

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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| Elder Nation | Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle, Maria Crowshoe |
| Lesson Plan Grade Level | Blackfoot |
| Time Required | Junior (Grades 1-6) |
| Subject Strand Links | 1 – 2 hours |
| | Language Arts Music Dance |

Teacher Summary

The Tipi

A Blackfoot tipi is deceptively sophisticated in terms of its *architecture* design and applications. The tipi features a circular *structure*, with a fire in the centre and an opening at the top. Tipis have no solid flooring, furniture or ceilings and there is but one entrance. Poles serve as the supports to the covering made of animal hides – buffalo and deer in the case of the Blackfoot. The circular shape, combined with the opening at the top, allows for the emission of smoke during fire use as well as encouraging healthy air *circulation* within the living space. Tipis were used as *dwellings* from *construction* materials that could be disassembled and moved quite easily, leaving but a trace behind. They continue to be used today for special ceremonial purposes.

The Circle Model

In terms of cultural values and practicality, the tipi illustrates a design that perfectly meets the needs of traditional Blackfoot society. The circular shape is conducive to face to face communication by promoting a sense of equity and participation, *consensus*, in discussions and decision-making. There

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| | <p>relationship with nature. Sitting in the tipi directly on the earth provides a definite <i>grounding</i> effect through the close contact with Mother Earth, again emphasizing kinship between man and nature.</p> <p><u>The Powwow</u> <i>Powwows</i> are gatherings, usually held outdoors in the summer months, in which drummers and dancers entertain over a period of days while community members connect and enjoy socializing. The Powwow is based on the circle model with the central dance activity at the centre, where dancers either dance around the drums situated in the middle of the area or in a large circle to the side of the group of drums. The Blackfoot dance in a clockwise direction at powwows as do most plains Indian <i>cultures</i>. Each drum is normally large enough for several men to sit around to play at once. Some powwows will attract as many as a dozen different drum groups to take turns singing.</p> <p>Most powwows today are flashy competition events where drummers and dancers of all ages vie for large prizes although some “traditional” powwows can be found in which there are no <i>competitions</i> whatsoever, dance <i>regalia</i> is more natural in appearance, and ceremony is more prominent. Various dance styles exist, such as the round dance, the chicken dance, the rabbit dance, the snake dance, etc. <i>Mimicking</i> of these animals is fundamental to powwows, as this relates the teachings of the animals or spirits as expressed through the dancers’ personal interpretation.</p> |
| <p>Learner Objectives</p> | <p>Knowledge/Understanding: To identify the circle model as central to Blackfoot ideology To identify the circle as the basis of the Blackfoot tipi and powwow To identify the powwow as a traditional Aboriginal social gathering</p> <p>Inquiry/Values: To relate the cultural relevance of song and dance to culture</p> <p>Skills/Applications: To use language to learn and communicate ideas in social interaction and group activities To navigate the internet with some measure of control</p> |
| <p>Strategy</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play a recording of a powwow song for the class or watch a video of a powwow – see additional resources. 2. Discuss first impressions of the dancing and drumming. How does it sound compared to other kinds of music? Is it happy or sad? What is unique about it? 3. Explain that a powwow is an Aboriginal social gathering where drummers and dancers come together to have fun and socialize. This is usually done outdoors in the summer and there are many different kinds of songs that drummers sing at powwows. The dancers wear decorated clothing and very ornate regalia. They mimic animals in many of these dances such as the owl dance, the rabbit dance, the chicken dance, etc. But there are also other kinds of dances |

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| | <p>such as the grass dance, the round dance and the shawl dance.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Introduce the circle model. Discuss the circle and the powwow. The one thing in common at powwows all over North America is that the dancers dance in a large circular direction, usually around the drums which are gathered in the centre. Plains Indians such as the Blackfoot dance in a clockwise direction. This circle model is much like the tipi that is a circular dwelling of traditional plains Indian cultural groups. 5. Now introduce Reg Crowshoe, Geoff Crow Eagle and Maria Crowshoe as elders of the Blackfoot nation and teachers of Blackfoot culture online. They have traditional teachings to share on the circle model. 6. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear the teachings. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Go to the Blackfoot teachings, under “Introduction” to learn about the Piikani Nation and the Tipi Circle Structure. b) Go to “The Great Dance” to learn about the powwow. 7. Discuss what the elders had to say about the circle. List as many things as possible of items that are circular. What is it that these items have in common? There is no beginning and no end. That is part of the Aboriginal way of looking at life and that is why the dances are done in a circle, the tipi is made in a circle, and the drum is made in a circle. 8. Wrap up the lesson with a guided reading of the summary above and a selection of various discussion topics and optional exercises below. <p>Discussion Topics:</p> <p>Name a number of cultures that use a drum in their cultural songs and dances, eg. Irish, South African, Japanese. What do these styles of drumming have in common, if anything? Do a study of these types of drums.</p> <p>How do people keep their cultures and traditions alive?</p> <p>Aside from dances and songs, what other ways do cultures transmit information about a people? Discuss paintings, carvings, religious ornaments, gardens, jewellery, etc.</p> <p>What are some of the feelings that people express through song and dance? How does music communicate in ways that words cannot?</p> <p>Optional Exercises;</p> <p>Visit a powwow – some are held in spring and fall when schools are in session. See additional resources for calendar listings.</p> <p>Invite an Aboriginal drum and dance troupe to perform at the school and to teach powwow dances</p> <p>Invite Aboriginal crafts persons to the class to teach regalia making or drum making</p> |
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| | Study some of the regalia of the powwow dancers and make your own Write a report on the significance of the circle in traditional Blackfoot society. |
| Vocabulary | Powwow Mimicking Culture Tradition Regalia Competition |
| Materials Required | Recordings of powwow music and dances |
| Evaluation | Teacher evaluation of discussions. |

