

Sequoyah: The Cherokee Man Who Gave His People Writing (Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Honor (Awards))

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The story of Sequoyah is the tale of an ordinary man with an extraordinary idea—to create a writing system for the Cherokee Indians and turn his people into a nation of readers and writers. The task he set for himself was daunting. Sequoyah knew no English and had no idea how to capture speech on paper. But slowly and painstakingly, ignoring the hoots and jibes of his neighbors and friends, he worked out a system that surprised the Cherokee Nation—and the world of the 1820s—with its beauty and simplicity. James Rumford's *Sequoyah* is a poem to celebrate literacy, a song of a people's struggle to stand tall and proud.

Master storyteller James Rumford combines his love for art and history in his picture books. Each of his books is vastly different in its content, design, and illustrations but one aspect remains constant throughout his work: his passion about his subjects. Rumford, a resident of Hawaii, has studied more than a dozen languages and worked in the Peace Corps, where he traveled to Africa, Asia, and Afghanistan. He draws from these experiences and the history of his subject when he is working on a book. His book *Sequoyah: The Cherokee Man Who Gave His People Writing* was a 2005 Sibert Honor winner. *Starred Review*. Grade 1-4—Fascinated by the Giant Sequoias they see during a California vacation, unnamed children listen to their father tell of the trees' namesake from the opposite side of North America. Thus, in short paragraphs accompanied by richly textured illustrations, Rumford presents the seminal events in Sequoyah's life, culminating in his invention of the Cherokee syllabary. The author writes with a concise eloquence that echoes the oral tradition and makes this one of those rare gems of read-aloud nonfiction. As in his other picture books, the artwork is executed in a style and medium that evoke the period and culture of the subject, in this case creating bold-lined scenes reminiscent of 19th-century woodblock prints. Done in ink, watercolor, pastel, and pencil, the illustrations were adhered to a rough piece of wood, and its textures were highlighted through the use of chalk and colored pencil. The perfect finishing element is the parallel text in Cherokee, which not only demonstrates the product of Sequoyah's genius but also makes this beautiful book readily accessible to Cherokee children in their own language. The end matter includes additional facts and the complete syllabary. *Sequoyah* is a perfect companion to Rumford's other picture books on important world scholars from history and legend—Jean-François Champollion, Ibn Battuta, Cadmus—whose (mostly linguistic) achievements are comparatively unsung. A must-have for all collections. —Sean George, Memphis-Shelby County Public Library & Information Center, Memphis, TN

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