The Syllabary that Shaped the Cherokee

Avary Serpa

Junior Individual Performance

9:45 (9 minutes and 45 seconds)

Without knowledge of any written language Sequoyah opened doors to the Cherokee nation by inventing the Cherokee syllabary. He did for the Cherokee what few other native tribesmen have effectively been able to do. He gave them a way to preserve their culture, identity, and pride through the invention of a written language. Despite U.S. Government’s efforts to end the Cherokee Nation through removal and assimilation, the Cherokee syllabary broke deeply held ideological barriers by allowing the Cherokee Nation to rebuild and survive.

Narration booth; Sequoyah’s home in Tahlequah Oklahoma; Elias Boudinot’s Cherokee Phoenix Printing Press in New Echota, Georgia; and Chief John Ross’ home.

About 1770-1843, 2020 today

The narrator introduces the performance and explains the thesis statement. Sequoyah then introduces himself and explains his childhood, inspiration and process to create a written syllabary. In 1821, the Cherokee Council agreed to utilize Sequoyah’s syllabary as the official Cherokee language. John Ross, the Principal Chief leader of the Cherokee Nation, recognizes the importance of Sequoyah’s syllabary by giving Sequoyah an award and a silver medal in 1824. Elias Boudinot, editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, explains how the newspaper communicated important news, stories, laws and treaties easier and faster. In ten years, 90% of the Cherokees could read and write using the Cherokee syllabary. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson establishes the Indian Removal Act, which forced 15,000 Cherokees to travel west, of which 4,000 Cherokees died along the journey. Sequoyah’s syllabary played an important role in helping the Cherokee Nation rebuild and settle in their new lands. Sequoyah later died in Mexico in 1843. Richard Pratt established the first Native American boarding schools to assimilate them into the rest of American society. Students were punished if they spoke their tribal language. As a result, the boarding schools caused generations of Native Americans to lose their culture and language. The Cherokees could break this barrier and preserve their culture because of the syllabary (while many other tribes without a written language die off). Recent language preservation acts and Cherokee immersion schools were established. Without any formal education, Sequoyah created a syllabary that preserved the
### Cherokee Language and Culture

**CHARACTERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Description/background for the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sequoyah</td>
<td>Avary Serpa</td>
<td>Sequoyah is the inventor of the Cherokee Syllabary. He was born into the Cherokee or Tsalagi Tribe around 1778 in Tuskegee, TN. His English name is George Gist. He was a blacksmith and fur trader. Sequoyah fought for the United States in many battles in the early 1800s. He then invented the Syllabary and taught the Cherokees how to read and write using the syllabary. He was an ambassador to the Cherokee Nation in Washington DC and broke up political conflicts between his tribal members. Sequoyah is known across America for his contributions to the Cherokee Nation and he is considered “the greatest of all Cherokee.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias Boudinot</td>
<td>Avary Serpa</td>
<td>Elias Boudinot was the editor of the first Cherokee newspaper, the <em>Cherokee Phoenix</em>, which was written in both English and Cherokee. He worked at a printing press in New Echota, Georgia built in 1828. He played a large role in helping others use the Syllabary in their everyday lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation</td>
<td>Avary Serpa</td>
<td>Chief Ross is the Principle Chief of the Cherokee Nation. In 1821, Chief Ross awarded Sequoyah a silver medal and a literary pension for his work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>Avary Serpa</td>
<td>The Narrator introduces the skit, explains Sequoyah’s life and how his syllabary was adopted as the official written language of the Cherokee Nation and how it is used today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## OVERALL STAGE SETTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe the Stage(s) of the Performance</th>
<th>Color Use Scheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add Photo of Stage (if possible)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refer to photo of stage:

![Stage Photo](image)

**Background Design**

- A display board with a collage of pictures from 1800s – today.
- Burgundy curtains in background with a table and an orange, yellow, blue and pink stitched table cloth.

**Props**

- Native American Cherokee Male outfit from early 1800s, suede shirt, pants, turban, shawl, pipe, medal, and walking stick.
- Early 1800s Male Costume: long black tailcoat, black derby hat, white shirt, copy of the 1828 *Cherokee Phoenix*.

## COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE

Please add or remove costume & props by scene as needed. This is only a template.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene #</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)</td>
<td>The narrator is wearing a white t-shirt, with a picture of Sequoyah on it, and black pants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Design &amp; Props</td>
<td>The narrator is standing in front of burgundy curtains, beside the display board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scene 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene #</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)</td>
<td>Sequoyah is wearing a blue, yellow, and red turban and shawl, a tan, beaded, a Native American Cherokee outfit including a suede beaded shirt, pants with a breechclout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Design &amp; Props</td>
<td>Sequoyah is standing next to the display board and points to pictures throughout the scene.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with leather fringe, and moccasins.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene #</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE**

**Scene #**

**Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)**
If costumes and props remain the same, write “same as scene # in the boxes below”

**Set Design & Props**

**Props**
Sequoyah is holding a pipe and a walking stick, used as a crutch because of a defect in his leg.

**Background Design**
Same as scene #2

Elias Boudinot is wearing a long, black, 18th century tailcoat and white shirt.

**COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE**

**Scene #**

**Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)**
If costumes and props remain the same, write “same as scene # in the boxes below”

**Set Design & Props**

**Background Design**
Same as scene #2

**Props**
Elias Boudinot is holding a copy of the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper.

Chief John Ross is wearing a long, black, 18th century coat, white shirt and a derby hat.

**COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE**

**Scene #**

**Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)**
If costumes and props remain the same, write “same as scene # in the boxes below”

**Set Design & Props**

**Background Design**
Same as scene #2

**Props**
A letter to Sequoyah.

Sequoyah is wearing a blue, yellow, and red turban, a tan, beaded, Native American Cherokee suede shirt, American pants with a breechclout and moccasins. He is also wearing a medal given to him by Chief John Ross.

**COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE**

**Scene #**

**Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)**
If costumes and props remain the same, write “same as scene # in the boxes below”

**Set Design & Props**

**Background Design**
Same as scene #2

**Props**
Same as scene #2

Same as scene #1

**COSTUMES & PROPS BY SCENE**

**Scene #**

**Costume(s) Visual(s) or Costume(s) Description(s)**
If costumes and props remain the same, write “same as scene # in the boxes below”

**Set Design & Props**

**Background Design**
Same as scene #1

**Props**
Same as scene #1
PERFORMANCE SCRIPT BY SCENES
Please add or remove scene pages as needed. This is only a template.

SCENE 1 – SCENARIO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this scene is to introduce the performance and explain the thesis statement.</td>
<td>Setting: Narration booth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeframe: Present day; 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters: Narrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of the Scene
Sequoyah invented a syllabary without any knowledge of a written language. His syllabary allowed the Cherokee to preserve their culture through writing. Even though many efforts were made to destroy Cherokee culture, the Cherokee syllabary broke these barriers by allowing the Cherokee to rebuild and survive.

DIALOGUE - SCENE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator (Avary)</td>
<td><em>I sit behind a table as I introduce the play.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without knowledge of any written language, Sequoyah opened doors to the Cherokee Nation by inventing the Cherokee syllabary. He did for the Cherokees what few other native tribes have effectively been able to do. Sequoyah gave the Cherokee Nation a way to preserve their Native American culture, identity, and pride through the invention of a written language. Despite efforts to end the nation through removal and assimilation, the Cherokee syllabary broke deeply held ideological barriers by allowing the Cherokee Nation to rebuild and survive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCENE 2 – SCENARIO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this scene is to explain Sequoyah’s life as he grew up and show his inspiration to create the written Cherokee language. It is also to describe Sequoyah’s process in creating his syllabary and the barriers he faced along the way.</td>
<td>Setting: Sequoyah’s house in Tahlequah, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeframe: 1778-1821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters: Sequoyah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of the Scene

Sequoyah is the inventor of the Cherokee syllabary. Sequoyah was born into the Cherokee or Tsalagi Tribe around 1778 in Tuskegee. When Sequoyah was exposed to written English, (or as his tribe members called it, “talking leaves”) he was amazed. Soon, Sequoyah began to toy with written Cherokee, until he had to fight for the United States. Once his service ended, Sequoyah worked on the syllabary and had it approved by the Cherokee Nation Council (of Native American chiefs). He began to travel and teach his syllabary to many tribes (not just to the Cherokees).

DIALOGUE - SCENE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sequoyah (Avary)</td>
<td>Osiyo (ᏣᏲ) or Hello! ¹ I am Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee syllabary. I was born into the Cherokee or Tsalagi Tribe around 1778 in Tuskegee. Tuskegee is near present-day Vonore, Tennessee. Sequoyah means “pig’s or boar’s foot”. I got my name because I have a deformation in my leg. My American name is George Gist, named after my American father. My mother was Wurteh, a full-blood Cherokee and sister of Old Tassel, a Cherokee chief. When I turned five, the Treaty of Paris was signed and ended the American Revolution. I found it amazing how Americans could communicate the news just by looking at a paper. My tribe members called it “talking leaves.” As I grew up, I traded furs and was a blacksmith. I wanted to be able to sign my work, but there was no way for Cherokees to write down our language. Charles Hicks taught me how to sign my work in English, but I was determined to work on written Cherokee. With a written language, we could document our stories and ways of life and communicate to our people. Cherokees only communicate verbally. My “talking leaves” will break the barrier of using oral communication, so we can accurately preserve and document our history, stories and educate our people. Before I began, I had to help the Americans. On March 27, 1814, I fought in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend against the Red Creek Tribe. We were led by General Andrew Jackson. Most of us Cherokees could not read orders sent in English or write letters to our loved ones. Only a few Cherokees could speak both Cherokee and English. Once the Battle ended, pioneers settled around Mississippi and the Treaty of Fort Jackson was signed by remaining soldiers. When the conflict with the Red Creeks ended, I began toying with the Cherokee spoken language. I figured writing a language would be like, “catching a wild animal and taming it.” I decided to try making pictographs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Refer to pictures 1,2,3
2- Refer to pictures 6,7

When I say, “Osiyo”, or hello, I wave to the audience. As I explain Sequoyah’s life, I walk around using my stick/crutch and point to different pictures and props.
Soon, the Treaty of 1819 was signed, the 25th treaty between the Cherokees and the US government. This treaty gave up a quarter of all the Cherokees land. My family and I were forced to move to Arkansas. This physical distance barrier slowed down the making of my syllabary. I gave up on making pictures for each word and started an alphabet. When my friend Turtle Fields thought I was going crazy, I told him:

“If our people think I am making a fool of myself, you may tell them that what I am doing will not make fools of them. They did not cause me to begin, and they shall not cause me to stop. If I am no longer respected, what I am doing will not make our people less respected, either by themselves or others; so I shall go on, and you may tell our people.”

Soon, my own wife lost patience with me. She gathered people in the town and burned down my house and my past work. I want to be respected by my people, but the only way was to finish my syllabary. I eventually overcame this barrier, and restarted my work.

Then, I had an idea. Instead of making pictures or writing an alphabet, I could break the words into syllables. There were 86 syllables in the Cherokee language. I needed to create symbols to represent each syllable. Tom Waters, a Bible maker, allowed me to copy some English letters from the Bible. It took me about 12 years to complete my work, but I finished it. I called it a syllabary.

I taught my 6-year-old daughter, Ahyoka, how to read and write the syllabary. Now, I need to go before the Cherokee Council and teach my invention. Since many people accused me of witchcraft, if my presentation failed, I could have been banished, tortured or even killed. When the demonstration worked, the chiefs were impressed but still skeptical. Many other demonstrations were made to Cherokees. Finally, the language was approved by the Council in 1821 and I walked many miles to spread the syllabary and overcame natural distance barriers.
### Purpose of the Scene
The purpose of this scene is to show the importance of Sequoyah’s syllabary from Chief John Ross’ perspective.

### Key Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Chief John Ross’ house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe</td>
<td>1824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Principal Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of the Scene
John Ross, the Principal Chief leader of the Cherokee Nation, recognizes the importance of Sequoyah’s syllabary. In 1824, he gives Sequoyah a silver medal for his contributions to the Cherokee Nation. Chief Ross expresses his appreciation of Sequoyah’s efforts in a letter to him stating, “…your name will be held in grateful remembrance…”

### Dialogue - Scene 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Ross (Avary)</td>
<td>I am John Ross, Principal Chief leader of the Cherokee Nation. When I heard about Sequoyah’s syllabary, I awarded him a silver medal in 1824. ¹ I wrote to him in a letter, “The old and the young find no difficulty in learning to read and write in their native language. Types have been made and a printing press established in the Nation. The Scriptures have been translated and printed in Cherokee. While posterity continues to be benefited by the discovery, your name will be held in grateful remembrance...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Refer to silver medal
**SCENE 4 – SCENARIO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The purpose of this scene is to explain how Sequoyah’s syllabary broke the barrier of communication through the *Cherokee Phoenix*. | **Setting**
Cherokee Phoenix Printing Press in New Echota, Georgia |
|                                                           | **Timeframe**
1828                                                   |
|                                                           | **Characters**
Elias Boudinot                                           |

**Summary of the Scene**

Elias Boudinot was the editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper and worked at a printing press in New Echota, Georgia, built in 1828. Thanks to Elias Boudinot and the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the Cherokees could communicate important news, stories or treaties easier and faster. However, the printing press faced financial barriers, was shut down in 1834 and later destroyed by the Georgia Guard.

---

**DIALOGUE - SCENE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Elias Boudinot (Avary)** | *I take off the hat to become Elias Boudinot. I pick up an issue of the Cherokee Phoenix and present it to the audience.*

1 I am Elias Boudinot. 2 I am the editor of the first Cherokee newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. Once Sequoyah’s syllabary was approved as the official Cherokee language, Chief Ross, approved a Cherokee printing press to be built in 1828 in the Cherokee Nation’s Capital, New Echota, Georgia. The paper was published weekly and included information in both Cherokee and English. 4 Each issue was four pages long and discussed the relationship with the Cherokee Nation and the United States government. 5 The newspaper broke communication barriers by allowing Cherokees to learn about national news such as the Indian Removal Act and Supreme Court cases that affected Indian rights. It also included local news, social and religious activities, religious stories and editorials. In 1829, the name changed to *The Cherokee Phoenix, and Indians’ Advocate* because so many other tribes were reading it. It showed white Americans that Cherokees were not wild savages and literate. Unfortunately, money to support the press ran out and the newspaper ended in 1834. The press was later destroyed by the Georgia Guard because they did not want the Cherokees to have their own newspaper. This was a financial and physical barrier for the Cherokees in utilizing their language. |

1- Refer to picture 9
2- Refer to picture 10
3- Refer to handheld prop of newspaper
**SCENE 5 – SCENARIO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this scene is to explain the spread of Sequoyah’s syllabary, the effort of assimilation and how it acted as a barrier for the Native Americans and Sequoyah’s death in Mexico.</td>
<td>Setting: Sequoyah’s house in Tahlequah, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeframe: 1778-1821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters: Sequoyah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of the Scene**

Sequoyah continued to travel and teach others his syllabary. In ten years, 90% of the Cherokee could read and write Cherokee. Soon, the United States began to try to assimilate the Cherokees and other Native American tribes and force them out of their homelands. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson established the *Indian Removal Act* which forced the Native Americans to travel west and took a large toll on the Cherokee. Sequoyah’s syllabary played an important role in helping the Cherokee Nation rebuild and resettle. In 1842, Sequoyah took a long, harsh journey to Mexico where he later died in August 1843.

**Character & Action**

**Sequoyah (Avary)**

*I come out from behind the table, change back into my turban and take the coat and hat off. I also put a silver medal on and use the walking stick to move around the stage. I am holding a hand-written version of my syllabary.  
1- Refer to pictures 12, 18  
2- Refer to picture 11*

**Dialogue**

As I continued to travel to different areas teaching my syllabary, the language, “spread like wildfire.” In ten years, 90% of the Cherokee learned how to read and write the language. My syllabary showed the Americans that the Cherokees are just as intelligent, literate and sophisticated as white people. Some missionaries, including Samuel Worcester, translated the Bible, religious stories and hymns into Cherokee to convert us to Christianity.¹ In 1838, the Cherokee Almanac was also written in Cherokee.² These efforts improved our overall literacy in Cherokee. During this time, there was a large assimilation effort by the Americans teach us English and make us more like the white man. This was a barrier against the continued use of Cherokee and the existence of our culture.

General Andrew Jackson, a man I once fought with, soon became President and established the *Indian Removal Act* in 1830. It forced 46,000 Native American people (15,000 Cherokees) to travel thousands of miles west. We called it the Nunna daul Tsunyi or the Trail of Tears, because over 4,000 Cherokees died.

After the Trail of Tears, my syllabary was valuable in helping to reestablish and preserve the Cherokee language, culture, laws and traditions. I helped the Cherokee Nation rebuild itself by teaching my syllabary, documenting the first Cherokee Constitution and resolving tribal disputes. I even received a $300 literary pension for my service.

In the spring of 1842, I travelled to Mexico to find other Cherokee tribes and teach them my syllabary. I was 60 years-old and in bad health. I soon died in Mexico, in August of 1843.
### SCENE 6– SCENARIO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this scene is to show how many tribes, including the Cherokee, had lost a generation of their culture and language because of harsh boarding schools. These schools acted as a barrier for the Cherokee to preserve their ways of life.</td>
<td>Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Summary of the Scene

General Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. This was the first of many schools meant to assimilate Native American tribes and “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” General Pratt promoted the idea of removing Native children from their families, practicing daily military drills and severely punishing those who showed any sign of their tribe’s culture or refused to listen.

### DIALOGUE - SCENE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Henry Pratt (Avary)</td>
<td>I sit behind the table and take off the turban and medal. Then, I put on a blue, revolutionary-styled coat and hat. I am U.S. Cavalry Captain Richard Henry Pratt. In 1879, I founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. My school removed Native American children from their homes to, “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” I believed that it would be best if the Cherokees gave up their language, syllabary and culture and became civilized American people. We conducted marching drills daily, forced the children to wear uniforms and cut their long hair. We severely punished anyone who spoke Native American language besides English. The conditions in the boarding schools were very harsh. Diseases such as the flu killed 200+ children during the school’s running.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SCENE 7 – SCENARIO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Scene</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of this scene is to explain the lasting impact and importance of Sequoyah’s syllabary on the Cherokee Nation today and how it has been used to overcome many barriers.</td>
<td>Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeframe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Summary of the Scene

Richard Pratt’s and other boarding schools, have caused generations of Native American people to lose their identity and language. Using the syllabary, Cherokees broke this barrier by preserving their culture through writing (while many other tribes without a written language died off). Many awards and honors are given to Sequoyah because without his syllabary, the Cherokee would not be surviving as well as they are today. In 1990, the United States government passed the Native American Languages Act and in 1991 Oklahoma passed the Act Relating to the Tribal Policy for the Promotion and Preservation of Cherokee Language, History and
Culture. These two acts allowed spoken and written Cherokee to play a large part in the tribes’ everyday lives. Unfortunately, many of the monolingual Cherokees over the age of 50 are dying, causing the language and syllabary to die with them. Cherokee schools, like the Sequoyah School, Cherokee Immersion School and the Kituwah Academy teach children, from a very young age, mostly or fully in Cherokee. Without any formal education, Sequoyah created a syllabary that helped preserve the Cherokee language and culture.

**DIALOGUE - SCENE 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Action</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrator (Avary)</strong></td>
<td>Richard Pratt’s and other assimilation efforts caused generations of Cherokee and other Native American tribes, to lose their culture and language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I take off the hat and coat and put on a Sequoyah t-shirt as I come out from behind the table.</em></td>
<td>Unlike the Cherokee, many other tribes did not have their own written language. This includes the Arapaho tribe which only has 1,000 speakers today and the Spokane tribe with only 20 speakers left today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Refer to picture 25, 26, 23 2- Refer to picture 14 3- Refer to picture 16, 19, 21, 22</td>
<td>Without Sequoyah’s syllabary, the Cherokee would not be surviving as well as they are today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many people believed it would be better if the Cherokees converted to English. Those who went to the boarding schools were traumatized to not teach their children English. Still, there were many efforts to save the Cherokee's language and culture.

In 1990, the United States Congress passed the Native American Languages Act which established federal policy “to allow the use of Native American languages as the medium of instruction in schools, and affirms the right of Native American children to express themselves, be educated, and assessed in their own Native language.”

In 1991, Oklahoma passed the Act Relating to the Tribal Policy for the Promotion and Preservation of Cherokee Language, History and Culture. This law made Cherokee and English the official language of their government. Soon, business was conducted and documented in both languages.

Today, written Cherokee is becoming more widely used. There are online applications and videos that teach written Cherokee and translate it from English. Traffic signs and laws are written in Cherokee and many books, cartoons and newspapers are also written in Cherokee.¹

Unfortunately, many of the monolingual Cherokees are elders and are dying, causing the language and syllabary to die with them. Younger Cherokees were not learning their native language as only English was taught in schools. Additional schools and programs were founded to break this generational barrier. Sequoyah Schools, along with the Cherokee Heritage Center grew to other areas, including the Cherokee Immersion School. At Sequoyah High School, the students take a class in Cherokee every year, until they know the language well enough to become translators. Schools like the Cherokee Immersion School and the Kituwah Academy teach students primarily in Cherokee. There is even a Cherokee Master Apprentice Program.²
A teacher at the Cherokee Immersion School explains, “Cherokee language is what makes us Cherokee. This total Immersion Program is not a school, it’s a home.”

“If we all speak Cherokee when we see each other in our communities, if we speak it, we won’t forget it. And if we speak it to the children they will learn it, because our language was a gift from God… But we have to work very hard.” says a Cherokee woman.

Another Cherokee man states, “There will be no Cherokee if we lose the language. Cherokee as we know it will be no more.”

The Cherokee Phoenix and the Cherokee Nation, still thrive in America. Today, the Cherokee language is considered a Class IV language (hard to learn) in difficulty. If someone already knows spoken Cherokee, the syllabary can be learned in about a week. Over 2,500 people can read and write it today with thousands more learning the language.³

During Sequoyah’s induction to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2017, Principal Chief Bill John Baker of the Cherokee Nation stated, “Without Sequoyah’s contribution to literacy and learning the Cherokee Nation would be unrecognizable today. His vision of talking leaves set us on a current path to become one of the most successful, advanced tribal nations in the United States."

WELAQT
Donadagohvi- Until we meet again (In Cherokee there is no word for goodbye)
Doh-na-dah-go-huh-ee
Photo of Stage Set with Avary Serpa dressed as Sequoyah:
Legend of Images on Display Board and Table:

2. Drawing of Sequoyah from Museum of the Cherokee Indian.
5. Portrait of Sequoyah by Henry Inman, c. 1830, located at National Portrait Gallery.
6. Original syllabary written by Sequoyah.
8. Recent issue of the Cherokee Phoenix written in Cherokee.
9. Elias Boudinot, the first editor of the Cherokee Phoenix. c.1828.
10. First issue of the Cherokee Phoenix: issued on Thursday February 21, 1828 in New Echota, Georgia.
11. 1861 Cherokee Almanac written in Cherokee and English.
13. A screenshot of a Cherokee mobile phone application that teaches the syllabary.
14. A student learning Cherokee and writing down the syllabary from a Cherokee Immersion School.
15. The before and after picture of a Native American who attended an Indian Boarding School (late 1800s).
16. Screenshot of RSUTV Public Television Cherokee I online language class.
17. Sequoyah’s cabin in Tahlequah, OK from 1829 – 1844.
19. A screenshot from an online Cherokee lesson stating, “What is your name?” in Cherokee.
20. A Sequoia National Park sign made from a Giant Sequoia Redwood tree.
21. Screenshot of an online Cherokee lesson for the word Dog: gitli.
22. Screenshot of an online Cherokee lesson for the word Cat: wesa.
23. The Cherokee Christian Fellowship Church sign in Cherokee NC, written in both English and Cherokee.
24. A Giant Sequoia tree is being cut down to be carved into a bust of Sequoyah by Wolf Toth.
25. Street intersection signs written in Cherokee in 2018, located in Webbers Falls OK.
26. Stop sign written in Cherokee in 2007, located in Tahlequah OK.
27. 1917 Sequoyah statue sculpted by Vinnee Ream, on display at the National Statuary Hall to represent Oklahoma in 1917.
The Syllabary that Shaped the Cherokee

Avary Serpa

Junior Division

Individual Performance

Process Paper: 494 words
In April 2019, my family traveled to the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. We visited the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum in Vonore, Tennessee. The museum showed interesting scenes of Sequoyah’s life which included exhibits, movies and artifacts from the early 1800’s. I decided to do more research on the topic for National History Day (NHD).

I started my research by reading several books including: “Sequoyah”, “The Cherokee Syllabary” and “Signs of Cherokee Culture.” I also found a Cherokee newspaper called, The Cherokee Phoenix. It was first published in 1828 using a printing press in New Echota, Georgia and is the syllabary. The Cherokee Phoenix is still published (online) today. I later found sources from the Museum of the Cherokee Indian Archives and the Library of Congress websites, which provided many primary sources. I went on the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum website and found additional information and artifacts. Last year, I visited the National Statuary Hall and saw Sequoyah’s Statue for the state of Oklahoma. I found some present-day articles about other tribes struggling to preserve their language and identity, as well. Finally, I started learning how to speak and write Cherokee, which gave me a better understanding of how the language works.

At first, I was contemplating whether to do a performance or documentary. Last year, I did a group performance and had an amazing experience at Nationals, so I decided to try a performance again. I started writing my script by going through Sequoyah’s life and the history of the Cherokee Nation. Once my script was finished, I worked on my set background and gathered props. We purchased a reusable banner with Velcro stickers so I could display pictures and move them around easily.

Sequoyah was the first person to write a syllabary from scratch. Many other tribes used Sequoyah’s syllabary because it was so easy to learn and they did not have their own written language. Sequoyah was awarded a silver medal and a literary pension with $300 given to him.
annually. Once Sequoyah’s syllabary spread throughout the Cherokee Nation, assimilation
efforts from the United States became a barrier to the use of his syllabary.

General Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School in
Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. This caused generations of Native American tribes to lose their
language, identity and culture. Even though the boarding schools affected many Native
American tribes, the Cherokees could overcome this barrier because of Sequoyah’s syllabary.
Tribes who attended the schools like the Spokane tribe (with only 20 speakers left today) did not
have any written language and consequently still struggle to survive today. Unfortunately,
Cherokees are still facing many barriers in trying to preserve their language. Most fluent
Cherokee speakers are elders and are passing away. To address this issue, schools such as the
Cherokee Immersion School and Acts like the Native American Languages Act, were established
to enable the Cherokees to pass on their language to their youth and with that, their culture.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:


This article explains how a log was carved to represent Sequoyah because of his contribution to the Cherokee Nation. I use this as background information and in my display.


This statue of Sequoyah was made by George Julian Zolnay. It represents Oklahoma in the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol Building and is the first statue to be dedicated to a Native American. I used this to understand Sequoyah’s impact and for my background.


This picture shows a monument of Sequoyah in Calhoun, Georgia. I used this for background information.


This portrait of Sequoyah was painted by Henry Inman in 1830. I used this picture as a reference to design my costume headpiece and props. This was also used in my background display.


This is a photograph of Sequoyah’s house. Parts of it are preserved and replicated at a museum today. I used the picture for background information and in my background
This archive includes the first published Cherokee Phoenix newspaper (edited by Elias Boudinot) written in both Cherokee and English. The Cherokee Phoenix is still functioning today and has a website where the issues are published. I use these issues for my script and for my backboard.

This article is about Oklahoma students learning Cherokee at the Cherokee Immersion School. I used this as background information for my script.

The article explains why schools (like the Kituwah Academy) were made and how they play a primary role in preserving the Cherokee language. The Kituwah Academy was mentioned in my script.

This video discusses the need to teach the Cherokee to youth and how they are creating schools (like the Kituwah Academy). I used this information in my script.

This is a story from the Appalachian Heritage magazine that is written in Cherokee and English. I used this to support how Cherokee is being used today in creative writing to keep the culture alive.

This article is part of the Cherokee Phoenix. I reference this newspaper during my performance as Elias Boudinot.


This is an article about a new video game being developed in which the player has to save the elders by learning and practicing the Cherokee language. I mentioned Cherokee apps in my script.


This article reports the death of one of the last monolingual Cherokee speakers. It also expresses the need to spread Cherokee to the youth because most of the Cherokee speakers are elders and are passing away.


This is the current Cherokee Phoenix website. The Cherokee Phoenix was a newspaper established in 1828 and is still running today. The website has both old and recent publications of the newspaper. I used this site to get a better understanding of how the Cherokee syllabary is used today. The site included examples of street signs in Cherokee and a picture of Elias Boudinot. I used the articles and pictures in my display board.


This website talks about the history of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, has original documents and explains how the newspaper was destroyed (note that the *Cherokee Phoenix* came back and is still running today). I used this as background information and for my script.

This movie was the primary source that I used for quotes and opinions from the Cherokee elders and youth today. This included the struggle to preserve Cherokee, and what the Cherokee are trying to do about it. I used this in my script.

Editor, RSUTV. “Cherokee Language Classes.” RSU.TV, 13 Jan. 2020, rsu.tv/cherokee/.

The Cherokee Nation and RSU Public TV offers classes to learn Cherokee through videos online. These classes are taught by Cherokee Nation language instructor Wade Blevins. I used this to learn some of the Cherokee language and included examples on my display board.


This source shows the entrance to the Cherokee reservation in Cherokee NC. It is written in both Cherokee syllabary and English. It also has the seal of the Eastern band of the Cherokee Nation. I used this as background information.


This article discusses a law allowing Cherokee to teach Cherokee without a license or college education which allows the language to spread and survive. I used this in my script and as background information.


This image is the cover of the first Cherokee Almanac, made in 1861. I used this in my script and for my set display.


This website was used to purchase a commemorative stamp of Sequoyah, issued in 1980.


This story is written in Cherokee and English and explains the importance of the Cherokee language and how it is a “gift” to the Cherokee. This supports my script about
how Cherokees are using their language and doing more creative writing in Cherokee today.


This short video explains why we need to “listen to our elders” and teach Cherokee to youth so that the language does not go extinct.


This Cherokee story is written in Cherokee and English about a turtle outsmarting a beaver in a race. This supports my script about how Cherokees are using their language and doing more creative writing in Cherokee today.

Powell, Mary. “‘Sequoyah - the American Cadmus Whose Name Is Borne by California’s Giant Trees’,” San Francisco Call, 7 July 1912. Library of Congress. chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/.

This article explains the importance of Sequoyah and his syllabary at the time. It also discusses the giant redwood Sequoia trees and why they were named after him. I used this article for background information purposes.


This website blog has pictures of street and traffic signs in Tahlequah OK written in both Cherokee and English. This shows how written Cherokee is still used today. The pictures were used in my display board.


This article explains how the new Cherokee Master Apprentice Program is “critical in how we will continue to preserve and promote our language for future generations,” (Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr.). I mentioned the Cherokee Master Apprentice Program in my script.

This story, written in Cherokee and English, is a Cherokee legend about a turtle and the "Wolf's Ear." I used this to support my script about how Cherokee culture is being revived today.

Secondary Sources:


This website featured a before and after picture of a Native American going to an Indian Boarding School. I used the picture for my backboard.


This website has information about the Arapaho tribe including how many tribe members speak their native language. I used this information to compare the Cherokee (using Sequoyah’s syllabary) to other tribes (without a written language). I mentioned this in my script.


This was the primary book I used for writing my script. It provides a history of Sequoyah’s life and a helpful timeline reference.


This book explains Sequoyah’s syllabary and has examples of how written Cherokee is used today. I used the pictures for my display board.

This website gave me a better understanding of how languages all across the world are struggling to survive, like the Cherokee. I used this as background information.


This website talks about Sequoia National Park. It has pictures of the large Sequoyah redwood trees and a National Park sign, which I used in my display board.


This book teaches the Cherokee language and written Cherokee. I started learning Cherokee to better comprehend the language.


This article explains how the Cherokee Immersion Program is allowing Cherokee youth to help preserve the Cherokee language. "We've got several programs in the Cherokee Nation that could also lead to more fluent speakers, with the Master Apprentice Program and everything else out there," said Principal Holly Davis. "We all go hand-in-hand and our purpose is the same thing: to save a language." I used this as background information for my script.


I used this book mainly for information about the Cherokee Phoenix. It describes the importance and impact of the Cherokee Phoenix and how it showed the Americans that the Cherokees could be sophisticated people. I used this for my script and set.


The Cherokee Central school’s website provides information on the Cherokee elementary, middle and high school Cherokee classes. I used this as background information and to support my script.

This is the official website of the Cherokee Nation. It provides general information about the Cherokee Nation, its government, culture, employment, Cherokee Immersion Schools, Master Apprenticeship Program and Cherokee language and technology resources. I used this to learn some Cherokee and to gain knowledge for my script.


This article gives information about the Trail of Tears. I used this in my script when Andrew Jackson established the Indian Removal Act.


This article talks about Cherokee immersion schools, specifically the Kituwah Academy. I used this as background information for my script.


This website discusses the federal laws and policies passed by the United States to preserve and promote Native American culture, history and learning. This helped the Cherokees grow and persevere over past assimilation barriers. I used this in my script.


This is the Sequoia National Park website that gives background information about the park. I used this as background information.

This website includes a video of Sequoyah’s induction to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker describes the importance of Sequoyah’s life. I used a quote from his speech for my script.


I used this website to get a better understanding of how English words and phrases were translated in Cherokee. I used a couple of these phrases in my script.

Editor, OsiyoTV. “Let’s Talk Cherokee: Season 1, Episode 2”, OsiyoTV, 21 Mar. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIXSpMy8mM.

This is a YouTube series to learn Cherokee phrases. I used one of the phrases in my display board.


This online article talks about the Indian Removal Act that Andrew Jackson established, forcing Indians to move west. I used this in my script describing the Trail of Tears.


This online paper discusses Sequoyah’s creation of the syllabary and his life. It includes a quote by Sequoyah to his friend Turtle Fields. I used this quote in my script to show Sequoyah’s motivation and determination to help the Cherokees.


This website provided information about the Native American languages that could soon go extinct. Many of these languages did not use a written language which put their language at a higher risk of dying out. I used this to support my script.

This website provides a brief history of the Cherokee people and includes phrases in Cherokee. In my script, I used this to find the Cherokee names of the Trail of Tears and the Cherokee Tribe. For example, Salami means Cherokee and it is a Creek word meaning, “people with another language.”


The American Indian Relief Council explains how the United States created Indian Boarding Schools as part of the assimilation efforts. It also discusses some of the current Acts and Laws attempting to bring back the Natives’ culture. This was used in my script.


This article talks about how the internet can help save dying indigenous languages and how 43% of indigenous languages are going extinct.


This ebook is a modern translation of the New Testament written in both Cherokee and English. I used this on my display board on how Cherokees are learning their language today.


This mobile and desktop application teaches how to learn the Cherokee syllabary and includes games to memorize it. I used a screenshot of this app is on my display board.


This source discusses how “Native Americans did not lose their languages. Their languages were stolen from them by immigrants to American shores who believed in assimilation.” I used this source in my script to explain the assimilation barrier for the Cherokees and other tribes.


This website provides a map of western tribes that I compared to the Cherokee Nation. I used this comparison in my script.


This article has a picture of Sequoyah’s cabin in Tahlequah OK and explains how Sequoyah is honored and recognized today. I used this as background information and on my display board.


This book explains how Sequoyah developed his syllabary and how it was used by the Cherokee Nation. It discusses the reasons why Cherokee Immersion Schools were created to preserve the Cherokee language and culture. I use this information in my script.


This website explains the development, importance and barriers of the Cherokee Phoenix newspaper and printing press. I used this in my script.

Angela Pulley discusses the development of the Cherokee Phoenix and how it was renamed to The Cherokee Phoenix and Indians' Advocate. I used this in my script.


This article summarizes Sequoyah’s life and talks about the development and importance of his syllabary. It shows a drawing of Sequoyah, a wooden carving of him made from a Sequoyah tree, a paper with Sequoyah’s original characters and a statue of Sequoyah from the National Statuary Hall in the US Capitol Building.


This article discusses the importance of learning Cherokee and how the language is dying out. It also talks about the programs in schools to learn Cherokee. I used the cover picture in my set display.


This article summarizes Sequoyah’s life and has pictures of his syllabary. I used it to write my script and understand Sequoyah’s process in creating the syllabary.


This article describes the experiences of the author’s mother when she attended an Indian boarding schools. It discusses how the boarding schools forbid the use of their native language and military drills. It also talks about the positive aspects of giving Native Americans a good education and trade. I used this in my script.


This article includes the perspectives of Cherokee Immersion Program students, how they were discouraged to speak Cherokee in the past, and are now encouraged to learn the language. I used this in my script.