

EDUCATION

Day 2004

CANADIAN ABORIGINAL FESTIVAL

November 26, 2004 • Toronto Skydome

Curriculum Connections

Dance Regalia

Grade 3

3z12 Describe Aboriginal communities prior to pioneer settlement

Grade 6

6z3 Demonstrate understanding of social, political and economic issues facing First Nations people

6z5 Describe the relationship between Aboriginal people and their environment

6z19 Identify contributions of Aboriginal people to the political and social life of Canada

Grade 8

8h42 Describe the impact of the Indian Act of 1876 on Aboriginal people

Key Concepts

- There are many diverse forms of Aboriginal dance other than the pow wow dances
- the Pow Wow is much more than just a social dance event
- The Pow Wow circle is a representation of the circle of life and our connection to Mother Earth and the environment

- The Pow Wow represents the complexity of the culture of First Nation peoples
- Dance regalia are very significant to the dancer and are not costumes

Background Information

The following is a brief summary of important components of the Pow Wow, focussing on the regalia of the dancers. In general, this form of pow wow originated with the western First Nations or Plains peoples. It is important to point out that there are many other different forms of Aboriginal dance, for example, this description does not include the social dances and round dances done by the Haudenosaunee peoples to the sounds of the water drum. It also doesn't cover the dances of the Métis or the Inuit Aboriginal peoples—a blend of French and Cree and is still spoken today by very few Métis, most with their roots in Manitoba and Northern Ontario.

Pow Wow

- The Pow Wow is a spiritual as well as a social gathering to celebrate life. The Pow Wow brings together all nations, from different locations, speaking many languages.

Sacred Fire

- Before the Pow Wow begins, a sacred fire is lit at sunrise of the day the Pow Wow is to begin. It is the responsibility of the men to take care of the fire, so a man knowledgeable in the traditions and teachings of firekeeping is selected and given tobacco and requested to take care of the fire for the duration of the Pow Wow. The firekeeper is responsible for making sure the fire stays lit and people visiting the sacred fire follow certain protocols. Only sacred medicines, such as tobacco and cedar, are placed in the fire and people enter the sacred fire area through the eastern doorway, smudge themselves usually with sage smoke, offer tobacco containing their prayers to the fire and move around the sacred fire in a clockwise direction exiting through the eastern doorway.

Grand Entry

- During Grand Entry staff carriers, flag carriers, elders, head dancers and all other dancers in regalia enter the Pow Wow circle through the eastern doorway, which is the only opening into the Pow Wow circle, also called the arena. There is an arena director who arranges the dancers into a certain order before the Grand Entry. All dancers are also smudged with sage smoke before entering the circle. Spectators are expected to rise and remove hats during Grand Entry and no pictures or videotaping is allowed at this time.

Drum

- The term “drum” refers to the actual big drum and the singers who sit at that drum. The drum is not just an instrument. It is considered a sacred being connecting us to the heartbeat of Mother Earth. There are usually several drums at each Pow Wow and they are located in the cedar arbor in the centre of the Pow Wow circle.

Eagle Staff

- This staff is usually carried into the circle by whoever has been given the responsibility of caring for it; perhaps an elder, veteran or dancer carries it. This staff honours the eagle who guards the Eastern direction. The eagle

is the bird who flies the highest and closest to the Creator and represents farsightedness, strength and beauty.

Invocation

- This is the prayer said by an elder to begin the Pow Wow after Grand Entry has happened and all participants in Grand Entry are in the Pow Wow circle. The elder is given tobacco when he or she is being requested to do the invocation or any other duty during the Pow Wow.

Flag Songs

- These songs honour the flags of all the nations that have been brought into the Pow Wow circle during Grand Entry. The flags are usually carried in by veterans or warriors. There is no dancing during the flag song.

Veterans' Song

- This may follow the flag song and is sung to honour all those who have fallen in battle.

Honour Songs

- These are special songs honouring an individual or group for some special accomplishment or contribution to the community. All spectators rise and remove hats and no pictures or videotaping is allowed during this time. The person being honoured usually dances around the circle once during the honour song, followed by their family. Then once they have danced around once, they stop at the Eastern doorway and the community comes out to shake their hand and offer congratulations then joins behind the family. Once all congratulations are received, everyone dances around the Pow Wow circle until the honour song is finished.

Intertribal Songs

- At a Pow Wow, there will be many intertribal songs sung. All spectators are welcome to dance to intertribal songs. Entry to the arena is through the eastern doorway.

Eagle Feather

- An eagle feather is sacred to aboriginal peoples. When an eagle feather is dropped from someone's regalia during a Pow Wow, it should not be picked up. It represents a warrior who has fallen in battle and can only be picked up by another warrior. The Arena Director will stand over the feather and protect it while four veterans are asked to come and dance for the feather before picking it up.

Giveaway

- Giveaway is a ceremony that is done on a number of different occasions. There will often be a giveaway during a Pow Wow. Giveaways are normally done when someone has something special happen to them and it is to express their gratitude for this gift.

Dance Styles

Women's Traditional

Women traditional dancers represent the connection that all women have with Mother Earth. They dance in a slow, stately manner bending knees slightly as they walk and one foot is always touching Mother Earth. Their fringes move rhythmically as they dance representing the rhythm of all life, the movement of the grasses and the waves on the water. The regalia is not a costume. It is sacred to the dancer and is treated with great respect by all. Women's traditional regalia consists of full-length fringed dresses, often made of deer hide but may be partly cloth. Dresses are often decorated with beadwork, shells and/or ribbons. Traditional dancers usually wear a folded shawl over their arm and carry a fan and possible a small bag. The fan is held up during the honour beats of a song to give thanks to Creator. Beaded hairpieces, earrings, chokers and/or full bone breastplates can also be worn.

Men's Traditional

Men's traditional dancers express stories through their movements, tales of battles or hunts or other life events. They often mimic the movement of birds or animals. The regalia consists of bustles made of a ring of many eagle feathers worn in the back over their hips. They wear a headdress which could be

an animal skin, head or simple roach of hair. They often wear a breastplate made of bone pieces, moccasins, and often carry a shield or staff and an eagle fan. The regalia varies with the nation of the dancer. Sometimes they paint their faces in different patterns.

Women's Jingle

Jingle dress dancers are healers. This dance originated from northern Ontario where the design of the dress came to a man in a dream. His daughter was very ill and he was instructed in the dream to have this dress made and his daughter was to dance wearing it in order to be healed. The jingles were originally shells but now they are made using metal cones similar to the snuff can lids that were used early in the 20th century. The regalia consists of a knee-length cloth dress with rows of jingles sewn onto the fabric. Dancers wear beaded moccasins with matching leggings, a belt, bandana around their necks, a feather fan, a beaded bag and an eagle feather held in their hair with a beaded hairpiece. Dancers do a beautiful hopping step in a zigzag pattern to the drumbeat to make the jingles tinkle and their steps stop precisely when the drum stops.

Men's Grass

This dance originated with the Grass Dance Warriors Society of the northern plains. Grass dancers had the responsibility of being the first dancers to arrive at the Pow Wow site to prepare the Pow Wow circle by dancing and flattening the grass down for the rest of the dancers. The regalia is cloth decorated with colourful fringing or yarn which now replaces the long grass that was traditionally tucked into their belts. Very often, the regalia includes beadwork or sequins and the dancers wear a bandana, a beaded headband and a hair roach on their heads. Grass dancers often carry a medicine wheel or dream catcher and an eagle feather fan. The footwork for this style of dance is very intricate and precise, in time with the drumbeat and requires a lot of stamina and flexibility. Dancers must stop with both feet on the ground at the final beat. The dancer moves so that the fringes look like long grass swaying in the wind.

Women's Fancy Shawl

The women's fancy shawl dance is a relatively new dance at the Pow Wow. It is said to have come from the western nations from a dream about a dancer emerging from a butterfly chrysalis. The movements of the shawl look like the movements of a butterfly and the spinning, high stepping footwork is intricate and energetic. This beautiful women's warrior dance requires endurance and stamina. The regalia consists of a skirt which comes to mid calf, blouse, beaded moccasins with matching leggings, beaded hairpieces, a yoke and shawl which is draped over the shoulders. It is made of colourful fabric and ribbons, often adorned with beadwork or sequins.

Men's Fancy

This dance is said to have originated in Oklahoma during the early 1900s. The regalia consists of 2 feather bustles, one worn behind the shoulders and one worn behind the hips. The regalia is often very brightly coloured with beadwork, sequins, ribbon and fabric. Dancers will sometimes wear a beaded headband and/or hair roach on their head and may carry a small staff. This style of dancing with high stepping spinning movements requires a great deal of stamina, and agility. The fancy dance is recognized as a war dance because at one time the dancers used their dancing to psyche themselves up for battle.

Resources

Ancona, George. *Pow Wow*. Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993.
ISBN 0-15-263269-7.

Anishinabek News. *Great Lakes Pow Wow Guide* 2001. Latest edition available through Anishinabek News, Box 711, North Bay, Ontario P1B 8J8.

Toronto District School Board. *The Pow Wow Grade 6 Native Studies Unit*, 1998.