

## Revitalization of the Cherokee Language



*"They did speak in Cherokee mostly all of 'em way back when I was growing up. They wasn't too many people that speak in English, just a few of 'em, and you go to the home, they'd all speak in Cherokee. Everywhere you went. And now, you can't go nowhere and they'd say, 'I don't know how to speak it.'"* – Mandy Swimmer

### Overview

"From Hatteras and across the Pamlico Sound, up the Neuse River, past the Sauratown Mountains, and all the way to Cherokee County, American Indians have left imprints of their ancestry on the place names of North Carolina. The remnant reminders capture a fleeting glimpse of the linguistic and cultural diversity that existed in North Carolina before the arrival of Europeans who brought their own notions about and names for the land" (*Talkin' Tar Heel*, p.183). In this lesson, students will explore language as it relates to American Indians, particularly by focusing on the Cherokees' movement to revitalize the Cherokee language. Through interactive reading, audio/visual clip exploration and partner and class discussions, students will gain an understanding and appreciation of how language is an intrinsic part of the Cherokee culture, and why it is so important to many Cherokees that their native language is both learned and spoken today. Students will finish the lesson with a group project in which they imagine working for the Cherokee Preservation and Education Program, whose mission is the revitalization of the Cherokee language. Students will work in groups to develop a 10-point plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee language, and then they will compare their ideas to the actual revitalization plan being implemented by the Eastern Band of Cherokee in western North Carolina.

### North Carolina Essential Standards for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1.2 - Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 8.H.1.3 - Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.1.5 - Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.
- 8.C&G.1.4 - Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States (e.g. enslaved people, women, wage earners, landless farmers, American Indians, African Americans and other ethnic groups).
- 8.C&G.2.3- Explain the impact of human and civil rights issues throughout North Carolina and United States history.
- 8.C.1.3 - Summarize the contributions of particular groups to the development of North Carolina and the United States (e.g. women, religious groups, and ethnic minorities such as American Indians, African Americans, and European immigrants).

### Essential Questions

- What can North Carolina's place names teach us about our state's diverse past?
- How many American Indian languages were present at the time of European contact and what does this tell us about American Indian diversity?
- Why was Sequoyah's development of the Cherokee syllabary significant?
- Why did boarding schools enact a strict "English-only" policy, despite the fact that American Indian languages were spoken in America long before English was?

- What connection does the preservation of language have to overall cultural preservation?
- Why do many Cherokees believe that revitalization of the Cherokee language is important?
- What are some of the ways the Cherokee revitalization project is trying to ensure that the Cherokee language is learned and spoken?
- What challenges does the Cherokee revitalization project face?
- Why is it important to learn about the numerous and rich American Indian cultures and their histories?
- How is maintaining culture, language, customs, beliefs, traditions, etc. an act of American Indian resistance in itself?

## Materials

- “What’s in a Name?” handout attached
- Copies of North Carolina road maps (at least one for every 2-3 students)
  - Maps can be requested at <http://www.ncdot.gov/travel/mappubs/statetransportationmap/>
  - If copies of maps are unavailable but laptops are available, students can also view PDFs of the North Carolina transportation maps, which are available for download at the same site. (Teachers may want to download the PDF of the map prior to class.) While the visual perspective is better with hard copies, students can still explore the PDF and zoom in and out. Teachers should provide brief instructions for this.
- Excerpt from *Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Are Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina*, by Walt Wolfram & Jeffrey Reaser, attached
  - For information on purchasing the book *Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina*, as well as numerous audio and video features, go to <http://www.talkintarheel.com/>
- Cherokee Language and Syllabary handout with corresponding questions attached
- Smartphones, tablets or laptops
- Cherokee Preservation Project, attached
- Cherokee Preservation Foundation, handout attached; or access to <http://cherokeepreservation.org/what-we-do/cultural-preservation/cherokee-language/>
- **Optional Resource:** For teachers interested in exploring North Carolina linguistics further, a multimedia dialect awareness curriculum, *Voices of North Carolina*, is available for free. Download the curriculum at [http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/research\\_dialecteducation.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/research_dialecteducation.php)

## Duration

- 1 class period
- Lesson length will vary based on each classroom’s level of discussion and reading levels.

## Preparation

- All of the *Talkin’ Tar Heel* links referenced throughout this lesson can be utilized using a smartphone or tablet. If choosing the smartphone/tablet option, download (and/or ask students to download) any free “QR Code Reader” app. Google “QR code reader” for the most up-to-date versions of the various free apps.
  - For more ideas relating to QR codes, visit <http://www.schrockguide.net/qr-codes-in-the-classroom.html>
  - If using the smartphone option, students should be reminded or prepped on appropriate use of smartphones in the classroom. Remind students that while in class, their phones are to be used as a research tool and not for socialization. Let students know upfront that abusing the trust put in them to utilize their phone responsibly will result in the inability to have their phones in class.
  - Certain students may not have access to a smartphone (for economic or other reasons.) Teachers should know if any students do not have a smartphone prior to implementing the lesson and have a considerate plan for sharing or providing alternate technology for these students.

- It is likely that students who are American Indians will be part of your class demographics. It is important that teachers ensure these students feel respected and heard as their history is broached in the classroom. It is also important to have a firm foundation of respectful communication and tolerance in the classroom before discussing topics such as culture, identity, etc. See the Carolina K-12's classroom management and character education activities for establishing a classroom community. (Available in the Database of K-12 Resources in the "Activities" section, or contact [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu) for recommendations.)
- This lesson is meant to provide a brief overview of American Indian history in North Carolina, with an emphasis on Cherokee history. For additional lessons on American Indians go to: <http://database.civics.unc.edu/lesson/?s=&lesson-topic=native-american-history>

## Procedure

### Warm Up: What's in a Name?

1. As a warm up, have students partner up and provide partners with a copy of a North Carolina transportation map (see the "Materials" section for details regarding accessing maps) as well as the attached "What's In a Name" handout. Students should read the introduction on North Carolina place names and then explore the North Carolina map searching for names that they think might have American Indian origin. Students can infer what might have led to this naming. Provide approximately 6-8 minutes for students to explore in partners. Afterwards, have them report out regarding the place names they uncovered. Provide some background on a few of North Carolina's place names that are American Indian: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/lessons/intrigue/1023/H407a.pdf>.
  - Teachers can optionally instruct students to also identify names they think may have settler origins. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/lessons/intrigue/1023/H407b.pdf> for specific settler place names.
  - For additional names students listed, an optional extension activity or homework assignment is to instruct students to research a particular place name to uncover its origin.)
  - This activity is adapted from the "Intrigue of the Past: North Carolina's First People" curriculum, available at <http://rla.unc.edu/lessons/Menu/title.htm>.
2. Next, provide students with the attached excerpt "The Legacy of American Indian Languages" from *Talkin' Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina* and instruct students to take a few moments to read the passage, and then to answer the discussion questions provided. Next, tell students to again partner up and discuss their thoughts to the provided questions together. Teachers should then bring students back together to allow them to report their thoughts in a class discussion:
  - What can North Carolina's place names teach us about our state's diverse past?
  - In what way were American Indian and European settlers connected?
  - What negative impacts did European settlement have on American Indians?
  - How many American Indian languages were present at the time of European contact? What does this tell us about American Indian diversity?
  - What happened to American Indian languages and why?
  - Why do you think there is an interest in preserving and resurrecting American Indian languages?

### Cherokee Language

3. Next, focus students on the excerpt's mention of the Cherokee language and their native language(s). Ask students to share what they already know about the Cherokee and the Cherokee language. Then play the following 22 second clip from *Talkin' Tar Heel: How our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina* of Mandy Swimmer, a Cherokee woman, talking about the Cherokee language. You can access the clip here: <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/8/video8-1.php>. At the conclusion of the short clip, discuss:
  - Who do you think Ms. Swimmer is referring to when she says, "They did speak in Cherokee mostly all of 'em?"
  - Judging by this clip, what do you think is happening to the Cherokee language?
  - Why do you think the Cherokee language is disappearing?

- How might this disappearance of language connect to other issues facing American Indian communities?
4. Tell students that they are going to complete an interactive reading regarding the Cherokee and their fight to preserve their language. Provide students with the attached “Cherokee Language and Syllabary” handout and corresponding questions. Students should read the text, highlighting and commenting on sections they find interesting, confusing, or would like to discuss. Tell students that as they read, they should stop to view the audio/video clips provided throughout the handout. (Teachers should let students know if they are allowed to do this via their Smart Phone, a tablet or a laptop. If limited laptops are available, students can complete this activity – or at least the clip viewing – in pairs.) Based on student reading levels, teachers should determine how much time to provide for completion of the handout and questions. (This can also be assigned for homework.)
  5. Upon completion, discuss the questions as a class to ensure student comprehension then focus students on the last question: “What are some of the ways the revitalization project is trying to ensure Cherokee is learned and spoken? What other ideas would you recommend for ensuring Cherokee language revitalization and education is successful and long lasting?” Ensure students discuss the various aspects mentioned in the reading, such as emersion programs, early childhood education programs, adult/child reading programs, adult education, mentoring (pairing older students with younger students), and workshops. As students report on their own additional ideas for language revitalization, note these in a list. Further discuss:
    - Which strategies do you think would be most successful and why?
    - What do you think the biggest challenge of Cherokee language revitalization is and why? What ideas can you offer for surmounting such challenges?
    - Why is community interest and support so important to a project like this? How can a revitalization project get the word out to the community in effective and inspiring ways?

**Culminating Project: You work for the Cherokee Preservation and Education Program!**

6. Tell students that they are going to continue this line of thinking in a small group project. Pass out the attached “Cherokee Preservation Project” handout and go over the details provided with students. Remind students that they’ve read about a few of the ways the Cherokee have implemented for revitalization, as well as brainstormed a few ideas in their class discussion. Let students know they can include any of these ideas and go into further detail as part of their 10-point plan, and that they can come up with alternate creative and effective ideas.
7. Teachers should decide whether to assign groups or allow students to choose. Teachers should also give students some details regarding how their final work should be documented and/or displayed. For example, students may simply finalize their work on a piece of notebook paper, or teachers may require them to display their 10-point plan on chart paper. Teachers can also require an art component to the project, such as instructing students to design a poster board representing their 10-point plan, or an advertisement for one of their ideas. Teachers should also determine how much class and/or homework time will be provided for completion. (This can be a short in-class activity completed in 15-20 minutes, or can become a more extensive project with artistic components, in which case additional time will be needed.)
8. Once groups are ready to present their 10-point plans, teachers should determine how to have students share their work. Ideas include:
  - If an artistic or display component was required as part of the final project, have students set up their work around the room and do a “gallery walk.” Teachers can either:
    - Split the class in two, with half of the groups standing in front of their display while the other half of the groups tour the different displays to learn about each plan and ask questions. Afterwards,

switch and have the second half of the groups stand in front of their projects and repeat the process.

- If students were not assigned a visual component, teachers can have each group present their plan to the class, accepting questions afterwards.

**9.** After all plans have been shared, teachers should lead students in debriefing:

- Did you notice any similarities in our plans (i.e., ideas that were repeated?) Were there any outliers (i.e., one group came up with something that no one else thought about?)
- Which ideas do you think would be most effective and most likely to succeed and why?
- What challenges do you think such projects would face and why?
- If we were really implementing a revitalization plan, whose voices would be most important in leading such planning and implementation and why? (Make sure students understand the importance of this being an effort led by the Cherokee community first, with consideration to their neighbors as well.)

**10.** Explain to students that there is actually a western North Carolina group, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, whose mission is “to preserve the native Cherokee culture, protect and enhance the Cherokee natural environment, and create appropriate and diverse economic opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and their neighbors in western North Carolina.” Provide students with the attached handout (or with web access to <http://cherokeepreservation.org/what-we-do/cultural-preservation/cherokee-language/>.) Tell the class that “In 2005, with the first of many significant investments from Cherokee Preservation Foundation, the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP) of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians initiated the development of a 10-year plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee language.” Explain that students will now have the opportunity to read about what the Cherokee actually did in their plan, and compare the actual implementation to their own ideas. Instruct students to read then discuss the accompanying questions (ideally, they will discuss in partners first, then debrief as a whole class.):

- The Foundation started with a community survey – did any of our plans think to do this? Why do you think they started this way and why was it important to do so?
- What components did the actual revitalization plan include? Which of these components are similar to your group’s ideas? Which projects did the Cherokee Preservation Foundation include that your group did not and what do you think kept you from thinking about such ideas? Are there any ideas our class had that are not included in the actual plan that you think would really be helpful to their mission? Explain.
  - Again, point out the importance of the actual revitalization effort and implementation being Cherokee conceived and led. “Outsiders” who are not Cherokee do not have the same cultural expertise, and history has created complicated struggles over governance between American Indians and others (e.g., remind students of boarding schools.)
- The actual revitalization plan also included an assessment. Did your group’s plan include this? Why do you think the Cherokee revitalization project included this assessment and why is this an important component of project implementation?
- What are the various challenges the project faced? What do you think it will take to overcome such challenges?
- Why is it important for us to know about the Cherokee language and its revitalization, whether we are Cherokee or not?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### What's in a Name?

Echoes of North Carolina's past linger today in place names. Whether towns, rivers, meadows, or mountains, the names given to locations in North Carolina are derived from a variety of sources. Some come from Indian words, which usually describe the landscape or qualities of the area, such as Nantahala, meaning "land of the noonday sun," or Cullowhee, meaning "place of the lilies." Others are taken from commodities or natural resources that were produced by the settlers, such as Sapphire or Cranberry. Still other names are derived from the influence of the English, European, and African settlers, such as Jefferson and Jackson Springs, or from military and religious history.

A name is a word or group of words by which a person, thing, or place is known. Everything has a name which identifies it to others, and it is through names that people can communicate with and understand one another. Names help people tell stories about the past. For example, the town of Silk Hope in Chatham County was probably named before the Civil War, when there was an interest in producing home-grown silk. Sometimes, however, the original meanings of names have been lost. Some Indian place names continued to be used by European settlers, but over time people forgot what the words originally meant. For example, Chockoyotte Creek, which flows into the Roanoke River, is believed to be a Tuscarora word, but its meaning is no longer known. (Source: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/intrigue/1023>)

### Explore North Carolina's Place Names

Explore the map of North Carolina provided by your teacher with your partner. Specifically, pay attention to the various names of North Carolina's counties, cities, towns, rivers, mountains, etc. As you do so, create a list of any names that you think may have originated from American Indians below. If you think you know anything about the name's American Indian origin, note that as well. Try to identify at least 8 names.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Excerpt from *Talkin' Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina***

**The Legacy of American Indian Languages (p. 183-184)**

From Hatteras and across the Pamlico Sound, up the Neuse River, past the Sauratown Mountains, and all the way to Cherokee County, American Indians have left imprints of their ancestry on the place names of North Carolina. The remnant reminders capture a fleeting glimpse of the linguistic and cultural diversity that existed in North Carolina before the arrival of Europeans who brought their own notions about and names for the land. The intertwining of American Indian and European names seems appropriate, however, when one considers just how connected the groups have been since the arrival of European explorers and settlers. American Indians at times have welcomed the European explorers, guided them, taught them, and even saved them from starvations. They fought alongside the British against the French and alongside the French against the British. They fought on both sides of the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War. At the same time, American Indians suffered greatly at the hands of their sometime allies, with many tribes even suffering extinction. The tribes who survived often did so barely, with many groups losing more than 80 percent of their population to diseases such as smallpox, measles, typhoid, and tuberculosis. In some cases, the remnants of once-independent groups merged in order to survive, and American Indian populations moved voluntarily and involuntarily throughout-out the known historical periods, making it difficult to recount their histories.

The language history of the American Indian in North Carolina is even more elusive than in other parts of the country thanks to their relatively early encounters with Europeans in this region. In 1929 linguist and anthropologist Dr. Edward Sapir described the incredible diversity of American Indian languages: "Few people realize that within the confines of the United States there is spoken today [in 1929] a far greater variety of languages...than in the whole of Europe. We may go further. We may say, quite literally and safely that in the state of California alone there are greater and more numerous linguistic extremes than can be illustrated in all the length and breadth of Europe." It is estimated that there were around 400 distinct native North American languages at the time of the European arrival. Nearly half of these languages are now extinct, and about 70 percent of the remaining languages have few if any younger speakers. Less than 0.1 percent of North Carolina's population speak a language native to North Carolina, and the majority of that small group are Cherokee. Even among those enrolled in the Eastern band of Cherokee, fewer than 10 percent speak the language with moderate proficiency, and a much smaller percentage of speak it fluently. Current estimates of fluent Cherokee speakers from tribal members range from 200-300.

Countering these dire predictions is an unprecedented interest in preserving American Indian languages. Around the country – including in the mountains of North Carolina – there are concentrated efforts to bridge the generation gap so that American Indian languages do not die with the passing of the current elders. In addition to preserving currently spoken but endangered languages, another remarkable trend is occurring: some tribal groups are attempting to revive previously dead languages (languages with no speakers.)

**Discuss with your partner:**

1. What can North Carolina's place names teach us about our state's diverse past?
2. In what way were American Indian and European settlers connected?
3. What negative impacts did European settlement have on American Indians?
4. How many American Indian languages were present at the time of European contact? What does this tell us about American Indian diversity?
5. What happened to American Indian languages and why?
6. Why do you think there is an interest in preserving and resurrecting American Indian languages?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Cherokee Language & Syllabary

The Cherokee language is written in a *syllabary*, a kind of alphabet in which each character represents a complete syllable. In English, each character (or letter) usually represents a single *phoneme*, or sound. The English language has far too many syllables (more than ten thousand!) for an English syllabary to be useful, but the Cherokee syllabary is a practical way of writing down the spoken Cherokee language.

The syllabary was developed by a Cherokee silversmith named Sequoyah, also known as George Gist or George Guess, between 1809 and 1821. Sequoyah originally wanted simply to be able to write his own name, so that like other silversmiths he could sign his work. He first tried *pictographs*, characters that visually represent entire words (as Chinese

a	e	i	o	u	v [ə]
D a	R e	T i	Ꭰ o	Ꭱ u	Ꭲ v
Ꭳ ga Ꭴ ka	Ꭶ ge	Ꭷ gi	Ꭸ go	Ꭹ gu	Ꭺ gv
Ꭽ ha	Ꭾ he	Ꭿ hi	Ꮀ ho	Ꮁ hu	Ꮂ hv
Ꮄ la	Ꭽ le	Ꭾ li	Ꭿ lo	Ꮀ lu	Ꮁ lv
Ꮃ ma	Ꮄ me	Ꮅ mi	Ꮆ mo	Ꮇ mu	
Ꮊ na Ꮋ hna Ꮌ nah	Ꮎ ne	Ꮏ ni	Ꮐ no	Ꮑ nu	Ꮒ nv
Ꮓ qua	Ꮔ que	Ꮕ qui	Ꮖ quo	Ꮗ quu	Ꮘ quv
Ꮙ s Ꮚ sa	Ꮛ se	Ꮜ si	Ꮝ so	Ꮞ su	Ꮟ sv
Ꮠ da Ꮡ ta	Ꮢ de Ꮣ te	Ꮤ di Ꮥ ti	Ꮦ do	Ꮧ du	Ꮨ dv
Ꮩ dla Ꮪ tla	Ꮫ tle	Ꮬ tli	Ꮭ tlo	Ꮮ tlu	Ꮯ tlv
Ꮮ tsa	Ꮯ tse	Ꮰ tsi	Ꮱ tso	Ꮲ tsu	Ꮳ tsv
Ꮴ wa	Ꮵ we	Ꮶ wi	Ꮷ wo	Ꮸ wu	Ꮹ ww
Ꮺ ya	Ꮻ ye	Ꮼ yi	Ꮽ yo	Ꮾ yu	Ꮿ yv

characters do), but found that this would have required thousands of symbols. Instead, he designed a symbol for each syllable in the spoken Cherokee language.



Watch the one-minute clip about the Cherokee syllabary at

<http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/8/video8-10.php>. Or, scan the QR code with your smartphone's QR Code Reader.

Some Cherokee leaders opposed his work, believing that written language was at best worthless and at worst evil. They said that white men's words dried up and blew away like leaves when the words no longer suited them. Sequoyah, perhaps making fun of this idea, called his syllabary "talking leaves."

But the syllabary quickly caught on. Schools began teaching it almost immediately, and the Cherokee Nation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century officially adopted it in 1825. According to some accounts, by 1830, as many as 90 percent of the Cherokee were literate in their own language. This made the Cherokee the most highly literate group in America at the time. American-born European Americans as a group didn't reach this level for at least another 50 years, and America as a whole took until 1910. Books, religious texts, almanacs, and newspapers were published using the syllabary, and the Bible was one of the first books to be translated into Cherokee.

Between 1828 and 1834, the Cherokee published a newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The paper was published in both Cherokee and English and distributed in North Carolina and neighboring states. It was the first newspaper published by any American Indian group and the first written in an American Indian language. State agents stopped the paper's publication in 1834 and shortly thereafter the Georgia Guard confiscated the printing press to ensure that it could not be used to stir up pro-Cherokee sentiment during their forced removal, but the paper was later resurrected in Oklahoma by the Cherokee Nation.

There are two major dialects of Cherokee currently spoken in the United States. The Cherokee in North Carolina (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) speak what is known as Kituwah, while the Cherokee of Oklahoma (Cherokee Nation) speak Otali. Kituwah is, in general, the more conservative branch of the language in that it has fewer changes than the western variety. The group that stayed in North Carolina at the time of forced



removal had already separated from the rest of the Cherokee over what they saw as a departure from traditional cultural norms. There are also far more Cherokees in Oklahoma than in North Carolina (288,000 vs. 13,000). And the Cherokee in North Carolina have traditionally been more insulated from other American Indian groups that might influence their spoken and written Cherokee. The two groups have now lived more than 750 miles apart for nearly 175 years, resulting in some significant dialect differences between the groups, but the language varieties are still mutually intelligible.

### The Transition to “English-Only” & Indian Boarding Schools

“Amid ethnic shopping and the American romanticization of American Indian culture, many American Indian groups are struggling with their own identities in the modern world. In no way is this identity struggle more keenly apparent than in language. American Indian groups across the nation are rushing desperately to attempt to revitalize languages that are on the verge of becoming extinct.

The transition to English was due to in part to the educational mandates that the federal government imposed on American Indians. Sarah Margaret Sneed, a member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians in North Carolina, discovered through interviews with community elders that the ‘English-only’ policy enacted in the schools was strictly enforced at home as well. The elders she interviewed who attended the Cherokee Boarding School in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century recalled some incidents of children being punished at school for speaking Cherokee, but the real threat to the language came from the school-instilled sense of shame the Cherokee felt for speaking their language. Sneed’s parents, who attended schools in the 1920s, refused to teach her or her siblings any of the Cherokee language. They felt it could only lead to trouble for their children. Thus the threat to the language moved from forces outside the community to those inside the community: most of the next two generations would not be exposed to the language in the home, leading to a quick decline in the number of Cherokee speakers.”

**Watch the one-minute clip about Cherokee Boarding Schools at**

<http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/8/video8-5.php>. Or, scan QR code with your smart phone’s QR Code Reader.

#### TRANSCRIPT:

**[Narrator]:** Prior to colonization, that area that would become North Carolina was home to numerous native language groups, including Iroquoian, Algonquian, and Siouan language families. In 1870, the United States government established mandatory boarding schools for Indians across the country. Young Indians were forced to live apart from their parents in the federal schools. Their hair was cut, their clothes were replaced by school uniforms, and the use of their native language was punished severely. All of these children were assigned new English names.

**[Myrtle Driver]:** They wanted to civilize us, I suppose. They were punished for being — for speaking Cherokee, so I think that was when it became endangered. Of course, you know, we feel the effects of it now because there are so many that don’t speak the language.



### Language Revitalization

The English-only policies of the boarding schools were largely effective in achieving their purpose with respect to suppressing American Indian languages. Across the United States, the vast majority of American Indian languages that survived the initial contact period have been lost or currently endangered. A 2005 survey

conducted by the Cherokee tribe in North Carolina identified only 460 fluent speakers of Cherokee – of whom 72% were over 50 – a number that tribal elders claim has since dwindled to somewhere between 200 and 300.

This stark finding launched an intensive, community-based language revitalization project. The project has a number of components, including the Kituwah Academy, an early childhood immersion program that teaches parents and children to read together in Cherokee. Since 2007, all Cherokee students have been required to speak some Cherokee in order to graduate from high school. The community has also begun adult education programs in the Qualla Boundary as well as events that bring older and younger speakers together. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina have also reached out to the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma to create workshops to discuss their common language and to help adapt it to the modern world.

**Watch the clip about learning Cherokee. To access the clip, scan QR code with the devices QR Code Reader or visit <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/8/video8-13.php>**

“Our language is who we are. Once you start learning the language, it branches out to all other areas – history, culture, traditions. So when they’re learning the language they’re learning, you know, everything about the Cherokee people as well.” – *Myrtle Driver, native Cherokee speaker.*

“The Cherokee Culture and language will survive because of the great emphasis that’s being going on for the last five or six years. And I think that we are getting to the children at the right time. And that is [from] birth... on.” – *Jean Bushyhead, a local Cherokee teacher*

“All our elders know it... [I]f we don’t learn it, nobody’ll know it, and it’s like our heritage is gone. Not many people can say they have – they can speak two different languages, and I mean, especially a Native American language, and I think it’s pretty cool that... we’re learning our heritage.” – *Harley Young, a Cherokee high school student*



*Adapted and edited from Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina and Learn NC’s “The Cherokee Language and Syllabary,” <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/4530>.)*

**Answer:**

1. Why was Sequoyah’s development of the Cherokee syllabary significant? Why do you think some Cherokee were resistant to it?
2. Why do you think the Cherokee were able to achieve such high levels of literacy decades before European Americans?
3. Why was the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper stopped?

4. Why do you think the Cherokee (as well as other American Indians) were forced to go to boarding schools? What happened at these schools?
5. Why do you think boarding schools enacted a strict “English-only” policy, despite the fact that American Indian languages were spoken in America long before English was?
6. What impact do you think these boarding schools had on American Indians who attended them? What impact did they have on American Indian culture throughout history?
7. Many Cherokee are trying to preserve the Cherokee language today from extinction. Why do you think it is important to some Cherokee that their children learn their traditional language?
8. Why do some young people want to learn Cherokee?
9. What are some of the ways the revitalization project is trying to ensure Cherokee is learned and spoken? What other ideas would you recommend for ensuring Cherokee language revitalization and education is successful and long lasting?

## Cherokee Preservation Project

Imagine that you work for the Cherokee Preservation and Education Program, whose mission is the revitalization of the Cherokee language. Your group has just been granted money and you must decide the most effective ways to spend it. Work with your group to develop a **10-point plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee language**. This means you must devise 10 of the most effective ways to ensure that Cherokee tribal members are learning the Cherokee language and why this is an important part of cultural preservation, and that the entire community (Cherokee as well as other North Carolinians) have knowledge of and respect for this important language movement.

Your plan must include ideas for **education, community involvement and marketing**, among others.

For example, point 1 of your 10 point plan might be:

*Open the Kituwah Academy, an early childhood emersion program for preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The program will specifically target young learners who will serve as the foundational generations of future Cherokee language speakers, with the goal of eventually returning the spoken Cherokee language to tribal spheres of governance, education, and other community gatherings. The school will also offer community programs and will specifically teach parents and children to read together in Cherokee. Parents must commit to enrolling in day or evening language classes, and to connecting their student with a fluent speaker—a relative, neighbor, or family friend—on a daily basis.*



1. Utilizing what you have learned thus far, brainstorm all of the ideas you can think of for ensuring that Cherokee tribal members learn about the importance of language preservation, as well as learn the Cherokee language itself. Further, consider how you can ensure all North Carolinians learn about and understand the importance of this language preservation to the Cherokee culture, and to the heritage of our entire state.
2. As you brainstorm, get as specific and creative as you can. Think about projects, events, advertising, marketing, community involvement, etc. Remember to stress WHY this is important and what it means not only for the Cherokee, but for the entire state.
3. Choose what your group believes are the 10 best ways to ensure long term success of the education and revitalization of the Cherokee language, both within the Cherokee tribe and throughout North Carolina.
4. Once you have selected your 10 points, work on providing at least a paragraph of details regarding what each point involves, why it is important, and what it will accomplish. Your group should be prepared to present your ideas to the remainder of the class, who will then vote on which ideas they feel would be most successful.

## **Mission**

The Cherokee Preservation Foundation's mission is to preserve our native culture, protect and enhance our natural environment, and create appropriate and diverse economic opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and our neighbors in western North Carolina.

Examples of work where we are involved include Cherokee language revitalization, perpetuation of Cherokee artistic traditions, leadership development programs for EBCI tribal members, support of entrepreneurship to diversify the regional economy, connecting rural schools with broadband and helping teachers learn and embrace technology-based learning tools, and renewable energy and energy efficiency programs.

The Foundation was established as part of the Second Amendment to the Tribal-State Compact between the EBCI and the State of North Carolina. We are an independent nonprofit foundation funded by the EBCI from gaming revenues generated by the Tribe. We are not associated with any for-profit gaming entity.

## **Language Revitalization Project**

Faced with the situation of elder speakers dying far more quickly than new speakers have been emerging, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is working to revitalize the Cherokee language. "Speaking a language means we have a culture," said an elder. "There is a big difference between people who have a culture and people with a history." Cherokee Preservation Foundation is investing significantly in the complex effort.

In 2005, with the first of many significant investments from Cherokee Preservation Foundation, the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP) of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians initiated the development of a 10-year plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee language. As a starting point, the Foundation funded a survey whose results indicated that 460 fluent speakers were then living in Cherokee communities, with 72 percent of them over the age of 50 and elder speakers dying far more quickly than new speakers were emerging. The process of revitalizing the language is complex. While it has been spoken for hundreds of years, there is little in written form that can be used for instruction and few people are trained in teaching it.

In recent years, Cherokee Preservation Foundation has invested over \$4.5 million in a multi-faceted effort that includes:

- The 10-year plan created by local leaders with the help of knowledgeable consultants.
- Curriculum development, teaching materials and teacher training for a total immersion program for children, beginning when they are preschoolers, which enables them to learn Cherokee as their first language. The participating children and their parents learn to speak and read together. The Tribe operates the Kituwah Academy.
- Creation of a post-secondary degree program for future certified elementary education teachers of Cherokee language at Western Carolina University.
- Scholarships for future teachers of Cherokee language.
- Community-based language programs for children and adults on the Qualla Boundary who want to learn Cherokee as a second language.
- Speaker gatherings that bring together fluent speakers so they can regularly use the language and provide stories and word lists which are shaped into curriculum material for immersion classes. The gatherings are a source of pride and fun for the elder speakers, who find a sense of community and trust in the setting.
- Language symposiums that bring together the EBCI, the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and the United Keetoowah Band to discuss the status of their common language.

## **What Has Been Accomplished**

During the past ten years, much has been accomplished by the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program and Western Carolina University, along with community-based language learning offered by the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. In 2010, Cherokee Preservation Foundation commissioned a mid-plan assessment by

native language experts to help identify how the Cherokee language initiative is doing and what is needed to help achieve its long-term goals.

The assessment reported solid progress in the effort to save the Cherokee language, with the authors saying:

- It is clear that the three community partners are engaged in work that comprises the core elements of language revitalization: language immersion with young children; teacher development; language material development; and adult learning. Language is viewed as critical to Cherokee tribal identity, history, culture and leadership.
- The initiative is utilizing all known best practices in Native language revitalization.
- There is a high level of commitment and determination among many key stakeholders.
- The key partners in the Cherokee language initiative are staffed by qualified, capable, committed, passionate individuals.
- A number of stakeholders believed the progress or impact of the initiative is “significant”; that there is a raising of consciousness regarding the status of the Cherokee language and the need to restore it; and that Cherokee language is heard more, seen more, appreciated more, and being used more by the younger generation—all of which are indicators of revitalization.
- A significant amount of space, technical support and equipment has been committed to the initiative.
- Integration of Cherokee language into the everyday lifestyle of the community is evident.

### **Challenges**

The assessors also acknowledged there are significant challenges inherent to the complex task of revitalizing Cherokee language. These include the mammoth [huge] undertaking of creating learning materials for varied ages, finding and training teachers, designing programs for adult second-language learning, and identifying tools to measure fluency—all of which are being done for the first time. The assessment report contained recommendations to strengthen the shared vision and planning, as well as the capacities and coordination of those working on language revitalization.

These recommendations will help language initiative partners strengthen their work over coming years, and their efforts are vital. “Speaking a language means we have a culture,” said an elder. “There is a big difference between people who have a culture and people with a history.”

From <http://cherokeepreservation.org/what-we-do/cultural-preservation/cherokee-language/>

### **Think About It**

- The Foundation started with a community survey – did any of our plans think to do this? Why do you think they started this way and why was it important to do so?
- What components did the actual revitalization plan include? Which of these components are similar to your group’s ideas? Which projects did the Cherokee include that your group did not and what do you think kept you from thinking about such ideas? Are there any ideas our class had that are not included in the actual plan that you think would really be helpful to their mission? Explain.
- The actual revitalization plan also included an assessment. Did your group’s plan include this? Why do you think the Cherokee revitalization project included this and why is this an important component of project implementation?
- What are the various challenges the project faced? What do you think it will take to overcome such challenges?