

0. The Need for Water - Story Preface

1. A Bit of Indian History

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4. The Need for Water

5. The Legacy of Wilma Mankiller



On the reservation there was no clean drinking water system. Wilma knew that it is a basic human requirement for survival to have a clean water supply.

She organized a million-dollar project to bring a water system to her people. She knew this would give them a sense of power to improve their lives.

But money was in short supply, so she rallied the tribal members to volunteer to lay the sixteen miles of pipe themselves. It was a huge undertaking, but the community worked together to successfully finish the project.

Because of her success as a community organizer, she became deputy chief of the Cherokee Nation and, in 1985, she ran for election of Chief of the Cherokees--a position never before held by a woman. It was not a popular idea with some of the tribal members. Her tires were slashed, she received death threats, and at one political event a man raised his finger and pretended to shoot her.

Wilma couldn't understand why her efforts to to work for a better life for her people would be met with so much opposition. She once said:

I have encountered more prejudice as a woman than I ever did as an Indian.

But it didn't deter Wilma in her determination to help the Cherokees. She kept talking to her people about her plans to help them and, when all the votes were counted, Wilma had won by a landslide.

She initiated programs for her tribe to work for themselves--provide for themselves--one step at a time. White people were amazed that this Indian woman could accomplish things they never could on the reservation. But she explained that Cherokees needed to work within their traditional roles and rich culture to achieve the glory they once had before they were moved to Oklahoma.

In 1990, Chief Wilma Mankiller signed an agreement with the federal government to allow the Cherokee Nation to govern themselves. A Cherokee tax commission was established and the Cherokee Nation assumed all responsibility that had once been with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Slowly, the Cherokee people saw a way to take their place in American society.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Need-for-Water-Wilma-Mankiller-Cherokee-Chief)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/The-Need-for-Water-Wilma-Mankiller-Cherokee-Chief)

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Questions 2 Ponder

What Do People Living on Native-American Reservations Do to Have Clean Water?

The health services tell us that we need ten cups of liquid everyday in order to stay hydrated. Reservations, where Native Americans live, frequently have insufficient water supplies.

If reservations do not have clean water, and people living on those reservations have insufficient funds to buy bottled liquids, what should they do? What do you think they did to stay alive?

Media Stream



Building the Pipeline

The Cherokee Word for Water

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