

LESSON EIGHTEEN: Powwows

Time 30 minutes

Trunk Resources

Video

Iowa Tribe Powwow

Powwow supplement (located in the back of the manual)

Graphics

#36 Grand Entry

#37 Three dancers

Objects

Drum and beater

Audio tape

Native American music

Objectives

1. Students will recognize the function of a Native American powwow.

Historical background

A powwow is a gathering of one or more clans, tribes, and/or nations to promote social activities and celebrate the rich Native American culture. It is a chance for friends and relatives to visit, youth to meet other youth, and a time to conduct whatever business may arise such as honoring, naming, give-away, building better public image, and relationships with non-Indians. Today's powwows have booths of Native art, foods, and/or educational sessions. Powwows are a relatively new concept and they have led to more pan-Indian activities leading to a blurring of tribal distinctions.

Dance contests are often at the center of powwows. Most powwow dances are of a social nature, sometimes involving partners. Dances of a deeply religious nature are not seen at powwows. However, the spiritual aspect of the powwow remains. The powwow is seen as an event of renewal and has been a major factor in keeping Native American culture alive. A major function of the powwow is to celebrate the rich Native American culture.

Many of the youth, such as the feather dancers, dress in colorful regalia. Young grass dancers do fancy steps. The older dancers often dress in more traditional regalia and usually do the more traditional steps.

Native Americans have always made many beautiful items to wear. They also decorate many of the articles they own and use. Many of these highly decorated objects are worn and used for special occasions such as ceremonies, celebrations, and dances.

The dance outfits which you see at a powwow are adaptations of dance outfits of long ago. Previously Plains Indian clothing was made entirely of decorated buckskin, but today more cloth is used.

It should be noted that each tribe has its own regalia traditions, although pan-Indian regalia is common today.

Men's Dance Outfits

Traditional – evolved during the late 1800s and early 1900s and consists of a fancy shirt, apron or breechcloth, leggings, moccasins, feather bustle, leg bells, bone breast plate, otter skin bandolier, decorated vest, arm bands, cuffs, head roach, choker, bells and/or fur

Fancy – originated in the early 1900s in Oklahoma and consists of a fancy shirt, vest or beaded harness, arm bands, cuffs, decorated apron, knee-high leggings, bells, moccasins, head roach, fancy feather bustles. The outfits consisting of yarn or fringe are for grass dancers.

Women's Dance Outfits

Traditional – consists of a buckskin or cloth dress with fully beaded yoke or ribbon work, elk teeth and cowrie shell decorations, decorated moccasins with knee-high leggings, a belt with bead work or silver conches, shawl, various jewelry, and bone breast plate

Fancy – consists of fancy knee-high cloth dress, beaded moccasins with matching leggings or high boots, fancy shawl, various jewelry, beaded yokes or bibs, belts (or decorative sequins applique, etc.)

Source: *Shawnee County Allied Tribes Inter-Tribal Traditional powwow program*, Sept. 4-6, 1992

Vocabulary

Bandolier – A belt worn over the shoulder and across the breast.

Breastplate – An article of clothing worn on the chest for either protective or ceremonial purposes.

Breechcloth – Worn by men and boys, this soft square of leather hangs from the waist by a belt.

Buckskin – Usually refers to deer skin, but sometimes is used to mean any animal skin.

Cowries – Marine molluscs such as snails with brightly colored shells. The shells are often used to decorate dance regalia.

Honoring – A ceremonial rite used to pay respect.

Leggings – Buckskin tubes which fitted over the legs and tied to the belt.

Pan-Indian – Involving numerous Indian tribes.

Powwow – A social gathering, a meeting.

Regalia – Special clothing, finery.

Roach – A roll of hair brushed straight back from the forehead or side of the head.

Activities

1. Show the Iowa Tribe Powwow video.
2. Display graphics #36 Grand Entry and #37 Three dancers.
3. Have the Powwow supplement available for extra information.
4. Ask students the following questions about the video:
 - a. What is a powwow? (A social gathering)
 - b. Name the tribe hosting this powwow? (The Iowa tribe)
 - c. In what part of Kansas is the Iowa tribe's reservation? (Students could gain this information from the powwow supplement as well as the video) (Northeast Kansas, near White Cloud)
 - d. Why is the powwow important to Native Americans? (Allows them to keep their culture alive.)
 - e. What shape did the drummers form around the drum? (A circle)
 - f. Why did the older Indians want the children to take part in the powwow? (Note the children in graphic #36.) (So the children would carry on Indian traditions.)
 - g. Who do the Indians want to honor and respect through the powwow? (Mother Earth)
5. Look at graphics #36 and #37 displayed and describe the clothes worn by Native Americans during a powwow. The reverse side of the graphics describes some items of clothing shown. Photographs are also available in the powwow supplement and the video has some good examples.
6. Powwows are very popular with both Indians and non-Indians. Ask students to think of reasons why this is so. (Colorful, attractive, musical, entertaining, educational, preserves Indian culture.)

Extended Activities

1. Powwow outfits

Trunk Resources

Graphics

#36 Grand Entry

#37 Three dancers

Objects

Drum and beater

Powwow supplement (located in the back of the manual)

Audio tape: Native American music

Video: Iowa Tribe Powwow

Teacher Resources

Paper, grocery sacks, scissors, markers, crayons, paints, brushes, VCR, audio cassette tape player

Activity

- a. Have students design their own outfits for a powwow. Advise students to use the photographs, the powwow supplement, and the video for ideas. They should design their outfits on paper first and then decide what materials to use to make their clothing. Some students may wish to use paper grocery sacks to create shirts, vests, or leggings. Moccasin patterns are available in the Preparing Buffalo Hides lesson on page 32. Ideas for jewelry are available in the Quillwork lesson on page 44. Students should be encouraged to be as creative as possible. Students may also paint their faces. Instructions for this activity can be found in the symbolism lesson on page 80.
 - b. Have all students dress in their clothing and play the Native American music on the audio tape provided. Students may also accompany this with the drum beat.
-
2. Comparing cultures
 - a. Ask students if they can think of examples of similar activities in their own culture (family gatherings, school reunions, dances, holiday celebrations). Make a list of similarities and differences.