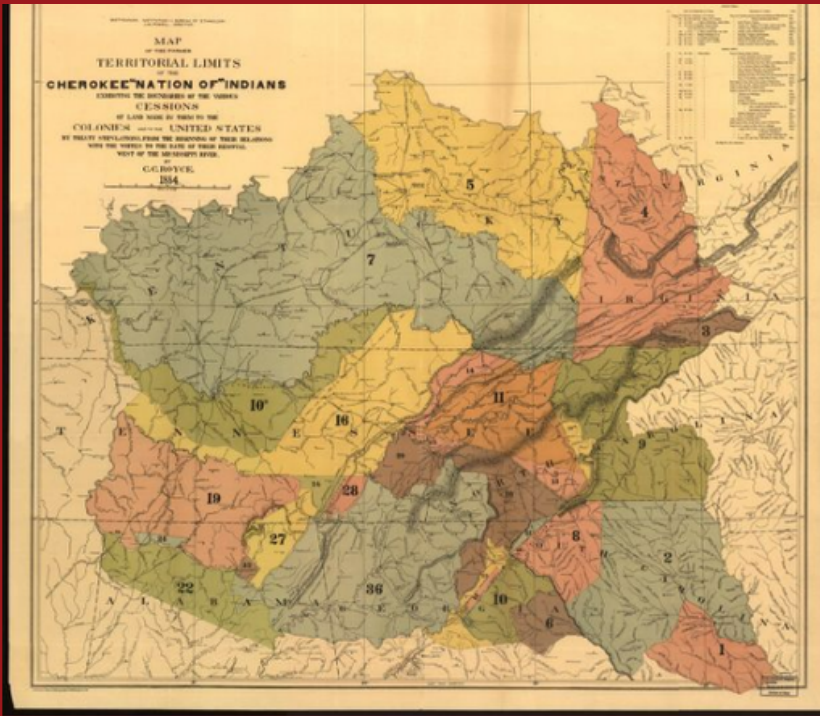


Wilma Mankiller (1945-2010) - an activist, community organizer and social worker, she was the first woman to serve as principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. Above she is pictured receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1988.

### The Beloved Woman

The "Beloved Woman" was a title given to women who made special contributions to the lives of the Cherokee people. Beloved Women were seen as special leaders and chosen for their wisdom and honesty. Their advice was sought on many aspects of Cherokee society including the decision to enter into a treaty or go to war with another people or tribe.





## The Impact of European Colonization

European Colonization had many terrible consequences for the Cherokee people. At the time when Europeans began to colonize what is now called North America, the Cherokee had villages all over parts of what are now known as North and South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

Colonization brought many difficulties to the Cherokee people, not the least of which was disease. Smallpox, in particular, was devastating to the Cherokee, and during the worst epidemic of 1738-39, half of the Cherokee population died.

Over time the Cherokee ceded more and more land until finally the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830.

## The Indian Removal Act and Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears was a series of forced displacements of approximately 60,000 American Indians of the "Five Civilized Tribes" between 1830 and 1850 by the United States government.

Members of the so-called "Five Civilized Tribes"—the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands in the Southeastern United States to areas west of the Mississippi River that had been designated Indian Territory.

The forced relocations were carried out by government authorities after the passage of the Indian Removal Act, signed into law by President Andrew Jackson in 1830.

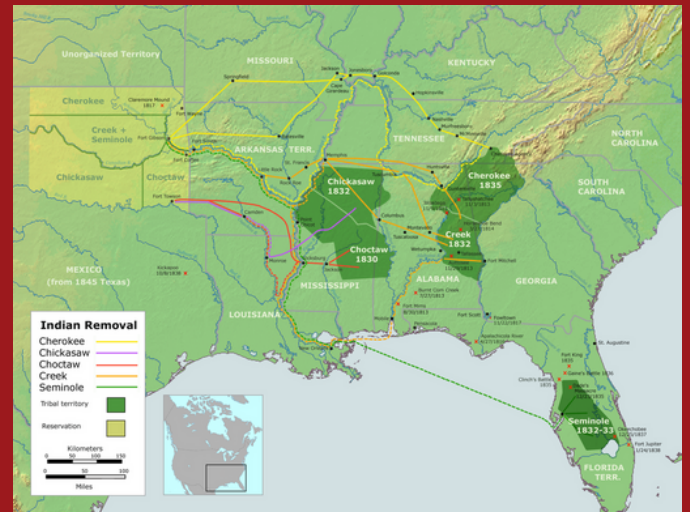
The relocated peoples suffered from exposure, disease, and starvation while en route to their newly designated Indian reserve. Thousands died from disease before reaching their destinations or shortly after.

### "We're Still Here: The Three Bands Of Cherokee Today"

Prior to the Trail of Tears, a number of Cherokee people had already moved West of the Mississippi River in response to white settlers aggression and in anticipation of the forced removal to come. Many moved to modern Arkansas and Oklahoma around 1817. This group was known as the "Old Settlers" and their descendants are now recognized as the "United Keetoowah Band" (UKB), headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. There are approximately 14,300 UKB members today.

According to first-hand estimates, 17,000 Cherokee were forcibly removed from their homes during The Removal, and some 4,000 Cherokee died during the journey to Oklahoma. Those who survived, created the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. The tribe has over 400,000 members today and is the largest indigenous tribe in the United States.

A small number of Cherokee hid in coves and hills of the Great Smoky Mountains to avoid removal. They later negotiated to buy the land that is now known as the Qualla Boundary, in and around Cherokee, North Carolina. Their descendants are known as the "Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians" and there are around 14,000 tribal members living today.



Above: A map of removal efforts during the Trail of Tears.

Below: A Map of National Historic Trails marking the Trail of Tears.



# THEATRE ETIQUETTE



## BEFORE YOU SEE THE PLAY

Attending the theatre is very different from watching TV or going to the movies. For one thing, the actors are real people who are performing right then and there. They can see and hear everything that happens in the audience. Because of this, YOU are an important part of the play and it's important to do your job as an audience member well. Here are a few ideas to think about before you see the show..

1. Please be quiet and respectful so everyone else around you can hear what's happening and so the actors can concentrate and perform.
2. If something is funny, it is okay to laugh, but don't use a funny moment on stage as an opportunity to distract others.
3. The actors may ask you to participate. Don't be afraid to respond, ask a question or volunteer!
4. Keep your hands to yourself and your eyes up front.
5. If you like the play, be sure to clap or "applaud" at the end.
6. Most importantly - Have fun! Enjoy yourself!

## All About Acting!



**Where to start:** All of our actors started out playing and telling stories when they were young - then they decided to study acting in school. Now they are pros! Here are some ways you can start doing theatre right away!

**In School!** Does your school have plays or musical performances? This is a great place to start.

**In Your Community!** Many towns have community theaters or local acting groups. See if you can try out!

**Start Something!** If your school doesn't have a drama club or a theatre club, talk to your favorite teacher about how you might be able to start one.

**At Home!** Get together with friends, cousins, brothers and sisters and make your own play. You can make up plays based on your favorite books and stories. Invite family and friends to see your performance.

**Try new things and do your best at them!** There are lots of jobs in the theatre besides acting. There are people who paint the sets, make costumes, write plays and more. Get the most out of your art, music and English classes. You can use all of these things to be a live theatre pro!



# Theatre Vocabulary

**Director:** The person who told the actors where to go while they were on-stage and helped them create the characters they would play.

**Costumes:** The wigs, clothing and glasses that the actors wore to help flesh out their characters.

**Actors:** The people on stage performed the play.

**Auditions:** How an actor gets a role is by auditioning, they may have to

**Backdrop:** The big back curtains for the set.

**Set designer:** The person who creates the backdrop and other set pieces.

**Props:** Anything that an actor holds onstage.

**Downstage:** the area closest to the audience.

**Upstage:** The area away from the like the back wall of a stage.

**Script:** The written text that the actors use to create their performance.

**Playwright:** The artist that creates the script.

Did You Know: Traveling acting troupes have been a part of the theatre for thousands of years. Long ago troupes would travel by horse and carriage but today we travel in our sweet rides - Mini Vans!!!



Our actors average around 1,000 miles a week traveling the country to entertain young audiences

Our company has been producing shows since 2003!

Our programs have been seen around the country and across the world!

## WHO ON EARTH IS BRIGHT STAR THEATRE?

Founded in 2003, Bright Star tours with a number of shows each season from anti-bullying to Black History and everything in between. The company strives to make professional theatre as accessible as possible with affordable pricing and quality shows.

We thank you for the opportunity to serve your young audience and hope you found the show and actors pleasant and enjoyable! We strive to make theatre a part of every young person's life!

## CONTACT US ANYTIME

**Phone: 336-558-7360**

ON THE WEB:

[www.brightstartheatre.com](http://www.brightstartheatre.com)