



The Story of Sequoyah

4_A

Note: Introducing the Read-Aloud may have activity options that exceed the time allocated for this part of the lesson. To remain within the time periods allocated for this portion of the lesson, you will need to make conscious choices about which activities to include based on the needs of your students.

Introducing the Read-Aloud

10 minutes

Essential Background Information or Terms

10 minutes

Students who have used the Core Knowledge Language Arts program in Kindergarten and Grade 1 will be familiar with some Native American tribes and the roles Native Americans played in early American exploration and settlement from the *Native Americans* domain (Kindergarten), the *Columbus and the Pilgrims* domain (Kindergarten), and the *Frontier Explorers* domain (Grade 1). Remind students that during the westward expansion of the United States, Native Americans already lived in the area. Remind students that there are many different tribes of Native Americans, and that in the 1800s each tribe had its own way of eating, dressing, and living, depending on where they were located. Explain that different geographical regions influenced different lifestyles, so even today, each Native American group has its own distinctive culture.

Tell students that in today's read-aloud they are going to hear about a very important man from the Cherokee tribe. His name was Sequoyah. Have students repeat the name *Sequoyah*. The Cherokee are presently the largest Native American group in the United States, and live mostly in Oklahoma. Point to Oklahoma on a map of the United States.

Tell students that Sequoyah cared very much for his people and his Cherokee culture. European settlers were trying to replace Native American customs with their customs. Sequoyah wanted

the Cherokee people to stand tall, or be proud of their culture. How do you think he made sure his people’s voices didn’t fade away, or disappear completely, as more and more white men, or Europeans, moved westward onto Native American lands? Keep listening carefully to find out.

Vocabulary Preview

5 minutes

Generations

1. In today’s read-aloud, you will hear, “The Cherokee people had many folktales that had been told and retold for many *generations*.”
2. Say the word *generations* with me three times.
3. Generations are people who are about the same age and live during the same time.
4. All the students in this class are part of the same generation; you were all born and live around the same time. You (student) and I (teacher) are from different generations.
5. [Draw a simple Family Tree on the board: student, parent, grandparent.] With your partner, take turns naming someone from your family who is from an older generation than you. Try to use the word *generation* when you tell it.

Syllable

1. In today’s read-aloud, you will hear, “Sequoyah realized that all Cherokee words were made up of *syllables*.”
2. Say the word *syllable* with me three times.
3. A syllable is a word or part of a word that has one vowel sound.
4. The word *expansion* has three syllables: ex–pan–sion.
5. I am going to say a word. Say each word after me, and tell how many syllables it has.
[You may wish to have students clap out the syllables.]
westward (two)
Sequoyah (three)
chief (one)

Cherokee (three)
transportation (four)
generations (four)

Purpose for Listening

Tell students to listen carefully to determine the main topic of the read-aloud and to learn more about Sequoyah and the Cherokee.



The Story of Sequoyah

← Show image 4A-1: Cherokee storyteller

People are not born knowing how to read and write. They have to learn these skills, just as they have to learn to talk. This is true for individuals like you and me, and it is also true for groups of people.

In the early 1800s the Cherokee people had a spoken language they used to communicate, but they did not have a written language for reading and writing. The Cherokee were Native Americans who lived in what is now the southeastern United States. There were Cherokee settlements in Georgia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. The Cherokee people had many folktales that had been told and retold for many **generations**.¹ But none of these tales had ever been written down because the Cherokee kept and passed down meaningful information orally, or by talking.²

That changed because of the hard work and dedication of a Cherokee man named Sequoyah. Sequoyah was born in Tennessee. He grew up with his Cherokee family, speaking the Cherokee language. But Sequoyah, who was a farmer and a silversmith, also spent a lot of time **interacting** with the white settlers who were living near Cherokee lands.³

← Show image 4A-2: Sequoyah watching officers communicate

Sequoyah believed that having a written language could make the Cherokee people even stronger.⁴ In 1809, he began to think about creating a writing system for his native language. Three years later, during the War of 1812, Sequoyah and other Cherokee joined the United States under General Andrew Jackson to fight the British troops. There, Sequoyah observed how the U.S. Army officers sent and received messages. The idea of creating a written language was not new to him, but Sequoyah saw how useful reading and writing was when the officers needed to communicate.

1 Generations are groups of people who are born and live during the same time.

2 Up until this time, the Cherokee had communicated by speaking but not reading or writing.

3 *Interacting* means talking or doing things with other people. So Sequoyah spent time talking and doing things with the settlers.



4 In what ways do you think writing is useful? [Encourage students to identify ways in which writing is used, e.g., writing down laws, poems, songs, history, stories, etc.]

The Cherokee called the letters that the officers sent each other “talking leaves.” Sequoyah had seen how helpful they were for the soldiers. He was convinced it would be good if the Cherokee people could use “talking leaves,” too.



← **Show image 4A-3: Sequoyah in his cabin writing**

5 In English, do we have individual symbols that stand for each of our words? Or do we have symbols—letters—that you can put together to make words?

6 [Point to Sequoyah carving symbols in the image.] Sequoyah carved the symbols on slats, or shingles, of wood.

7 Why did his wife think he didn't know what he was doing?

8 Why do you think the Cherokee thought his writing would bring them bad luck?

9 Since his wife and his people didn't believe in him, do you think Sequoyah will give up trying to create a Cherokee writing system now that all his work is gone?

When the war ended, Sequoyah kept working to develop a writing system for the Cherokee language. At first he tried to come up with a symbol for each word in the language.⁵ He spent a year trying to **create**, or make, symbols for all the words in the Cherokee language. Even after a year, he was still not done.⁶

Sequoyah was so busy with his project developing the symbols for the Cherokee written language that he didn't plant any crops that year. All he did was work on creating symbols. His wife was worried. She thought Sequoyah didn't know what he was doing.⁷ She thought he was just wasting his time. She did not understand what Sequoyah was trying to do. How would she and her children survive without crops? What were they supposed to eat? Some historians have recorded that, after a while, Sequoyah's wife was so upset that she gathered up all of Sequoyah's work and burned it. Others have said that his fellow Cherokee destroyed the symbols because they thought they would bring their people bad luck.⁸ Either way, Sequoyah's work went up in smoke.⁹

This was a heavy blow for Sequoyah. But, in a way, it was a good thing. It was good because Sequoyah realized the **approach**, or the way he had chosen to create the symbols, was not the best one.

← **Show image 4A-4: Photo of Sequoyah's symbols**



10 [You may wish to remind students that the Chinese writing system uses eight thousand symbols.]

11 How many letters does the English language have that we use to make all the words we speak?

It is possible to make a writing system in which there is a different symbol for each word in the language. Writing systems of this sort do exist, but they took a long time to create and are very difficult to learn.¹⁰

Think what it would be like if we had to learn a different symbol for all of the tens of thousands of words in the English language. How would we ever remember all those symbols?¹¹

Sequoyah knew there had to be a better way. There was a better way, and eventually he found it. Sequoyah realized that all Cherokee words were made up of syllables. So he created eighty-four symbols to represent all of the syllables in the Cherokee language. This was extraordinarily clever. Sequoyah had never learned to read and write, but he figured out a writing system for his native language.¹²

12 Do you think it would be difficult for someone who didn't know how to read or write to create an entire written language?

Once Sequoyah had come up with symbols for the eighty-four syllables in the Cherokee language, he was confident that he could teach other people to use them. He started by teaching his own daughter Ayoka [ah-YOH-kah]. Ayoka easily learned to read and write with the symbols Sequoyah created. Then Sequoyah went to show his writing system to the chiefs of the Cherokee nation.



← **Show image 4A-5: Sequoyah and his daughter at council house**

At first, the chiefs were skeptical. Some of them did not understand what Sequoyah was trying to do. Others thought his system might not really work. A few thought Sequoyah might be trying to trick them.¹³

13 Why do you think the chiefs thought he was trying to trick them?

Sequoyah had expected this. He told the chiefs he could prove that his system really worked. He would send Ayoka away. Then he would write down any words the chiefs wanted him to write. When he had done this, he would call Ayoka back and she would read the words. That way the chiefs could be sure Sequoyah was not tricking them.

14 Do you think she will be able to read it?

The chiefs agreed. Ayoka went away. One of the chiefs spoke some words in the Cherokee language. Sequoyah wrote down what he said, using his syllable symbols. Then they sent for Ayoka.¹⁴ When she returned, she read the words Sequoyah had written.

15 The chiefs admired Sequoyah's hard work and were interested in what he had done, but they still didn't believe it was true.

The chiefs were impressed. But they were not convinced.¹⁵ They tried the same test a few more times, using different words each time. The chiefs had Sequoyah write the symbols and then called Ayoka in to read them. Then the chiefs had Ayoka write the symbols and called Sequoyah in to read them. Finally, the chiefs **concluded** that Sequoyah's writing system really did work!¹⁶

16 *Concluded* means they decided after a period of thought and observation.



← **Show image 4A-6: Painting of Sequoyah and his writing system**

After all of his hard work, Sequoyah’s writing system was accepted. He and Ayoka taught other Cherokee people to use the symbols—and that is how the Cherokee people learned to read and write.¹⁷

17 Was Sequoyah successful at making sure that the Cherokee language would never fade away?

Later, many sad things happened to the Cherokee people. In the 1830s they were forced to leave their lands. Later they were forced onto reservations and into English-speaking classrooms. Thanks to Sequoyah’s hard work, the Cherokee were able to keep their language alive. Even today, almost two hundred years later, the Cherokee language is written with symbols developed by Sequoyah.¹⁸

18 [You may wish to tell students that the Cherokee language is still kept alive due to modern technology, such as the Internet.]



← **Show image 4A-7: Photographs of Sequoyah statue and sequoia trees**

Sequoyah is remembered and honored as the man who taught his people to read and write. However, he is not only honored by the Cherokee people, he is considered to be a national hero, too. There is a statue of Sequoyah in the U.S. Capitol building. And, it is believed that the tall, strong sequoia trees that grow in California may have been named to honor the man who allowed his people to stand a little taller, too.¹⁹

19 [Point to the statue and the sequoia trees in the image. Note that the spelling of the tree and the man are different.]

Discussing the Read-Aloud

15 minutes

Comprehension Questions

10 minutes

If students have difficulty responding to questions, reread pertinent lines of the read-aloud and/or refer to specific images. If students give one-word answers and/or fail to use read-aloud or domain vocabulary in their responses, acknowledge correct responses by expanding students’ responses using richer and more complex language. Ask students to answer in complete sentences by having them restate the question in their responses.

1. *Evaluative* What was the main topic of the read-aloud? (Sequoyah and the Cherokee writing)
2. *Literal* What made Sequoyah famous? (He created a writing system for the Cherokee.)

3. *Inferential* Why did Sequoyah feel that writing down the Cherokee language was important? (He wanted to capture their voice; he wanted to preserve Cherokee culture and customs; he cared about his culture and thought that writing was a way to keep the Cherokee strong.)
4. *Inferential* Did people like what Sequoyah was doing at first? (no) How do you know? (His wife thought he didn't know what he was doing; the Cherokee people thought his symbols were bad luck; Sequoyah's work was burned.) What changed their minds? (The chiefs saw how people could communicate through reading and writing.)
5. *Evaluative* After Sequoyah's work was burned, he had to start over again. Describe the kind of writing he invented that the Cherokee still use today. (He invented symbols that represent the different syllables in the Cherokee language. There are eighty-four symbols that stand for the various syllables.) Does the English language have more symbols or fewer symbols than the Cherokee language? (fewer symbols)
6. *Inferential* Why was Sequoyah's invention important? (What had once only been communicated through speaking and listening could now be written and read.)

[Please continue to model the *Question? Pair Share* process for students, as necessary, and scaffold students in their use of the process.]

7. *Evaluative Who? Pair Share:* Asking questions after a read-aloud is one way to see how much everyone has learned. Think of a question you can ask your neighbor about the read-aloud that starts with the word *who*. For example, you could ask, "Who did you hear about in today's read-aloud?" Turn to your neighbor and ask your *who* question. Listen to your neighbor's response. Then your neighbor will ask a new *who* question and you will get a chance to respond. I will call on several of you to share your questions with the class.
8. After hearing today's read-aloud and questions and answers, do you have any remaining questions? [If time permits, you may wish to allow for individual, group, or class research of the text and/or other resources to answer these questions.]

Word Work: Create

5 minutes

1. In the read-aloud you heard, “[Sequoyah] spent a year trying to *create* symbols for all the words in the Cherokee language.”
2. Say the word *create* with me.
3. The word *create* means to make or produce something that did not exist.
4. In art class the students will create their own paintings.
5. Have you ever created something? What did you use to create it? Try to use the word *create* when you tell about it. [Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase the students’ responses:
“I once used _____ to create . . . ”]
6. What is the word we’ve been talking about? What part of speech is the word *create*?

Use a *Drawing* activity for follow-up. Directions: Draw a picture of something that you have created or something that you would like to create. Be sure to answer in complete sentences and use the word *create* when you tell about it. I will call on a few students to share their drawings.

Note: Explain to students that the words *create*, *created*, *creating*, and *creation* are all from the same root word, *create*.



Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day



The Story of Sequoyah

4_B

Note: Extensions may have activity options that exceed the time allocated for this part of the lesson. To remain within the time periods allocated for this portion of the lesson, you will need to make conscious choices about which activities to include based on the needs of your students.

Extensions

20 minutes

Sayings and Phrases: Back to the Drawing Board

5 minutes

Proverbs are short, traditional sayings that have been passed along orally from generation to generation. These sayings usually express general truths based on experiences and observations of everyday life. Although some proverbs do have literal meanings—that is, they mean exactly what they say—many proverbs have a richer meaning beyond the literal level. It is important to help your students understand the difference between the literal meanings of the words and their implied or figurative meanings.

Note: Before asking students if they have ever heard the saying before, have them practice reading it. Write the word *board* on the whiteboard or chalkboard. Have students read it out loud. Add the word *drawing* in front of *board*. Have students read the two words together (*drawing board*). Add the words *to the* in front of *drawing*. Have students read the phrase (*to the drawing board*). Finally, write the word *back* at the beginning of the phrase, and have students read the whole saying (*back to the drawing board*).

Ask students if they have ever heard the saying “back to the drawing board.” Have students repeat the saying. Explain that if someone has to go back to the drawing board, that means s/he has to start something they have been working on all over again because it didn’t work out the first time. Remind students that in the read-aloud they heard, Sequoyah’s work was burned because the Cherokee people thought his symbols

for the Cherokee writing system were bad luck, and they didn't understand what he was doing. He lost all of his work in the fire. Instead of giving up, Sequoyah went back to the drawing board and started his work on the Cherokee writing system all over again. He found a better way to create the writing system, and he even won an award for it. You may wish to explain that going back to the drawing board may be difficult, but in the end, something good may come out of it, just as it did for Sequoyah.

Ask: "Have you ever had to go back to the drawing board and start over on something you had worked really hard on? In the end, were you proud of what you accomplished?" Give students the opportunity to share their experiences, and encourage them to use the saying.

↔ Vocabulary Instructional Activity

5 minutes

Word Work: Communicate

1. In the read-aloud you heard, "Sequoyah saw how useful reading and writing was when the officers needed to communicate."
2. Say the word *communicate* with me.
3. *To communicate* means to give information to someone else.
4. I communicate with my grandmother by talking on the phone.
5. How do you communicate with others? Try to use the word *communicate* when you tell about it. [Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase students' responses: "I communicate with others by . . ."]
6. What's the word we've been talking about?

Use a *Word to World* activity for follow up. Directions: With your partner, think of as many ways to communicate as you can. [After students have had a chance to talk, call on several pairs to share. Some possible answers include *by letter, telegram, telling a story, radio or television broadcast, telephone, e-mail, text message and other instant messaging, video-chat, skywriting, billboards, and posters.*]

Note: Explain to students that the words *communicate*, *communicated*, *communicating*, and *communication* are all from the same root word, *communicate*.

Westward Expansion Timeline

5 minutes

Briefly review what was placed on the Westward Expansion Timeline in the previous lessons. Show students Image Card 8 (Cherokee Writing). Explain that Sequoyah completed his system for writing the Cherokee language in 1821, which was after Fulton’s steamboat took its first voyage but a few years before the completion of the Erie Canal. Ask students where the Image Card should be placed on the Timeline, and then place it between the image of Fulton’s steamboat and the image of the Erie Canal. (Refer to the answer key on Instructional Master 1A-1.)

Have students add Sequoyah’s Cherokee writing system to their individual Timeline. Students should include the year (1821) and a depiction of the event in writing and/or pictures.

Westward Expansion Quilt (Instructional Master 4B-1)

15 minutes

Note: Write the main topic of the read-aloud (*Sequoyah* or *Cherokee writing*), and ask students to tell you important details about the main topic. Write accurate student responses on the board for students to refer to as they complete their quilt squares. Some details you may wish to list are *Sequoyah*, *Cherokee*, *writing system*, *symbol*, *syllables*, *communicate*, *culture*, *customs*, *language*, *preserve/keep going/continue*, *hero*, and “*talking leaves*.” Include any available images (or drawings) that help explain the information. If needed, model writing a sentence about the main topic using one or two of the words or phrases on the board.

Tell students that they are going to make another quilt square for their quilts. Have students recall important details from the read-aloud. You may prompt discussion with the following questions:

- Who was Sequoyah?
- Why is Sequoyah famous?
- Why did Sequoyah think that it was important to invent a writing system for the Cherokee language?

Remind students that first they should cut out the quilt square. Next, they should draw a picture representing the main topic of the read-aloud in the center diamond. (Sequoyah or Cherokee writing) Then, they should write a word or short phrase in each corner, sharing facts learned about Sequoyah. Next, ask students to write a sentence on the back of the quilt square, using one or more of the words they've written. Finally, students should share their drawings and writing with a partner.

Save these quilt squares for making the complete quilts at a later time.