

LESSON FIFTEEN: Ceremonies: The Green Corn Dance

Time 30 minutes

Trunk Resources

Graphics

- #28 Kansa Dog Dance
- #29 Sun Dance
- #33 Ceremonial clothes
- #36 Grand Entry
- #37 Three dancers

Books

- The Pawnee* by Dennis Fradin
- Corn is Maize* by Alik

Objects

- Drum and beater
- Pipe

Teacher Resources

Have students bring in items related to their own family gatherings. Paper, crayons, pencils, and/or markers

Objectives

1. Students will compare ceremonies in their own culture with ceremonies in the Native American culture.

Historical background

Religions and ceremonies among the various Native American tribes often were different. A tribe that depended greatly on the buffalo would often give thanks to the buffalo's spirit. Whereas agricultural tribes would praise Mother Corn for providing them food.

The Pawnees, for example, believed in a main god, Tirawa, who had created the earth and the heavenly bodies. Many of the bright stars and planets made by Tirawa were also considered gods. Four bright stars were believed to hold up the heavens.

The Pawnees had many customs and beliefs associated with heavenly bodies. When they saw two twinkling stars in a certain position in the sky, they held the spring ceremony. When they saw shooting stars, they thought it meant their enemies were coming to attack. When the harvest star god appeared in the sky, they knew it was time to gather their crops.

To thank Tirawa and the star gods, the Pawnees held religious ceremonies. They believed that by performing ceremonies the earth would continue to provide food. One ceremony was held at corn planting time. Ceremonies also were held when it was time to harvest corn and hunt buffalo.

Ceremonies were often linked to the seasons, and sometimes games were played during ceremonies to indicate the cycle of the seasons. One such game played by the Pawnees involved a wheel or hoop made from a bent sapling. The four seasons of the year were marked off on the hoop by using a different color for each quarter. The winter quarter was white, the spring quarter light green, the summer quarter darker green, and the autumn reddish-yellow.

Green Corn Dance

The Indian farmers relied on agriculture more than hunting for their food. In particular, they relied on corn. The Green Corn Dance was held when the flour corn was in the roasting-ear stage, in July or August. This ceremony was a new-year rite to renew the entire world and the plants, animals, and people who lived on it.

For the Cree Indians in the northern Plains, the ritual normally occupied four days but was sometimes repeated for a total of eight. The following is a generalized calendar of main events. On the first day, the town square was cleared and arranged and a new fire was started. On the second day, a feast of new corn was held. On the third day, all mature men fasted then drank the “black drink” concocted from holly. On the fourth day, a feast of venison seasoned with salt was held. Ball games were played for amusement; a wide variety of dances were held in the evening for the same purpose.

Sources: David Webb, *Indians of Kansas*; Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains*; George S. Fichter, *How the Plains Indians Lived*; and Harold E. Driver, *Indians of North America*

Vocabulary

Ceremony – A special occasion with prayers, songs, dances, and feasting.

Nomadic – To move with purpose from place to place.

Ritual – An established ceremonial act or action.

Activities

1. Have students sit in a circle and ask them about the ceremonies or celebrations they have in their families (weddings, baptism, birthdays, religious holidays). What do they do during their ceremonies? What do they eat? Do they dance? What do they drink? What do they wear? What are they celebrating? Have each student share his or her story. You might want to prepare the students for this activity the day before so they can bring photographs or other relevant items to share.

2. Read aloud to the class *The Pawnee* by Dennis Fradin, pages 20-24, “What the Pawnee believed.” Read *Corn is Maize* by Aliko. Reinforce the importance of corn to Native American tribes and to the Pawnee Indians in particular. Many examples of the Indians’ use of corn is found in *Corn is Maize*. Talk about these uses to help teach the students the importance of corn.
3. Explain to students about the Green Corn Ceremony. The Green Corn Dance was held when the flour corn was in the roasting-ear stage, in July or August. This ceremony was a new-year rite to renew the entire world and the plants, animals, and people who lived on it. The ritual normally occupied four days but was sometimes repeated for a total of eight. The following is a generalized calendar of main events. On the first day, the town square was cleared and arranged and a new fire was started. On the second day, a feast of new corn was held. On the third day, all mature men fasted and then drank the “black drink” concocted from holly. On the fourth day, a feast of venison seasoned with salt was held. Ball games were played for amusement; a wide variety of dances were held in the evening for the same purpose.
4. Have each student draw a picture of a scene from the Green Corn Ceremony. Have students look at the books provided, particularly *Corn is Maize*. The pipe and the drum from the trunk may be useful to include in their pictures. The students could either draw one scene or a scene from each day of the ceremony.
5. Have students look at graphics #28 Kansa Dog Dance; #29 Sun Dance; #33 Ceremonial Clothes; #36 Grand Entry; #37 Three Dancers. Point out that the Green Corn Dance is just one example of a ceremony, there are many others in Native American culture.
6. Have students make a list of the similarities and differences between weddings, birthdays, religious ceremonies, and the Green Corn Ceremony.

Cross references

1. Have students attempt The Many Uses of Corn lesson on page 52.
2. Have students attempt the corn recipes located in the back of the manual.