

SEQUOYAH

The Sequoyah School name honors Sequoyah, a Cherokee man who gave his people a lasting educational gift – the power to read and write their own stories. Sequoyah’s lifetime contributions reflect qualities we hope to nurture in our students: initiative, creativity, and persistence, and a commitment to stewardship and social justice.

Sequoyah was raised by his Cherokee mother near the small village of Tuskegee in the late 1700s. When he was young, he wondered at the symbols scratched on thin pieces of trees used by people who came and went from his mother’s trading post. He knew the scratched symbols made words, so he named these strange objects “talking leaves.”

Sequoyah grew from boy to man and joined the Paint Clan to fight for the United States in the War of 1812. While serving alongside other Cherokee, he felt deep frustration at his inability to write letters home to his wife and little daughter, Ayoka. He and his clansmen couldn’t keep journals of their wartime experiences or even read basic military orders. When Sequoyah returned home, he became determined to invent a Cherokee alphabet.

TALKING LEAVES – THE CHEROKEE SYLLABARY

Twelve years later, Sequoyah had created 85 symbols for the sounds spoken by his people, thus developing the first syllabary writing system for the Cherokee language. He created a game to teach it to Ayoka, and together, he and his daughter presented the new writing system to Cherokee tribal leaders. They were so astonished by his invention that they adopted it as the official writing system of the Cherokee tribe. Within months, Sequoyah and Ayoka taught thousands of Cherokee people to read and write.

With this new gift of literacy, the Cherokee began translating and recording newspapers, educational materials, the laws of the Cherokee Nation, and many other works. Eventually, they created the Cherokee Phoenix, the first bilingual newspaper of native North America. For the remainder of his years, Sequoyah continued to serve his people by helping negotiate treaties during the Trail of Tears and bring unity during times of deep tribal division. By the time he died in 1843, more than four million books, articles, and newspapers had been published in Cherokee using Sequoyah’s alphabet.



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Sikwoya

Sequoyah

**“Never before, or since, in
the history of the world,
has one man, not literate
in any language,
perfected a system for
writing a language.”**

– The Sequoyah Birthplace Museum,
Vonore, TN