

## VIEWER DISCUSSION & EDUCATION GUIDE



**Top:** Wilma Mankiller (center) and colleagues hold ceremonial shovels at the groundbreaking of the Wilma P. Mankiller Health Center.

**Above:** Wilma Mankiller giving a speech.

**Right:** Wilma Mankiller being sworn into office as Principal Chief.

Photos courtesy of the Wilma Mankiller Foundation



### Program Synopsis

Wilma Mankiller was the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, elected at a time when women faced considerable opposition to taking on leadership roles. During her time in office, she helped solidify the Cherokee Nation's political structure, expanded economic opportunities, improved health care services, and reminded people of traditional roles for women that were more empowering than those that developed over many generations of involvement with colonialist and western societies.

When Mankiller entered public service, she drew on a variety of influences. These included civil rights activism, her traditionalist cooperative style of leadership, and the shift towards self-determination in federal Indian policy. Throughout her career, during which she was once elected as Deputy Principal Chief and twice elected as Principal Chief, she overcame serious adversity, including major health problems and sexism. She helped unify the Cherokee Nation during a time of dramatic change and was recognized locally, nationally, and internationally—including with the Presidential Medal of Freedom—as a powerful role model for Native women, American Indian political and community leaders, and public servants everywhere.

### In Their Words

**“I want to be remembered as the person who helped us restore faith in ourselves.”**

— Wilma Mankiller  
(Cherokee)

## Directors Statement

As a Native American woman myself, I am honored and humbled to have been given the opportunity to direct and produce this documentary in collaboration with my tremendous production team, especially Executive Producer Gale Anne Hurd.

Gale and I are committed to bringing to the screen important stories that have been absent or minimized in history books. *MANKILLER* is our third documentary.

We have worked diligently to foster trust within Native communities as filmmakers who are true to our subjects, fair and honest in our portrayals and accurate in our storytelling.

As we completed this film, we realized how Wilma Mankiller's leadership style, her focus on consensus building and her ability to organize a community with quiet influence and humility are

all qualities that are extremely topical.

We can learn rich and valuable lessons from her story and her legacy. I see this film as so much more than a biography; I believe it actually is a wakeup call.

Wilma lived her life with the philosophy of "Ga-Dugi" which translated means "in a good way" – and our goal is that we embody "Ga-Dugi" on this project as well as in our lives, to honor her memory.



- Valerie Red-Horse Mohl (Cherokee)

## About the Filmmakers

### Gale Anne Hurd – Executive Producer

Hurd's career as a Producer was launched when she produced and co-wrote *The Terminator*.

Hurd's additional feature credits include the Academy Award winning films *The Abyss*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, and *The Ghost and the Darkness*, as well as the Academy Award-nominated *Armageddon*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Tremors*, *Dante's Peak*, *Aeon Flux*, *The Punisher*, *Dick*, and *The Waterdance*.

She has also produced two other documentaries on Native American subjects, *TRUE WHISPERS: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers* and *Choctaw Code Talkers*.

Hurd is currently an Executive Producer on *The Walking Dead*, which reigns as the most-watched scripted cable drama.

In 2015, Hurd was awarded the prestigious David O. Selznick Award for Achievement in Motion Pictures by the Producers Guild of America, and she was inducted into the International Women's Forum Hall of Fame in 2014. In 2012, Hurd received her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



### Valerie Red-Horse Mohl – Director/Producer

A filmmaker of Cherokee ancestry, Red-Horse Mohl's body of work spans over three decades of film and television content creation and production.

A graduate of UCLA's Theater/Film Program, she has produced, directed and written over a dozen award winning films and television programs including *Naturally Native* (Sundance Feature), *TRUE WHISPERS: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers* (PBS-with Hurd), *Choctaw Code Talkers* (PBS-with Hurd), Pop Hunter's *Dew Drop Inn* (PBS), *Diversity in the Delta* (PBS), *My Indian Summer* (CBS) and *Beauty* (NBC).

Red-Horse Mohl is a member of the Directors Guild and Screen Actors Guild and was inducted into the NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners) Hall of Fame in 2008. In addition to her entertainment expertise, Ms. Red-Horse is an investment banker serving as owner/founder of Red-Horse Financial Group, Inc.; she holds seven FINRA securities licenses and has raised/structured over \$3 billion in capital for American Indian Tribal Nations.

Red-Horse Mohl is also the founder of three non-profit organizations and is a member of the Northern California International Women's Forum.

## Lesson 1: Cherokee History

(Video Clip – 00:03:25-00:06:33)

Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

The ways that we relate to larger groups and their histories often shape how we think of ourselves individually.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Identify defining moments in Cherokee history that led to the removal to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) and that later brought Mankiller's family to California.
2. Consider why Mankiller insists on telling her story in the context of Cherokee history.
3. Examine how our belonging to different groups of people (friends, family members, employers, different communities at school, religious societies, or work, etc.) affects how we interact with each of them.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do our ideas about the groups we belong to—thinking of ourselves as Americans, coming from a particular place (California, Oklahoma, New York, from the city or the country, etc.)—affect our ideas of who we are and who we can become? What characteristics describe the groups you identify with?
2. Are there particular historical moments that we think of as helping to define groups of people? What are other relevant factors, like spiritual, cultural, economic, or artistic beliefs or practices?
3. What seems most relevant for Mankiller in identifying herself as a Cherokee?

### Class Activity:

Research and outline major events in Cherokee history. Discuss how such events might impact the lives of or otherwise matter to Cherokee people today. Compare with an outline and analysis based on students' own histories of groups they identify with.

### Vocabulary:

Cherokee, tribal nation, removal, relocation



Felicia Olaya, Wilma Mankiller's daughter, at the Mankiller home.  
Photo by Evan Taylor

## Lesson 2: Cherokee Women

(Video Clip – 00:01:39-00:06:33, 00:16:53-00:19:57)

Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

Relationships based on reciprocity lead to obligations to communities.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the political roles that women played historically in Cherokee society.
2. Differentiate between matriarchal and patriarchal societies.
3. Investigate the principles of mainstream feminism and how they align, or do not align, with the aspirations of Cherokee women, both in the 1970s and today.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What difference might it make to a culture's cosmology to understand major natural bodies, such as the sun, as feminine rather than masculine?
2. Where do you see women taking on powerful roles in today's society, close to home and on national or international levels?
3. Why did Cherokee society move away from a matrilineal organization?
4. How might Cherokee women's power come from kinship relationships or attachments to extended families?
5. In what ways might the principle of reciprocity, that is, a mutual give-and-take, lead to authority in a community? Are there potential downsides or costs to reciprocity?
6. Do you see the emphasis on community reciprocity as compatible or at odds with the emphasis on individualism, which is often thought a major part of Western society?

### Class Activity:

In small groups, have students discuss the biographies of women in their families, discussing the limits they might have faced in their choices for careers, or their opportunities for advancement.

Research matrilineal societies, which describes many American Indian peoples, and describe how property ownership and where people reside in relation to their families is connected to political and cultural power.

### Vocabulary:

Reciprocity, cosmology, matrilineal, matriarchy, patriarchy, feminism



## Lesson 3: Cooperation and Consensus

(Video Clip 00:03:25-00:06:33, 00:19:58-00:38:40)

Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

Collective decision-making can happen in different ways, such as by majority vote, authoritarian rule, or consensus, the last of which is a traditional Cherokee model.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Construct a list of leadership qualities.
2. Distinguish what makes these qualities effective in relation to particular desired outcomes or in different cultures.
3. Identify and analyze decentralized models of government such as those the Cherokee traditionally used, illustrating an understanding of their caucus-based structure of accountability.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Who do you think of as model leaders in your communities, state, or nation? What qualities make them successful leaders?
2. How might the kinds of leadership principles Wilma Mankiller learned in urban California have helped her become a leader in rural Oklahoma? How might they have hindered her?
3. Why do you think some Cherokee people objected to having a woman in a leadership position? Why do some people continue such objections? How do women or some people defy/overcome such objections in other times and places?

### Class Activity:

Name several important female role models who are in leadership positions. Compare their historical and social contexts, and discuss the circumstances that help put women in positions of leadership.

Research and identify societies that are led more by consensus than by hierarchy, i.e., with a small number of people in prominent positions of power. Analyze how decentralized, consensus-based models operate. Evaluate the pros and cons of such systems, such as in dealing with other communities that operate on hierarchical models.

### Vocabulary:

Cooperation, consensus, decentralized, caucus, sexism, hierarchy

## Lesson 4: Red Power

(Video Clip – 00:06:34-00:17:38)

Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

The Red Power movement's response to harmful effects of federal Indian policy helped bring an activist consciousness for social change to American Indian communities.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Position the Red Power movement in the broader context of federal Indian policy.
2. Students will relate Wilma Mankiller's political coming-of-age to the Red Power movement of the late 1960s.
3. Appreciate the American Indian component of the Civil Rights movement.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How were lands taken away from Native people during the Allotment Era, and how was this taking justified by US courts and Congress?
2. Relocation was a voluntary program. Why might some American Indian people have chosen to move from reservations to urban cities? What might have prevented the program from being widely successful?
3. What were the circumstances that American Indian people were objecting to in the late 1960s, and what remedies did they want to see?
4. How effective were activist actions in both the short term and the long term? (Relate to the last Class Activity below.) Offer examples of social activism today, and discuss how you see them addressing both short- and long-term goals.

### Class Activity:

Create a timeline of American Indian history at least from the General Allotment (Dawes) Act, to the Indian Reorganization Act, to the Termination Era.

Research the "trust responsibility" Congress has towards American Indian nations. Discuss how these obligations compare to the policies laid out in the timeline students created.

List several incidents connected to the Red Power movement, or the American Indian Movement (AIM) specifically.

### Vocabulary:

General Allotment or Dawes Act, Indian Reorganization Act, trust responsibility, activism, Red Power, Civil Rights Movement, relocation, termination

## Lesson 5: Self-Determination

(Video Clip – 00:24:19-00:27:20, 00:36:01-00:47:52)  
Estimated Time: One class period

### Key Concept:

The shift in federal policy towards self-determination enabled tribal communities to administer their own affairs in ways that uphold Congress's trust responsibility, are more respectful of tribal cultures, and less paternalistic than earlier policies.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the nation-to-nation relationship between tribal nations and the US government is grounded in their sovereign status and history.
2. Connect American Indian advocacy and administrative successes with the shift towards self-determination.
3. Describe and distinguish different aspects of self-determination (political, cultural, artistic, intellectual, e.g.).

### Discussion Questions:

1. What legal status do treaties have? How are treaties related to the idea of a nation's sovereignty?
2. Why did the federal government pursue termination of its relationship to tribal nations?
3. What changes in national attitudes do you think led to the end of the Termination policy?
4. Why are American Indian tribal nations allowed to operate casinos in states where gambling is not permitted?
5. How might the artistic, intellectual, or other traditions of a nation connect to or support its ideas of self-determination?
6. How was the Bell water project that Wilma Mankiller coordinated connected to the self-determination policy? How might the project have inspired Cherokee people to make similar community-based efforts?

### Class Activity:

Create a diagram that shows the relationships among municipal, state, tribal, federal, and international governments. Discuss how these different institutions might influence one another.

Evaluate the Termination policy and its effects on one or two tribal nations that had their relationship with the federal government terminated. Research the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and how it affected the future of those tribes. If they have worked to regain federal recognition, describe how they have done so, and how successful they have been.

### Vocabulary:

Treaty, self-determination, sovereignty, federally recognized tribe



Wilma Mankiller being sworn in as Deputy Chief.  
Photo courtesy of the Wilma Mankiller Foundation

## Lesson 6: Overcoming Adversity

(Video Clip – 00:17:39-00:25:28, 00:41:03-00:49:39)  
Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

In facing adversity, Mankiller modeled ways of drawing on a variety of resources, such as Cherokee and Christian spirituality, modern and traditional medicine, and focusing on others' material needs.

### Learning Objectives:

1. Survey the economic and social circumstances that Cherokee people faced during the time that Mankiller entered service for the nation.
2. Identify resources that could be used to gather this information (such as census data, or reports from the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs).
3. Detail how different social roles require different skills and generate different values, which might be in competition or be used complementarily.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever encountered times when your different roles (as a student, child, sibling, employee, or member of a group like a band, team, church group, community organization, etc.) have been in conflict with one another? How did you or might you have resolved those conflicts?
2. How do you think Wilma Mankiller was able to reconcile the different roles she took on, as a politician on the national stage, a tribal leader at home, a mother, wife, community member, Christian, Indian traditionalist, and more? How might her strengths in these different areas have helped her in facing the trauma of her car accident and her health troubles?

## Lesson 6: Overcoming Adversity *continued*

- Principal Chief Ross Swimmer discusses difficulties people in the Bell community had in not expecting to do the labor on the water line themselves. Does it seem reasonable to expect municipal, county, state, tribal, or federal services to provide access to water, even in far rural areas? How might such needs be connected to health, education, and economic development, as Mankiller discusses?

### Class Activity:

Research the ways that assimilation efforts in the US attempted to replace Native religious traditions. What characteristics of Native spiritual practices were thought incompatible with becoming part of the American mainstream? Do people in the US still see some religious or spiritual beliefs as running counter to mainstream American life?

Investigate the socio-economic profile of your community or communities and compare with places that have large Native American populations. How do demographic figures like income, household size, telephone availability, age, and others compare, both now and historically? Discuss how these differences might matter to access to resources, quality of life, and physical well-being.

### Vocabulary:

Traditionalism, assimilation, accommodation, social role, demographics

## Lesson 7: Cherokee People Today

(Video Clip – 00:45:04-00:55:26)

Estimated Time: One-half class period

### Key Concept:

Through a variety of initiatives grounded in self-determination, the Cherokee Nation today continues to prosper and build on Wilma Mankiller's legacy of locally centered leadership aware of national contexts.

### Learning Objectives:

- Situate advancements in Cherokee people's economic development in the broader policy of self-determination.
- Identify major programs benefitting Cherokee people such as job training, defense manufacturing, health care, or housing construction, learn how they grew out of the self-determination policy, and analyze how they are currently structured and administered.
- Trace Mankiller's legacy in tribal governance and Native American community leadership.



The Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland, California.  
Photo by Curt Mohl

### Discussion Questions:

- Many American Indian people applaud casino gambling for the economic benefits that it entails, many oppose it on both moral and social grounds, and still more see it as a necessary evil in light of pervasive economic problems. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each of these positions? Are there other advantages that tribal governments have (such as tax-free sales of tobacco) that state or municipal governments do not have? What advantages do these governments have in terms of raising revenue that tribal governments do not? (You might find it helpful to look into various modes of taxation and fee generation.)
- Many tribes have diversified their economic activities by starting new businesses and even banks. As the Cherokee Nation and other tribal nations look towards the future, what opportunities seem the most potentially productive? What obstacles do you think such efforts might face?

### Class Activity:

Imagine your local government wants to build a casino in your town. Research how it might benefit those who are economically disadvantaged or other areas such as education funding, and how it might negatively impact local residents and communities, such as through gambling addiction. Research pro and con arguments made by advocates and opponents in the past, and stage a town hall-style debate on the topic.

Investigate and summarize the accomplishments of women and men who have been similarly honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Identify American Indian or international Indigenous women who have become prominent leaders of their communities, along with their achievements, since Mankiller served as chief (they might have served in tribal, state, or federal governments, in any of the branches, or they might be community organizers with movements like Idle No More or the NoDAPL protests). Discuss how and why their influence has grown in the recent past.

### Vocabulary:

Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, economic diversification, Idle No More, NoDAPL, Indigenous

## Resources

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- www.cherokee.org. The official website of the Cherokee Nation, with information on tribal government, history, culture, and more.

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Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/mankiller>