



# Good Medicine Bundle

DIGITAL LESSONS

OPERATION  
PREVENTION

## The Medicine Wheel: Finding Harmonious Balance

Educator Guide

Middle  
School Bundle



Discovery  
EDUCATION





# Time

x4 60-minute class periods



# Good Medicine Bundle

DIGITAL LESSONS

## OVERVIEW

This digital lesson bundle uses the symbolism of the Medicine Wheel to provide learners with information related to historical trauma and how wellness and resilience is embedded in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) culture. Through ceremony and teachings that incorporate stories of prayer, fasting, giving back, and respecting all things in life, students will learn how AI/AN communities use traditions and cultural practice to heal from traumas and keep their lives in balance. Learners are asked to develop their own personal Medicine Wheel and think about how all pieces of that wheel are related and connected. They will then apply this same thinking to their classroom and community, focusing on the roles they play in keeping these communities harmonious and in balance.

As we realize more about the effects of trauma, current and historical, on our students, it becomes crucial that educators have access to instructional materials that support emotional and mental wellness for students. This Good Medicine Bundle shares knowledge about historical trauma in Native communities and how Native approaches to wellness and finding balance through the Medicine Wheel can help students become more self-aware of areas in which they need balance.

To support a holistic approach to wellness, you may choose to utilize other lessons from Operation Prevention on making healthy decisions and responsible uses of medication to connect student understanding of balance and wellness as a way to avoid reliance on opioids or other substances.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- ◇ Recognize the concept of historical trauma and discuss how historical trauma can be connected to stress and imbalance in our lives.
- ◇ Explore the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel and think about how the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of the Medicine Wheel can guide one toward balance and harmony in life.
- ◇ Design their own Medicine Wheel that represents their own identity.
- ◇ Discuss what a classroom or type of community needs to stay in balance, what kinds of things can create imbalance, and the role they play in keeping the community harmonious and balanced.

## MATERIALS

### Day 1:

- ◇ Handout 1: Resilience in the Face of Trauma
- ◇ Handout 2: Talking Circle History and Protocol

### Day 2:

- ◇ Handout 1: Connecting the Four Directions
- ◇ Handout 2: Medicine Wheel Bingo

### Day 3:

- ◇ Handout 1: The Healing of Ceremony
- ◇ Handout 2: The Healing of Traditional Medicine
- ◇ Handout 3: The Healing Dance
- ◇ Handout 4: My Medicine Wheel (task sheet)

## NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Next Generation Science Standards

- ◇ MS-LS1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structure and Processes
  - ◇ MS-LS1-6: Construct a scientific explanation based on evidence for the role of photosynthesis in the cycling of matter and flow of energy into and out of organisms.
- ◇ MS-LS2 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics
  - ◇ MS-LS2-3. Develop a model to describe the cycling of matter and flow of energy among living and nonliving parts of an ecosystem.
  - ◇ MS-LS2-4: Construct an argument supported by empirical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations.

### English Language Arts Common Core State Standards

- ◇ Reading – Craft and Structure:
  - ◇ R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- ◇ Language – Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:
  - ◇ L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- ◇ Speaking and Listening – Comprehension and Collaboration:
  - ◇ SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaboratives with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.



## IMPORTANT GUIDANCE FOR THE TEACHER:

**For teachers of American Indian/Alaska Native students:** For Native students, it is important to help them understand that what has happened to Native people historically is passed down through generations, not only through community stories and structures, but also through epigenetics. This can play a subconscious/inherent role in how students may feel about themselves or how they engage with their emotions. This can also affect their own mental health and wellness as well as their community. This also has a connection to their potential use of substances and the higher rates of addiction in Native communities.

The Day 1 lesson discusses historical trauma, which includes the loss of culture, language, land base, and more. The far-reaching impact of this trauma is still very real today and has led to cyclical and extreme poverty on many reservations. In turn, this causes grief, depression, poor health, anxiety, and substance misuse. The work of many tribes to revitalize culture and language is part of the process to heal from grief and trauma. For Native students, the reality of this trauma, combined with confronting it in lessons can be painful, as well as cause feelings of anger, hurt, or confusion. It is important to think about what support structures your school has in place for these students.

It is also critical as trauma is addressed that the topic of resilience is also discussed. Resilience and recovery from trauma for Native communities is directly connected to freedom to practice cultural traditions, embrace and express identity, and speak Native languages. Without these, the “fire” so culturally valued cannot burn with resilience. Creating a safe space for Native students to feel their cultural identity is acknowledged, respected, and valued in school is non-negotiable.

**For teachers who do not teach Native students:** For classrooms or schools that do not serve Native students, the information above is still important for the teacher to internalize. However, non-Native students may be hearing information about trauma or Native culture that is very new. While the narrative of historical trauma is very important for ALL students to hear, it is just as important to stress that Native communities have shown great resilience, and many are actively reclaiming cultural practices and language today. Because federal policy in the past attempted to eradicate Native culture, it is only through resilience and revitalization that Native peoples are able to engage in the process of healing. If this is restricted or ignored, such as in schools or workplaces, then trauma is further perpetuated.

The historical narrative of the United States has created intergenerational trauma first in Native communities, but also in other minority communities, such as African American or Latinx. This is an opportunity for students to consider the many narratives of historical trauma that may be present in the community and what factors are contributing to resilience and healing. While the Medicine Wheel is a Native practice of wellness that is similar among many tribes, it is also an example of how a culture or people have relied on their own traditional or natural ways of wellness to combat the external forces of trauma or suffering.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

It is important that the teacher note the sensitivity in discussing trauma as well as the discussions and feelings that can arise from introducing historical trauma. We strongly encourage teachers to read the [Trauma Informed Research & Strategies](#) one-pager by the National Indian Education Association (NIEA). This will provide context and background to historical trauma of native people and adverse childhood experiences. The one-pager also briefly shares trauma-informed strategies for supporting students.

There are topics in this lesson that may be new to some students and even some educators. For more information on Carlisle Indian Industrial School, visit <http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>. To understand the trauma impact of boarding school and the current movement to bring healing to native communities, visit the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/>.





# Procedure



## DAY 1

### Slides 1-3: Title Slide, Objectives, and Essential Question

1. Introduce the lesson and discuss the objectives with students.
2. If your classroom and community is not part of an AI/AN community, or not near one, this is an opportunity to ask students what they know about AI/AN peoples and ensure they know there are many modern AI/AN communities and people who are still in existence and thriving today.
3. For slide three, share with students that by the end of the lesson series, they will be able to answer this essential question.

### Slide 4: The Imbalance of Historical Trauma

4. Introduce the lesson.
5. Ask the students to raise their hand if they have heard the word trauma. If most students do not raise their hand, then use the examples below to explain that trauma is what happens to a person or community when something harmful or stressful happens. If most students do raise their hand, ask them to think quietly about an example of trauma. Share the list below to see if these are some of the things they think could be traumatic. Emphasize that trauma is something that happens to everyone but sometimes events may seem more harmful or affect us more than we realize. For example,
  - ◆ Moving to a new city and leaving friends and family behind
  - ◆ Losing a loved one or a beloved pet
  - ◆ Being in a car accident
  - ◆ Events such as pandemics, fires, storms, and other natural disasters



### Notes for the teacher:

Keep in mind that discussions around trauma could bring up some difficult topics for some students if they have experienced trauma in their lives. Remind everyone that they don't have to share personal experiences unless they want to, and to be respectful of one another when having these types of discussions.

6. Continue the discussion by asking them how they think experiencing trauma like the examples above can affect our emotions and our physical bodies.
7. This is the opportunity to lead into the next reading. Share with students that traumatic events that happened in the past can sometimes also leave impacts on families and communities. Natural disasters can force people to have to leave their homeland and lose their belongings and never return home. Wars can cause countries to change and separate families. When major traumatic experiences in the past cause a community or a people to feel emotional harm and long-lasting impact, this is called historical trauma. Then, share that in their reading, they are going to learn about historical trauma that Native American tribes still experience even when some of the events happened many years in the past.

### Notes for the teacher:

If students probe additionally about examples of historical trauma, some examples that may be known to them would be the lasting effects of slavery on the African American community or the Holocaust for Jewish people.

### Slide 5: Storytelling

8. Ensure that students have Handout 1: Resilience in the Face of Trauma. Ask students to read the story by Dr. Shane Doyle of the Apsaalooke Nation about generational trauma and the Indian Boarding School Movement.
9. Take a few minutes to find the Apsaalooke Nation on the map in handout 1. The Apsáalooke (Up-saw-low-gah) are also known as the Crow People, which is the name that the Europeans called them.
10. After they read the story, have them write down their thoughts on their own to the question, "What is resilience?"
11. Then, direct students' attention to the map on page 3 of the handout. Ask students what they notice about the difference in the amount of land that Native tribes occupied at each date. Discuss the significance of where most of the reservations are located now. Also, ask students to share their noticing about the population growth chart in the corner of the map. Then ask students why the resiliency of Native people is so critical considering the land loss their ancestors have suffered.

### Notes for the teacher:

This is another opportunity for a personalized lesson. Ask students to find where your community is located on the map. Are you close to any of these reservations? If so, what can you do to learn more? If not, how does that affect the demographics of your region and the amount of knowledge or lack of knowledge of native people in the United States?



### Slide 6: Talking Circle: Read, Reflect, and Respond

12. Provide students with Handout 2: Talking Circle History & Protocol, and read through this brief history and description of talking circles together. Ask students to raise their hand if they have ever participated in a talking circle or something similar. Call on these students to share their experiences with the class.
13. Tell the students that talking circles are going to be how discussions will take place in these lessons.
14. Discuss the following, together with the group of students
  - ◇ How do talking circles allow everyone's voice to be heard?
  - ◇ How do they promote respect?
15. Ask the students to brainstorm some social norms that might be good to follow in talking circles. Tell them that "norms" are guidelines that everyone is expected to follow, in a social situation. Once the brainstorming ideas begin to slow down, ask the students to come to consensus on the norms they will have in their talking circles.

#### Notes for the teacher:

Write the norms that everyone agrees on in a place where they can remain, and where all of the students will be able to see them during talking circles.

### Slide 7: Talking Circle: Reflect and Respond

16. Ask students to get into groups of 4–5 students to form talking circles.
17. Remind them to follow the group norms that were agreed upon, and ask students to respond to some or all of the following questions/prompts in their talking circles.
  - ◇ What causes stress in our lives? How can it be helpful and/or harmful?
  - ◇ How might the long-standing effects of historical trauma that is passed down through generations be similar to the stress we feel? How is it different?
  - ◇ What kind of historical trauma may exist in our families and/or our community?
  - ◇ In what ways can the image of the Medicine Wheel, that Dr. Doyle talked about in his story, help people to heal from historical trauma? How can it help to keep people mentally healthy?

## DAY 2

### Slide 8: The Medicine Wheel

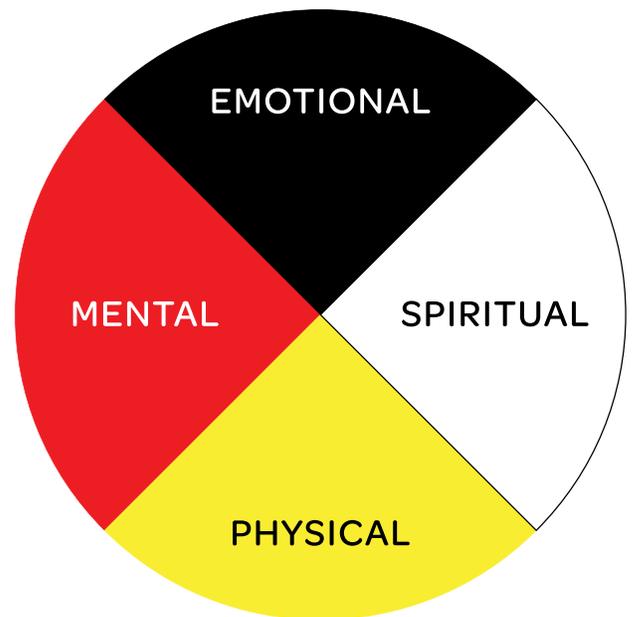
1. Introduce this lesson about the Medicine Wheel. If your students have completed Lesson 1, they have already seen one version of the Medicine Wheel that included heart, mind, spirit, and body in the four quadrants.
2. Ask students to brainstorm out loud with the class about other ideas that the four directions or four quadrants can represent. Invite them to think about things that are important in their lives and remind them that a Medicine Wheel represents something in a balanced and harmonious way.

### Slide 9: Storytelling: Connecting the Four Directions

3. Ensure the students have Handout 3: Connecting the Four Directions. Ask students to read it to themselves while keeping in mind the image of the Medicine Wheel.

### Slide 10: Medicine Wheel Bingo

4. After they have read the story in Handout 3, provide each student with their own bingo card that is included in Handout 4: Medicine Wheel Bingo.
5. Randomly call out an “activity” from the table in Handout 4 and ask the students to write the activity into the quadrant where they think it best belongs.
6. Continue to call out items from the table. Stop at a set time and invite students to share their “Medicine Wheel Bingo” card with the class.
  - ♦ Note: One of the purposes of this activity is to move students toward realizing many of the things we deal with or feel can fall into multiple quadrants because things that take place in our lives affect us as a whole, and all quadrants of the Medicine Wheel are connected.
7. After the game has been played for some time, invite students to come up with their own “personal health activities” to add to the list.



## Slide 11: Talking Circle: Reflect and Respond

8. Invite students to form talking circle groups of 4-5 students each.

### Notes for the teacher:

Talking circles are an ancient and important part of many Native American communities. They are a simple and valuable way to communicate our feelings to a group and, in doing so, we form a respectful and compassionate community.

**Protocol:** Sit in a circle and prepare to listen and share. The talking circle can be focused on any topic or issue. Each person has the opportunity to speak when they are holding the stick, feather, or other object used to identify whose turn it is to speak. The circle is complete when everyone has an opportunity to speak once, and most discussions have two or more opportunities for individuals to speak.

9. Ask students to discuss all or some of the following questions in their talking circles, reminding them of the talking circle norms that were agreed upon in the earlier lesson.
  - ◇ What does the Medicine Wheel teach us about American Indian/Alaska Native traditional knowledge and understanding?
  - ◇ How are physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual parts of our selves connected?
  - ◇ What is the impact of changing one of the Medicine Wheel components? What is their relationship to one another?

## DAY 3

## Slide 12: Balancing Your Own Medicine Wheel

1. If the students completed Lesson 2 focused on learning about the Medicine Wheel, introduce this lesson by reviewing what was discussed in the activities from Lesson 2.
2. Invite students to write down their responses to the following questions:
  - ◇ How do we become imbalanced in our lives?
  - ◇ What are some things that I do to heal and try to live a harmonious and balanced life when I feel imbalanced?
  - ◇ How do substances like opioids, other medications (which are sometimes intended to help), or other unhealthy practices lead to imbalance?

### Notes for the teacher:

Because this topic is focused on personal information, students may not feel comfortable sharing what they write for this activity with the class. It is important to acknowledge this and let them know that while they are not required to share their personal information with others, they are encouraged to think about areas of imbalance in their lives and how they move their lives toward harmony and balance.

3. Ask students to share their responses with the group, if they feel comfortable.

### Slide 13: Storytelling: The Healing of Ceremony

4. Ensure students have Student Handout 5: The Healing of Ceremony.
5. Invite the students to read this story on their own.

### Slide 14: Storytelling: The Healing of Traditional Medicine and Dance

6. Ensure students have Student Handout 6: The Healing of Traditional Medicine and Student Handout 7: The Healing of Dance.
7. Ask them to read these stories aloud either in small groups or with the larger class.

### Slide 15: My Medicine Wheel

8. Introduce this activity by inviting students to think about the stories they have just read about healing, and to reflect on some things in their life that help them to live a balanced life.
9. Invite students to fill in Student Handout 8: My Medicine Wheel, choosing quadrants they can relate to and listing activities or elements within those quadrants that demonstrate their lives and contribute to who they are. Encourage them to use words, drawings, colors, or anything else that demonstrates all of the pieces they balance in their lives.

### Slide 16: Talking Circle: Reflect and Respond

10. As a wrap-up, ask students to share their personal Medicine Wheel in a talking circle. If they are not comfortable sharing their personal Medicine Wheel, ask them to write a reflection that addresses the following:
  - ♦ Which quadrant are you the most focused on at this time in your life?
  - ♦ What are some things in your life that tend to disrupt the balance in your Medicine Wheel (e.g., relationships, social media, illnesses, trauma)?
  - ♦ Discuss what you learned about traditional ways of healing, and how this might help you think about healthier ways to find balance in your life.



## Notes for the teacher:

Talking circles are an ancient and important part of many Native American communities. They are a simple and valuable way to communicate our feelings to a group and, in doing so, we form a respectful and compassionate community.

**Protocol:** Sit in a circle and prepare to listen and share. The talking circle can be focused on any topic or issue. Each person has the opportunity to speak when they are holding the stick, feather, or other object used to identify whose turn it is to speak. The circle is complete when everyone has an opportunity to speak once, and most discussions have two or more opportunities for individuals to speak.

## DAY 4

### Slide 17: The Power of Community

1. Introduce this lesson with a classroom brainstorm in response to the questions:
  - a. "What keeps a community in balance?"
  - b. What can throw a community out of balance?
2. Consider having students brainstorm what community means and what kinds of communities they are a part of. Emphasize that their class is a community.

### Slide 18: Storytelling

3. Ensure students have Student Handout 9: Maintaining Balance and Harmony in Our Communities and Student Handout 10: The History of the Jingle Dress Dance.
4. Invite them to read both of these handouts in preparation for the next two activities.

### Slide 19: Classroom Medicine Wheel

5. Develop a Classroom Medicine Wheel with the students, which incorporates four aspects of the classroom that need to remain in balance to keep the classroom balanced. As you are doing this activity, facilitate and promote students' thinking with the following prompts:
  - ♦ Like the jingle dress dancing, can you think of any ceremonies or rituals that represent pride, wellness, and celebration in our classroom?
  - ♦ Are there things that work to "purify" the classroom space, help with de-stressing and create a healthy setting for learning (i.e., sunlight, artwork, furniture)?
  - ♦ Are there any practices that, like the adopting practices of the Apsáalooke (Crow) people, work to strengthen relationships in the classroom?
  - ♦ What categories do these things fall into? For example, is the physical space important to keep the classroom in balance? Are the relationships with one another a key aspect of a balanced classroom?



## Slide 20: Community Medicine Wheel

6. Ask students to think about communities they are a member of, such as their family, a sports team, or the neighborhood or town they live in. Ask them to create a Medicine Wheel for that particular community.

## Slide 21: Talking Circle: Reflect and Respond

7. Invite students to form talking circles.

### Notes for the teacher:

Talking circles are an ancient and important part of many Native American communities. They are a simple and valuable way to communicate our feelings to a group and, in doing so, we form a respectful and compassionate community.

**Protocol:** Sit in a circle and prepare to listen and share. The Talking Circle can be focused on any topic or issue. Each person has the opportunity to speak when they are holding the stick, feather, or other object used to identify whose turn it is to speak. The circle is complete when everyone has an opportunity to speak once, and most discussions have two or more opportunities for individuals to speak.

8. In the talking circle, ask students to share their Community Medicine Wheel and respond to the following questions:
  - ◆ What ensures this community stays in harmony and balance?
  - ◆ What are some examples of imbalance that could affect this community?
  - ◆ What is your role in the community you chose for this activity?
  - ◆ How does your role play a part in keeping the community in balance?



## DAY 1: Student Handout 1

# Resilience in the Face of Trauma

By Dr. Shane Doyle, Apsáalooke Nation

### A. A Circle of Resiliency

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Nations are resilient in many good and positive ways. Much of their cultural strength comes from a ceremonial heritage that emphasizes spirituality and healing. In AI/AN communities, resiliency is passed down to each generation through an oral tradition that is not written down, but shared face to face through the living breath of elders to youth. Elders share stories and details about the ancient customs of prayer, fasting, giving back, and respecting all things in life. These sacred teachings are connected to what native people call the Medicine Wheel. Through ceremonies like the Sun Dance and the Giveaway, native people strengthen their spiritual connection to one another and to the Earth and are renewed in a circle of resiliency. The sacred ceremonies and prayers connected to the Medicine Wheel have helped AI/AN Nations remain resilient in the face of historic trauma, which continues to impact native communities in negative ways. In the past, the US government inflicted trauma on Native peoples by trying to erase their culture and force them to be “civilized.” To be resilient and heal from this trauma, Native nations work very hard to reclaim and keep their languages, foods, and cultural customs.

### B. Understanding How Trauma Impacts Us

Everyone, and probably every living thing, experiences some type of traumatic event during their life. Some traumas are a natural part of life, like losing our teeth as children, falling and hurting ourselves when learning to walk, experiencing severe illness like the flu, or being separated from a parent or caregiver. These are the types of traumas that all people experience and build resilience to because they are only temporary and give us insight into what it means to suffer, lose, and to accept our limitations and grow in our wisdom. Some traumatic experiences are not normal or natural, and are the result of someone or something being violent or cruel. These types of traumatic experiences can be both physically and emotionally damaging. In most cases, a physical injury will heal far faster and more completely than the invisible emotional wounds that can remain. Sometimes people and communities suffer through extreme and violent traumatic experiences. This can take years, and sometimes generations, to heal from the destruction inflicted in people’s hearts and minds. Often what is lost through traumatic experience can never be fully recovered. The survivors must accept this loss and find a way to move forward, despite what they have lost.

### C. Severe Trauma Leaves Long Lasting Legacy of Destruction

American Indian/Alaska Native people today are faced with this kind of trauma, called historic generational trauma as a result of suffering through unimaginable loss of life, land and way of life. After enjoying thousands of years of good health, millions of AI/AN died in just a few hundred years from diseases like smallpox that came from invading Europeans. This devastating pandemic was the first traumatic event that caused AI/AN communities to become severely weakened and distressed, but it was just the beginning of their struggle to stay alive. The AI/AN people who survived these pandemics went on to fight and lose a war to protect their homelands and then faced poverty and starvation. Soon after, AI/AN children were taken from their families and their communities and placed



in U.S. Government Boarding Schools, traumatizing them by not allowing them to speak their language or practice any of their customs, and teaching them to be ashamed of their culture and traditions. The goal and motto of the boarding school movement was to “kill the Indian and save the man,” as stated by Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, founded in 1879. The list of traumatic experiences that AI/AN communities have endured since the start of colonization is long and tragic, but their ceremonial values and spiritual ways of life have allowed them to be resilient.

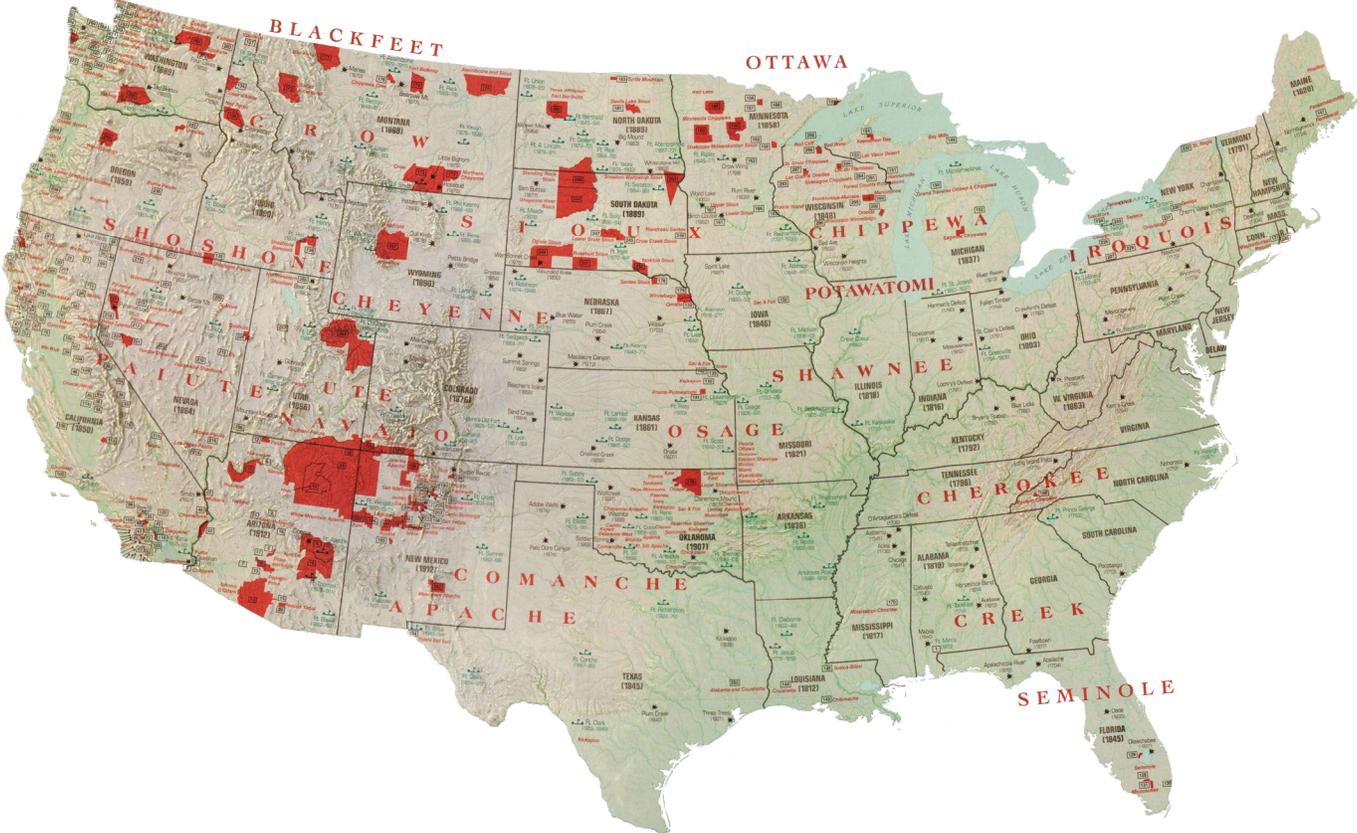
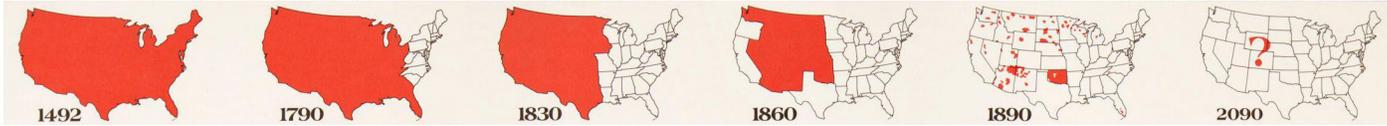


Figure 1: Native students with Richard Pratt on arrival at Carlisle Indian Industrial School [http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/NavajoStudents\\_Before.jpg](http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/NavajoStudents_Before.jpg)



Figure 2. Native students after coming to Carlisle Indian Industrial School [http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/NavajoStudents\\_After.jpg](http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/NavajoStudents_After.jpg)

Understanding the negative effects of historic generational trauma requires that we first understand a healthy and fully functioning community. The image and shape of the Medicine Wheel is a powerful visual tool to help us think about what a balanced and whole individual and community should embody. When historic trauma impacts a person and a community, the perfect circle is broken or crushed under the weight of loss, suffering, grief, and sometimes addiction. The everlasting ability of prayer and ceremony can heal us from trauma in an instant and give us a renewal of our heart/emotions, intellect/minds, spirits and bodies. This is the resilient power that a ceremonial way of life can provide, and therefore AI/AN people like myself continue to celebrate and honor the traditions of my ancestors and strive to be resilient. Although we live in the modern world, we carry our ways of knowing and healing with us, and the Medicine Wheel diagram below shows how our communities continue to cherish our ceremonial way of life that honors prayer, sacrifice and all our relatives.



## DAY 1: Student Handout 2

# Talking Circle History and Protocol

Talking circles are an ancient and important part of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) culture, as all native communities have a strong oral tradition, which emphasizes face-to-face interaction and communication. Talking circles are a simple and valuable way to express our thoughts and feelings to a group, and in doing so, we form a respectful and compassionate community.

Sit in a circle and prepare to listen and share. The talking circle can be focused on any topic or open to any issue. Each person can speak when they are holding the stick, feather, or other object used to identify whose turn it is to speak. The talking stick is passed in a clockwise fashion, with each person passing the stick after they have spoken. The circle is complete when everyone has an opportunity to speak once. In most discussions, the talking stick will go around the circle two or more times, giving more opportunity for individuals to speak.

Full group discussion questions:

- ◇ How does a talking circle allow everyone's voice to be heard? How does it ensure we are listening to one another?
- ◇ What are some group norms we can all agree on during talking circles?

### Group Norms for Talking Circles:



## DAY 2: Student Handout 1

# Connecting the Four Directions

By Dr. Shane Doyle, Apsáalooke Nation

Shodajee (Show-daw-jay)! Hello students, greetings from Bozeman, Montana. Bozeman is in a large valley surrounded by tall mountains, and is the traditional homeland of many indigenous nations, including my own Apsáalooke (Up-saw-low-gah) Nation. My people and other Indigenous people believe strongly in a ceremonial way of life that emphasizes the importance of discipline, humility, and prayer each day. There is also an understanding

among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people that medicine is not necessarily something that comes in the form of a pill or shot from doctors at the hospital or pharmacy. Instead, the Apsáalooke word for sacred medicine is “baxpa”, pronounced bawk-paw, and it is believed that each of us can receive the blessings of sacred medicine if we practice a balanced life and do good for ourselves and others. This is the reason the stone circles used in many of our tribal nations are called “Medicine Wheels.” They remind us how we can heal from pain and trauma and become whole again.



Figure 3 The Bighorn Medicine Wheel National Historic Site  
<https://brewminate.com/medicine-wheel-sacred-hoops-of-indigenous-americans/>



AI/AN communities on the Northern Plains recognize the number four as a sacred symbol of balance, wholeness, and wellness. The number four is most clearly recognized in the ceremonial Medicine Wheel, and it is particularly important to my nation, the Apsáalooke, and to me personally. My great-great-great-grandfather, who was born around 1820 near the Yellowstone River in Montana, was named Four Times, and was known as a respected chief. Today we do not know what exactly his name meant, or how he received it, but because the number four is a sacred number, it suggests a ceremonial title. The sacredness of the number comes from our earliest creation story, which describes how the maker of people, Old Man Coyote, needed the help of four ducks to retrieve mud from the bottom of an endless lake in order to form the first man and woman. Since that beginning, four has played a prominent role in the life of the Apsáalooke people.

The four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel represent the sacred four directions and the four sacred seasons of the year. Growing up on the Apsáalooke (Crow) Indian Reservation, I was taught by my elders to pray for everything and everyone within the four directions and the four seasons. During the sacred Sweat Lodge Ceremony, which all the Northern Plains Nations utilize, there are four prayer sessions that occur in sequence. Four times the door is opened and closed, and while it is closed a prayerful ceremony occurs when water is poured onto hot rocks to create a healing steam. The four sessions represent a full circle of prayer and healing, and a complete and perfect



cycle of life, including an ending that represents rebirth. During the fourth and final prayer session of the Apsáalooke Sweat Ceremony, we are told not to count the number of pours of water we put on the rocks because we are told that life goes on and on, like the stars in the sky, so we call the number “infinity”. After the four prayer sessions are complete, the ceremony is concluded, and participants feel a physical cleansing and a spiritual renewal. My tribal elders told me that the Sweat Lodge Ceremony could be used to heal any ailment, whether it be physical, emotional, psychological, or social. I have seen and experienced the healing powers of the Sweat Lodge Ceremony for over 40 years, and Native people have been utilizing it for their health and well-being for many thousands of years.

The Medicine Wheel also represents the four stages of life: Childhood, Young Adult, Adult, and Elder. Each stage provides challenges and blessings, but we are told by our elders to be thankful for each day and all things in this life. Even when tragedies and bad things happen, our traditional belief is to cry, to express our feelings and be aware and in touch with our emotions. This is the sign of a healthy and mature adult who has experienced the wide range of human emotions and seeks to maintain a balance, rather than repressing or diminishing their natural and normal feelings.

While each Tribal nation or region may have its own traditional medicine wheel, the image models the general modern concept of the Medicine Wheel, which has four quadrants. The four parts are symbolic as they can represent things that exist naturally in fours. For example, the four directions (north, south, east west); the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, autumn); the four elements (fire, air, earth, water); even the four stages of life (birth, youth, adulthood, death). For many people seeking balance in their lives, the four parts of the wheel represent the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual parts that make up an individual. The wheel is often comprised of red, black, white, and yellow, though some will have other representative colors.



Figure 4: Cheyenne Indians at a Sun Dance, by Edward S. Curtis, circa 1910 (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing-ways/medicine-ways/key-role-of-ceremony/images/ob1410.html>)

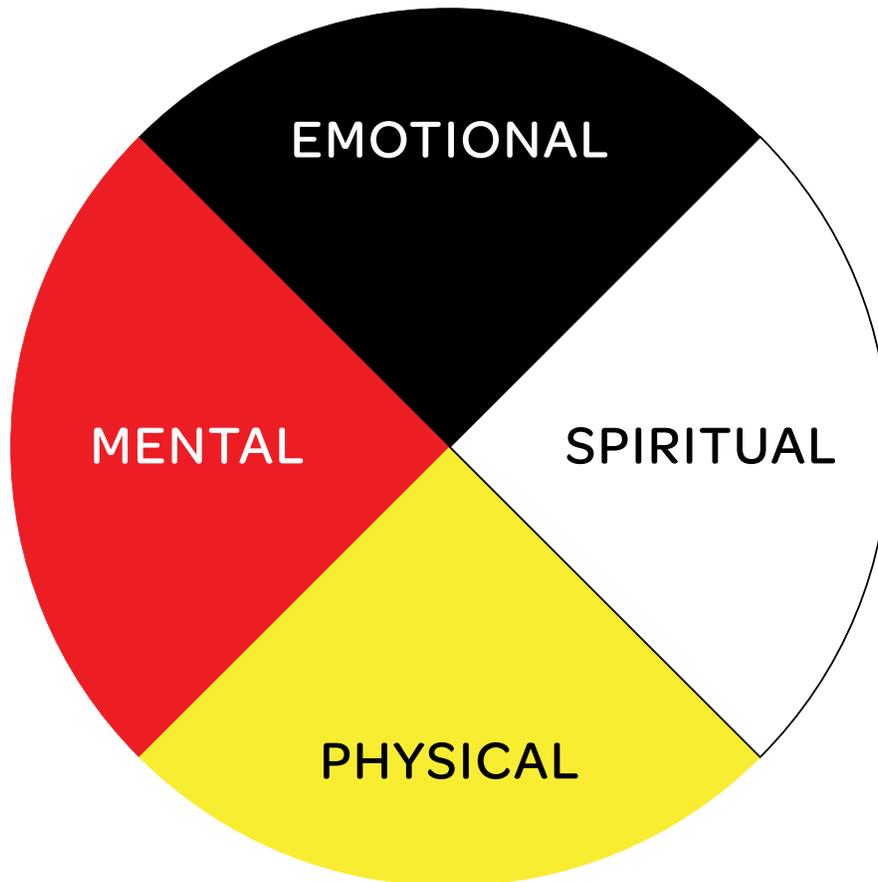
Some Medicine Wheels, like the one seen in figure 3, are over 6,000 years old. From these wheels came the Sun Dance ceremony. This ceremony is shared in some form by all tribes of the Northern Plains and is meant to heal the mind, body, and the community. It requires great work and preparation, as well as sacrifice and generosity. Participants in the ceremony must fast without food or water while dancing and praying for as many as 3 days and nights. Family and friends come together to support the ceremony, sharing food and exchanging gifts at the conclusion. There is a powerful feeling of connection, respect and sacredness at these ceremonies. This is the spiritual medicine that helps us to heal and to understand how only relying on pills or other substances to feel better may take us away from the circle of balance, health and wellness.

I am very thankful and proud of the beautiful traditions that have been passed down from my ancestors. The ceremonies and knowledge that have guided me in my life have protected me from addiction and given me the tools and the ability to live my best life.



## DAY 2: Student Handout 2

# Medicine Wheel Bingo Game



Jumping rope	Painting a picture	Taking a walk in the woods
Writing in a journal	Sleeping too little	Keeping a promise
Sleeping all weekend	Helping a friend	Going to church
Singing	Stretching after running	Reading a book
Eating too much	Eating a healthy breakfast	Yelling at your friend
Staying hydrated	Feeling sad	Doing drugs
Worrying too much	Telling someone you care.	Helping the community
Saving your money	Eating too much candy	Being kind to someone in need



## DAY 3: Student Handout 1

# The Healing of Ceremony

The Sweat Lodge ceremony is one of the most important traditional ceremonies that is still used on a weekly basis for many native people in Montana. The ceremony is much like a sauna, and happens in a smaller dome type of tipi, held up by willows that bend, rather than straight tipi poles. The person who directs the ceremony pours water onto hot rocks to create steam that is used to pray and cleanse the body, mind, and spirit. The Sweat Lodge ceremony is thousands of years old and connects us to each other and the natural world. Every tribal nation has different versions of the Sweat Lodge ceremony, but all of them are use for the purposes of healing, renewal, and giving thanks to the Creator. In the Lakota Sweat Lodge tradition, participants say the prayer “Mitakyasi oyasin,” when they enter the Lodge. This prayer means “I pray for all of my relatives” and signifies an understanding that everything is connected and related. In the Apsáalooke Sweat Lodge, there is a story about how a father and son use the ceremony to heal their son and brother from severe trauma. Native people are blessed to maintain such important and beautiful healing ceremonies, as they continue to help us heal from the wounds of historical trauma and give us the strength and guidance we need to live our best lives.



Apsáalooke Sweat Lodges yesterday and today



## DAY 3: Student Handout 2

# The Healing of Traditional Medicine

Let's look into three common sacred herbs used for purification and prayer in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities.

1. **Sage:** Sage or 'salvia' comes from the Latin word *salvare*, which means "to heal." Dried sage plants have been used in shamanic ceremonies for a long time as a way to protect, cleanse, and purify the sacred space and the people participating in the ceremony. It is said that any conflict, anger, illness, or evil that is absorbed by the sage smoke is released from the energy field of a person.

The smoke from dried white sage actually changes the ionic composition of the air and can have a direct effect on reducing our stress response. You can burn loose leaves of sage or use a traditional smudge stick or wand before starting your personal ritual or meditation. The shamans use dried sage in their ritual to call upon ancestral spirits, and sage can be used to balance chakras, increase relaxation during meditation, and cleanse oneself from psychic and emotional trauma. In sweat lodge ceremonies, sage is strewn over the floor and wrapped around sacred objects such as ceremonial pipes. The use of sage leaves in teas helps to calm, focus, and center the mind. It is also antifungal and antiseptic as well as astringent.

2. **Sweetgrass:** Sweetgrass, also called northern sweetgrass, vanilla grass, holy grass, Seneca grass, and alpine sweetgrass, is burned after smudging with sage to welcome the good spirits of peace and love after the bad spirits have been driven out. It is one of the "four sacred medicines" for the North American indigenous people – the other three being cedar, sage, and tobacco. Sweetgrass is considered by the AI/AN as the sacred hair of Mother Earth and its pleasant fragrance serves as a reminder of the gentleness, love, and kindness she has for us. This is also why the natives braid it in three strands representing love, kindness, and gentleness. It is burned as a special offering during sacred prayers, used for many healing rituals including sweat lodge ceremonies, for protection of spirits, and keeping out evil and harm. Sweetgrass tea also has a healing effect – it is used to relieve coughing, vomiting, sore throats, and bleeding.
3. **Cedar:** Like sage and sweetgrass, cedar drives out negative energy and brings in good influences. When burned, cedar acts as a purifier, cleansing the area in which it is burned and emitting a pleasant scent. It is the main purification herb used at the Lakota sun dance ritual. In sweat lodges, cedar is offered to the fire to smudge the whole area and people, and cedar branches are used to cover the floor of many sweat lodges. It is believed to aid clairvoyance, revive the tired mind, body, and spirit, and ward away sickness. It is also used externally to make oils and ointments for sore muscles and chest congestion or colds. When mixed with sage for a tea, it cleans the body of all infections. Cedar baths are also very healing.



## DAY 3: Student Handout 3

# The Healing of Dance

By Dr. Shane Doyle, Apsáalooke Nation

Traditional dances are still a big part of modern American Indian/Alaska Native culture, and on weekends during the summer season, there are traditional dance gatherings known as “Pow-wows” throughout the United States. Some of the gatherings have as many as 1,000 dancers, and it is indeed a grand procession when all the dancers are on the floor together.

Pow-wows are a way for modern American Indian/Alaska Native people to gather and celebrate their lives and their traditions through singing, dancing, competing, and most of all, spending time with the family. Pow-wow participants include all ages, from infants to elders over 100 years old. To attend a pow-wow in your area, you can research to see when the nearest one occurs and then visit with your family to experience the sights and sounds firsthand. Pow-wows are open to everyone and are a lot of fun to just observe the many activities and fantastic performers.



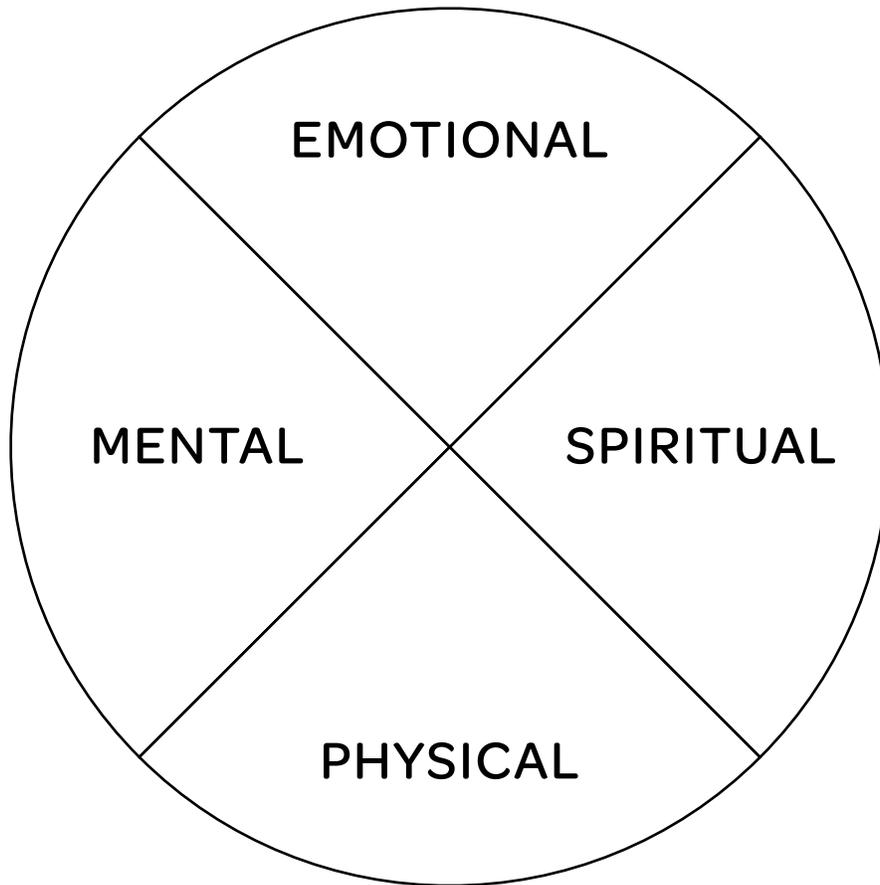
Pow-wow Dancers fill a dance arena

The pow-wow tradition includes 3–5 different types of women’s dance, and 3–5 styles of men’s dance. The spirit behind the dances is a celebration of health and wellness. Pow-wow dancers heal their bodies and spirits through the art of dancing, which requires them to be disciplined athletes and balanced individuals. Exerting oneself on the dance floor is only one half of what these dancers do. Pow-wow dancing success comes from taking care of their bodies, minds, spirits and relationships each day.

One of the most popular styles of dance overall is the Jingle Dress Dance. It is said that this dance is meant to heal the dancers and their loved ones. The origin of the Jingle Dress Dance can be traced back to a dream. This dance, in particular, is exhausting on the calves, as dancers must bounce on their toes for several minutes during a typical song, while keeping their backs and chins straight, upright, and poised during their fast-paced movements. The art of the Jingle Dress movement is a source of inspiration and cultural pride for dancers. They understand that they are carrying on a sacred healing tradition from their ancestors and passing it down for future generations to utilize and celebrate.



# My Medicine Wheel



## DAY 4: Student Handout 1

# Maintaining Balance and Harmony in Our Communities

By Dr. Shane Doyle, Apsáalooke Nation

American Indian/Alaska Native communities have many traditions that strengthen families and communities. Most of these old ways are still practiced today by modern Native people because they are powerful and positive. My nation, the Apsáalooke (Crow), continue to utilize a beautiful tradition of adoption, which I have been a part of many times. Our tradition is to adopt special friends into our family, making them a permanent part of the community and providing a feeling of love and acceptance to everyone who is involved. I have been adopted by a friend as a son, and I have also adopted a friend as a brother. Both times the experience was uplifting and one of the highlights of my life. Adoptions are public ceremonies that usually occur at pow-wows. Sacred songs are sung during the adoption ritual, and cedar is burned to purify the air and bless the area. Gifts are given to the person being adopted, and a short dance is performed by all of the participants. Afterwards, there is usually a dinner and celebration of the new family member. In the photo below, the Montana Attorney General, Tim Fox, is adopted by the Cedric Black Eagle family during the nighttime dancing at the Crow Fair Pow-wow.

Adoption ceremonies are a sacred aspect of the Apsáalooke way of life, and they create a balance in an individual's life because they celebrate and honor powerful loving relationships and connect us to other people and places. Often, when a non-Indian is adopted into an American Indian/Alaska Native family, they are given a traditional, or "Indian" name to go with their new identity as a tribal family member. Their new traditional name also connects the adopted person to the Apsáalooke heritage, which believes that all things are connected and related, and that even when we are by ourselves, we are never alone. As an example, my traditional name means "Old Buffalo Bull" when translated into English from the Apsáalooke language. My name connects me to my clan father, who named me, and his relationship with the buffalo, among many other things. I have a rich connection to my world just through my name alone. Our elders teach us that our animal relatives and the spirits of the land are always in our company, so we should be aware of their presence and pay attention by interacting with our world in a respectful manner. This means taking care of the air, water and earth, because what we do to these things, we do to ourselves.



Montana's Attorney General, Tim Fox, is adopted by the Cedric Black Eagle family during the nighttime dancing at the Crow Fair Pow-wow in 2016. [https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/montana/attorney-general-spiritual-runner-adopted-by-crow-tribe/article\\_effaad8d-d528-5fae-934d-cbf7fa2c1834.html](https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/montana/attorney-general-spiritual-runner-adopted-by-crow-tribe/article_effaad8d-d528-5fae-934d-cbf7fa2c1834.html)



## DAY 4: Student Handout 2

# The History of the Jingle Dress Dance

By Harper Estey

Throughout Indian Country, women and girls don their Jingle Dresses and mesmerize powwows as they move lightly, kicking out their heels and bouncing to the drumbeat. The dresses – also known as Prayer Dresses – are lined with rows and rows of metal cones, or *ziibaaska'iganan*, traditionally made from rolled up snuff can lid and hung from the dress. The cones create another melody as the dancers move, mimicking the sound of falling rain and bringing a sense of peace to the whole endeavor.

The dance itself began just over a century ago when the granddaughter of an Ojibwe medicine man fell sick. As the man slept, he dreamt, over and over, of four women as his spirit guides wearing Jingle Dresses and dancing. The women taught the man how to make the dress, what songs to play, and how to perform the dance. The spirits told him that making the dress and performing the dance would make his granddaughter well.

When the man awoke, he set out and made the dress, and once completed, the tribe gathered to watch the ill girl dance. At first, she was too weak and had to be supported and carried by the tribe. Slowly she gained her strength and performed the dance on her own, cured of her sickness.

The young girl was likely infected with the flu pandemic of 1918 which hit Native communities around the Great Lakes hard. This was closely followed by a ban on ritual dancing on reservations, yet despite this the Jingle Dress dance spread from the Ojibwe people, first to the Lakota and then on to the rest of Indian Country.

Today the Jingle Dress Dance is performed at powwows across the country, with the women and girls often dancing with feather fans, eagle feather plumes, or eagle feathers in their hair. As the dress and dance have spread to tribes from coast to coast, the Jingle Dress Dance has grown to represent both healing and pride, a spiritual form of wellness and celebration that links us to our past and helps us move forward with strength and hope.



A Native American jingle dress worn by a performer at a pow-wow in Leede Arena at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire in 2015. Photo by Joshua Renaud. Retrieved from: <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2019/04/native-american-students-prepare-47th-annual-powwow>

