



## Using First Amendment Freedoms: Native American Leaders

### **Purpose:**

The First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and of petition, can be seen through a study of two Native American leaders, who used such liberties to advance the interests of their people. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the power of written language in expressing ideas and preserving a community's history as they examine the life and achievements of Sequoyah. Similarly, students will better understand the power of the spoken word, as uttered through the many speeches and correspondence by Chief Joseph in his attempts to peacefully petition the government for his people's rights. This lesson may be used in conjunction with celebrations during Native American Heritage month or anytime throughout the school year.

### **Procedure:**

1. Ask students to read aloud the following quote, written on the blackboard:  
"The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it."  
Tell students that this was part of a speech given by a Native American leader, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce nation, over 100 years ago. Conduct a classroom discussion, asking students to summarize in their own words what they think Chief Joseph is saying. Do students believe all people are equal and should have equal rights? What types of rights do they think Chief Joseph wanted for his people? How do most people gain rights they have been denied? What role does free speech play in people gaining their rights? Inform students that today's lesson will focus on learning about two Native Americans who helped their people gain rights by using the First Amendment's freedoms of speech and the press.
2. Ask students to imagine what life was like over one hundred years ago. Remind them that there were no cell phones, no computers or the Internet, no movies, no television, no radios, etc. How did people and families who lived far distances apart communicate with each other? Students should arrive at the conclusion that people had written languages, that people wrote letters to one another or printed their thoughts in newspapers which could be sent far distances. Next, ask students to imagine living over one hundred years ago but they cannot read because there is no alphabet which could be put together to make words. How would families living far distances communicate with one another? Inform students that this was what life was like if you lived in any Native American community because no alphabet existed in any Native American language. Inform students that some Native Americans developed a system of sending smoke signals to each other, while others created pictures and drawings that could tell a story. But most messages had to be delivered in person, by runners or riders going from village to village, spreading news by word of mouth.
3. Divide students into two groups. Assign each group one Native American leader, Chief Joseph or Sequoyah, and read the short summary about each leader. As they read, ask students to consider how each leader used the First Amendment to help his nation's people.
4. Conduct a classroom discussion of the groups' findings. Make a class Venn diagram, using the template titled First Amendment and Native American Leaders. On the left hand side of the Venn, ask students to list information they learned about Sequoyah and his use of the First

Amendment. In the right hand side of the Venn, ask students to list information about how Chief Joseph used freedom of speech to help his people. In the middle, overlapping section of the Venn, ask students to list one or two characteristics these two leaders share in common.

5. Option: If available in the school or community libraries, locate two of the recommended children's' books below- one about Sequoyah and one about Chief Joseph. The instructor may wish to read the books aloud to the class, giving each student an individual copy of the Venn diagram. As the teacher reads, students should jot down their ideas on the Venn diagram to be shared in a follow-up class discussion.

6. Extension: If this lesson is used during Native American Heritage month in November, teachers can use the PowerPoint, *Our Native American Heritage*, to commemorate Native Americans' contributions in American history. In addition, students should be encouraged to study contemporary leaders, such as Wilma Mankiller, former chief of the Cherokee, examining how freedom of speech and the press are still used today to express the thoughts and wishes of Native American peoples. Students may wish to investigate the modern publication of the Cherokee Phoenix, a newspaper first published using Sequoyah's syllabary and which is still published, <http://www.cherokeephoenix.org>.

### ***Recommended Children's Literature:***

#### **Sequoyah: The Cherokee Man Who Gave His People Writing** (ages 4-8)

Written by James Rumford.

New York: Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, c2004.

Robert F. Sibert Book Award A winner of the Sibert Award, the book is an intelligent examination of the Cherokee metalworker who gave his people their own written language. In short paragraphs accompanied by richly textured illustrations, Rumford presents the major events in Sequoyah's life, culminating in his invention of the Cherokee syllabary. The author writes with an eloquence that echoes the Native American oral tradition and makes this one of those rare gems of read-aloud nonfiction.

#### **Ahyoka and the Talking Leaves: The Story of the Cherokee Alphabet** (ages 7-10)

Written by Connie and Peter Roop; illustrated by Yoshi Miyake

New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, c1994

The story tells of Sequoyah, the Cherokee who invented an alphabet for his people in the early 19th century. His daughter, Ahyoka, helped him, but exactly how is unknown. In this historical novel, the authors have invented a situation that seems very likely to have happened. The daughter, Ahyoka, is a realistically drawn character based on the authors' extensive research.

#### **Chief Joseph: Nez Perce Peacekeeper** (ages 4-8)

Written by Diane Shaughnessy and Jack Carpenter

New York: Rosen Publishing Group, c1998

This book is part of a series that goes beyond stereotypical depictions of great Native American leaders to celebrate their achievements with facts within an historical context. This inspiring narrative serves as excellent supplemental material for American history classes.

**Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé** (ages 4-8)

Written by Bill McAuliffe

Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, c1999

Illustrations include actual historical photographs of the Native American leader and his people. This work is an appealing read for young students, offering an insightful introduction to this Native American leader, using quotes from his most famous speeches.

## TALKING LEAVES and the Story of Sequoyah

Like many Cherokee in the late 1700s, Sequoyah helped his family in the fur trading business. But upon becoming a family man, he learned the trade of a metalworker and was known by the name George Guess. People came from far and near to have him make things for them; things such as spurs, horse bridles, and knives.

One day the men in his shop were talking about the white man's "speaking leaves"- pages with writing on them. Although the Cherokee had no written language, Sequoyah told them he could invent marks that could represent words. They all laughed at him. But this didn't stop him.

He started out by drawing pictures, but finally decided it was an impossible task because of the thousands of pictures that would be required to stand for each word in the Cherokee language.

He then started studying the sounds of the words in the Cherokee language. He found there were about eighty unique sounds. He took the English alphabet and added more symbols of his own, creating a Cherokee alphabet in which each symbol represented a sound. With it he was able to write any word in the Cherokee language by making a symbol for each sound.

He spent twelve years working on his invention! When the alphabet was finally completed in 1821, Sequoyah tried to interest his tribesmen in learning the symbols. They still laughed at his ideas and thought he was crazy.

So, he began to teach his young daughter, Ahyoka, to read and write the new language. To prove the alphabet worked, Sequoyah sent his daughter to the other side of the village. Away from her, Sequoyah wrote a message taken by doubtful villagers to Ahyoka. She read the message to them and wrote a reply for them to take back to her father.

The tribesmen were finally convinced! This would be a valuable tool for talking and spreading ideas across the Cherokee nation's villages. It would also help preserve their history!

Within a short time, many people of the Cherokee nation could read and write in their own language. They published a newspaper called the *Cherokee Phoenix* and nicknamed "Talking Leaves." It was the first Indian newspaper published in the United States.

Sequoyah believed that expressing ideas and opinions was needed in a democracy like America. Today, you will find the name Sequoyah on many schools, where learning is important. Our state of Oklahoma displays his portrait in the state capitol, and a bronze statue of him stands in the United States Capitol in Washington D.C.





## Chief Joseph Speaks for Peace

Chief Joseph, known by his people as Nee-mee-poo, was a great leader of the Nez Perce people. He became famous for his many speeches, trying to convince his people that peace with the white man was the best path.

The Nez Perce were a peaceful nation living in villages from Idaho to Washington. But white settlers and gold prospectors moving west wanted the Nez Perce land.

At first, Chief Joseph led his warriors into battle against the U.S. army. But he realized that war was not the answer.

Chief Joseph surrendered and made this promise, "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

Many of the Nez Perce were sent to a reservation in Oklahoma, where many died

from diseases and hunger. Instead of fighting, Chief Joseph went to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Hayes. He used his skills as a great speaker to plead for his people.

Finally, the Nez Perce were allowed to return to the Pacific Northwest and their homeland in the Wallowa Valley of Idaho.

In his last years, Chief Joseph kept speaking for justice for his people. He held out the hope that America's promise of equality might one day be fulfilled for Native Americans as well. He spoke these words to his nation, "The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it."

