

**Clay County Communities Revitalization Association  
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Sandy Nicolette**

**Sixth Grade Students Experience Cherokee Culture**

Each year the sixth graders come to the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit in the spring to learn how European settlers impacted the Cherokee people and their culture. With rain falling Wednesday morning, the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA) volunteers decided to take their presentations to the classrooms. While challenging without the incorporation of the Cherokee structures, art and mound gardens, Wednesday morning's presentations were successful due to the cooperation of the classroom teachers, presenters and students.

The students learned how Cherokee traditions and culture were passed down orally from the elders to the younger members of the family. After seeing the written language of the Europeans, Sequoyah developed the Cherokee alphabet, with each symbol representing a spoken syllable. The students learned how to pronounce several Cherokee words thanks to volunteers Marsha Christy and Rachel Baughn.

The sixth graders learned how Cherokee women began making European-influenced baskets with wooden handles and materials other than river cane and oak, so their baskets could be traded for fabric, pots and other household items. Cherokee hunters resorted to trading large numbers of deer and bear hides for guns and other metal implements, making deer hides a valued commodity. River cane continued to be used to make trade baskets, and was also used to feed the cattle that were acquired from Europeans. As a result, both of these resources began to diminish.

Volunteer Eleanor Moyer helped students discover how farming practices of European settlers influenced Cherokee farmers to change from mound gardening to planting their crops in rows. Planting in rows contributed to erosion and tended to deplete the soil of nutrients.

Thanks to instruction from volunteers Sally Jordan and Jonnie Walker-Rohs, each sixth grader made a gorget from a piece of gourd. While the Cherokee originally wore gorgets made from shells around their necks they later began wearing metal gorgets obtained from Europeans. "Making a gorget was my favorite part of the morning," stated Summer Feyes. The other students standing nearby concurred.

Lead teacher Judy Bourne stated, "We look forward to visiting the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit each year where the students learn about local history. Even though the students had the instruction in their classrooms this year, they enjoyed the experience and the lessons support the sixth grade curriculum."

We'd like to thank our presenters and volunteer photographer Jacqueline Blackburn for making this program possible for our students. Since 2009, more than 15,840 people have participated in Cherokee educational programs at the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit and other locations. These activities are made possible by donations from CCCRA and

the community. Should you like to see these programs continue to be offered, you may make a donation by mailing a check to CCCRA, PO Box 1533, Hayesville, NC 28904 or visit our Web site: [www.cccra-nc.org](http://www.cccra-nc.org) to donate through PayPal. CCCRA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. You will receive a receipt for your tax-deductible gift.

Suggested caption for accompanying photo: Hayesville's sixth graders work diligently to create their personal gorgets, which will serve as a reminder of the Cherokee presentations.

