

Native American Culture



- Music/Dance
- Art/Drama

Many People, Many Tribes



There are many Native American groups in the United States. You have probably heard of the Sioux, Pueblo, Shawnee Comanche, Navajo, and Iroquois.

PART 1:



■ Native
American

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Native American Music

During the Colonial period, there were many different Native American nations spread across the whole continent. However, the music of the different nations had much in common. All of it sounded very different from the music the Europeans brought with them to the new world.

Native American Instruments

- Always used drums (most important)
 - Drums were played in unison and kept a steady beat
 - In Europe and America during the colonial period, drums were never heard in cities. They were used for the battlefield, because they could be heard over the noise and fury of the fight.



DRUMS

- The drum is recognized as a separate entity and represents a liaison with our Creator, containing thunder and lightening, and when struck calls the Creators attention and the spirits of our forefathers.



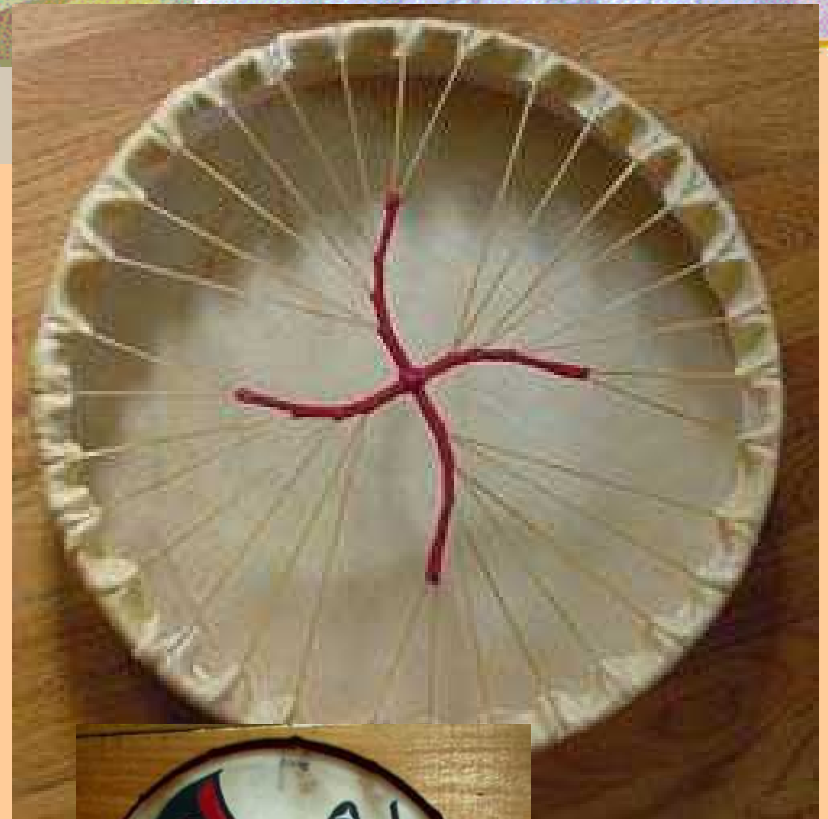


More On Drums

- Different tribes have different traditions about the drum and how to play it, but the basic construction is very similar in most tribes:
 - A wooden frame or a carved and hollowed-out log, with finely tanned buckskin or elk skin stretched tight across the opening.
- Traditionally American Indian drums are large, two to three feet in diameter, and they are played communally by groups of men who stand around them in a circle.



Native Americans believe that the drum is the heartbeat of the Earth Mother, the heartbeat of all Indian people, and a way of bringing things back into balance. Whether dancing, singing or listening, people around a drum are able to connect with the Spirit through its rhythmic pounding, and as a result, the drum beat is a focal point of ceremonies.



Carved wood
from the north



Native American Instruments



■ Rattles/Shakers

- Native Americans used a variety of rattles, made from the materials they had available.



Native American Instruments



■ Flutes

- Played by a single musician and weren't that important

These traditional Native American flutes are known by several names, the most common being love flutes, or courting flutes. As the name suggests, they were flutes played in courting rituals - by a young man serenading his intended bride. Generally they were played for no other reason, although some men are known to have played them for their wives as a sign of love.



Native American Songs

- Another reason the songs sounded so different is because of the pitches.
- It wasn't important for everyone to sing "on key."
- The singers never harmonized
- Sometimes the words are just sounds, not real words (chants).



Ceremonial Music

- Music was an important part of Native American worship
- Most singing was done as a group activity on ceremonial occasions
- Songs were seen as ways to communicate with the divine (like prayers)
- Singing, drumming, and dancing went together, so all ceremonies also included dance





Examples of Native American Ceremonies



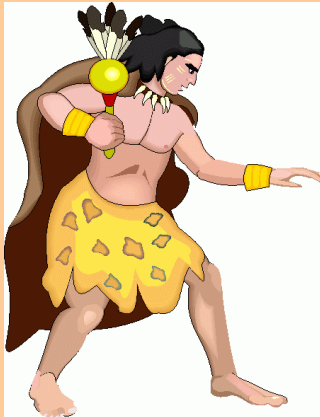
They were special songs for

- Baby being born
- Children as they became adults
- Marriages
- Deaths
- Safe travel on journeys
- Success in a hunt or a game
- After victory in a battle



Importance of Songs

- Songs or music were never performed just for entertainment.
- Songs sung at family and tribal gatherings told stories about the history of the people
 - The dances went along with the music and illustrated the story



American Influence

- Native American music has not had much of an influence on American music today. In fact, the opposite is true. American folk songs and African American rhythms have had an influence on Native American music in the 21st century.



Native American Music Outline

■ Rhythm

- Steady beat
- Drums keep the steady beat
- Steady beat reflects "the heartbeat of nature" or the heart beat of an animal they have killed



■ Tempo

- No change



Native American Music Outline

■ Timbre

- Drums
- Rattles/shakers
- Voices

■ Dynamics

- Generally same dynamics throughout piece
- Dynamics are determined by the purpose of the piece (Lullabies are *piano*-soft)



Native American Music Outline

■ **Melody/Harmony**

- Repetitive (repeats)
- Unison-everyone singing the same thing at the same time
- Lyrics are "vocables" rather than actual words
- Chanted sounds rather than melodic lines



Native American Music Outline

■ Form

- Call and response was often used
- Repetitive (repeats)
- No other real structure or form

PART 2:



■ Native
American



Native American Dance

- Some social dances, but most are ceremonial
 - Religious services and celebrations
 - Like a prayer
 - Told stories and history through dance
 - Story of a successful hunt



Eagle Dance

Music for the Dances included...

- Drums
 - Often just drums
- Flutes
- Rattles/shakers



There are hundreds of different Native American nations, and each has its own dances, even though some of them are very similar. Here are three dances from Native Americans who lived in or near Kentucky during the Colonial period.

- The Shawnee people celebrated with a **Green Corn Dance** when the corn was ripe enough to pick, in early summer. Another dance celebrated the harvest, like our Thanksgiving holiday.




- The Chickasaw people honored the snake for its patience and skill as a hunter with a Snake Dance. The dancers formed a long line, following the head dancer. As they moved across the space, the head dancer imitated the slithery movement of the snake closing in on its prey.



- The Cherokee **Stomp Dance** involved a lot of forceful movements and a very loud song. A leader began the singing and dancing, and the other dancers answered him with their movements and voice. Noise-making instruments, like shells, deer hoofs, and turtle-shell rattles, were fastened to the dancers' ankles and wrists





Native American Dance Today

- Native American dancing was almost wiped out a hundred years ago, because it was not allowed by the American government.
- Now, dance is an important part of the festivities at pow-wows, social events where Native Americans gather together to celebrate their cultural heritage (family reunions)

Pow-wows

- Held once a year
- Like family reunions
- People who are not Native Americans are invited (taste the food, watch crafts being made, attend dance ceremonies, learn more about the Native Americans)
- Storytellers tell their stories which are hundreds of years old



PART 3:



■ Native
American
Drama

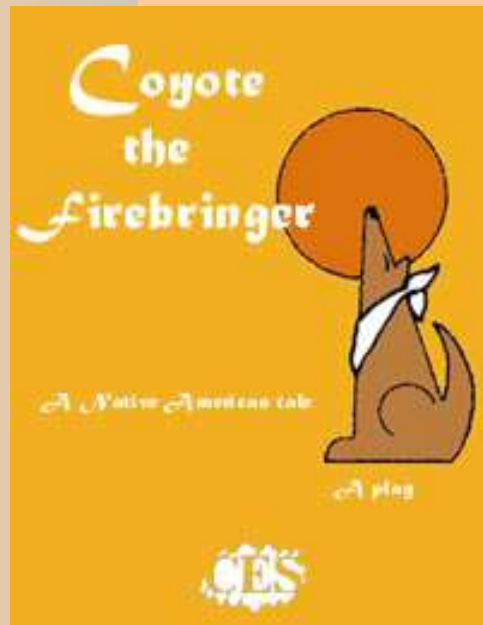


Native American Drama

- Native American didn't put on play; playacting was not a part of their traditional cultures.
- Oral tradition-means passing beliefs, information, and ways of doing things without writing.
 - Extremely important to Native Americans and West Africans because they had no written language.
- Storytelling was very important
- Folktales

Native American Folktales

- A folktale is a story that belongs to all the people (“folk”) just like a folk song is a song that belongs to all the people.





Myths

- Are folktales that explain how things came to be. They're usually set in a long ago time when magic and mystery seemed to make many odd things possible. Many cultures have creation myths telling how the world and all the things in it (people, too) came to be.



Legends

- Are stories about people in history such as John Henry, King Arthur, Robin Hood, and Pocahontas and John Smith. Their legends give these people powers they didn't have in real life.

Trickster tales

- Are about people or animals who act like people. Tricksters delight in tricking others and usually win because of their cleverness and because of a character flaw in the trickster's victim (such as being greedy or careless).



Anansi the spider

Storytellers

Literary Elements a storyteller uses...

- Facial and vocal expression
- Body movement
- Diction
- Speaking style
- Nonverbal expression



...To make the story live in the minds of the listeners. Although the technical elements are not like those of a play, *costume* and *sound* can still be very important.

Purpose of Stories

- Stories in the Native American tradition were told not only to entertain
 - Teach children to respect and honor all living things



Native American religions emphasize living in harmony with the earth, like modern-day environmentalists. Animals in Native American stories are not cute or funny. They don't talk and walk like humans. Animals are equal partners with people, and they own the land, water and sky as much as people do.



The story “Spider the Fire Bringer” is found in the folktales of many Native American nations. Sometimes it’s called “How Grandmother Spider Brought Fire to the People” or “Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun.” The details are different too. This retelling is based on the Cherokee version.





Spider the Fire Bringer

A Native American Myth

Long ago, when the world was very new, the animals lived in darkness and in cold. The Great Spirit, having created them, took pity and thought, **“I must send them something to keep them warm.”** With a flick of his wrist, he sent lightning crashing to the ground below; with a snap of his fingers a tree on an island in the middle of the sea burst into light, bright red fingers licking its long bare limbs. **“I call this fire,”** the Great Spirit said to the animals, their eyes a wonder at all they could see for the first time. **“It is yours now to use as you will.”**



“But how will we bring it here?” the animals asked each other for island was far from their home. The little water spider cried out with all her might, **“Let me try it, please,”** but nobody paid attention because she was so small and helpless.

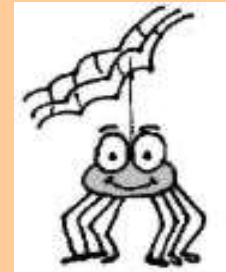
The big white bird volunteered and flew close to the flaming tree, but the air near the tree was thick and hard to breath so he flew back, his feathers turned black from the smoke (and he was called crow forever after).



Possum said he would fetch the fire because his fur coat would protect him from harm, but as he drew closer, a burning ember flew into the air and caught in the thick fur of his tail. Before his friends could douse the flames, all the fur was burned away, and still this day the possum's tail is as naked as a newborn possum baby.



Then the spider begged again. **“I have a plan,”** she said. The other animals laughed, but none of them had a plan and so they agreed she could go.





The water spider ran so fast across the water she seemed to fly. Then she spun a long thin web and curled the strands around until she'd made a tiny pot with a tiny lid, tight and sound as a drum, that she could carry on her back. She spun a pathway through the air to the still burning tree and slowly, carefully, lowered herself near the flames, close enough to catch a spark, which she tucked away inside the tiny pot and took safely away. And until this day, on the back of the water spider and all her many children, is a tiny red dot, a memory of the little bowl she carried on her back to bring light and warmth to the world. **THE END**



Spider the Fire Bringer

- What voice would you use for the Great Spirit?
 - Loud or soft
 - Strong or weak

(This would be the Great Spirit's speaking style)

- What about the spider?
 - Her voice would probably be high, because she is little, but would she sound old? Or young?
 - What about her vocal expression?
 - *Would her voice make you think she was excited about getting the fire? Determined? Nervous?*



■ What movements could you use?

- You could glide around in front of your audience with your arms outstretched when the crow flies too near the fire, and, as the possum, you could jump back and try to swat your tail to put out the flames.

■ How would the water spider move?

PART 4:



■ Native American Art

Native American Visual Art

- The visual art produced by Native Americans is among the finest in the world
- It is not like European art
- Much of the purpose for NA art is functional, even art made for ceremonial reasons.
 - For example, the Apache made beautiful items of clothing to honor warriors and their religious leaders.



Navajo women collected wool from their sheep and goats and wove it into beautiful blankets.

- There is no reason, other than the love of beauty, for the extra time it took to create the color and the intricate designs.



Pottery and Basketry

- Pottery and basketry is found in almost all Native American nations, including the Native Americans who lived in or near Kentucky.



Pottery



- Pottery is made from clay
 - Today we use it for dishware and decorative pieces, just like the Native Americans have done for thousands of years





Basketry

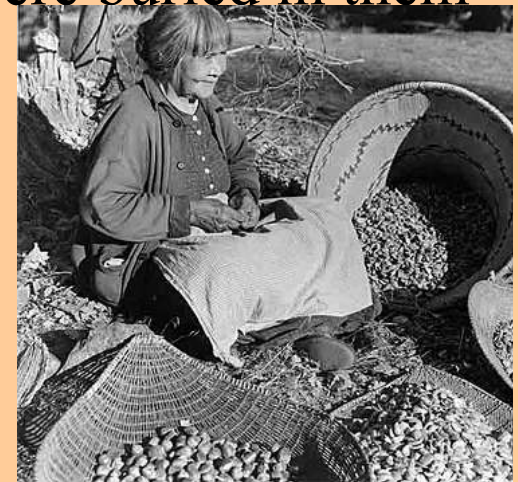


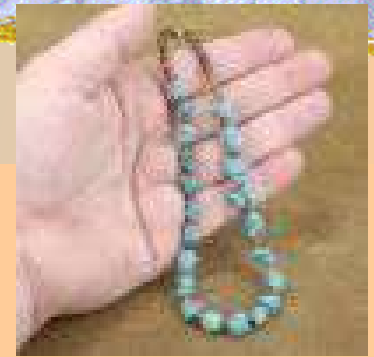
- Baskets woven from plant fibers served many functions

- Babies were carried in them
- Food was gathered and stored in them
- Some NA cultures, people were buried in them

■ A single baskets might take dozens of hours to

make





Beads/Shells

- The Shawnee people of Kentucky, along with several other Native American cultures, made shell beads to use as part of their regalia (*traditional Native American dress*)
- Trade with other Native American.
- The beads were made into jewelry, belts, or sewn onto clothing
- Larger shells, *gorgets*, were worn by men around their necks
- Carvings on the larger shells often told stories or gave the history of a family

Masks and Totem Poles



- Native Americans who lived along the coast created weird and wonderful colored masks by carving wood
- The masks were worn by the dancers in their worship ceremonies
- They also carved whole logs into totem poles.
Totem-symbols
 - They had special meaning and often told the history of the people.



Review



- What have you learned?