

Cherokee Heritage

Lesson 2: Cherokee Clans

Since ancient times, clans were assigned names that in some way related to various attributes of animals and birds. Cherokee elders say our people recognized that various animals demonstrated attributes, traits and characteristics that helped them to obey and follow the great design of the Creator. Better than humans, the animals behaved and conducted themselves in a manner that indicated they knew their purpose in life. The animals lived in harmony with the environment.

Continued learning:

What is the wolf named for? What is another name for the Longhair Clan? How did the Cherokee people regard birds? What does the Cherokee word for Blue or Bear Clan mean? What kinds of animals are described by the Cherokee name of the Wild Potato Clan? Is the Paint Clan named after a bird of prey? What other animals does the Cherokee word for Deer Clan describe?

WOLF - A Ni Wa Ya



The Wolf Clan name is clearly taken from the wolf. *Waya* is the Cherokee word for wolf. *Wahaya* is also a Cherokee word for wolf. In the Cherokee language, when we hear a wolf howl, we say *wayanigawe*, and we add *wayani* (he is calling). Therefore, the wolf is named by the sound he makes and is the symbolic animal that represents the *aniwaya*, Wolf Clan.

BLUE or BEAR - A Ni Sa Ho Ni



The Blue Clan name has been associated with the Cherokee word *sokoni*, which means blue. *Sohoni* and *sakoni* sound similar but have no correlation. It is very probable that *sohoni* is taken from an old description of a bear's movement. The movement by animals of the bear family creates the symbol that represents the *anisohoni*, Blue or Bear Clan.

LONG HAIR or BIG CATS - A Ni Gi Lo



The Long Hair Clan name has an animal sound to it. English translations for this clan have called it "the long hair," "the twister" and "the stranger clan." An elder, the late Stoke Smith, recalled hearing that the name *anigilo* referenced lions, *anitvdatse*. Lions have a habit of lying along high places that give them a vantage point from which to observe all that passes beneath them. In Cherokee, *ungilo* means "they are perched," "up on" or "above ground." *Danigo* means "they lie (ground level) there often." The *anitvdatse* are given unique credit for the ability to both perch and lie above ground level. The sounds and syllables of these two verbs are combined to form *gilo*. Oral history strongly suggests that lions are the symbolic animals that represent the clan *anigilo*, Long Hair or Lion Clan.

SELFO STORY OF ORIGINS SPOTLIGHT THE SEVEN CLANS

PAINT or HAWK - A Ni Wo Di



The Paint Clan name strongly suggests that it is taken from an animal's appearance. English translation has called this clan the Paint Clan. There are several words that bear consideration: first, the name given to the hawk, *tawodi*, a name derived from the word *atawodi*, meaning "it is combed." Second, there is the Cherokee word meaning pretty, *uwoduh*.

The hawks, with their neatly combed look and stately posture, were deemed pretty by our ancestors. Third, the Cherokee word *uwodi* is the name given to the red powder medicine that is highly regarded and used during the most extreme times of human endeavors. *Uwodi* does not have an animal correlation. From their appearance, the birds of prey seem to be the most likely symbol to represent the clan name *aniwodi*, Paint or Hawk Clan.

BIRD - A Ni Tsi S Qua



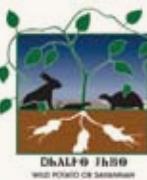
The Bird Clan name clearly designates birds as the symbol for the *anitsisqua* clan. The Cherokee word for bird is *tissqua*. The name appears to be derived from *unisquisda*, a word meaning "many." For instance, the name given to blackbirds is *squilisda* or *anisquilisda*, perhaps because these small birds flock in great numbers. The *anigaduwaga* (Cherokees) have a parable: "Throughout their lives, birds, as many birds as there are, can come together at the same time to eat and share the shelter." It is said that many birds mate for life and return each season to the same nesting place. The people regarded birds as exhibiting very high moral family values.

DEER - A Ni A Wi



This clan name uses the sound that means deer. *Ahawi* and *ahawa* both mean deer. The elk, buffalo, antelope and other hoof-footed animals share like traits and characteristics with the deer. These animals have a strong instinct to flee to protect themselves and have great speed, endurance and keen senses. *Vwi* is an old Cherokee word that refers to the lower leg with the hoof still attached, which was used as medicine to doctor horses, dogs and others for various physical conditions, or to achieve improved results. Because of its physical characteristics, the deer and its near relatives are the symbolic representatives for the *aniawi*, Deer Clan.

WILD POTATO or PRAIRIE - A Ni Go Di Ge Wi



This clan name has perhaps the broadest description and representation of the animal world. *Anigodigewi* resembles several other Cherokee words and phrases. These word similarities readily suggest to English translators a variety of meanings. In Cherokee, *Agodi* denotes prairie, and there is little doubt that the *godi* in the clan name refers to a prairie. The name, therefore, refers to animals that live on the prairie. The English translation of *anigodigewi* is the "wild potato clan." *Gewi* in the clan name perhaps refers to those small creatures of the prairie with sparse or little covering of hair surrounding the head or eye area. Something that is *agewi* would not have eye brows or hair covering the head. It seems very logical that the broad array of smaller animals that make the open prairie their home are collectively the animals to symbolically represent the *anigodigewi*, Wild Potato Clan.

Source: Cherokee Nation and CNE Department of Cultural Tourism Education Tour Student Activity Book