

# Nancy Ward

## Nanyehi, Beloved Woman

By Sarah Glasscock



### Characters (in order of appearance)

#### Narrators 1-3

**Nanyehi:** Governor of the Cherokee Women's Council  
(also known as Nancy Ward)

**Kingfisher:** Nanyehi's husband

#### Cherokee Warriors 1-4

**Creek Warriors 1-4** (nonspeaking roles)

**Old Tassel:** Cherokee chief

**Dragging Canoe:** Nanyehi's cousin, and leader of the  
Chickamaugans (a group of Cherokee)

**John Ross:** President of the Cherokee National Committee

**Major Ridge:** Cherokee leader



## ACT 1

### Scene 1: Mid-1700s. Battle with the Creeks in what is now the southern United States.

**Narrator 1:** In the 1700s, the Cherokee people lived in the region of the United States that is now Georgia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Both women and men were leaders in the Cherokee government. Cherokee and Creek territories were near each other. Hunting parties from the two tribes often encountered each other, and fights would break out. These fights sometimes turned into wars between the Cherokee and the Creek. Nanyehi, a Cherokee woman, accompanied her husband Kingfisher into one of these battles. As a War Woman, she prepared food, carried water and firewood for the warriors, and was in charge of prisoners.

**Nanyehi:** Kingfisher—did you hear that?

**Kingfisher:** It sounded like the call of a mockingbird.

**Nanyehi:** That's what I thought. It *sounded* like a mockingbird. Listen! There it is again!

**Kingfisher:** It's a Creek signal!

**Narrator 1:** As Kingfisher grabs his gun, he also gives a hand signal to his warriors to prepare for battle. Nanyehi quickly puts out the campfire and then passes out water pouches to the men. She stores the food behind a fallen tree and guards it. The Cherokee warriors position themselves behind trees. They listen. Suddenly, a band of Creek warriors jumps into the clearing. The battle begins!

**Nanyehi:** Behind you, Kingfisher!

**Kingfisher** (turning and wrestling with a Creek warrior): You'll pay for what you did to my brother!

**Narrator 1:** A shot rings out. Kingfisher falls to the ground, mortally wounded. Nanyehi rushes to her husband's side.

**Nanyehi:** Kingfisher! Kingfisher! Please, open your eyes! Kingfisher!

**Narrator 1:** Realizing that her husband is dead. Nanyehi picks up Kingfisher's gun and begins to fire at the Creek warriors.

**Cherokee Warrior 1:** It's no use! We should retreat!

**Cherokee Warrior 2:** We can't win without Kingfisher.



**Nanyehi:** Kingfisher didn't give his life so we could crawl away in defeat. Use your weapons! NOW!

**Narrator 1:** The Cherokee warriors led by Nanyehi drive the Creeks away.

**Cherokee Warrior 3** (to the retreating Creek warriors): Cowards! Stay away from our hunting grounds!

**Cherokee Warrior 4:** Kingfisher sacrificed his life for a great win.

**Nanyehi:** I'll prepare him for our journey home.

**Cherokee Warrior 1:** Your courage saved us, Nanyehi. You stepped in and took Kingfisher's place.

**Cherokee Warrior 2:** It's true. Your bravery has earned you the title of Beloved Woman.

**Cherokee Warrior 3:** You'll have a voice in the Chief's Council.

**Cherokee Warrior 4:** The women will look up to you as their Governor in the Women's Council. Kingfisher would be proud of what you did, just as we are.

**Nanyehi:** I wanted to protect my people. Any woman would have done what I did.

## ACT 2

### Scene 1: 1785. Peace Council held in South Carolina.

**Narrator 2:** During the American Revolution, both the Americans and the English tried to get Native Americans to fight on their side. The Cherokee wanted to stop more American settlers from moving onto their lands. About one-fourth of the Cherokee, led by Dragging Canoe, sided with the English. The rest of the Cherokee wanted to remain neutral. Unfortunately, the Cherokee people lost much of their land and other property in the war. To save what was left, they agreed to sign a peace treaty with the new United States, the Treaty of Hopewell.

**Dragging Canoe:** Signing a piece of paper will not give us peace! It won't stop the settlers from moving into our land!

**Nanyehi:** Cousin, you fought the settlers during their war. How many Cherokee lives were lost? How many of our towns were burned? We have less land today than we did when their war started.



**Old Tassel:** Your own father was a peace chief, Dragging Canoe. Did you learn nothing from him?

**Dragging Canoe:** Do the Americans have peace chiefs? No! You talk peace, and they talk a different language. You don't understand them. I do.

**Nanyehi:** We've come here to talk to the Americans. They'll have to give up some things, and so will we.

**Dragging Canoe:** The talking's already started. How much land do they want us to give up?

**Old Tassel:** Everything east of the Appalachian Mountains. But they promise that white settlers won't be allowed into our territory.

**Dragging Canoe:** What about the settlers that are already here? Does the piece of paper say that they must leave? No!

**Nanyehi:** The Americans have just fought a long, hard war. They won, it's true, but they don't want to do more fighting right now. They're forming a new government. We have a chance to influence them.

**Dragging Canoe:** The treaty says that the Americans will do all our trading for us. It says that they will tell us what to do.

**Nanyehi:** Cousin, the Americans are here. There's nothing we can do about that. What we can do is protect ourselves and our people. This treaty will help us do that. Tomorrow, I will meet with the Americans and present them with the wampum belt the Women's Council has made.

**Dragging Canoe:** And you think the Americans will care? Do you think they'll understand that a wampum belt is a more precious thing than a piece of paper?

**Nanyehi:** I've explained to the American commissioners that giving them a wampum belt is a sign of agreement with the Cherokee. We need your strength, Cousin. Don't desert us.

## ACT 3

### Scene 1: 1817. At a meeting in New Echota, capital of the Cherokee Nation.

**Narrator 3:** After signing the Treaty of Hopewell, many Cherokee became farmers. Their children went to school and learned English. But, until his death in 1792,



Dragging Canoe led his band of Chickamaugans against the white settlers living in Cherokee territory. The Cherokee signed several more treaties with the United States, losing more land, but white settlers continued to pour into their territory. The United States government decided the Cherokee and other Native American societies in the east should move west of the Mississippi. Another treaty was offered to the Cherokee.

**John Ross:** Nanyehi, what word do you bring us from the Women's Council?

**Nanyehi:** We're against the treaty. We've given up enough land.

**Major Ridge:** Andrew Jackson says we owe this land to the American government. He says that the Cherokee who have moved to Arkansas have taken land from his government.

**John Rossi:** Jackson also says that more of us should move west. He wants all of our land. If we sign this new treaty, he won't stop.

**Nanyehi:** First the Americans send us plows and tell us we must be farmers. We have become very good farmers. Now, Jackson offers us rifles and bullets, blankets, and kettles or beaver traps if we move west. He wants us to be hunters again. You men may do as you please. You may go to Arkansas and become hunters, but you'll go alone. None of the women will go with you.

**Major Ridge:** But—

**Nanyehi:** *None* of the women will go. We've spoken.

**Narrator 3:** Like Nanyehi, most of the Cherokee people wanted to stay in their homes. Unfortunately, the Cherokee lost more and more of their land.

**Narrator 2:** When she was over 80 years old, Nanyehi's home and land were taken away from her. She opened an inn in Tennessee. Nanyehi, also known as Nancy Ward, died in 1824.

**Narrator 3:** The Cherokee fought their removal to Indian Territory in the West. But in 1838, they were forced to go. Because so many people died along the way, their long trip west is called the Trail of Tears.



## Nancy Ward Teaching Guide

*“Cherokee mothers do not wish to go to an unknown country . . . . We have raised all of you on the land which we now inhabit . . . . We beg of you not to part with any more of our land.”*

— *Nanyehi’s message to the Cherokee council in 1817*

### Biography

Nanyehi was probably born in or around the year 1738 close to the present-day city of Knoxville, Tennessee. Her father was of Cherokee and Delaware descent. Her uncle on her mother’s side was Chief Attakullakulla, a famous Cherokee Peace Chief. Nanyehi married Kingfisher, a Cherokee. During the war with the Creeks, she followed her husband into battle. When Kingfisher was killed, Nanyehi retrieved his gun and took his place in the fighting. For this, she was named Beloved Woman. The title of Beloved Woman gave Nanyehi voting rights on the Cherokee Chief’s Council and made her Governor of the Women’s Council. Nanyehi advocated trying to live peacefully with the white settlers who were moving into Cherokee territory. Although she urged neutrality during the American Revolution (and leaned toward the Patriot side), some Cherokee supported the English. After the war, in 1785, Nanyehi helped negotiate a peace treaty with the United States. At some point during this time, she married Brian Ward, a white man and was called Nancy Ward. By 1817, after white settlers had violated many treaties and the U.S. government had formed its policy of relocating the eastern Native Americans to territory west of the Mississippi, Nanyehi argued against giving up the Cherokee homeland. Nanyehi died in or around the year 1824 before the Cherokee were forced into exile on the Trail of Tears. Her headstone reads: “Princess and Prophetess of Tennessee. The Pocahontas of Tennessee and the Constant Friend of the American Pioneer.”

### Take a Closer Look

*Native American Women* by Suzanne Clores (Chelsea Juniors, 1995)

*Women in American Indian Society* by Rayna Green (Chelsea House, 1992)

*When Shall They Rest? The Cherokees’ Long Struggle with America* by Peter Collier (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973)

*Mankiller: A Chief and Her People* by Wilma Mankiller (St. Martin’s Press, 1993)



## Activities

### **That's Diplomatic!**

Nanyehi was well-regarded as a peace negotiator for the Cherokee people. Talk about the skills required for a negotiator and why that role is important in society. Do students consider themselves to be good negotiators? What examples can they give?

### **Homesick**

When she was over 80 years old, Nanyehi was forced to leave her village of Chota. The land was no longer considered part of the Cherokee Nation. She opened an inn near what is now Benton, Tennessee. How would your students feel if their homes were taken away from them and they had to move? Would students want to take along items that reminded them of their old home, or would they rather leave everything behind and start fresh in their new homes?

### **Draw Up a Treaty**

The Cherokee signed over 20 treaties with the United States government. To dramatize the realities of treaties, divide the territory of your classroom or your playground area into two different but equal areas. Have half of your students settle in one area, and the other half move into the other area. What things do students discover that they want or need from the opposite side? Each side should draw up a list of demands, and then negotiate with the other side. When a compromise is reached, the two sides should draw up a treaty.

### **Brave Women**

Because of her bravery, Nanyehi was named Beloved Woman and received power within the Cherokee government. Let students cite other brave American women. The women may be famous historical or contemporary figures or someone the students know. Then students may designate titles and honors to bestow. Have them produce publicity packages that include photographs or drawings of the women, examples of their bravery, their titles, and honors.

### **Other Voices**

Mary (or Molly) Brant was a Mohawk woman who lived during the American Revolution. She and her people supported the English during the war. A British Indian agent said that "one word from her [Mary Brant] goes farther with them [the Iroquois] than a thousand from any white man without exception." Have students learn more about the role of women in Iroquois society. As part of their research, direct them to find Iroquois folktales that feature women. They may use aspects of the folktales as a springboard for presenting their information.

### **The Trail of Tears**

In 1838, the Cherokee people were forced to march west to a new home in Oklahoma. Almost a quarter of them died along the way. Consequently, this relocation is known as the Trail of Tears. Ask students to research the Trail of Tears. Encourage them to pay special attention to visual representations and first-hand accounts of the march. Student may use the images and words in juxtaposition with each other when they present their findings to the class.