Cue sheet
FOR STUDENTS

Native Pride DANCERS

Notes from the Director:

Hello! My name is Larry Yazzie. I am a Native American of the Meskwaki Tribe. I perform all over the United States and in other countries teaching people about Native American beliefs and traditions through dance. Sometimes I dance with a group, like today. The group includes my nine-year-old son, Jessup.

I am very proud to have my son Jessup dancing with me. He has learned a lot about his Native American heritage through dance. I thought you might like to share some of this information, too! Please read through my director's notebook and like Jessup, you can learn about our traditions.

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The First Inhabitants of the United States

Many Tribes Together

A long time ago, Native Americans lived across all of what we now call the United States. They belonged to different tribes, or groups. People of the same tribe lived together in villages, had similar traditions, and spoke the same language. When Europeans came to the United States, they wanted land that belonged to the Native Americans, and took much of it for themselves. Today, Native Americans of the same tribe often live together on land set aside for them called reservations. The dancers in today's performance are from various tribes:

I (Larry) am *Meskwaki*

My son (Jessup) is *Meskwaki-Lakota* (I'm *Meskwaki* and his mom is *Lakota*)

Carmen Annis is *Lakota*

Kaye Annis, who does the Women's Traditional Dance, is *Lakota*

Lowery Begay, the Hoop Dancer, is *Navajo*

Arlan Whitebreast is *Navajo*

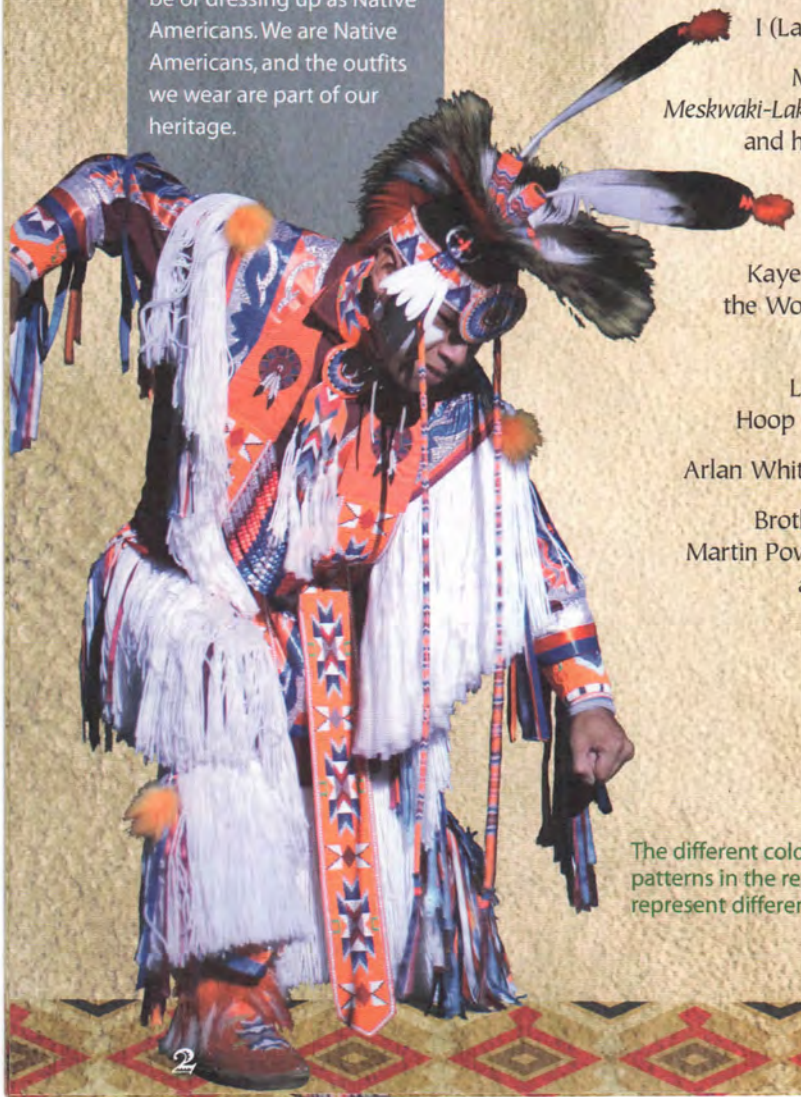
Brothers Wendell and Martin Powless, the singers, are *Dakota-Ojibwe*

Native American Regions

All of these tribes, except the Navajo are from the Mid-west region, from the areas now divided into the states of North and South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The Navajo are from the Southwest area of the United States, from territories now called Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Regalia

Dance is one way Native Americans celebrate life and honor creation. We wear outfits called regalia when we dance. Our regalia is not a costume, because we are not pretending to be or dressing up as Native Americans. We are Native Americans, and the outfits we wear are part of our heritage.



The different colors and patterns in the regalia (outfits) represent different tribes.

We Are All Connected

Each Native American tribe has its own traditions and beliefs, but there are some similarities among tribes.

Native Americans believe that all elements of creation are important and interconnected. For example, we believe that all of the natural world, including mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, animals, and humans are alive and filled with spiritual power. Humans are one part of creation, connected to everything around them.

PowWow Life

Jessup and I attend PowWows, or gatherings where Native American families come together to celebrate using dance and song. PowWows can take place anywhere many people can meet- in large open areas or in sports arenas.

While drummers play and sing, the dancers compete in front of judges to see who will win cash prizes. Jessup and I have both competed and won. At PowWows both men and women dancers perform some of the same dances you will see our company do today. In fact, our show is about PowWow life.

Here I am (Larry) with my son Jessup. We are both dressed in our regalia at a PowWow. The number on Jessup's chest helps the judges identify him when he dances.

Notes to Jessup

What you need to know to dance well at a PowWow:

You will be judged on

- how well you dance
- how your regalia looks
- if you can stop dancing on the final drum beat of the song

The Magic of a PowWow

I began dancing at a young age, just like Jessup. I went to a PowWow and loved the atmosphere. I especially loved watching the dancers with their strong movements and beautiful regalia. I felt proud of my heritage. When I was five years old I told my mom and grandpa that I wanted to dance. They made me a special outfit so I could perform. I have been dancing since. For me, dancing is a way of life.

The Sacred Eagle

The eagle is considered a sacred animal to Native Americas; because the eagle can soar so high, it is believed that it can communicate directly with the Creator. Eagle feathers are an important part of the regalia for both men and women.

If an eagle feather is dropped on the ground during a PowWow, all activity must be stopped. A respected elder is asked to perform a ceremony to retrieve the feather.

The eagle is represented in some dances you will see performed today. The dancer looks and moves like a proud, soaring bird in the Eagle Dance. You will also see the eagle appear in the Hoop Dance, which shows other elements from the natural world as the dancer uses different numbers of hoops to create a butterfly, a tree, the sun, and the moon.

This dancer represents an eagle, a sacred bird for Native Americans.

From Father to

Jessup's Questions

Jessup began dancing at age two. He began performing professionally with me on stage at age five.

When Jessup started learning about Native American dance he had many questions for me that I tried to answer the best I could. Maybe you have some of the same questions. Here are his questions, and my answers.

Jessup performing on stage, wearing the regalia of a Men's Fancy Dancer.

Why do Native Americans dance?

Native Americans dance for several reasons. Sometimes we dance to celebrate something important - like the birth of a child, or to honor a war veteran or hero. Other times we dance to connect to the spirit world and communicate with the Creator. We also dance for social reasons- to have fun together. For me dancing is a way of life. It is a medicine for me. It is a way to heal from the past, and help our culture survive into the future.

Why is there always a drum beating?

The drum is very important. There is a Native American story from the Iroquois that tells how the drum was given to us. In a time before the drum there were many people living separately. All of them had skills - some were good at hunting, others at making clothing. They didn't help one another.

Then the spirits sent the drum. When all the people heard the beat of the drum, they came together and realized they could work better together than apart.

The drum is the heartbeat of the Native American Nation and Mother Earth. It calls all spirits and nations together. It provides rhythm for the dancers to follow.

Why do dancers wear outfits with feathers and other animal parts?

We include animal skins and feathers on our regalia because we believe that when we dance the spirit of this animal will come to life. We put on eagle feathers and then glide like an eagle in our movements. Horsehair helps us to show the strength and speed of a wild mustang. We may even charge like a buffalo in buffalo hide.

In the Women's Traditional Dance, the regalia often includes female otter skins. Female otters take care of their families. Women dancers use the otter skins in their outfits to show that caring for family is important to them as well.

Son

What language are the singers using?

Sometimes the singers use vocables. These are syllables, not actual words, that the dancers sing or chant. If a singer doesn't know the language of a song, they can use vocables for all or part of the lyrics to that song. Songs are sung in English as well as in native languages.

Can I do whatever moves I want when I'm dancing?

The steps in the dance are not the same every time, but there is a style to each kind of dancing. Usually a dancer picks one or two styles to focus on. I often perform the Men's Fancy Dance. The steps in this dance are much faster than in other styles. As long as I stay true to the style of the dance in my movements and regalia, I am free to add elements, like quick spins and even the splits! When you and I dance together, we won't need to do the same steps at the same time, just dance in the same style.

I play the flute in some performances. Notice my regalia includes traditional and modern elements. You can see colorful ribbons hanging from my arms and shoulders, made from modern materials. I also use eagle feathers and animal hair in my regalia, as did my ancestors.

How Dancing De

Here I am dancing the Men's Fancy Dance, which is the brightest and fastest of men's dance styles.

Director's Notes

I think it is important for all of the dancers in the show and the audience to understand the stories behind the dances we perform:

Men's Fancy Dance

This dance is relatively new. It is a dance created to entertain and show the skill of the dancer. Mostly young men dance this style, as it is very active, with quick steps and turns. The dancers do the "ruffle," meaning that they shake or ruffle the feathers on their regalia. These feathers are sewn into bustles that are worn by the dancer. Fancy dancers wear two bustles, an upper and lower one. One is tied to the neck, the other to the waist.

Look for the extra bright colors used in the Men's Fancy Dance Regalia. It adds to the showy character of the dance.

Grass Dance

This is an old ceremonial dance. There are different stories of how the dance came to be. One version is that the dancers were called to a place where a special feast was to take place. While the dancers moved to the beat of the drum, blessing the ground, the grass was flattened to make space for the festivities.

Their movements imitate nature – watch how they sway like grass in the wind.

Watch for symmetry! Every movement a grass dancer performs on the right side of their body is also done on the left.

Women's Jingle Dance

This dance comes from the Ojibwe people of Northern Minnesota. It is a healing dance with its own story.

A medicine man, or healer's, granddaughter was very sick. He had a dream where a spirit wearing the jingle dress told him he could help his granddaughter by making a similar dress for her. When he awoke, he and his wife made the dress as the spirit described.

The granddaughter put it on and was carried to the dance hall. At first, she could not dance without assistance, but as she continued to circle the space, she regained her strength and was healed.

fines Us

The dancers's steps are done in a zig zag pattern across the floor, to represent the zig-zag journey of life.

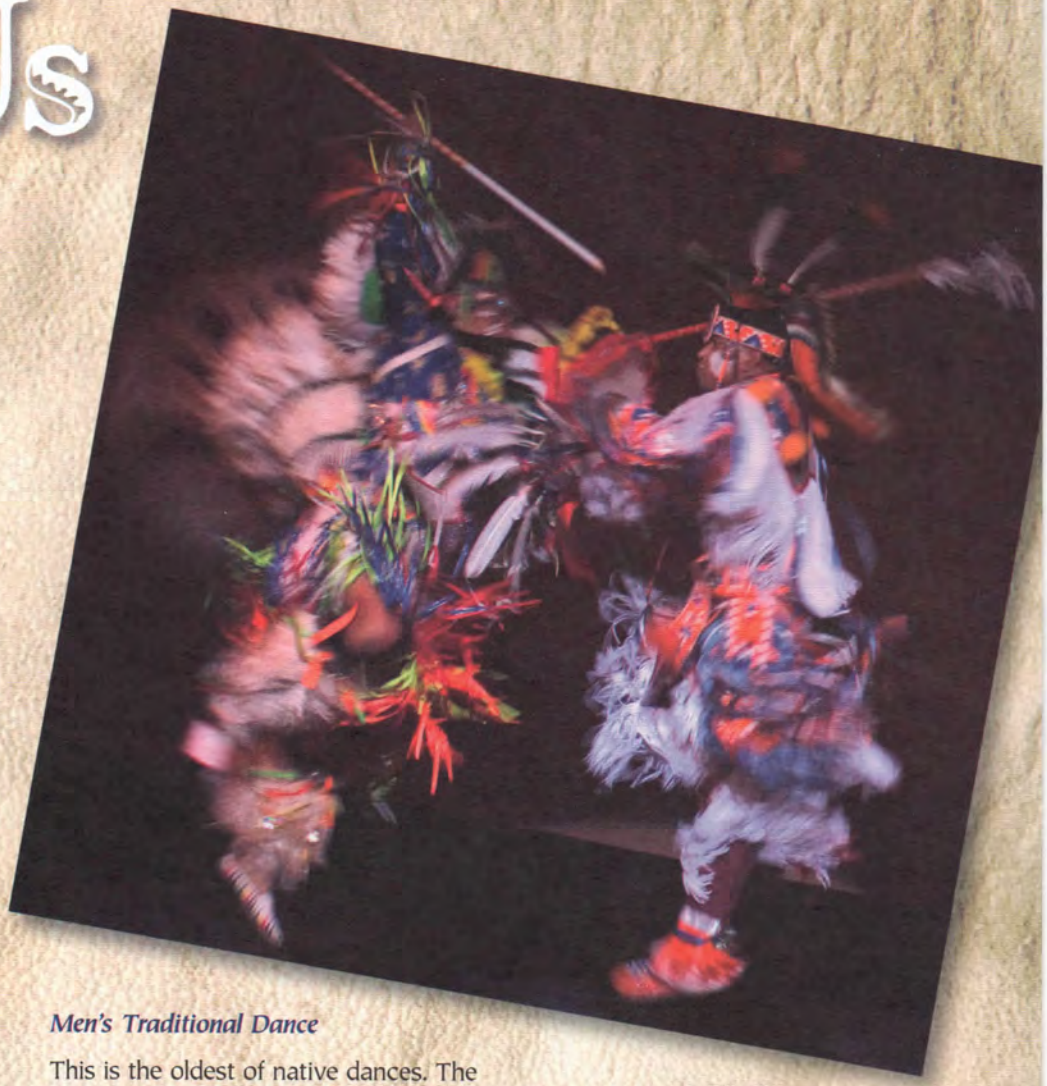
Guess how many jingles it takes to make a jingle dress? Give up? 400-700 jingles, all sewn on by hand!

Women's Traditional Dance

This is the oldest form of dance for women. Women of all ages can dance this style, holding themselves in a proud and dignified manner.

There are two styles- northern and southern. Northern dancers stay in one spot, bouncing in time with the drum, while southern dancers slowly and gracefully walk a circle pattern. In either style, the dancers wear a shawl over their left arm and carry a feather fan.

When the drummers perform the "honor beats" at the beginning and end of the dance, the dancers raise their feather fans.



You can see one dancer representing a buffalo and the other, a hunter, ready to strike the buffalo.

Notice I wear two bustles of eagle feathers!

Men's Traditional Dance

This is the oldest of native dances. The animal parts worn on the regalia are thought to represent the animals put on the earth by the Creator.

Dancers add their own personal elements to the regalia as warriors did in the past. You may see a breastplate made of animal bone or shell to protect against arrows. A band around the neck would protect against a knife attack. Traditional dancers wear a single eagle bustle.

Dancers show the movements of warriors in this style. Watch for movements that indicate hunting, sneaking up on game, or battling an enemy.

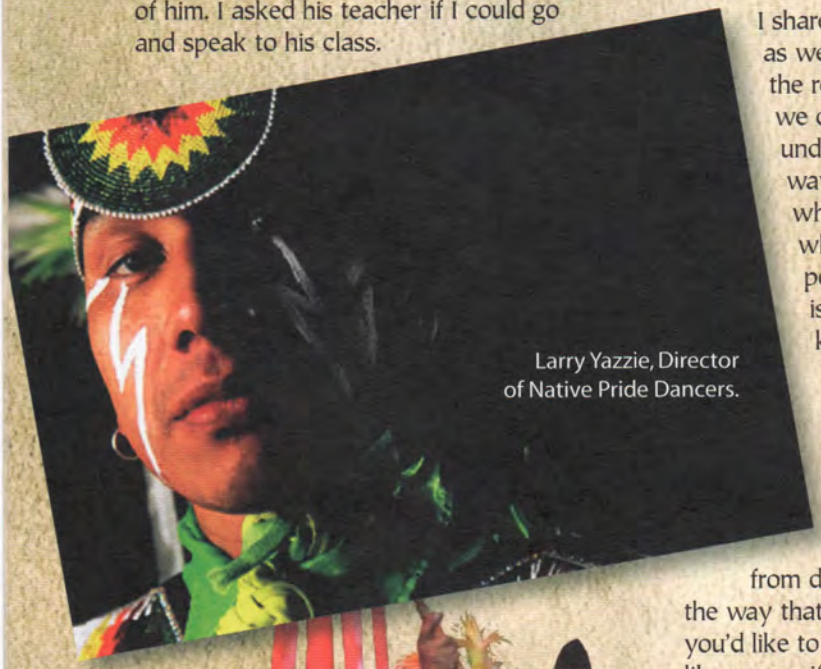
Understanding Others

Sometimes it is hard to be different. I know this and so does Jessup. There aren't any other Native American kids in his class at school.

One day Jessup came home asking to cut his hair because kids at school were making fun of him. I asked his teacher if I could go and speak to his class.

I wear my hair long, like Jessup does. I explained to the children that my hair is a symbol of my strength. It reminds me that I am part of a proud history that goes back a long, long time. It connects me to my ancestors, who-like me-wore their hair this way.

I shared some dances with the class as well, and showed them some of the regalia Jessup and I wear when we dance. Afterwards, the kids understood why Jessup looks the way he does. They also understand why he misses school sometimes when we go to different cities and perform. Now they think his hair is pretty cool, and they want to know more about his dancing!



Larry Yazzie, Director of Native Pride Dancers.

Cultural Character

Are you curious why people from different cultures dress or look the way that they do? Pick a country that you'd like to learn more about. In the library, see if you can find a book about that country that shows the traditional clothing people wear. Read, or have an adult read to you, and find out more about the country. What language do they speak? What kind of food do they eat? Do they have their own style of dance? Share your discoveries with your class.

Resources

You may want to Read:

Bruchac, Joseph, and John Hakionhes Fadden. *Native American Stories (Myths and Legends)*, Fulcrum Publishing, 1991.

King, Sandra. *Shannon: An Ojibway Dancer (We are Still Here, Native Americans Today)*, Lerner Publishing Group, 1993.

Monroe Jean Guard and Ray A. Williamson. *They Dance In the Sky: Native American Star Myths*, Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Look online:

www.nativepridedancers.com, the company web site, which has information about Larry, Jessup, and the other dancers in the company.

Watch:

Red Earth Festival 2007. By James Stewart and Wayne Clark. Studio: Clark Native American Productions, 2008. This is a video that showcases dance, music and arts from one of the biggest native festivals around.