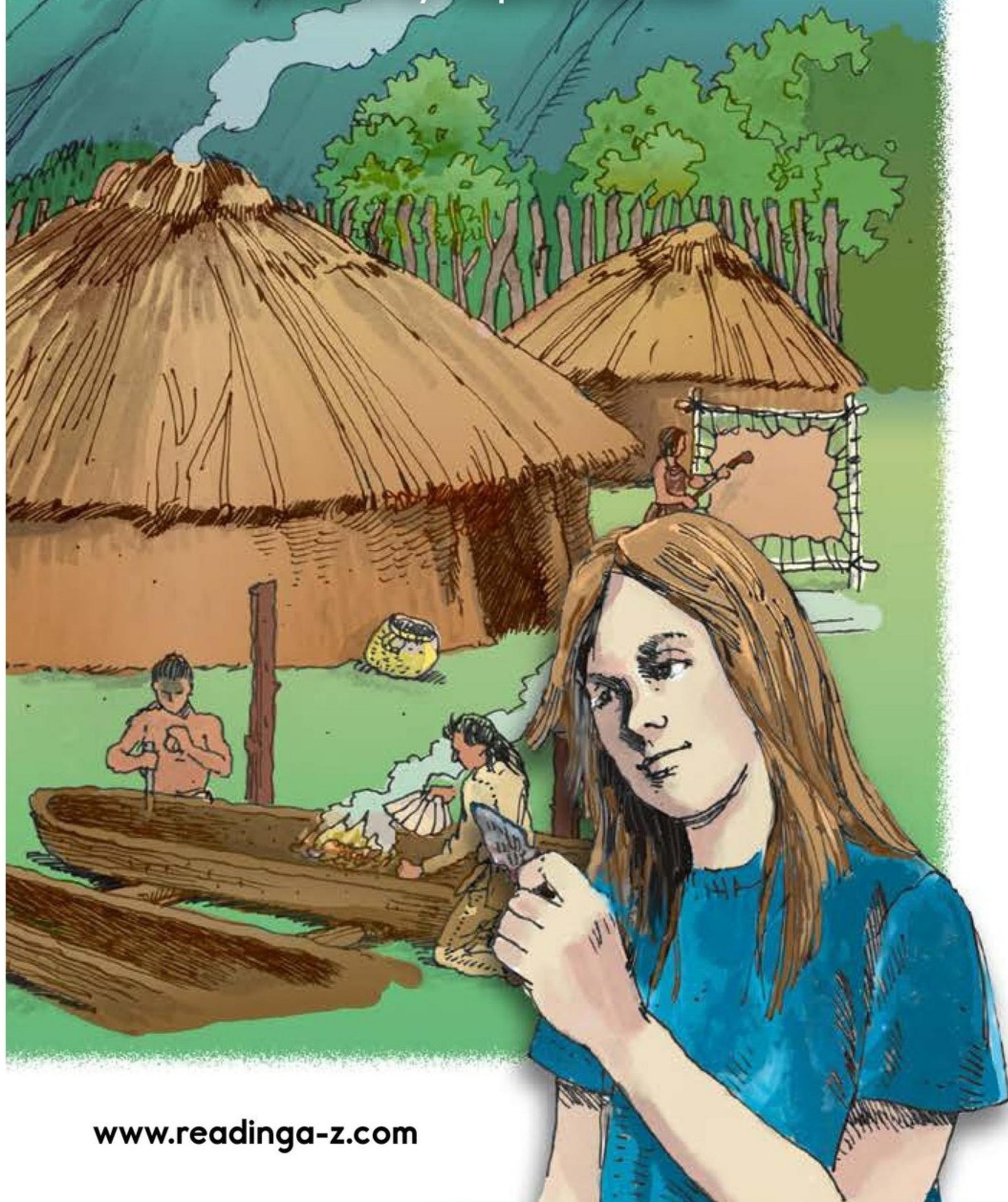


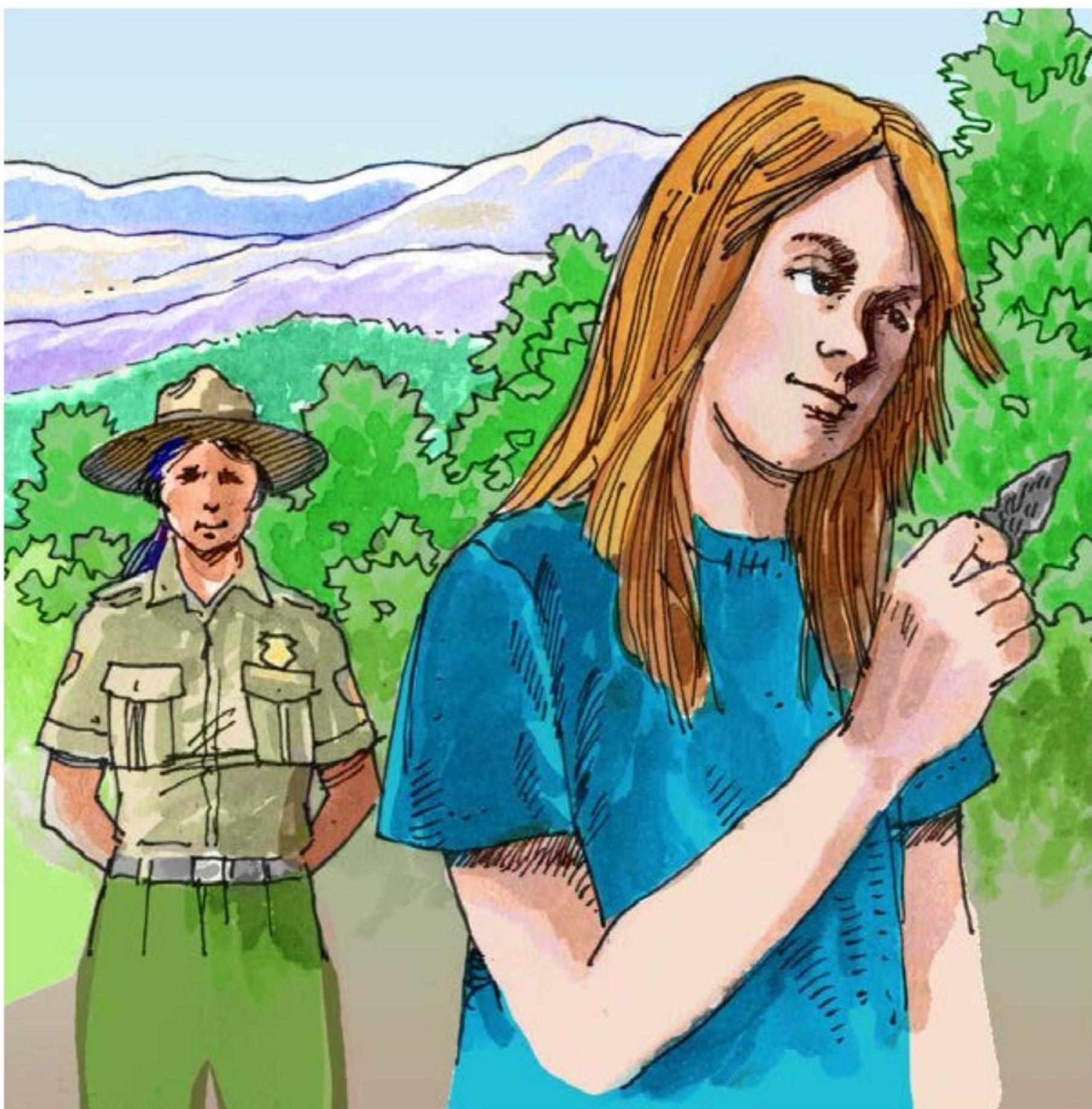
LEVELED BOOK • Z

The Cherokees

Written by David L. Dreier
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi



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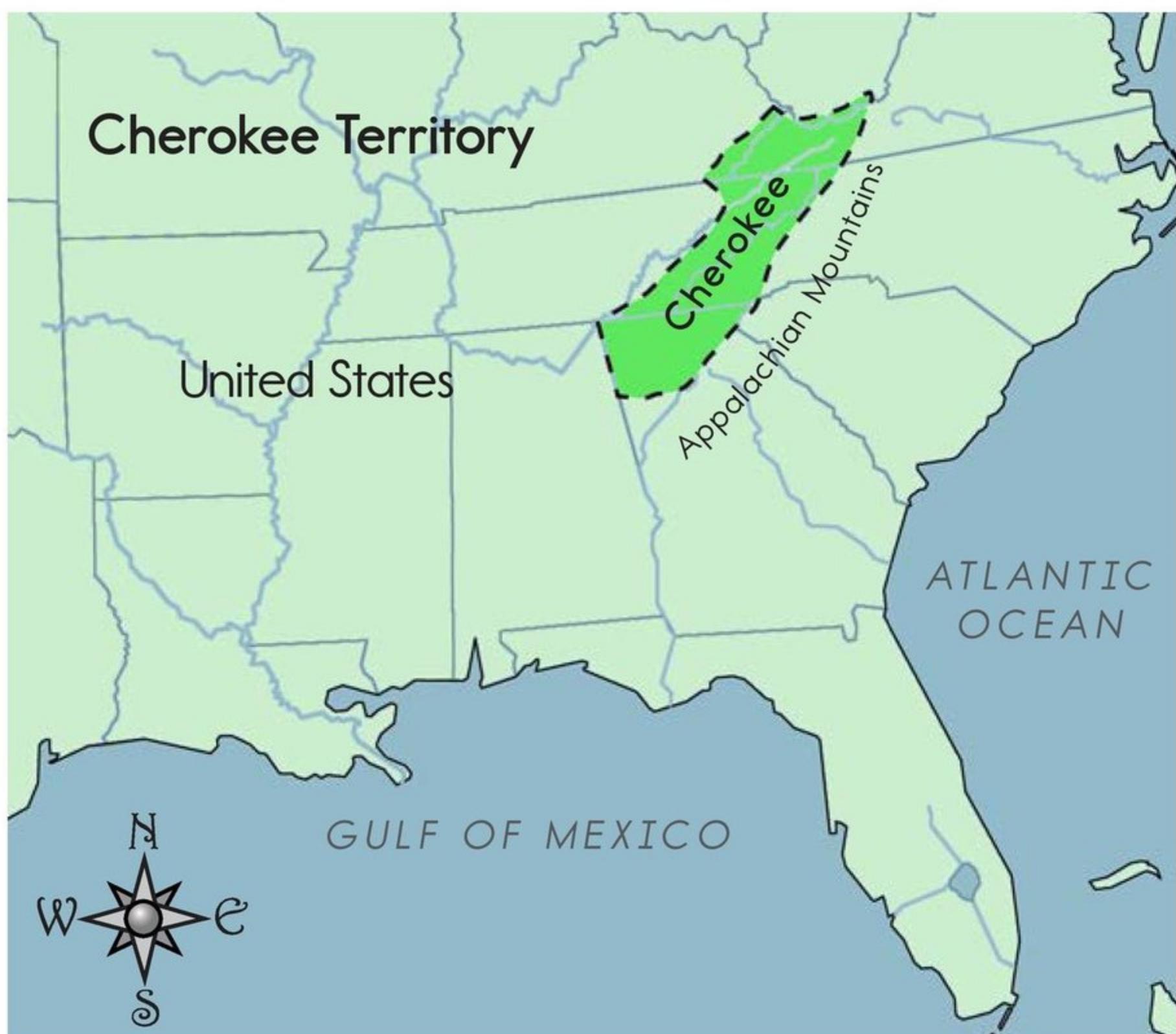
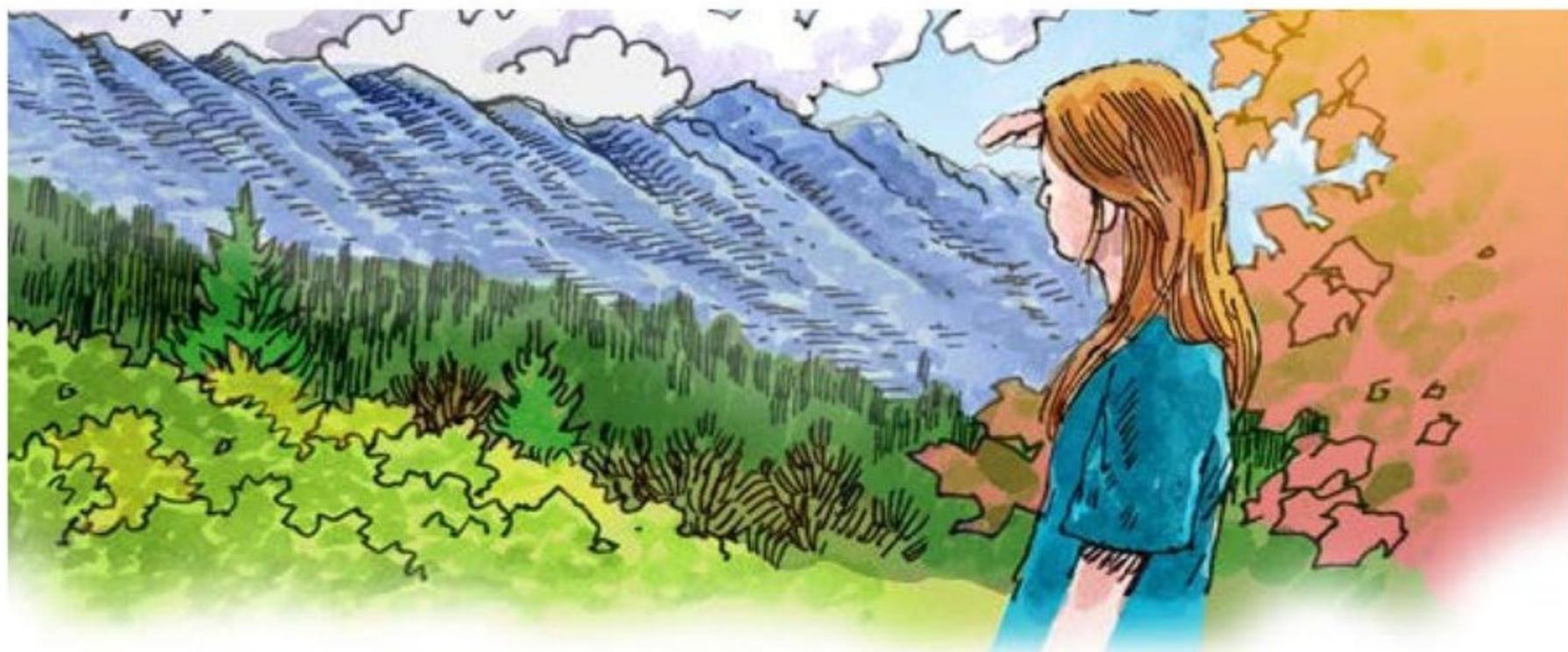


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A Link With the Past

With lunch over, a bored Debbie wandered away from the campsite. “Don’t go far,” her mother called after her as she cleaned off the picnic table.

Debbie rolled her eyes. “Don’t worry, Mom. I’m just gonna take a short walk.”

“Parents!” Debbie mumbled to herself. “Always worrying about every little thing.” At the age of twelve, Debbie was quite able to look after herself, thank you very much.

The girl strolled through a grove of fragrant pine trees, going nowhere in particular. She came to an overlook along the path and gazed across Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She saw several distant mountain ranges, and a bluish mist blanketed the valleys between the low, forested mountains. “This must be the most beautiful place in the world,” she sighed. “I wish we could live here.”

Debbie walked to a grass-covered **embankment** and sat down at the base of a tree. She picked up a stick and poked lazily at some loose soil by her feet. Suddenly she noticed a small brown object in the turned-up dirt. She picked it up, rubbed it clean, and examined it. It was some sort of stone point.

"Well, what have you there?" said a friendly female voice. Startled, Debbie stood up. A young woman in a park ranger's uniform was smiling down at her. She had a tan complexion and dark hair tied in a long ponytail.

Debbie held up the object. "I don't know what it is. Some pointed thing."



The ranger reached forward and gently took the object from the girl's hand. She looked at it and smiled—*a bit sadly*, Debbie thought.

"It's a flint arrowhead," the ranger said, "probably made hundreds of years ago by a Cherokee warrior."

"What's a Cherokee?" Debbie asked, taking the arrowhead back and rubbing it between her fingers.

"The Cherokees were Native American people who once lived in these mountains. They were my ancestors. I'm half Cherokee on my mother's side, and my name honors her family heritage—I'm Anna High Cloud. What's your name?"

"Debbie Smith. You have a really pretty name."

"Thank you. My people have many interesting names. And they have a very interesting—and often sad—history. Would you like to hear about it?"

Debbie nodded. "Sure."

"Well, then," said Anna, "make yourself comfortable, because there's quite a bit to tell."

Debbie leaned back against the tree. Anna adjusted her ranger hat, and then she began her story.



Olden Times

"Let's make this as visual as we can," Anna said. "I want you to actually see the things I'm telling you. Pretend you're wearing magic glasses that let you fly into hidden places and see into the past."

"Okay," said Debbie. "This is going to be fun." She adjusted her magic glasses with a smile.

Anna pointed to the mist-shrouded mountains. "Now, look out across those mountains and then fly back into the past and down into a valley. You're landing beside a beautiful rushing river—all clear and cold with a pebble bottom. Large fish are darting through the water."

"I can see it," Debbie exclaimed.

"Good. Now look around. There, near the bank of the river, is a large Cherokee village: about fifty houses made of tree branches and mud that look like big, round, upside-down baskets. In the center of the village is a large meeting house. You're looking at the way things were in the 1600s."

"More than a hundred people lived in this village," Anna continued. "It's one of about two hundred Cherokee villages in what became North Carolina—where we are now—and a few other southeastern states. There were more than twenty thousand Cherokee people, divided into seven large clans, or groups. The Cherokees had been living in this area for about six hundred years, since migrating from the north."



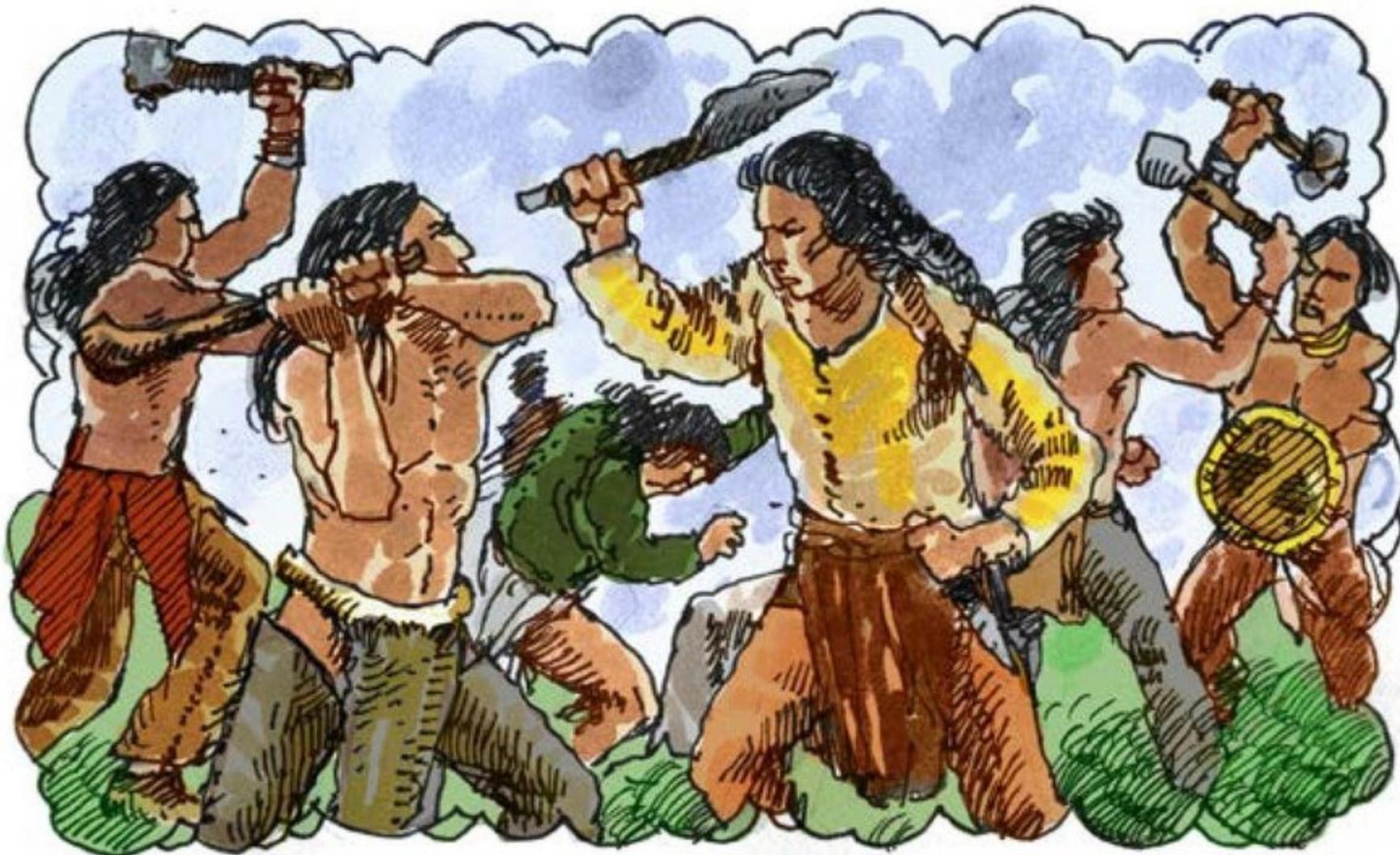
Debbie nodded, her eyes fixed on the past.

“These people didn’t call themselves Cherokees,” Anna said. “That name came from a word used by another Native American nation, the Creeks. The Creeks called my ancestors ‘the Chelokee,’ which means ‘People Who Speak Differently.’ The”—she wiggled two fingers of each hand in the air to make quote marks around the next word—“Cherokees’ called themselves the Principal People.”

Anna smiled. “Well, let’s see what’s going on in the village. Oh, look, some men are coming back from a hunt, carrying freshly killed deer on poles. The older children are out picking wild plants and berries. Many of the women are working in the village farm, tending crops of corn, beans, and squash.”

Debbie could see it all, as though she were watching a movie.

The ranger’s voice grew wistful. “The Cherokee people had a wonderful life in these mountains. They believed that the Creator—the Great Spirit, or God—would see to it that they never had to leave.”



Treaties and More Treaties

"Didn't the Cherokees ever have wars?" Debbie asked.

"Yes, they did," Anna replied. "I was just getting to that. War was always an important part of life. Nations fought with each other over land and to settle disputes. But they also fought one another just for the . . . the glory of it, I guess you'd say. Bravery in battle was how a young man made a name for himself. But the wars were usually limited. Nations didn't try to **exterminate** one another."

"However, things began to change when Europeans started settling in America in large numbers. That was in the early 1700s. Settlers were hungry for land, and they wanted all native people—including the Cherokees—removed."

Anna spoke more quickly now. “The Cherokees always tried to get along with the Europeans. They fought them only when they felt they had no choice. They signed one peace treaty after another, hoping each time that it would bring peace.”

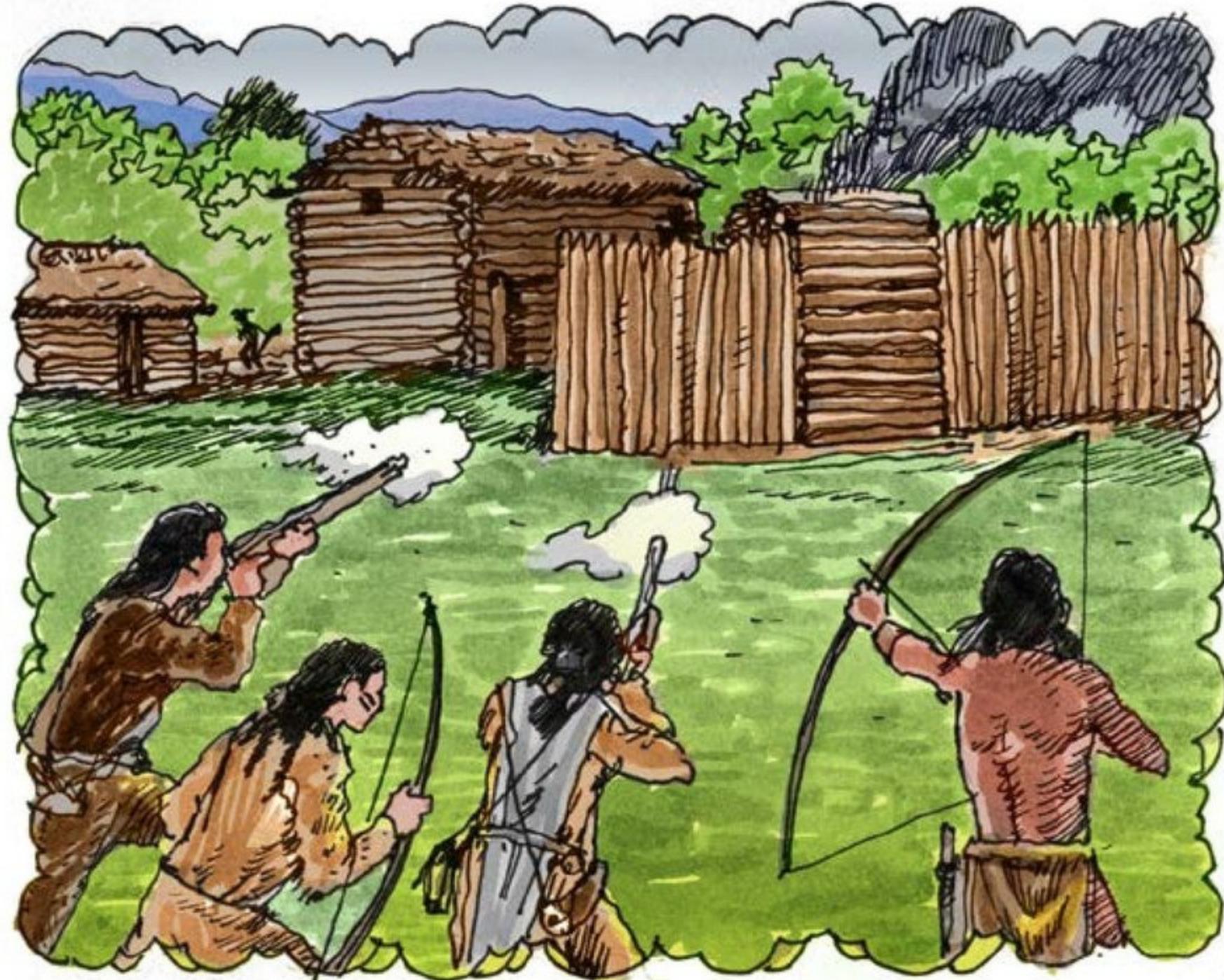
“They signed the first treaties with the British, when they ruled North America. Then, later, Cherokees signed treaties with the United States. Each treaty took more land away from the Cherokees. Every time, they were promised that they could have their remaining lands forever. But every time, the other side broke the treaty.”

“How come?” Debbie asked.

“Because there were too many people who wanted land—and because, at that time, many people didn’t think of Native Americans as people with rights. To them, the Cherokees and other Native Americans were just a dangerous **nuisance**. ”

“So why did the Cherokees keep signing treaties?” Debbie asked.

“They had no choice. It was either sign a treaty or go to war. So they signed. But one group of Cherokees, the Chickamaugas, finally decided that they would not sign any more treaties and continue to give up more of their land. For about twenty years, they fought settlers and soldiers.”



"Use your magic glasses and imagine hundreds of painted warriors shouting war cries as they attack a settlement with rifles, bows and arrows, and tomahawks."

Debbie shivered.

"By the late 1790s, the Chickamaugas' fight for land they believed was theirs was over. They gave up their land and moved west into Arkansas, which was ruled by Spain. The United States acquired the territory a few years later. The Chickamaugas then became part of the Western Cherokees who had already settled there. After that, warfare between the Cherokees and the Americans came to an end."

An Amazing Change

"So what happened next?" Debbie asked.

"Well," Anna replied, "have you heard the **expression** 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em'?"

Debbie shook her head back and forth.

"It means that if you can't defeat an opponent, you should change to become like your opponent, so the two of you can get along. The Cherokees still living in the East decided to change their way of life and become just like other Americans. They thought that if they did that, people would accept them and let them keep their remaining land."

"Did they change?" Debbie asked.

Anna nodded and smiled. "They sure did. Many Cherokees became successful plantation farmers and lived like the settlers. They also adopted the new American culture in other ways."

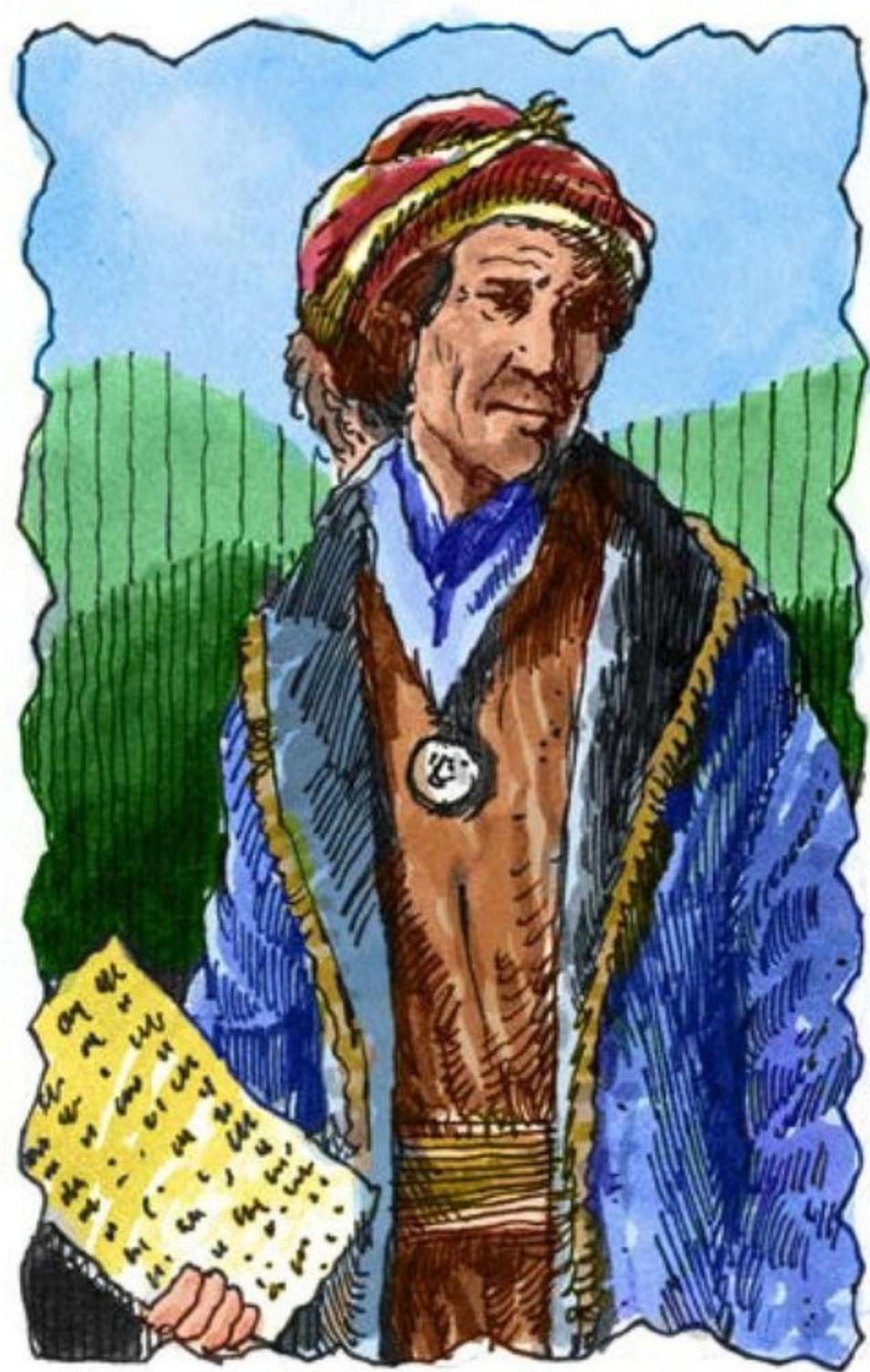


Debbie was fascinated. "What other ways?"

"The Cherokees built schools and established a system of courts. A Cherokee man named Sequoyah invented a type of alphabet for the Cherokee language, and most Cherokees learned to read. The Cherokees then published a newspaper and books in their own language. They even wrote a **constitution** for all their people, who called themselves the Cherokee Nation. When they had accomplished all this, they were very proud. They said to themselves, 'Surely, now, the people of the United States will let us live in peace.'"

Sequoyah's Accomplishment

Sequoyah (sih-KWOY-uh), who was half Cherokee, was born in about 1770. He single-handedly invented a new system of writing. He spent twelve years developing his writing system. The system is a syllabary (SIL-uh-bare-ee) that uses eighty-six symbols to represent all the syllables in the spoken Cherokee language.



Final Defeat

Anna gazed for a few moments at the misty mountains, the cherished homeland of her ancestors. “Well, now we’re coming to the saddest part of the story,” she said.

Debbie had suspected the tale might end badly and sat down with Anna next to the tree. “What happened?”

“Even though the Cherokees did everything they could to become like other Americans, it was useless. In 1830, Congress passed a law called the Indian Removal Act. The law required the Cherokees and four other tribes in the southeastern United States to move to a western area called the Indian Territory. They were given eight years to move themselves and all their possessions.”

“That was so unfair!”

“Yes, it was. The Cherokees decided to fight—but this time with lawyers. They went to the U.S. Supreme Court seeking protection, and the Supreme Court sided with them.”

“So they got to stay?”



"No. The president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, refused to enforce the Supreme Court decision. He was in favor of making the Cherokees and the other tribes leave the eastern United States. So the Cherokees decided to make one last try for justice."

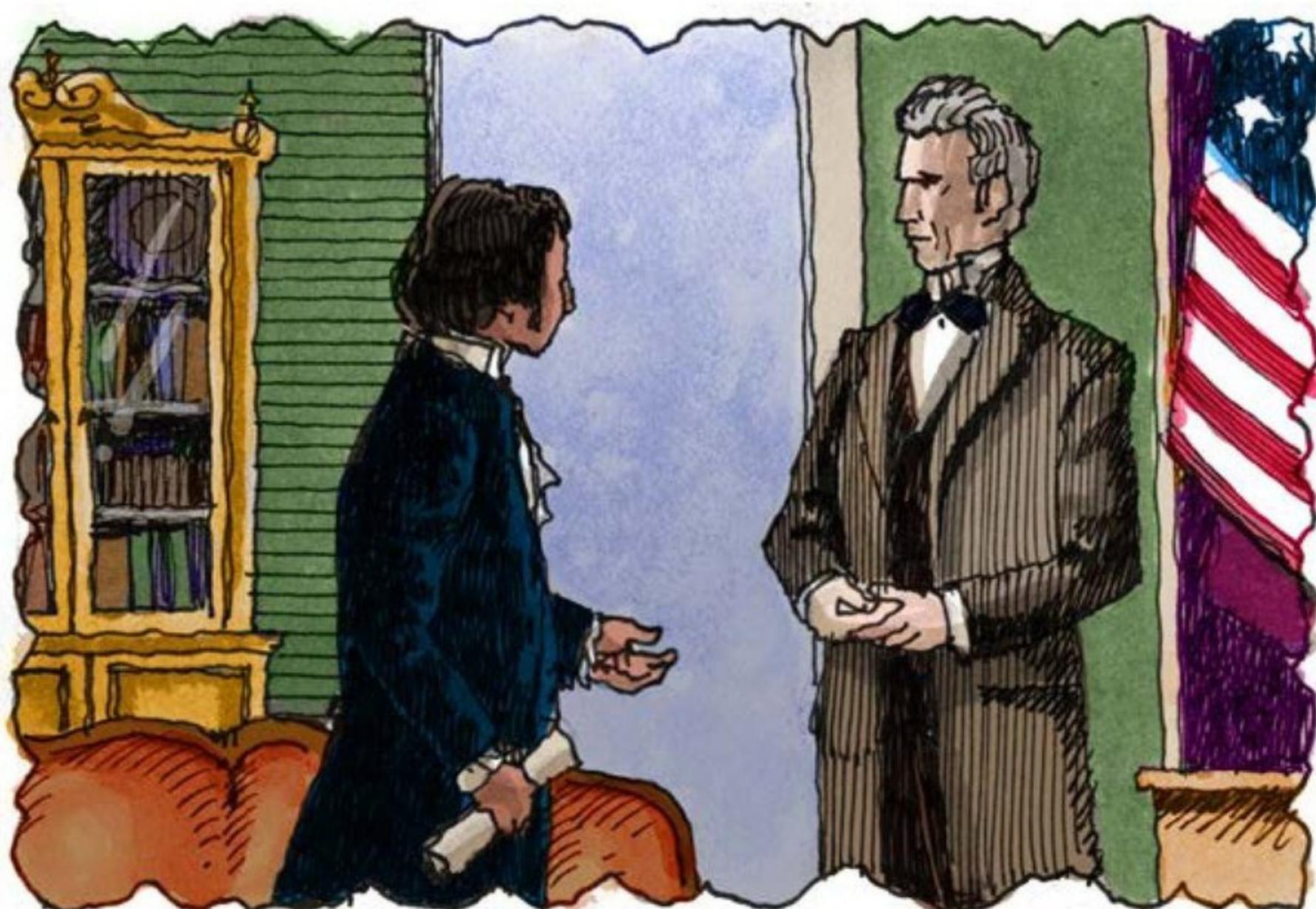
"What did they do?"

"They made a direct appeal to President Jackson. In 1834, a man named John Ross went to see the president. Even though Ross was only one-eighth Cherokee, he was deeply committed to the Cherokees, and he was their most important chief."

“Andrew Jackson was a stern-looking man. He was more than six feet tall, with bushy gray hair swept back from his forehead. John Ross was a short fellow, only five-and-a-half feet tall. But he made up for his lack of height with an unshakable **conviction** that his cause was right. Picture them meeting in Jackson’s office in the White House.”

“Okay,” said Debbie, with another adjustment of her invisible glasses.

“Jackson and Ross made polite conversation for a few minutes. Then they discussed the matter at hand. Ross insisted that the Indian Removal Act was wrong. He urged Jackson to let the Cherokees stay on their land and to protect them with U.S. troops. Jackson listened but said very little.”



“Ross thought he might have persuaded the president to do as he asked, but then his hopes were shattered. Jackson said that the Cherokees must go to the Indian Territory, and he wouldn’t budge from that position. The fate of the Cherokees was sealed.”

“In 1838, the deadline for the Cherokees to depart **voluntarily** for the Indian Territory arrived. Most of the Cherokees had refused to leave, so U.S. troops pulled them out of their homes. Mobs burned their houses and stole their cattle and possessions.”

“This is just awful,” Debbie said.

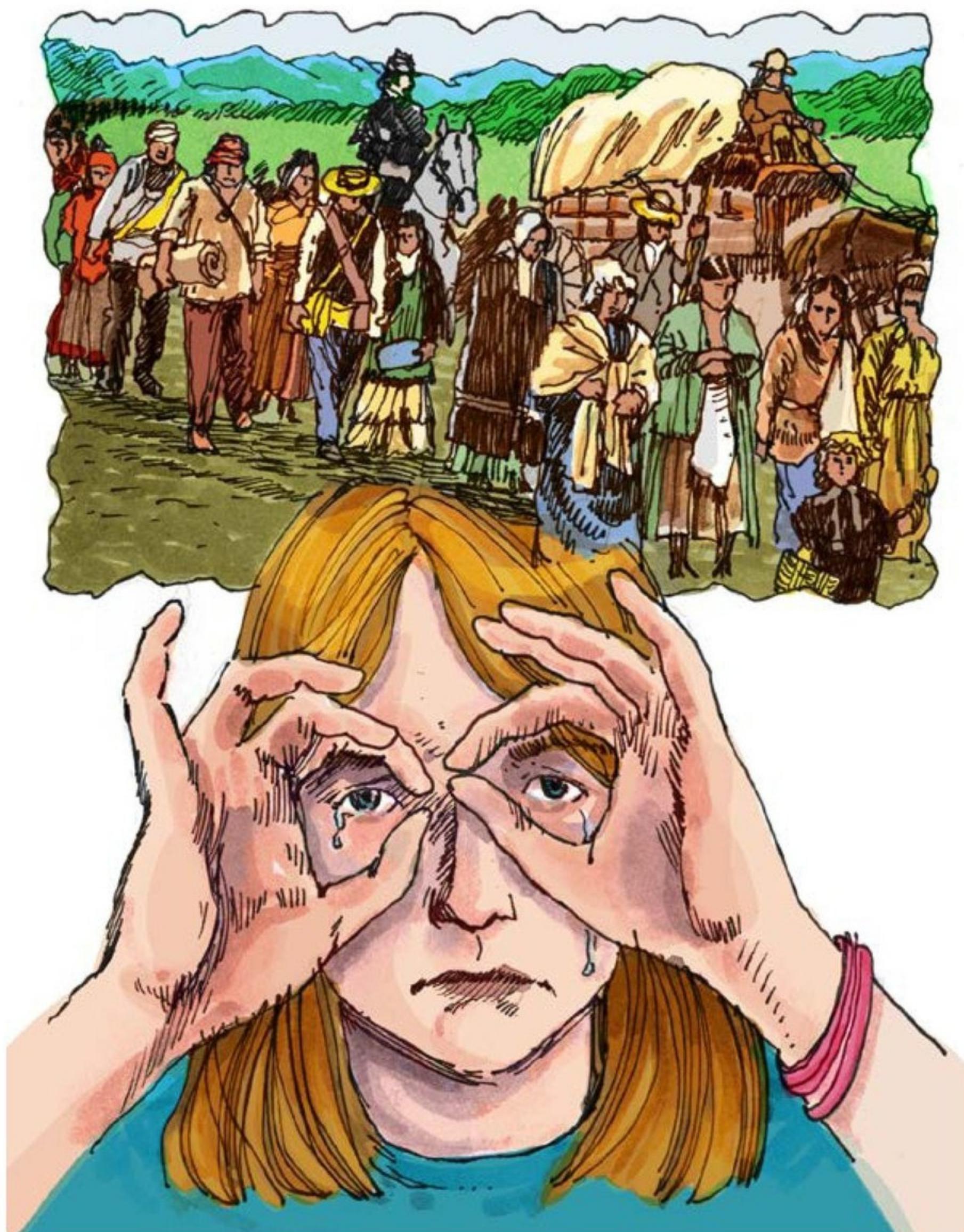
“It gets worse,” Anna replied. “The Cherokees were put in stockades—temporary prisons. Then they were shipped west on riverboats and in railroad boxcars. For the last eight hundred miles of the journey, they had to walk. All along the way, they were robbed and cheated by anyone who had a chance to do so.”

“Food supplies from the government were sometimes stolen. Many people got sick from hunger and from **unsanitary** living conditions. Of the eighteen thousand Cherokees who started the long journey, more than four thousand died before reaching the Indian Territory. Many of the dead were simply left at the side of the road.”

Debbie could see it all.

"This was such a terrible time for the Cherokees that it's called the Trail of Tears," Anna said.

Debbie had tears of her own trickling from the corners of her eyes.



A New Life in a New Land

"The Cherokees tried to make the best of their new situation," Anna continued. "They decided to start a new **civilization** in the Indian Territory. First, they joined with the Western Cherokees—remember, the ones who lived in Arkansas?"

Debbie nodded.

"Those Cherokees had also been sent to the Indian Territory. So, the Western Cherokees became part of the Cherokee Nation. And the Cherokee Nation became part of a group of southeastern tribes that were called the Five Civilized Tribes. The other four tribes, which included the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, had also been resettled in the Indian Territory.



"The Cherokees and the other tribes did well in their new home. Each tribe had its own land and formed its own government. Some Cherokees became very **prosperous**, just as they had been back in the east. But most of them lived very simple lives."

"So everything went pretty much okay after that?" Debbie asked.

"Well, not quite. When the American Civil War started in 1861, the Cherokee Nation sided with the South—the Confederate states. After the war ended, the United States was angry about what the Cherokees had done. So it started taking away their land for railroad construction and to build towns."

"Sometime after that, the government divided the remaining lands of the Cherokees and the other Five Civilized Tribes into small pieces. The Cherokees ended up with just a tiny part of the land they had originally been given."

"But it was all just part of the settlement of the country. People wanted to make that area into a state. In 1907, what had once been the Indian Territory became the state of Oklahoma."





Back to the Present Day

“Well, that’s just about the end of the story,” Anna said. “There are now about 300,000 Cherokees living in the United States, most of them in Oklahoma. But there are more than 13,000 living here in North Carolina.”

Debbie was puzzled. “Oh, really! Did they move back here from Oklahoma?”

The ranger smiled. “No, they’re the **descendants** of Cherokees who’ve been here all along. This is one happy little part of the story that I’ve saved for last. When the Cherokees were being rounded up back in 1838, about a thousand of them escaped and hid out in the mountains. The army finally gave up looking for them, and the government later gave them permission to stay. They became known as the Eastern Band of Cherokees.”

“Wow, that’s great.”

"Yeah. And in 1889, the government set aside a large portion of the Great Smoky Mountains for a Cherokee reservation. It's just a short distance from here, and it's where I grew up."

Debbie eyes lit up. "Awesome!"

Just then Debbie saw her parents waving to her from the edge of the campground. "Oops, there's my mom and dad. I guess I'd better go."

"Thanks very much for telling me about your people," Debbie said, realizing she had rubbed the arrowhead in her hand to a shine.

"It was my pleasure," Anna said, as she watched Debbie gently replace the arrowhead where she had found it. Anna and Debbie got to their feet and shook hands. Then, with a quick "Bye," Debbie turned and walked back toward the campground.



Glossary

civilization (<i>n.</i>)	an organized society with an advanced form of government, religion, science, language, art, and learning (p. 20)
constitution (<i>n.</i>)	basic laws of a state or nation that tell how the government is run (p. 14)
conviction (<i>n.</i>)	a firmly held opinion or belief (p. 17)
descendants (<i>n.</i>)	people, animals, or plants related to someone or something that lived in the past (p. 22)
embankment (<i>n.</i>)	a ridge or mound of dirt that holds back water or supports a railroad track (p. 5)
expression (<i>n.</i>)	a group of words used to communicate a thought, feeling, or idea (p. 13)
exterminate (<i>v.</i>)	to kill or destroy somebody or something (p. 10)
nuisance (<i>n.</i>)	an annoying person or thing (p. 11)
prosperous (<i>adj.</i>)	having success; well off (p. 20)
unsanitary (<i>adj.</i>)	not healthy; dirty (p. 18)
voluntarily (<i>adv.</i>)	done out of free will (p. 18)

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The Cherokees

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