

Louis Mofsie and members of the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers

in

ENDURING TRADITIONS

Through the rhythms and movements of authentic, traditional Iroquois dances and songs, **Louis Mofsie and the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers** invite students to discover the rich cultural legacies alive among today's Native Americans. A series of workshops presented by the director, Louis Mofsie, and members of his company engages students in a singing, dancing tour of what is now known as New York State and Canada. Students will learn about the clothing, musical instruments, and customs of many people and may have an opportunity to video their own culminating presentation.

In the first workshop Mr. Mofsie (from the Hopi tribe of Arizona and the Winnebago tribe of Wisconsin) and his partner share their own histories - including the geographical origins of their tribes and the significance of their Indian names - and discuss the history of the Iroquois people, known as the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy (made up of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Seneca tribes). They then teach the students the rhythms, song, and movements of the *Robin Dance*, which uses the movements of the robin to celebrate Spring. The students also learn the *Canoe Song* and its accompanying motions.

The second workshop introduces students to musical instruments (such as the *water drum turtle rattle*, *horn rattle*, and dew claws) and clothing of the Iroquois. Mr. Mofsie shows the students a False Face mask and tells the story of *Crooked Face*. The workshop concludes with a rehearsal of the *Robin Dance* and *Canoe Song*.

The **Thunderbird American Indian Dancers** use the third and all subsequent workshops to help students link the enduring traditions they have been studying to the lives of Native Americans today. The picture book [Native American Regalia](#) illustrates the dress worn when attending a Pow- Wow, while pictures of "Indians Today" demonstrates the variety of professions held by Native Americans in current times. The class again rehearses the Robin Dance and Canoe Song in preparation for the final sharing which can be presented to other classes in the school.

Additional workshops focused on visual arts and crafts projects can be added to this residency. Projects can include: making a rosette or medallion necklace; making a headband with pictograph name designs; illustrating a story from Native American traditions; or making a birchbark rattle.

Throughout the series students develop an awareness that today's dance forms and styles have their roots in rich and enduring traditions that are connected to nature. Their greater understanding of these traditions encourages a broader perspective and appreciation for the variety of cultural forms in the Americas.

NEW IDEAS

TRY THIS

BEFORE THE WORKSHOPS: Read the background information **Louis Mofsie** and the **Thunderbird American Indian Dancers** have provided about the traditions of Native American cultures, particularly those of the Iroquois. A discussion might include the following:

Where on a map of the United States would you find the geographical origins of various tribes? How have these places changed since the first European settlers arrived in the Americas? What do you know about different North American Indian groups? Are there similarities or differences among the people of each tradition? What can we learn from each other's histories and traditions?

What do you know about your family's history? What can their stories, songs, music, clothing tell you about your lives today? your ancestors? celebration as well as hardship? nature and animals? what else? Do you know stories and traditions that have been passed through your family from one generation to the next? *connectors:* SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

AFTER THE WORKSHOPS: Discuss the workshops presented by **Louis Mofsie** and members of the **Thunderbird American Indian Dancers**.

What did Thunderbird American Indian Dancers communicate and how did it make you feel? What were your favorite parts of the experience? What did you need to bring to the workshops in order for them to be successful? How is hearing about a people's traditions from a member of their community different from reading a book? from watching TV? How did learning the music and dance help you to understand the traditions and history of some Native American people?

While their energy is high after the workshops, perhaps your students would like to:

draw a picture of what you experienced during the workshops. Would you like to add a sentence or caption to it? Can you make a school display of your drawings or send some to Louis Mofsie and the Thunderbird Native American Dancers at ArtsConnection?

STORYTELLING: AN ORAL TRADITION

Discuss the importance of storytelling among the Native American Indian people.

What is an oral tradition? [one in which stories are told but not written down] **Does your family tell stories which have been passed down through the generations? How are you able to remember them? Can you tell the class a story you have heard many times?**

TELEPHONE

One interesting result of an oral tradition as opposed to a written one is that it allows for change. A simple game of "Telephone" illustrates to students the way retelling changes the sounds and meanings of words:

Have the group sit in a circle. One student chooses a simple phrase or saying to whisper to the next person on the circle. That person whispers the phrase to the next and so on. When the last person has received the message he or she announces to the group whatever he or she heard -- even if it makes no sense. Compare the original phrase with the final version.

Now read a story from the Eastern Woodlands group (such as "Creation Myth of the Iroquois, Turtle Island" or the Winnebago story "How Rabbit Lost His Tail"). Ask students to try telling the story again from memory. Discuss the process with your students:

Did the storyteller capture the meaning of the story when he or she retold it? How did it change? Did you enjoy the changes in the story? Can someone else tell the story again?

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 animals' 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 eaves 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 hand 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.

'A" IS FOR...

Do your students know these words as they are used in workshops with **Louis Mofsie and members of Thunderbird American Indian Dancers**?

ceremonial - formal; ritual; a set of ceremonies performed as part of a rite

contemporary -- of the current time; modern *gastoweh* a split feathered headdress worn by the Iroquois

Iroquois -- meaning "real adders"; a confederation of six Indian tribes made up of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Seneca. Established in the late 16th century, the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy originally occupied the land now known as the state of New York.

pow-wow -- Believed to have evolved from the Omaha tribe of Nebraska's ceremony in celebration of victorious warriors, today's pow-wow is a social gathering for Indian people. The pow-wow is not a show, but is a means of communicating, socializing, and sharing a sense of belonging.

regalia -- magnificent or fancy attire; finery; the distinguishing symbols of any rank, office, order, or society

religious -- of, pertaining to, or teaching religion

sacred -- dedicated to or set apart for worship; pertaining to religious objects, rites, or practices

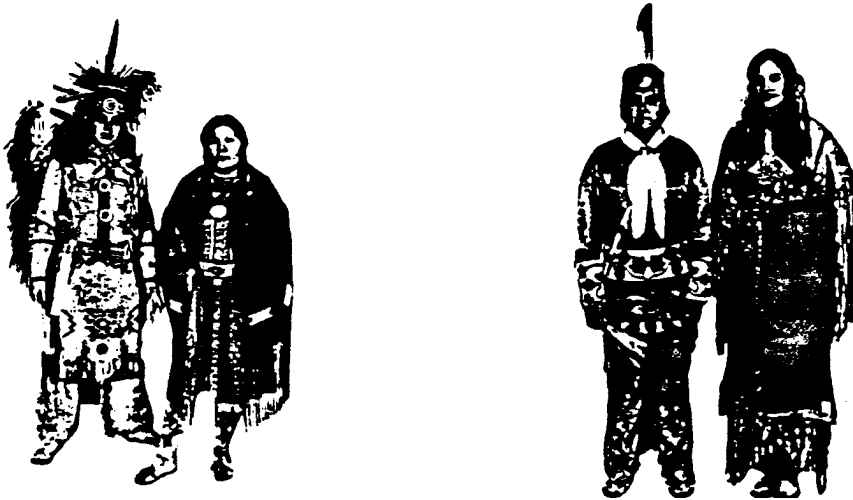
social -- living together in communities; intended for companionable, sociable activities

MEET THE ARTISTS

Thunderbird American Indian Dancers, officially incorporated in 1963, traces its roots further back, to a group of teenagers called the Little Eagles. From the beginning, keenly aware of the great diversity of tribal groups living in and around the metropolitan area -- each with a very distinct cultural background -- its members were determined to learn and preserve the songs and dances of their own tribes, then to branch out and include other tribes. Their teachers were their fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Since its formation, **Louis Mofsie and the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers** have visited and performed in almost all fifty states, where they have learned from a wide variety of Indian peoples.

In addition to dancing and singing, the **Thunderbird American Indian Dancers' activities** include the Native American Craft Workshop, Indian Studies programs for Indian youth, Cherokee language classes, the Thunderbird American Indian Dancer's Scholarship Fund for Indian students, the election of fifteen New York City Indian Queens, and the New York City Indian of the year. The company also presents an annual season at the *Theatre for New City* in Manhattan, and has produced an album of songs.

The Thunderbird American Indian Dancers take great pride in sponsoring the only monthly Pow-Wow in New York City, which has been held continuously since November, 1963 at the 23rd Street YMCA in Manhattan.



WHAT NEXT?

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 museum, 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 (general information)/769-5651 (Education Department)
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, New York 12092
Features a Children's Museum which may have materials for the elementary grades.

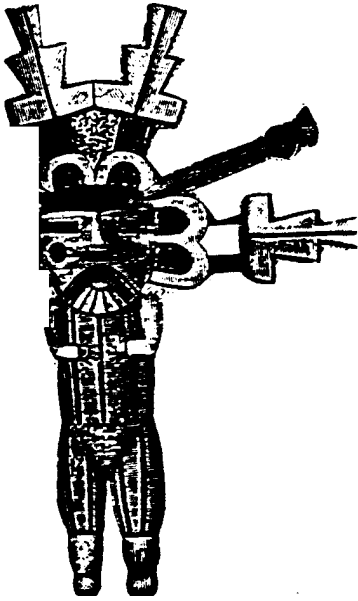
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings
Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Washington, D.C. 20560
(202)287-3424
A catalogue of music from world cultures recorded live and available on cassette.

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, New York 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.

kacluna image (Hopi)

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Iroquois Ltd.

Oshweken

Ontario, Canada NOA 1MO

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

LOOK AT THIS!

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, Connecticut: 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 Incorporated, 1972) [intermediate grades - 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 Britannica Educational Corporation, 1972) [intermediate grades - 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 of the tribe. (Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1970) [intermediate grades - 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 - college]