

Johnny Cash

"The Talking Leaves"

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Sequoia's winters were sixteen
Silent tongue spirit clean
He walked at his father's side
Across the smoking battle ground
Where red and white men lay all around
So many here had died

The wind had scattered around
Snow white leaves upon the ground
Not leaves like leaves from trees
Sequoia said, "What can this be?"
"What's the strange thing here I see?"
"From where come leaves like these?"

Sequoia turned to his father's eyes
And he said, "Father you're wise
From where come such snow white leaves
With such strange marks upon these squares
Not even the wise owl could put them there
So strange these snow white leaves"

His father shielding his concern
Resenting the knowledge Sequoia yearned
Crumbled the snow white leaves
He said, "When I explain then it's done
These are talking leaves, my son
The white men's talking leaves"

The white man takes a berry of black and red
And an eagle's feather from the eagle's bed
And he makes bird track marks
And the marks on the leaves they say
Carry messages to his brother far away
And his brother knows what's in his heart

They see these marks and they understand
The truth in the heart of the far off man
The enemies can't hear them
Said Sequoia's father, "Son
They weave bad medicine on these talking leaves
Leave such things to them"

Then Sequoia walking lightly
Followed his father quietly
But so amazed was he
If the white man talks on leaves
Why not the Cherokee?

Vanished from his father's face
Sequoia went from place to place
But he could not forget
Year after year he worked on and on
Till finally he cut into stone
The Cherokee alphabet

Sequoia's hair by now was white
His eyes began to lose their light
But he taught all who would believe
That the Indian's thoughts could be written down
Just as the white men's there on the ground
And he left us these talking leaves

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