

Reading guide: Cherokee women

BY PAULINE S. JOHNSON

These questions will help to guide students' reading of "Cherokee Women¹" and encourage them to think critically about the text. The questions focus primarily on the Cherokee matrilineal kinship system and on the cultural differences between the Cherokee and the Europeans who arrived in the early 1700s.

Worksheet: Cherokee Women

1. Dr. Perdue writes that the white men who visited the Cherokee in the 1700s were amazed by the position of Cherokee women. Why do you think that was the case?
2. Describe in your own words the Cherokee matrilineal kinship system.
3. What do you find the most surprising about the system?
4. Why do you think the Europeans were so surprised that Cherokee women were the heads of the households?
5. In the Cherokee and other Native American cultures, which gender was mostly in charge of farming?
For the European settlers, which gender would do most of the work for farming?
6. Why could this have led to misunderstanding?
7. What kind of misunderstandings could have developed?
8. How could these misunderstandings have influenced the relationship between the two cultures as they met and interacted?
9. What rights and responsibilities did Cherokee women have that they lost as the white Americans began to dominate their culture?

Worksheet: Teacher's guide

1. Dr. Perdue writes that the white men who visited the Cherokee in the 1700s were amazed by the position of Cherokee women. Why do you think that was the case?
Students should understand that the European cultures were dominated by men, so they would have been surprised at the power and influence of Cherokee women.
2. Describe in your own words the Cherokee matrilineal kinship system.
Students should include the major components: a person is related only through the mother, he/she is not related to the father. They may also indicate the relationships with grandparents and uncles.
3. What do you find the most surprising about the system?
Most will indicate that the children were not related to the fathers, but other answers are possible.
4. Why do you think the Europeans were so surprised that Cherokee women were the heads of the households?
Answers will vary. Most should have some indication that European men were the heads of households.
5. In the Cherokee and other Native American cultures, which gender was mostly in charge of farming?
Female
For the European settlers, which gender would do most of the work for farming?
Male
6. Why could this have led to misunderstanding?
The groups were totally opposite in this.
7. What kind of misunderstandings could have developed?
Answers will vary. You may want to lead the students to discover that the Native Americans could have believed that European men were unmanly since they were doing "women's work." On the other side, the Europeans could have believed that the Native men were "lazy" since they mostly witnessed women doing work.
8. How could these misunderstandings have influenced the relationship between the two cultures as they met and interacted?
Answers will vary. Each group would have incorrect ideas about the men of the other culture. There could be a lack of respect and an underestimation of the other group.
9. What rights and responsibilities did Cherokee women have that they lost as the white Americans began to dominate their culture?
Most students will indicate some of those listed in the reading: "At this time white Americans did not believe that it was proper for women to fight wars, vote, speak in public, work outside the home, or even control their own children."

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

SOCIAL STUDIES (2003)

Grade 8

- **Goal 1:** The learner will analyze important geographic, political, economic, and social aspects of life in the region prior to the Revolutionary Period.
 - **Objective 1.02:** Identify and describe American Indians who inhabited the regions that became Carolina and assess their impact on the colony.

On the web

Cherokee women

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.8>

Before the arrival of Europeans in North America, women enjoyed a major role in the family life, economy, and government of the Cherokee Indians. Cherokee society was organized according to a matrilineal kinship system, and women were the heads of households. Women also did most of the farming and had a voice in government.

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-twoworlds/2.8>.

About the author

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I am currently the Director of a Teaching American History Grant for Buncombe County Schools, Asheville City Schools, and Madison County Schools. I have taught history and English in the seventh and eighth grades for over twenty-six years at Reynolds Middle School in Asheville, North Carolina. I am currently doing adjunct work for Mars Hill College and Western Carolina University. I have a Masters Degree from Western Carolina University and am Nationally Board Certified in Early Adolescence/Social Studies-History. I am certified to teach K-12 and I also have Academically-Intellectually Gifted certification.