

BY C.L. LANEY

WILMA MANKILLER

CHIEF OF THE CHEROKEE NATION





TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	
Who Was Wilma Mankiller?	5
CHAPTER 2	
American Indian Life	9
CHAPTER 3	
Early Life	17
CHAPTER 4	
Finding Her Purpose	23
CHAPTER 5	
Improving Life for the Cherokee People	31
CHAPTER 6	
Mankiller's Legacy	41
GLOSSARY	44



CHAPTER 1

Who Was Wilma Mankiller?

Picture a leader. What qualities come to mind? Some think of strength. Others see courage. What about compassion? Any of these traits might make a good leader. Wilma Mankiller had them all.

Mankiller was the Cherokee Nation's first female **principal chief**. She helped the tribe make important changes. Living conditions got better. Health care and education improved. Government was reformed too.

As a child, Mankiller lived in poverty. At age 11, she left her home in Oklahoma. Her family moved to California in hopes of finding a better life. There, the Mankillers faced **discrimination**. The future chief's personal struggles would later inform her leadership. Problems she witnessed within her tribe would too.

Before becoming chief, Mankiller was an **activist**. The Native American rights movement of the 1960s inspired her. During this time, American Indians **protested** unfair treatment. They fought to regain lands their people had lost. These had been taken by the U.S. government. Mankiller's passion for helping others was sparked. She wanted to make life better for her tribe.



American Indians continued to fight for their rights well past the 1960s. Here, activists protest in front of the White House in 1976.

This illustration depicts the meeting between Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag tribe, and the colonists in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the 1620s.





CHAPTER 2

American Indian Life

American Indian culture is **ancient**. For the Cherokee, it goes back thousands of years. Long ago, each Cherokee village had several leaders. Peace chiefs handled **domestic** issues. War chiefs focused on matters outside their village. One was trade. Another was war. Each leader had specific duties. All helped shape the culture of the tribe.

In the 1500s, Europeans explored North America. They soon began to interact with American Indians. But the cultures were very different. This led to many misunderstandings. One was about leadership.



WILMA MANKILLER

Growing up, Wilma Mankiller experienced many of the hardships facing the Cherokee people in the mid-20th century firsthand. She fought for change, and as the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, her work greatly improved life for her tribe. Mankiller's legacy of compassion and dedication continues to inspire people in the American Indian community and beyond.

LEXILE HL360L

ISBN: 978-1-63889-005-8

