

Arrows

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,480



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ARROWS



Written by Dina Anastasio
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Page 7: © Rodger Mallison/MCT/Landov

The photograph on page 7 shows the Choctaw Telephone Squad at Camp Merritt, New Jersey, on June 7, 1919.

From right to left : Captain E.H. Horner (Commanding)

Private James Davenport, Choctaw, age 27

Corporal James Edwards, Choctaw, age 20

Corporal Calvin Wilson, Choctaw, age 24

Private Mitchell Bobbs, Choctaw, age 25

Corporal Taylor Lewis, Choctaw, age 22

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Correlation

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THE FIRST ARROW

Poloma was tossing her new ball high into the air when she discovered the first arrow in the forest. When her ball came down, it bounced off a tree trunk, hit a log, and came to rest at the base of a boulder.

She was digging the ball out from the heavy **undergrowth** when she noticed the arrow. It was carved into the lower part of the massive rock.





Poloma grabbed her ball and raced home. Her grandfather was resting on the porch swing. His eyes were closed, and for a moment she wondered if she should wake him with the news.

“You’ve discovered something,” he said softly, when she was settled beside him. “I can tell by the way you’re fidgeting.”

“I’ve found an arrow, Papa!” Poloma said.

“And where is this arrow that excites you so much?” her grandfather asked.

Poloma told her grandfather about the bouncing ball, the boulder, and the strange arrow carved into the rock.

“Do you think the arrow is a **glyph** like the ones in my **code** books?” Poloma asked. “Maybe it’s a Mayan hieroglyphic. The Mayans used tiny pictures instead of words and letters. Maybe they carved that arrow,” Poloma guessed.



Papa pulled himself out of the swing and smiled down at his granddaughter. “That’s an interesting idea,” he said. “But I doubt the Mayans were carving rocks around here. The Mayans lived farther south, in Mexico and Central America. However, your arrow might be part of a code of some kind.

“Come on,” her grandfather said, “I think we should visit this mysterious arrow.”

Poloma's grandfather knew a lot about codes. In fact, he had won a medal for his code work during World War II. Papa and other Native American **Code Talkers** had helped the United States and its allies win the war by sending secret messages.

Poloma loved to hear the story of the Code Talkers, even though she had heard it many times before. She especially liked to hear about Mississippi **Choctaw** Code Talkers like her grandfather.

As they made their way toward the boulder, Papa told Poloma how the Code Talkers sent messages that only other Code Talkers could **interpret**.



This group of Oklahoma Choctaw soldiers from World War I paved the way for other native languages to be used as codes in World War II.



QUESTIONS

"We spoke into walkie-talkie radios," he explained. "There was a Code Talker on each end, and we would only use Choctaw words that no one else could understand. Someone would give me the message that I was to pass on, and I would speak the words in Choctaw. If the enemy was listening in on the radio, they wouldn't be able to understand what we were saying."



When Poloma and her grandfather arrived at the boulder, they knelt and Poloma pointed to the roughly carved arrow. “What do you think it means?” she asked.

Papa ran his fingers back and forth over the carving. “I’m not sure,” he said. “It’s a very old carving, but it’s hard to determine its age. It takes a lot of time and effort to figure out how old something like this is.”

Poloma stared at the arrow for a long time. Suddenly, she had an idea.

“I know!” she shouted. “Why don’t we follow where the arrow is pointing?”

The arrow pointed to another boulder nearby. Poloma and Papa examined the boulder the arrow was pointing toward and found a second arrow almost immediately. The second arrow pointed in the same direction as the first, so they followed that one, too. It led to another boulder, and another arrow, which led to yet another, and then another arrow.

There were six arrows in all.



They continued on, and the arrows led them straight toward a stream.

“What should we do?” Poloma asked.

“Let’s cross the stream. It looks shallow. If we tiptoe from stone to stone, maybe we’ll find another arrow on the other side. Hold my hand tight; we’ll cross together.”



ANSWERS

They crossed the stream, holding hands, stepping carefully. When they reached the other side, they almost crashed into the next boulder. It was hidden in a grove of old pine trees.

“I found something!” Poloma shouted, as she leaned closer to the boulder and scraped off some moss with her fingers. “It’s not an arrow at all. A bunch of letters are carved into the bottom of the boulder! I wonder if we can make them out.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to read them to me.” Papa stood up slowly and rubbed his knees. “My eyes are too old to make out those tiny letters. I’m afraid my knees aren’t too good either.”

Poloma leaned closer to the boulder and studied the letters. “They don’t make any sense,” she said. “I’ll read them to you, but I don’t think they mean anything.”

Poloma read each letter out loud, very slowly.

g p m m p x u i f e s j o l j o h h p v s e

“What do you think the letters mean?” Poloma asked.

“I’m not certain,” Papa said, “but I think it’s a cipher.”



Poloma knew what a cipher was. It was a code that substituted letters or numbers for the real letters in a message. She knew ciphers were used in wars to keep the enemy from learning about battle plans. Now they had to crack the code.

“Did you use a cipher in the war?” Poloma asked.

“I saw them used in World War II. Ciphers that substitute letters for other letters have been used since the time of Julius Caesar, more than two thousand years ago,” said Papa.

CRACKING THE CODE

“I wonder if these letters were used in a war,” Poloma said.

Papa had to think about that. He paced for a very long time, and then he stopped beside his granddaughter and cleared his throat. “I think I remember something,” he said. “As you know, a great war took place right around here.”

“The Civil War—right, Papa?” Poloma said.

“Yes. About 150 years ago, the Civil War was fought to free the slaves in the South. I can recall reading that the soldiers and spies in the North used a special code.”



“Do you remember what the code was, Papa?”

“Read the letters again and maybe that will help me.”

Poloma read the letters slowly.

g p m m p x u i f e s j o l j o h h p v s e

She was about to ask her grandfather what the letters meant when she noticed something in the cipher that she had seen in codes she had **deciphered** before. Most sentences contained at least one small common word, and this one was no different.



“I think I see some interesting letters,” she said. “Let’s say the letters form words. One of the words has three letters. Let’s guess that it’s a common word.”

“. . . like *and*?” suggested Papa.

Poloma and Papa were quiet for several minutes as they thought about the three letters. “I don’t think it’s *and*,” Papa said. “The letters don’t make sense.”

“Maybe the letters *uif* stand for *the* in some way,” Poloma said.

Papa smiled. “What letter comes before *u* in the alphabet?” he said.

“*T*,” Poloma said. “And the letter *h* comes before *i*, and the letter *e* comes before *f*. This is a substitute-letter cipher, Papa!”

“Yes! I remember now! During the Civil War, some Northern spies used a code called the advance cipher. They advanced each letter one letter of the alphabet.”



THE DRINKING GOURD

Once they cracked the code, it was not difficult to read the message.

“I know what it says, Papa! It says, ‘Follow the Drinking Gourd.’ But I don’t know what the message means. Do you know what it means?”

“The Drinking Gourd is the group of seven stars now called the Big Dipper, which can always be found in the northern sky. Escaping slaves followed the Drinking Gourd from safe house to safe house until they reached their freedom.”



The sun began to set, and tiny slivers of light flickered through the branches. Meanwhile, Poloma took her flashlight from her backpack, turned it on, and grabbed her grandfather’s hand. By the time they returned to the other side of the stream, the sun had completely disappeared. Poloma stopped and studied the sky.

“Are you looking for the Drinking Gourd?” her grandfather asked.

“There it is!” Poloma pointed to a bright shape in the sky. “Shall we follow it?”

“It’s your decision. Are we heading north?”

Poloma had to think about that for a minute. The Drinking Gourd would lead them back across the stream, past the boulder with the cipher, on to places north.

“We need to go south, Papa. That’s where we live.”

Poloma and Papa turned. They moved slowly, like creeping night creatures. The glowing beam from Poloma’s flashlight led them away from the North Star, past the arrows pointing the other way, out of the woods, and home.



GLOSSARY

- Choctaw** (*n.*) a member of a group of Native Americans in the Southeast (p. 7)
- code** (*n.*) a system of letters, symbols, or signals that have special meaning and are used to send messages (p. 6)
- Code Talkers** (*n.*) Native Americans who used their native languages as codes during World Wars I and II (p. 7)
- deciphered** (*v.*) worked out the meaning of a secret message or writing (p. 15)
- glyph** (*n.*) a picture or other character with special meaning that is often carved into something (p. 6)
- interpret** (*v.*) to tell or explain the meaning of something (p. 7)
- undergrowth** (*n.*) shrubs and small trees growing under large trees (p. 4)