

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET

### Chapter 7: Western Virginia's First People Section 2: Historic Native Americans

## The Myth of the Cherokee

Many of the Shawnee eventually became part of the Cherokee Nation. All the Native American tribes explained natural phenomena through stories and myths. This document contains excerpts from a Cherokee myth that explains how certain animals are able to see well at night and why certain plants remain evergreen all year round.

### The Myth of the Cherokee

The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardinal points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock. When the world grows old and worn out, the people will die and the cords will break and let the earth sink down into the ocean, and all will be water again. The Indians are afraid of this....

When the animals and plants were first made—we do not know by whom—they were told to watch and keep awake for seven nights, just as young men now fast and keep awake when they pray to their medicine men. They [the animals and plants] tried to do this, and nearly all were awake through the first night, but the next night several dropped off to sleep, and the third night others were asleep, and then others, until, on the seventh night, of all the animals only the owl, the panther, and one or two more were still awake. To these were given the power to see and to go about in the dark, and to make prey of the birds and animals which must sleep at night. Of the trees only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end, and to them it was given to be always green and to be greatest for medicine, but to the others it was said: "Because you have not endured to the end you shall lose your hair every winter."

**Source:** *James Mooney's History, Myths and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (Asheville, NC: Bright Mountain Books, Inc., 1992).

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is oral history?
2. Describe what the Cherokee believed about the Earth.
3. Which "nocturnal" animals are mentioned by the Cherokee? Why are they nocturnal? What special gifts were they given? Why were they treated differently?
4. What trees were able to remain awake to the end? What special gifts were they given? What does this explain?
5. What role does myth play in various cultures?