

Sequoyah

Essential Question: What contributions did Sequoyah make to the Cherokee?

Sequoyah was born in the Cherokee town of Tuskegee along the Tennessee River in what is now Monroe County. Sequoyah was the son of a Virginia trader named Nathaniel Gist and Wureth, the daughter of a prominent Cherokee family. While he was sometimes known by his English name of George Gist, Sequoyah was raised in the traditions of the Cherokee. Sequoyah was silversmith, farmer and soldier. He fought with the Cherokee allied to the United States at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

Sequoyah had already become interested in “talking leaves” as Native Americans referred to written language before the war. While away from home during the Creek War, he saw that white soldiers could read orders, write home and keep journals. He recognized how beneficial it could be to the Cherokee to have their own written language. He spent the next ten years perfecting his language even though many of his friends and family ridiculed him. He was even accused of witchcraft by some Cherokee who believed that creating a written language was wrong. In 1821, Sequoyah and his daughter publically demonstrated the language for the first time. Within five years, literacy rates among the Cherokee far surpassed their white neighbors.

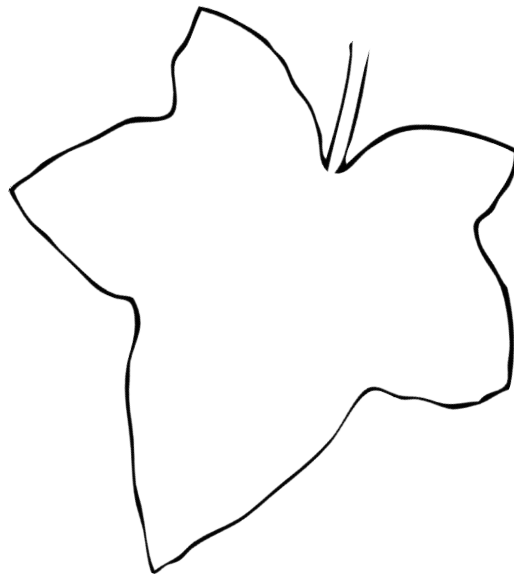
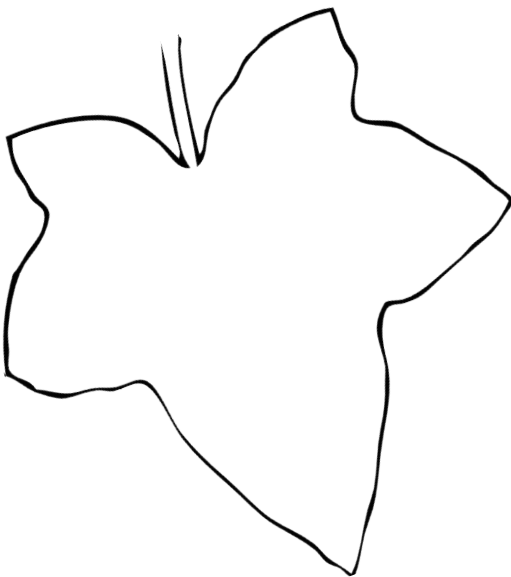
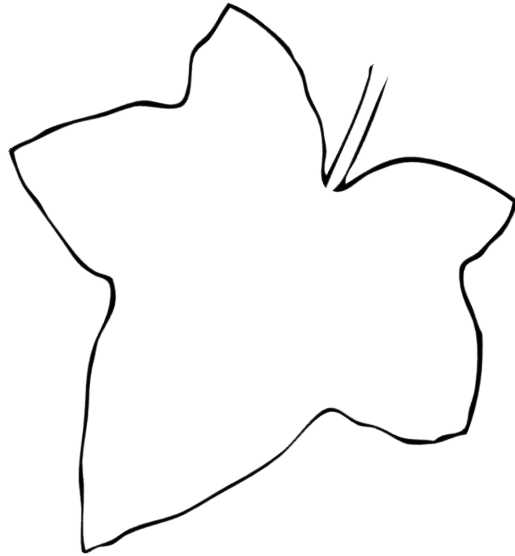
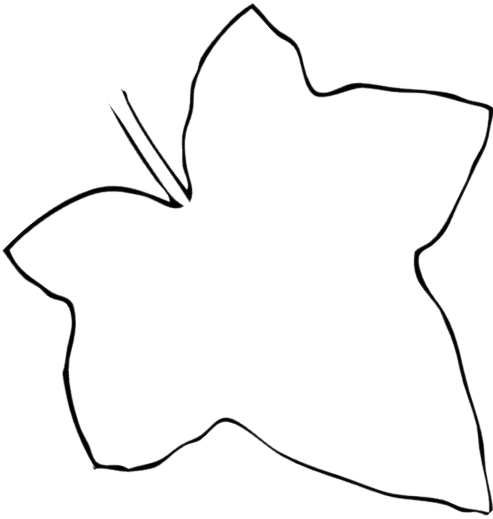
Sequoyah created a symbol to represent each of the 85 syllables in the Cherokee language. This made the Cherokee language easier to learn than English, where the same letter can represent multiple sounds. Another factor in the language’s success was missionary Samuel Worcester’s work to make the language easily printable. Worcester believed that translating the Bible into native languages was an excellent way to spread the gospel. He urged his missionary board in Boston to send him a hand printing press in 1827. On February 21, 1828 the first issue of the Cherokee *Phoenix* was published. The newspaper was published with parallel columns of English and Cherokee. By 1843, more than four million pages had been printed using Sequoyah’s “talking leaves.” Using the syllabary, Cherokee could write letters home, record their history and use the language for government purposes. During the Indian Removal Crisis, Cherokee literacy and conversion to Christianity were cited by their allies and evidence of the successful civilization of the Cherokee nation. The *Phoenix* was also a useful tool for spreading news about the crisis.

Source: “Sequoyah.” Tennessee *Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. 1st edition. 1998. Print.

Wadley, Ted. "Sequoyah (ca. 1770-ca. 1840)." New Georgia Encyclopedia. 05 June 2014. Web. 02 July 2014.

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In each leaf below, write one way that Sequoyah's "talking leaves" helped the Cherokee.



Sequoyah created a syllabary which means that he created one symbol for each sound in the Cherokee language. Sequoyah used many familiar letters to represent sounds in the Cherokee language. Try creating your own symbols to represent the syllables in your name. Create your syllabary on the back of this page.