

A Common Core State Standards-Aligned  
Discussion/Activity Guide for Grades PK-2

# We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga

- ★ “A gracious, warm, and loving celebration of community and gratitude”  
– *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ “Perfect for holiday and family sharing”  
– *School Library Journal*, starred review

Written by Traci Sorell

Illustrated by Frané Lessac

Published by Charlesbridge 

*The word otsaliheliga (oh-jah-LEE-hay-lee-gah) is used by the Cherokee people to express gratitude. Beginning in the fall with the new year and ending in summer, follow a full Cherokee year of celebrations and experiences.*

*Written by a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, this look at one group of Native Americans is appended with a glossary and the complete Cherokee syllabary, originally created by Sequoyah.*

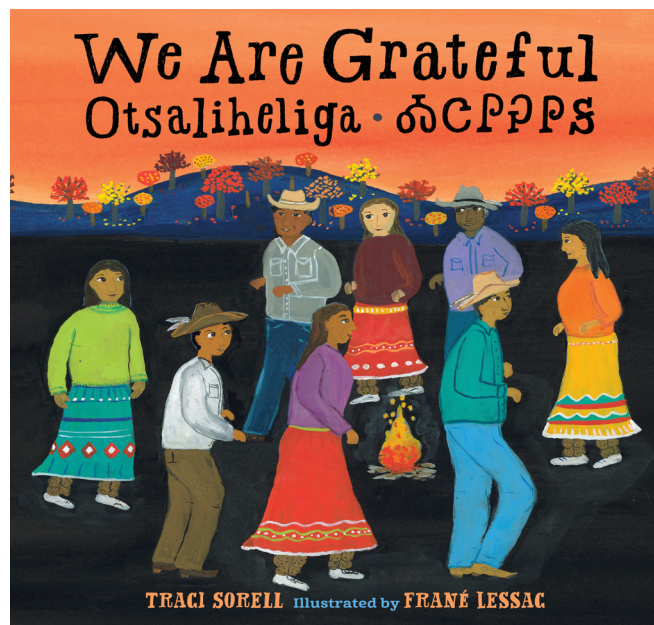
Guide created by Debbie Gonzales, MFA



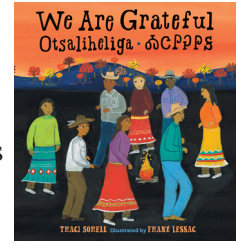
*“Wado” to Tonia Hogner-Weavel, M.Ed., Education Director at the Cherokee Heritage Center and Cherokee National Treasure, for her review of this guide.*

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## Pre-Reading Discussion



### Consider the cover of the book:

- The word grateful is defined as being appreciative and thankful. The title of the book is *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*. The word *otsaliheliga* means “we are grateful” in the Cherokee language. The characters following the word *otsaliheliga* means represent each syllable of that sentence in the Cherokee syllabary. Do you suppose the people featured in the illustration are feeling grateful? If so, why do you suppose they feel this way?
- Describe the action taking place in the illustration. Predict why the people featured in the illustration are moving around a fire. Notice the expressions on their faces. Make a connection with their actions and their feelings.
- Observe the circular shells attached to the women’s calves. Those are empty turtle shells filled with pebbles. During the stomp dance, the women shake the shells as everyone dances, so the women are called *shell shakers*. Some Cherokee say that the turtles sing for the women as they shake the shells. The men also sing as everyone dances around the sacred fire. *Sacred* means blessed and cherished. Discuss the importance of the people praying for everyone and everything all night long through their dance and song.

### Meet the author - Traci Sorell:

- When Traci was very young, she loved listening to her grandmother’s stories about her Cherokee ancestors. She particularly enjoyed looking through old photographs of her family and other Cherokee people in her grandmother’s scrapbooks. Consider how these childhood experiences might have influenced Traci to write a book about the language and traditions of the Cherokee people.
- Before becoming an author, Traci helped many tribal nations by writing important legal documents created to help them govern their people. Determine how writing a book for children is equally as important in the lives of the people she loves.
- Traci’s website is filled with fascinating information about her connection with the Cherokee Nation. Access [www.tracisorell.com](http://www.tracisorell.com) to learn more about her life and work.



### Meet the illustrator - Frané Lessac:

- On her website, Frané discusses that her world travels have had a tremendous influence on her art. She explains that taking care to notice small details such as a “lizard in the grass” or “the pattern on a woman’s dress” serve to express the unique culture of her subjects. Consider the illustration on the cover of the book. Identify the details she included in her artwork. Discuss how these details communicate the culture of the Cherokee Nation.
- A snapshot is a photograph taken quickly, one that freezes time and motion. Frané feels that her illustrations represent a “snapshot” of life. Tell the story behind the “snapshot” illustration on the cover of the book. What story is Frané communicating in her art?
- Find out more about Frané and her art by accessing her website at [www.franelessac.com](http://www.franelessac.com).



## Post-Reading Discussion

*Note: The Cherokee language is the first Native American language fully integrated into Microsoft's core operating system. Students are now able to hear the translations of over 180,000 words at the click of a computer mouse! In the discussion questions below, Cherokee words have been linked to the Dikaneisdi (word list) section of the robust [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org) webpage. Encourage students to explore these and other words of interest to discover all the the Cherokee people have to be grateful for!*

**Cherokee people say otsaliheliga to express gratitude. It is a reminder to celebrate our blessings and reflect on struggles—daily, throughout the year, and across the seasons.**

- The word *blessings* means kindness, goodness, and joy. Explain why the Cherokee people are reminded to celebrate blessings.
- To reflect means to think about and remember. Determine why the Cherokee people remind themselves to reflect on struggles and hard times.
- Observe the tree in the illustration depicting a family and their dog walking by a creek. Notice the details featured on each branch. Explore reasons why the illustrator chose to create the tree in this way.

**When cool breezes blow and leaves fall, we say otsaliheliga . . . as shell shakers dance all night around the fire, and burnt cedar's scent drifts upward.**



Photo Credit: [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org)

- Women shake turtle shells as they dance during the Great New Moon Ceremony, which celebrates the new year. The Cherokee people believe the world was created in uligohvsdi (fall/autumn). Families harvest corn, beans and other crops from their fields and hunt game to share during the celebration. To prepare for the new year, they also clean their homes, wear new clothes and forgive old disagreements. List the similarities and differences of the Great New Moon Ceremony and how the United States celebrates the New Year.
- The stomp dance involves everyone in the community. Women shake shells, men sing, and even children dance as everyone together celebrates through the night, praying for everyone and everything on Mother Earth. How does dancing and celebrating in this way bring Cherokee people closer together as a community?
- Return to the illustrations featuring the Great New Moon Ceremony. Identify and discuss how the details depicted in the illustration correspond with the information expressed on the website.





**We say otsaliheliga . . .  
to remember our ancestors who suffered.**

- Indian removal represents a time in history when the U.S. government forced 100,000 Native Americans from different tribal nations across the southeastern United States to leave their homelands. The U.S. government wanted to take the tribes' lands for white people to live on. The journey for the tribes to Indian Territory in the center of the continent was long, hard, and very difficult. Many children, elders and adults died from walking for months and sleeping outside through the hot summer and cold winter weather. In the Cherokee language, the people called their forced emigration, The Trail Where They Cried, or as it is referred to in U.S. history, The Trail of Tears. Determine why the Cherokee people believe it is important to remember this difficult time period and what their ancestors endured.
- Indian removal for the Cherokee people occurred from 1838 to 1839. Many Cherokee leaders had been visiting federal officials in Washington, D.C. to petition that removal not occur. They kept Cherokee people informed by using the Cherokee language. In 1821, a Cherokee man named Sequoyah had created the Cherokee syllabary. A syllabary uses characters to represent syllables that make up words, phrases or whole sentences, whereas an alphabet uses individual letters to form words. The creation of the syllabary allowed the Cherokee people to read and write in their language. In 1828, the Cherokee Nation started their own newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, which shared information about tribal government and community activities. The newspaper also helped the Cherokee people stay informed and advocate against the federal government's plan for removal. Consider the remarkable impact having a newspaper had on the Cherokee people – then and now.
- Discuss the importance of preserving the Cherokee syllabary today. Explain how learning to speak and write Sequoyah's symbols continues to keep Cherokee people connected to their culture and history.

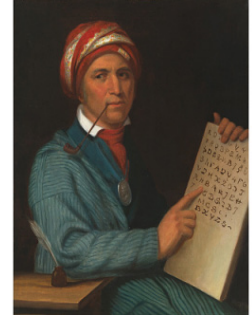


Image Credit: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

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**For additional information access the following websites:**

<https://www.nps.gov/fosm/learn/historyculture/nunahi-duna-dlo-hilu-i-trail-where-they-cried.htm>

<https://www.npca.org/articles/482-where-they-cried>



**As the crops mature and the sun scorches, we say otsaliheliga . . . to celebrate  
nulistanidolv, history, and listen to our tribal leaders speak at  
Cherokee National Holiday.**

- The Cherokee Nation is the largest Native American tribe in the United States and is committed to promoting and protecting the Cherokee culture, language, and values. Discuss how remembering and celebrating the trials and achievements of the past benefits the Cherokee people today.
- Observe the emblems featured on the official Seal of the Cherokee Nation. According to [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org), the seal represents “the early governmental structure, and the eternal endurance of the Cherokee Indians.” Make a connection between elements of the seal and illustrations and text found in *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*.



Photo Credit: [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org)

- ~ The Trail of Tears ended in 1839. Show where in the book the Cherokee people honor the ancestors who traveled the Trail of Tears.
- ~ Discuss the date of September 6, 1839 on the Cherokee Nation Seal and its importance for the Cherokee people who signed a new Constitution that day to bring all the Cherokee people together under one government after arrival in Indian Territory. Show where in the book the Cherokee people remember and celebrate the signing of the Constitution.
- ~ Investigate what the seven pointed star on the seal represents to the Cherokee people.

Fun Find!



Image credit: Frané Lessac

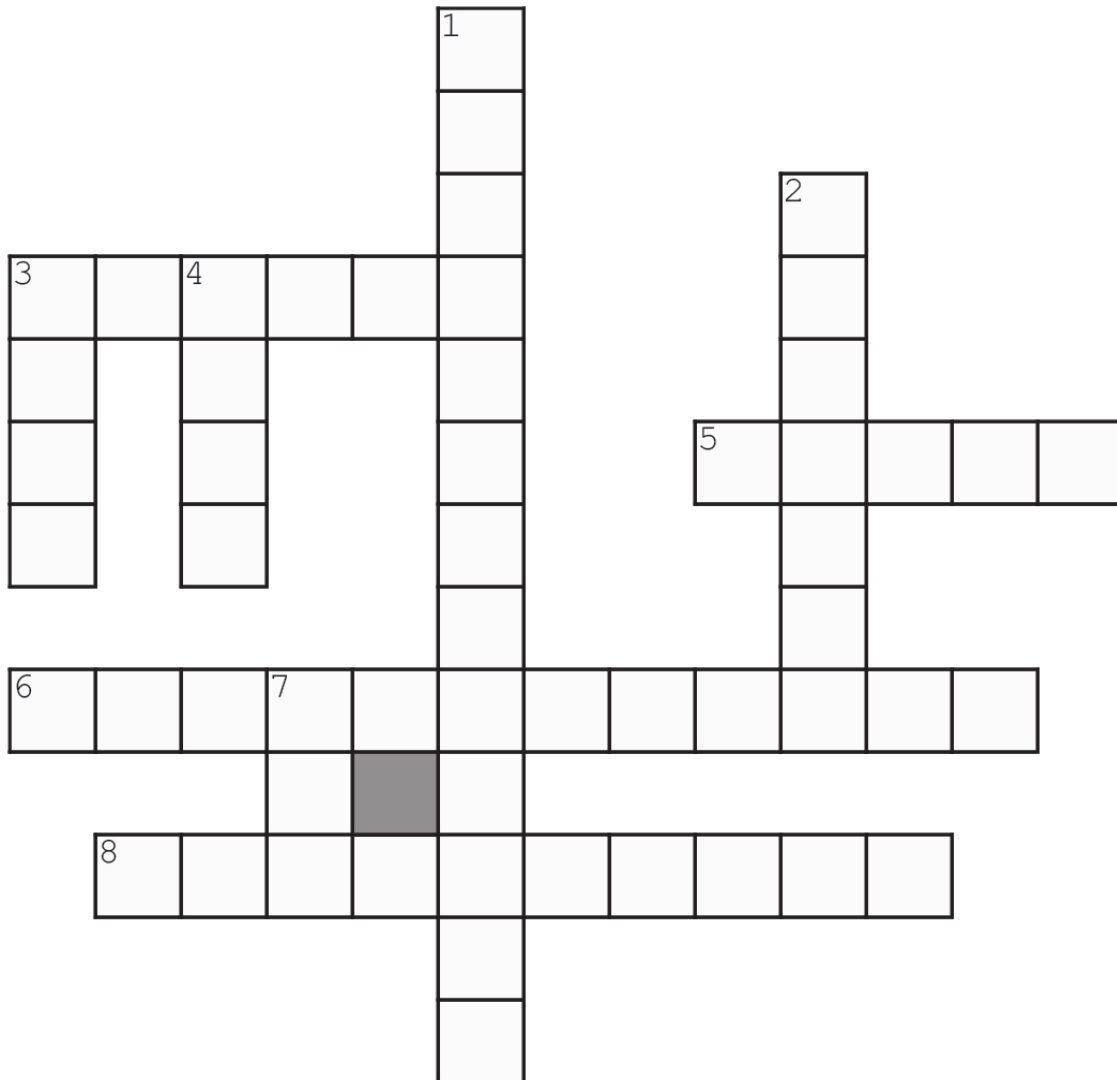
The pileated woodpecker lives in the woods that cover the Cherokee Nation. To discover multiple illustrations of the pileated woodpecker featured in *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, search through each double spread of the book.

For more information about the pileated woodpecker’s song and habitat, access <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/pileated-woodpecker>.



## Crossword Puzzle

Solve the crossword puzzle by using the Cherokee words featured in the text.



### Across

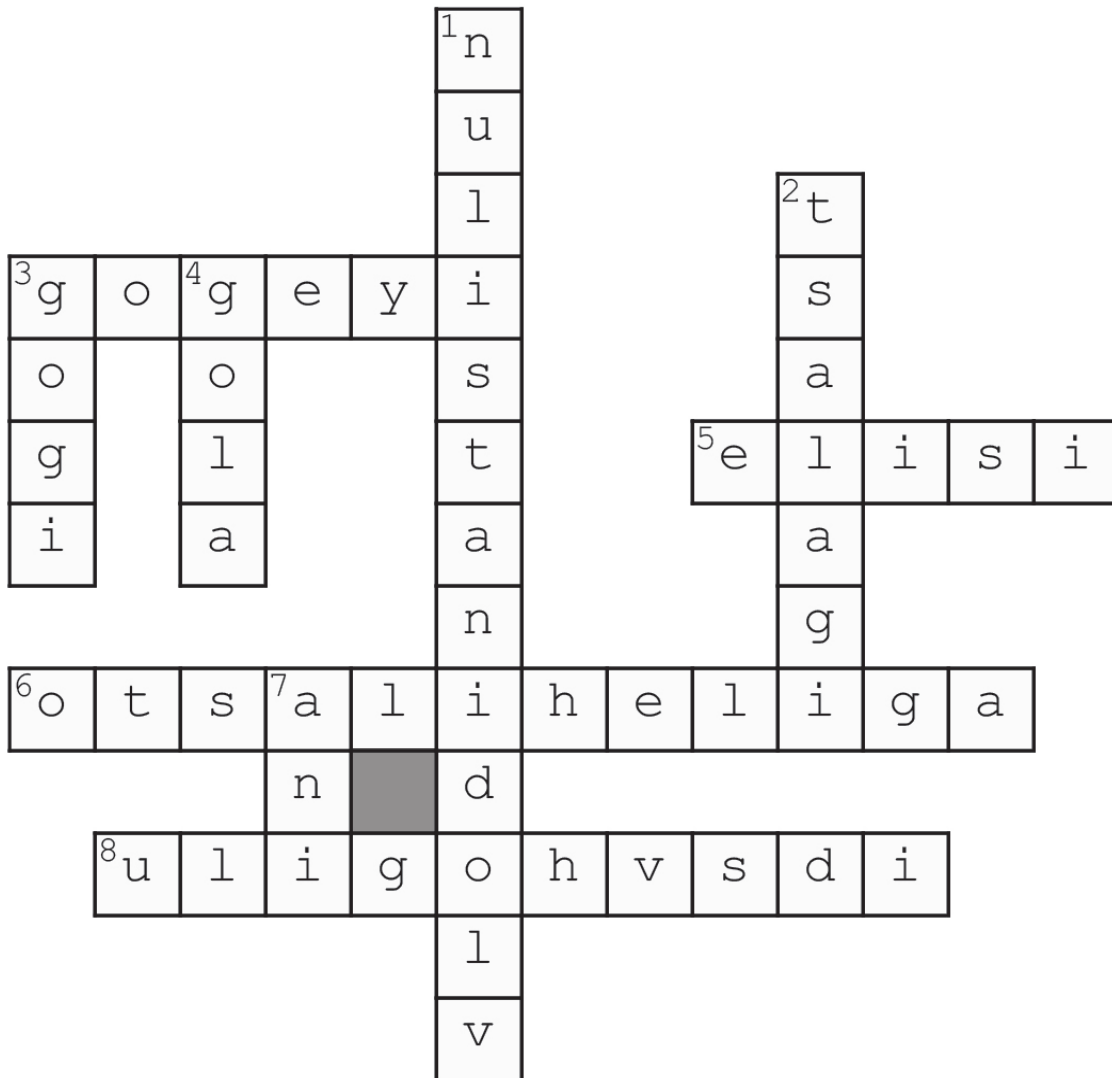
- 3. spring
- 5. grandmother
- 6. We are grateful
- 8. fall/autumn

### Down

- 1. history
- 2. Cherokee
- 3. summer
- 4. winter
- 7. strawberries



## Crossword Puzzle Answers

Across

3. spring
5. grandmother
6. We are grateful
8. fall/autumn

Down

1. history
2. Cherokee
3. summer
4. winter
7. strawberries





## The Seasons of Gratitude Project

**Objectives:** To combine prior and background knowledge with content presented in the text.

### Materials:

- *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*
- Seasons of Gratitude Template (Guide, pg. 10)
- Pencil
- Markers

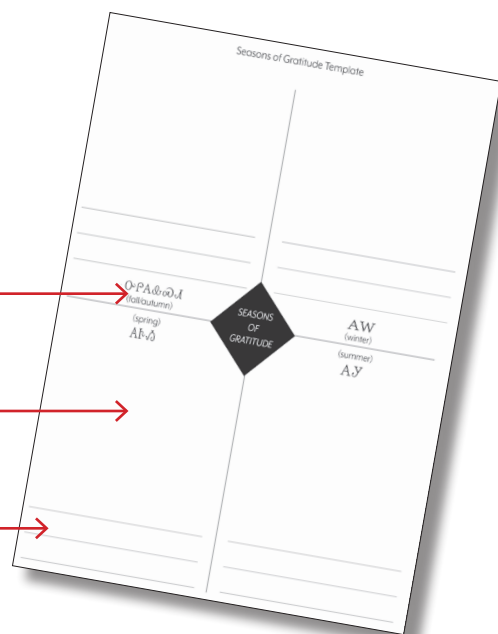
### Procedure:

- Re-read *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*, paying close attention to the seasonal details featured in the illustrations.
  - ~ Consider the Cherokee syllabary identifying the names of the seasons. Explain that the letters and symbols printed represent the written forms of the Cherokee language.
  - ~ Discuss the activities depicted in each illustration.
  - ~ Notice food the Cherokee people are enjoying.
  - ~ Consider the colors of the changing seasons.
  - ~ Determine the focus on gratitude taking place in each illustration. Identify what the Cherokee are most thankful for.
- Using the **Seasons of Gratitude Template** as a guide, discuss what aspects of each season that the students are grateful for. Encourage them to consider aspects of their own lives that they deeply appreciate.
- Instruct students to write a few lines and illustrate what they are grateful for during each season in quadrant.
- Encourage students to share their work with the class.

Examine the Cherokee syllabary designating each particular season in the quadrants.

Instruct students to illustrate what they are most grateful for during each season.

Use the lines provided in each quadrant to write a brief description of the activity taking place in their illustrations.



# Seasons of Gratitude Template

The template features a central black diamond with the text "SEASONS OF GRATITUDE" in white. Four lines extend from the corners of the diamond, dividing the page into four quadrants. Each quadrant contains three horizontal lines for writing. The quadrants are labeled as follows:

- Top-Left:** OʻFA&ʻoʻDʻA (fall/autumn)
- Top-Right:** AW (winter)
- Bottom-Left:** (spring)
- Bottom-Right:** AY (summer)



## A Cherokee Vocabulary Booklet: A Folder Project

**Objectives:** To use the writing process, visual literacy, and technology skills to create a project demonstrating a new understanding of language and culture.

### Materials:

- *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*
- Vocabulary Booklet Cover Sheet (Guide, pg. 12)
- Cherokee Vocabulary Cards Pockets (Guide, pg. 13)
- Cherokee Vocabulary Cards (Guide, pgs. 14-16)
- The Internet
- A manila folder
- Cardstock
- Tracing paper strips (computer paper will do)
- Scissors
- Tape
- Pencil
- Paper clips
- Stapler



Front cover & completed vocabulary booklet

### Procedure:

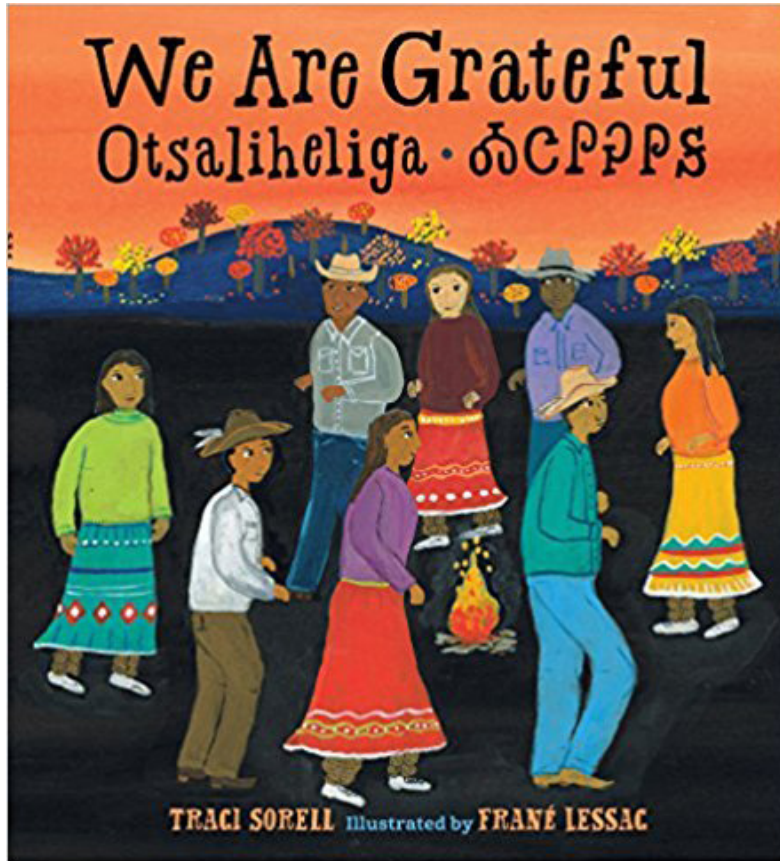
- In this lesson, the students will be making a vocabulary booklet using the Cherokee vocabulary words featured in *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga*. Students are encouraged to access [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org) to hear the pronunciation.
- Print the **Vocabulary Booklet Cover Sheet** and the **Cherokee Vocabulary Cards Pockets**. Use scissors to trim around the borders of each of these.
- Instruct students to tape the **Vocabulary Booklet Cover Sheet** on the front on the manila folder.
- Create pockets by taping three sides of the **Cherokee Vocabulary Cards Pockets** on the two inside sections of the folder.
- Print **Cherokee Vocabulary Cards** on cardstock. Use scissors to trim around the borders of the cards. Store the vocabulary cards in the designated pocket.
- Trim 10 to 12 strips of tracing paper measuring 5 1/2 by 2 1/2 inches. Store these strips in the designated pocket inside the manila folder.
- Instruct students to use paper clips, pencils, tracing paper strips, and vocabulary labels to create a booklet of Cherokee words.
- Create a cover for the booklet. Use stapler to secure strips together. Encourage students to illustrate their work.
- Once booklets are complete, encourage students to practice Cherokee vocabulary words by reading the pages of their booklets. Return to [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org) for pronunciation clarification.



Inside pockets & traced word label



Vocabulary Booklet Cover Sheet



Cherokee Vocabulary Folder Project

name \_\_\_\_\_





## Cherokee Vocabulary Cards

# otsaliheliga

*we are grateful*      *oh-jah-LEE-hay-lee-gah*

# uligohvsdi

*fall/autumn*      *oo-lee-GO-huhs-dee*

# elisi

*grandmother*      *eh-LEE-see*





# gola

*winter*

*GO-lah*

# Tsalagi

*Cherokee*

*JAH-lah-geeh*

# gogeyi

*spring*

*go-GEH-yee*



# ani

*strawberries*

*AH-nee*

# gogi

*summer*

*go-GEEH*

# nulistanidolv

*history*

*new-lees-tah-nee-doe-luh*



## Common Core State Standards Alignment

		Discussion Questions	Crossword Puzzle	Seasons of Gratitude	Vocabulary Booklet
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.1	With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.2	With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.	✓		✓	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.3	With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.4	With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.	✓	✓		✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.6	Name the author and illustrator of a text and define the role of each in presenting the ideas or information in a text.	✓			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.7	With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear.	✓		✓	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.10	Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.1	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.2	Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.	✓		✓	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.3	Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.4	Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.7	Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.10	With prompting and support, read informational texts appropriately complex for grade 1.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.1	Ask and answer such questions as <i>who</i> , <i>what</i> , <i>where</i> , <i>when</i> , <i>why</i> , and <i>how</i> to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.3	Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text.	✓			
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Foundational Skills</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.K.1	Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.K.2	Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.K.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.K.4	Read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.1	Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.2	Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.	✓	✓	✓	✓



English Language Arts Standards » Writing		Discussion Questions	Crossword Puzzle	Seasons of Gratitude	Vocabulary Booklet
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.2	Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.			✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.6	With guidance and support from adults, explore a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.	✓			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.2	Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.			✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.6	With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.	✓			
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2	Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.			✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6	With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.	✓			
English Language Arts Standards » Speaking & Listening					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1	Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>kindergarten topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.2	Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.3	Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.4	Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.5	Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.			✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.6	Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1	Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>grade 1 topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.2	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.4	Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.5	Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.			✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1	Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>grade 2 topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	✓	✓	✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.2	Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.	✓		✓	✓
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.5	Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.			✓	✓

