

# Study Guide For Teachers

## The Thunderbird American Dancers

In  
*Yah-oh-way*

presented by

Young Audiences

(866) 500-9265

[www.yanj.org](http://www.yanj.org)

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### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This Native American dance troupe was formed more than four decades ago to preserve and celebrate the songs, dances, and traditions of the many tribes that inhabited North America before the arrival of Europeans. In addition to performing, Thunderbird's 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, and the only monthly Pow-Wow in New York City.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Become acquainted with the true depth and complexity of Native American societies and how different these are from stereotypes to which students may have been exposed.
- Understand the origins and meanings of various dances and songs.
- Be encouraged to respect cultural diversity.

### ARTIST INFORMATION

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 mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Since its formation, Louis Mofsie and the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers have visited and performed in almost all fifty states, and have learned from a wide variety of Indian peoples.

In addition to dancing and singing, the Thunderbird Indian Dancers' activities include the Native American Craft Workshop, Indian Studies programs for Indian youth, Cherokee language classes, and the Thunderbird American Indian Dancer's Scholarship Fund for Indian students. 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.

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

1. Locate on a map of the United States 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?
2. Get the music teacher involved! Native Americans used many musical instruments. Many are related to traditional instruments used in schools today i.e., drums, rattles, and flutes. If Native American instruments are available, have students experiment with producing sound. If instruments are not available, have students listen to recordings of these instruments. Explore and discuss the similarities and differences between these instruments and similar instruments more commonly used in Western music.
3. What do you know about your family's history? What can their stories, songs, music, and 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?

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

Mr. Mofsie (from the Hopi tribe of Arizona and the Winnebago tribe of Wisconsin) and his partner share their own histories, including the geographic origins of their tribes and the significance of their Indian names.

They 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 demonstrate the rhythms, song, and movements of the Robin Dance, which uses the movements of the robin to celebrate spring; the Flute Music, a Sioux story of how the first flute came about; and the Hopi's Kachina Dance, calling the villagers to come see the Katchinas dance. As each dance is performed, the dancers explain its origin and meaning, and discuss the music and regalia.

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

1. What did Thunderbird Indian Dancers communicate and how did it make you feel? What were your favorite parts of the experience? 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?
2. Have students read a Native American folktale to themselves. Have students create their own tale – ones that teach a lesson, perhaps. Suggest substituting animal characters for people.
3. Get the art teacher involved! Have students create illustrations for their tale. Ideally, have students make their own books for their illustrated tales.
4. Research and reproduce games and recreational activities of Native American children. Discuss how these are similar to/different from games your students play.

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

|              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| CEREMONIAL   | RELIGIOUS |
| CONTEMPORARY | SACRED    |
| GASTOWEH     | SOCIAL    |
| IROQUOIS     |           |
| POW-WOW      |           |
| REGALIA      |           |

## **RESOURCES**

Beauchamp, William M. *Iroquois Folklore*. AMS Press.  
Courlander, Harold. *People of the Short Blue Corn: Tales and Legends of the Hopi Indians*.  
Scale, Doris and Slapin, Beverly, editors. *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.  
Bruchac, Joseph. *Native American Animal Stories*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing.