

Reclaiming Ceremonies

Photographer Sue Reynolds first met Joe, seen below, at the Arlee Celebration, or powwow in 2006. Joe is getting ready to dance, as his ancestors did, to celebrate their culture. Dancers wear colorful, intricate regalia (outfits), including beaded and feathered clothing, which has been given to them by their families, and which represents hundreds of hours of craftsmanship. Rare eagle feathers are sometimes given to honor a dancer's achievements and/or service to their community.

At the Arlee Celebration, Sue Reynolds noticed that Joe stood out among the junior Traditional Dancers for his intense concentration, beautiful outfit and straightforward manner. Two years later, again at the Arlee Celebration, Joe remained intently focused as his grandmother helped him get ready to dance.



Joe Parizeau Getting Ready with Grandmother Rose, Montana, 2008 by Sue Reynolds

Discussion and Writing Questions

The top photograph is what is referred to as a documentary photograph: It clearly documents or records what is happening and to whom. The second photograph is referred to as a fine art photograph or image because it comes in close, giving you only part of the story and the subject, as it focuses more on overall design elements like colors, lines and shapes.

1. Even though the two photographs are very different, what similar thing is happening in each photograph? Do you think one photograph tells the story of an older family member teaching a younger one better than the other one? Explain.

2. Do you prefer the documentary style photograph at the top or the art photograph below it? Explain.

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Mother and Child, Rocky Boy Reservation, Montana, 2010 by Sue Reynolds

Powwows can last from one day to a week and take many months to organize. Dance arbors such as this large arena in the photograph below, are semi-permanent or permanent structures that are considered sacred space because of the traditional singing, drumming and dancing that takes place inside.



Grand Entry, Tamkaliks Celebration, Wallowa, Oregon, 2006 by Sue Reynolds

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Women Under a Big Sky, Crow Reservation, Montana, 2010 by Sue Reynolds

The line of brightly dressed women above are part of the evening session's Grand Entry, when all dancers gather at the entrance to the arena where, accompanied by singing and drumming, they parade into the dance arbor. The Grand Entry for many tribes is the East entrance, where the sun rises. Many Native Americans consider the dancing, singing and drumming in the arena to be praying. They do this for family members in need and/or for the whole community. They are also celebrating life.

These women have just entered Crow Fair's large dance arbor as the sun is setting. Crow Fair is one of the largest attended U.S. powwows in Indian Country, and the dancers and drums (drum groups who sing while drumming) come to Crow Fair from all over the West, including western and central Canada.

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. In small groups, make a list or a poster: if you are not an American Indian, if you are and do not identify much with your Native heritage, or do not live near an Indian reservation, where has your information about Native Americans come from? If you are Native American, where has your knowledge about your own tribe/s come from?
2. Were you aware of Indian powwows before discussing them in class? If so, what did you think a powwow was and what did you think happened there?
3. What surprising thing did you learn about Native American powwows from this discussion?
4. Why do you think the entrance to the powwow arena faces East, where the sun rises?
5. Why do you think the arena where American Indian dances, singing and drumming takes place is considered sacred?
6. Would you like to attend a powwow?

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Blurred Drum Beats Cirled, Flathead Reservation, Montana, 2008 by Sue Reynolds



Red Fancy Dancer, Arlee Celebration, Montana, 2006 by Sue Reynolds

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. Native people say the powwow drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth. What do you think that means?
2. Do you think of the earth as a living entity as American Indians do?
3. This drum, like many, is ringed by men who sing traditional tribal songs while drumming. Do you think it's necessary to show people's faces in photographs in order to tell the story of what they are doing?
4. This photograph is another example of the photographer coming in close to isolate and draw attention to the main subject, which is the drum, the blurred drum sticks and the participants' hands.
5. Imagine the rhythmic beat of the drum urging and accompanying the Fancy Dancer in the photograph on the left as he whirls in the fast style of this dance. The Fancy Dance is one of the powwow's most colorful and exciting dances. Highly anticipated, it is performed by young men dressed in brilliant regalia, whose stamina allows them to execute intricate or "fancy" footwork at high speed.
6. To photographer Sue Reynolds, this Fancy Dancer is the spirit of joy and transformation at the heart of contemporary powwows. How does her photograph capture the essence of the Fancy Dance?

Use the # interpretation lesson in **Interpretation Strategies** to begin discussion and elicit one or two word descriptions of both photographs above. Create group or class poems from students' responses.

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Share one or both poems below by Victor Charlo. "Mobility" is suggested for all grades.

This excerpt from Victor Charlo's [Poet's Statement](#) reflects on how his Native history and experiences have influenced his poetry.

"Through reservation imagery, the sounds of my poetry, the symbols, the use of Salish words, I continue to teach myself so I won't forget. These are the things that I want people to know: you do dig bitterroot, you do tan hides. That is how I was raised. I want people to get a sense of wonder. How did we get here? Is there a trail, a path that we can take so we can do it again? We aren't always up there at the top of the mountain. Sometimes we are at the bottom of the mountain and you have to figure how to get up...That is what my poetry is about, how and why I write it..."

MOBILITY

Indian youth are too mobile.
They flow and flow. We see them afraid
As we hit hard times. They laugh one day
And the next the fear of God has them shaking.
I fear their homelessness.
Dancing Boy, you have your mountain.
Sing me a brave song.

Dirty Corner Poems and Other Stories, by Victor A. Charlo.

Charlo's poem, "Rebellion," is suggested for older students.

"My poetry tells of the trickiness and difficulty of living in two worlds: Native and non-Native. Through my family, in other elders, in the lives of my children and grandchildren, my good friends, and all of my students, I have been able to discover and foster a continuity and understanding of my life lived in-between two worlds via poetry."

Discussion and Writing Questions

1. In this poem Victor Charlo urges Native youth to connect to the traditions their people find sacred and powerful. What fears has he shared about their lives that lead him to suggest this?
2. What do you think Charlo means when he writes that Indian youth are too mobile?
3. When the poet states he fears their homelessness what do you think he means?
4. Why does he think traditional singing and dancing will help Native youth?
5. What is Dancing Boy's mountain and what does it bring him?
6. Why do you think the poet asks Dancing Boy to sing him a brave song?

Note: Students can research the sacred traditions of tribes near them or in their state. What are their ceremonies? Who leads their rituals? Why do tribal members participate in traditional ceremonies?

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"My early experiences are why I write the way I do -- with as few words as possible. I cut to the quick. When I write I try to conjure up the old sayings, those words I grew up with that come out every now and then."

REBELLION

Chokecherry leaves are red,
money trees quake a young grasshopper green.
Bark dazzles you like the snow vest
on dancing boy as apples so good are gone
Outside the kitchen window
Beyond right through that narrow passage.
Jocko, who is going to teach me to dance?
Should I ask the dancing boy to show me how?
Knees bent, legs raised, arm up, ribbons
Flowing in the wind, eagle feathers, dancing, dancing.
They ask me to go to Wounded Knee
But I say I am helper here at home
and I have to tend to the garden.
They agree, for people have died at Wounded Knee,
And it is time that they come home.

I am home, that is all the wisdom I need to know.
For now, White bird dancing.
Everyone should have a place at least once
in their life that is secure, where they can
Come and go as freely as they want,
Break camp, dancing boy, you have the mountain.

Dirty Corner Poems and Other Stories, by Victor A. Charlo.

Discussion and Writing Questions

Read the poem to your students and then read it again slowly, or share the written version.

1. What words or phrases does Victor Charlo choose to relate to:
The colorful regalia worn for celebration ceremonies? Discuss how the colors relate to and come from nature.
2. What the poet is seeking? Why do you think he wants to be taught to dance?
3. How does Charlo evoke the past?
4. What do you think Victor Charlo believes the dancer can summon from his ancestors?
5. What does being "home" mean to the poet? What does being "home" mean to you?
6. What have you learned about Native ceremonial dances from Victor Charlo's poems?

Note: Older students can research Wounded Knee to continue this discussion or you can explain that it was an historic massacre that killed many American Indians. They can further research the history of government suppression of American Indian religious ceremonies for a tribe in their state or region. In addition to secondary sources, students can contact an elder from a local tribe to learn more about this subject.

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Other Sections Inside this Chapter:

Reclaiming Culture Introduction
Reclaiming Culture
Reclaiming Language
Interpretation Strategies

Additional Chapters:

Reservation Life
Mother Earth Introduction

Other Resources

Arlee Powwow Website

"Crow Fair 2018." *Facebook.*

"Heart Butte Indian Days
Powwow." *Facebook.*

"Lakota Powwow & Celebrations
Calendar." *Travel South Dakota.*

Tribal Directory Website

"Rules Governing the Court of
Indian Offenses." *Department of
the Interior, Office of Indian
Affairs, 30 March, 1883.*