

# ***THUNDERBIRD AMERICAN INDIAN DANCERS***

## ***STUDY GUIDE***

This study guide has been prepared to help make this a fun and motivational experience for you and your students. It includes mini-lessons and activities that enhance the performance, and reflect City and State Learning Standards and your curriculum.

### **ABOUT THE COMPANY**

Thunderbird American Indian Dancers began over 30 years ago as a group of teens who learned the songs and dances of their tribes in order to preserve them. Their teachers were their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The performers use the traditional movements, clothing, and instruments of the Iroquois, Northeast Woodland and Southwest Tribes and the Great Plains Peoples. Since 1963, Louis Mofsie and the ensemble have visited and performed in almost 50 states. They also provide a variety of workshops and classes, sponsor a monthly powwow, and have produced an album of songs. Thunderbird members also participate in the annual Queens County Farm Museum powwow.

### **CURRICULUM FOCUS: SOCIAL STUDIES**

**NYS Social Studies Learning Standards: 1, 5**

**Preparing to Study: Breaking Stereotypes -- Do's and Don'ts**

The following guidelines are suggested for studies on Native American Indians. It is most appropriate to use the tribal name when speaking of a specific tribe. The term "Native Americans" came into use during the 1960's as a gesture of respect, but it includes all native people of the United States and its territories, including Native Hawaiians and American Samoans. It is appropriate to use the terms American Indians or Alaska Natives when referring to these culturally distinct indigenous people of the U.S. Most children are familiar with stereotypes of the American Indians perpetuated by television, movies and children's literature, which have often depicted American Indians negatively—as uncivilized, simple, and superstitious, or positively—as romanticized heroes living in harmony with nature. Many sources unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes. Through class discussion, help children to recognize how stereotyping occurs and how it damages our ability to judge people as individuals. Create a resource of American Indian authors and illustrators during your studies to aid in breaking stereotypes.

Here are some POSITIVE STRATEGIES for classroom use:

- Provide knowledge about contemporary American Indians to balance historical information;
- Prepare units about specific tribes rather than units about generalized “Native Americans;”
- Locate and use books that show contemporary children of all colors engaged in their usual daily activities;
- Cook ethnic foods, but be careful not to imply that all members of a particular group eat that food;
- Do not use generalized books, guides or lesson plans with an American Indian theme, but rather focus on a single tribe or several tribes to compare and contrast;
- Avoid presenting sacred activities in trivial ways.

Based on *Teaching Young Children about Native Americans* by Debbie Reese. Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, IL

### **Mini-Lesson: The Four Great Ideas**

#### **Teaching Point: Examine American Indian Protocols in the American Government**

*Whole Group:* On a piece of chart paper, begin by playing a game of “Hangman” with the word “GOVERNMENT” in the center of the page ( \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ ). After guessing the word, create a group webbing activity centered on the meaning of the word government. Discuss why we have the type of government we have today. Be sure to discuss the four ideas listed below, assessing their value. Reveal that these four ideas originated with the Iroquois Confederacy, were adopted by the U.S. government, and are still used today by Congress and the United Nations.

- 1. Only one leader speaks at a time.** Interrupting or shouting at someone who is speaking is prohibited, unlike the Canadian and English Parliament, where leaders interrupt and yell at each other regularly. The United States Congress does it the American Indian way.
- 2. Caucus.** This is a Mohawk word. At a caucus, a majority of the leaders have to be present before voting on an issue. This assures that a few leaders cannot pass a law in secret.
- 3. Impeachment.** This process allows a bad leader to be removed from office by the people.
- 4. Confederacy of sovereign nations.** All of the nations work together as equals - no one nation rules any others.

#### **Activity: Research and Report on Indian Tribal Life**

*Small Groups:* Assign research topics for the group to be followed by individual reports.

*Share:* Select one student from each group to give an oral presentation of their research; maintain a chart to highlight differences and similarities on selected topics (see list below); mount reports on bulletin boards and display with illustrations children provide after the concert. Augment visuals with constructions of teepees or longhouses, etc.

## Research Suggestions:

*Tribes:* Haudenosaunee (ho dee noe sho nee – People of the Longhouse), Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy (made up of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Seneca tribes); Eastern Woodland Indian tribes: Cherokee Confederacy; Seminole; Powhatan; Delaware; Susquehanna; Mohican; Massachusetts; Iroquois. *Topics:* Political organization; map of the territory showing that of neighboring tribes; daily life; religion and cultural beliefs; village and/or home design; food production (hunting, gathering, farming); entertainment (Revise scope based on ages and abilities of your students).

*Lower Grades:* Select 2-3 picture books depicting tribal life in different parts of the country. Set up a chart listing some of the topics above, and after reading the books together, fill in the chart noting differences and similarities as part of your discussion.

## CURRICULUM FOCUS: DANCE

**Blueprint for the Arts: Dance: Dance Making, Making Connections**

**NYC Learning Standards for the Arts: 1, 2, 4**

**Activity: Create a Dance**

Break into small groups. **TRY THIS:**

**NATURE & DANCE:** Nature has always been an important part of the lives and traditions of Native Americans. One of the dances taught by Thunderbird American Indian Dancers is the Robin Dance, based on the movements of the robin. Try these dance-making experiences with your students.

## ANIMAL DANCES

Clear a large space in your room and have students sit comfortably in a circle. Ask each student to think of an animal and picture the way that animal moves. A series of questions will help the students to imagine the details of their animal's movements. They may wish to close their eyes (but don't have to) and should answer silently to themselves as you ask:

- Is your animal large or small? How heavy or light is it?
- What is its shape - round and blubbery? long and lean? low to the ground or very tall?
- Does it have legs? How many and are they long or short? Does it have wings or fins? Is there something unusual about your animal - a long neck or a trunk, for example?
- What is the texture of your animal? Is it soft, furry, feathered, smooth, oily? Does it have a shell?

Next ask the students to begin moving like their animals, slowly through the space, still thinking about the qualities their animals exhibit. (If space is tight, you may want to have one group move while the other watches from the side. Then change roles.) Guide them in their movement:

- Try to capture every detail of your animal. Is it moving through the air, the water, or on the ground? What is its environment like - does it have to step over large boulders or burrow through the earth? Does it move into dark caves or swim around coral? How does it sit or stand? Try moving in the different ways your animal might move: when hunting its prey, when swimming smoothly through the water, when hopping across the sand, when flying from branch to branch. What is your animal's rhythm?
- Does your animal move slowly or quickly? How does it move its head and eyes as it looks at the world around it? Is it cautious (careful) or bold?
- Make sure your movements have the same feeling or quality as your animal's; they may be smooth and flowing, lightly flitting, quick and sharp, or they may change.

Have the students watch each other in small groups or individually. Encourage the students to expand the range of movement and not get stuck at one level or in one movement activity. For example, if their animal is a snake, can they show how a snake would move if it could move upward, off the ground in a vertical direction? If a bird, can they put the movement of flight into their torsos and necks as well as their wings; can they show the bird in its nest or hunting for worms? Ask the students observing to describe the types of movement they see (smooth, bouncy, sharp, quick, slowly plodding, etc.) and to offer suggestions for students who are having difficulty being clear and detailed.

You may ask students to each come up with a series of four or five different, repeatable moves that capture their animal's movement style. Ask them to teach each other their dances and show them to the class. Remind students of the Robin Dance which was taught by members of the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers as they think about setting their moves into a repeatable form.

## **WEATHER DANCES**

Follow a similar procedure to the one used in Animal Dances to discuss with your students different types of weather and its effect on nature. Using one aspect of weather - wind, for example - ask students to consider different types of force: a gentle breeze, a stiff wind, shifting gusts, a hurricane or tornado. Ask the students at their desks or in their places to use just their hands to demonstrate the changing force of the wind. (You could choose to do the same with rain: a fine mist, a

steady drizzle, a downpour.) Lead the students through a movement exploration with a series of questions, just as you did in the above activity.

- How can you show the gentleness of a mild breeze? How do your movements change as the wind becomes stronger?
- Can you show me a storm building -- from the soft beginnings, to the darkening sky, to the torrential downpour -- and then show it lessening and growing mild again? Show me those movements in just your arm (your torso, your whole body).

After this exploration students might want to discuss the other aspects of a storm (thunder, lightning, cloud formation and color, etc.) and take different parts to create a Storm Dance. They might also like to explore the sounds of weather, either vocally or with instruments (a cymbal, triangle, small drum, rattle, etc.), creating a sound score to accompany the dance. Continue to help students expand their range of movement (and of sound) by asking them to explore the qualities (sharp, smooth, soft, rough, heavy, light, etc.) within the images they see in nature. Help them to connect this activity to their experience with the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers and their understanding of the role of nature in Native American cultures.

*Share:* Each group performs the dance for the class while one person narrates or chants the words, or provide rhythmic accompaniment on the drums or other percussion instrument. *Extension:* Repeat exercise with "Twelfth Song of the Thunder" or another American Indian song you or your students provide.

## **CURRICULUM FOCUS: LANGUAGE ARTS**

**NYC Language Arts Learning Standard 1d, 2b, 3b, 5b**

**NYC Arts Standard 1, 4**

**NYC Social Studies Standard 1, 3**

**Coordinate "Twelfth Song of the Thunder" and "The Circle of Life"**

**Mini-Lesson: Creating a poem in the style of American Indian poetry**

*Whole Group:* Read the two poems aloud. Make a chart of some of their qualities. Find other Native American Indian poems and see if they share these qualities: (expresses how American Indians feel about their world; what they saw in their land; praises some aspect of life; teaches a lesson; is a personal reflection; is written in the first person; is repetitive.)

## ***TWELFTH SONG OF THE THUNDER***

*The voice that beautifies the land!*

*The voice above,*

*The voice of the thunder*

*Within the dark cloud*

*Again and again it sounds,*

*The voice that beautifies the land!*

*The voice that beautifies the land!*

*The voice below;*

*The voice of the grasshopper*

*Among the plants*

*Again and again it sounds,*

*The voice that beautifies the land!*

## ***Circle of Life***

*Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle.*

*The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars.*

*The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.*

*Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.*

*The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle.*

*The moon does the same, and both are round.*

*Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.*

**Small Group Activity:** Write a poem that uses the qualities of American Indian poetry.

*Share:* Perform each group's poetry as a chant or dance (see dance activity above).

### **Activity: Create a Glossary of Indian-derived Words**

Working alone or in groups, students create a glossary of words used in the English language that have Native American origins. Many place names around NYC are derived from Indian names and would be an interesting research project. After compiling lists, students may illustrate words and place them in ABC order. For the origin of the names of 28 U.S. states derived from native nations, see <http://americanindiansource.com/indianed/statesnames.html>.

### **Mini-lesson: Oral Tradition**

*Whole Group:* The American Indians have a strong oral tradition. Discuss how and why this tradition arose and its value to the community. *Individual work:* Interview a family member and write down their story about family traditions, early memories, etc. *Share:* Retell your stories in class to a partner. Select several to tell their family story to the group.

## **CURRICULUM FOCUS: MUSIC**

**Activity: Make a Rattle**

**NYC Arts Standards: 1,2,4**

**Blueprint for the Arts: Visual Arts: Art Making, Making Connections**

**Music: Making Connections**

For more information about Native American culture, or to further explore ideas brought up in these workshops, the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers suggest the following resources. "*PLACES TO GO*" lists ideas for field trips and locations for independent study. Along with resources such as your local libraries and museums, these destinations can help you and your students continue your inquiries into the enduring traditions of the native peoples of North America. "*LOOK AT THIS!*" suggests related materials including books, magazines, and audio and video materials.

### **PLACES TO GO**

American Museum of Natural History  
Central Park West and 79th Street  
New York, New York  
212-769-5100 / 769-5000

Features exhibits from the Northwest Coast peoples and Africa. Bookstore and craft shop

National Museum of the American Indian  
George Gustav Heye Center  
Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House  
One Bowling Green  
New York, NY  
212-283-2420 / 212-283-2497

Features exhibits from the Northwest Coast peoples, the Southwestern Pueblos, the Iroquois, and many other tribes. Bookstore and craft shop.

Iroquois Indian Museum  
PO Box 7  
Caverns Road  
Howes Cave, NY 12092

Features a Children's Museum which may have materials for the elementary grades

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies  
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
202-287-3424

A catalogue of music from world cultures recorded live and available on cassette.

Audio-Forum  
The Language Source  
Room 3228, 96 Broad Street  
Guilford, CT 06437

Native American Indian programs dealing specifically with the Mohawk of the Iroquois League

The Library of the Performing Arts  
New York Public Library at Lincoln Center  
111 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, NY 10023  
212-870-1657

Includes an excellent children's library with a focus on the performing arts, as well as a special collection which suggests ways of exploring the performing arts with children.

Iroquois Ltd.

Oshweken

Ontario, Canada NOA 1MO

This company deals almost exclusively with material on the Iroquois: books, cassette tapes, baskets, dolls, regalia, etc.

### **Books:**

(about the Iroquois)

- Beauchamp, William M. Iroquois Folklore. AMS Press
- Bruchac, Joseph. Iroquois Stories. The Crossing Press (Grades 3-7)
- Graymont, Barbara. The Iroquois. Chelsea House. (Grades 7-12)
- Graymont, Barbara. Iroquois in the American Revolution. Syracuse University Press.
- Lyford, Carrie A. Iroquois crafts. R. Schneider, Pub.
- McCall, Barbara. The Iroquois. Rourke corp. (Grades 5-8)

(for adults)

- Barbeau, Marius Totem Poles, According to Crests and Topics. published by the Canadian Museum of Civilization

Available in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bookshop and the American Museum of Natural History Bookshop for \$20. It includes myths and tales collected from many villages. A valuable resource for in-depth study. Contains stories for children.

- Courlander, Harold. People of the Short Blue Corn: Tales and Legends of the Hopi Indians. library call number 398 (this number is the listing for all folktale material throughout the worldwide library system using the Dewey Decimal numbering system)

Courlander has many books on folklore throughout the world. Contains stories for children.

- Seale, Doris and Slapin, Beverly, editors. Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

Over 100 essays and book reviews that reclaim for children the histories and stories of the many Native Peoples of North America.

(for children)

- Brody, Ed, editor (with Stories for World Change Network). Spinning Tales, Weaving Hope. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

A collection of 29 stories for children. A rich resource of stories from around the world and throughout time, with a focus on living with ourselves, each other, and the earth.

- Bruchac, Joseph. Native American Animal Stories. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing.

A great selection of stories, with illustrations and maps, from Native American cultures.

- MacDonald, Margaret Read. World Folktales to Talk About. Hamden, CT: Linnet Books, The Shoe String Press
- Skipping Stones: A Multicultural Children's Quarterly. PO Box 3939, Eugene, OR 97403 (503) 342-4956

A non-profit, children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity, and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity.

## Photographic collections

- Chiefly Feasts. The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlach. Available at the Museum of American History

A richly-photographed study of the lives of the Northwest Coast peoples. Records the social-economic values of the potlach gift-giving ceremony.

- Our Voices, Our Land. Northland Publishing, Flagstaff, Arizona

Contains many photographs of the Southwestern peoples and the land. Includes words spoken by the people, giving insight into their way of life.

## Video:

- **Hopi Way** (23 min., color)

Shows the conflict between Hopis - an agricultural people who have lived on three southwestern mesas for 1300 years in harmony with nature and themselves -- and a large coal mining company threatening to upset the fabric of Hopi life.

(Shoshoni Productions/Films Inc. 1972) Intermediate grades to adult.

- **Indian Artists of the Southwest** (14 min., color)

Contrasts tribal specialties in metal work, pottery, weaving. Katsina dolls, rug-weaving, and pottery processes are shown.

(Encyclopedia Britannical Educational Corp. 1972) Intermediate grades to adult.

- **The Legend of the Magic Knives** (11 min., color)

Uses recorded Indian chants, Indians wearing appropriate masks, and shots of totem sculpture to tell the legend of an old Indian chief. Points out the importance of the totem as a public document that records acts, events, and honors the tribe.

(Encyclopedia Britannical Educational Corp. 1970) Intermediate grades to adult.

- **Words!** (14 min., color)

Demonstrates how word play can be a joyful experience. Children use their bodies to form letters, form alliterative sentences, pantomime secret words, and collaborate in forming a cinquain (a five-line poem). (Churchill Films 1977) Kindergarten to college.

## World Wide Web

[http://www.nativewiki.org/Main\\_Page](http://www.nativewiki.org/Main_Page)

<http://www.cradleboard.org/main.html> -- free online curriculum for grades 3-9.

<http://www.aaanativearts.com/article905.html> -- finding the meaning behind the symbols