

Montana Small Schools Alliance  
**HONORING MONTANA'S FIRST PEOPLES**

**UNIT:** Powwow Traditions and Activities in American Indian Cultures

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**SCHOOL AND COUNTY:** Deerfield Colony School in Fergus County

**GRADE LEVELS:** 3-6

**INDIAN RESERVATION REFERENCED:** Flathead Reservation

**LESSON DESCRIPTION:**

Students will research Powwows and learn about the many activities and traditions that go along with it.

This lesson will take approximately 1 week.

**SUBJECT AREA:** Social Studies, Writing, Art, Language

**CONTENT STANDARD AREAS:**

Social Studies Standard 6: Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies. Benchmark 4

Art Standard 1: Students create, perform/exhibit and respond to the arts. Benchmarks 3 & 4.

Art Standard 5: Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures and historical periods. Benchmarks 1 & 6.

Speaking and Listening Standard 4: Students apply a range of skills and strategies to speaking and listening. Benchmark 2

World Languages Standard 4: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the perspectives, practices, and products/contributions of cultures studied, and use this knowledge to interact effectively in cultural contexts. Benchmark 3

## **ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING:**

Essential Understanding 3: The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

### **Editor’s Note:**

These are a series of six short instructional units that integrate various subject area content standards and the Montana American Indian Essential Understanding 3. The different units can be used at different times throughout the year so that students will have several opportunities to learn to Honor Montana’s First Peoples of the Fort Belknap Reservation.

Before beginning these units, teachers should view the official website of the Fort Belknap Nations ([www.fortbelknapnations.nsn.gov](http://www.fortbelknapnations.nsn.gov)) and read the home pages of the histories of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Peoples. Also, teachers could review and use the three DVD’s provided to all Montana school districts by the Indian Education for All Program at OPI. The three are *Long Ago in Montana*, *Talking without Words*, and *Tribes in Montana*. In addition, the author has provided some specific resources for these units.

## **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:**

The term Powwow originally comes from the Algonquin language. The Powwow is a time for people to get together to sing and dance and to visit and share their many talents and crafts. Native Americans see the Powwow as a time to remember and try to preserve their heritage and beliefs. Some Powwows are large, and some are small.

Powwows began long ago. In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, American Indians were not allowed to dance because the government thought that they were doing it to resist the federal forces. In the 1960’s, the officials came to realize that they were important to them and they let them hold their Powwows. They are a time to share the many traditions and craft work. Powwows are a social time to meet new friends and greet old friends who live far away.

Songs are an important part of the Powwow. They are traditional songs that have been passed on for many generations. There are different songs for the different dances.

Powwows begin with a parade of dancers in ceremony called “The Grand Entry.” The dancers will spend many hours getting ready in their regalia. They are made

of bright feathers, and intricate beadwork. They dance to the singing and the beat of the drum.

The circle is used in many different ways during a Powwow. It is an important symbol to the American Indian.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

Students will recognize the important role of traditions and customs in families and communities. Students will identify a special tradition in their family.

Students will become familiar with the activities of a Powwow and demonstrate.

### **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:**

Start off with a K-W-L chart. (Know-Want to Know-Learned) fill in the Know and Want to Know section of the chart. Upon completion of the activities, come back and fill in the learned section. Discuss with the students the time they would get together with family to have fun and to celebrate something. (i.e. birthday, Christmas, family reunion) share ideas with the class and make a list on the board. Discuss the purpose of festivals and gatherings and what they have in common with each other. Have students write down three things that have in common. (i.e. feast, fun, dance, sing, tell stories) Show students different pictures of a powwow and discuss the things that they see. Students will watch, "On the Powwow Trail with Chad Killscrow and Mike Roberts." Students will make a class mural of what takes place at a Powwow. (i.e. dancing, singing, crafts)

Students will make a comparison of something significant in their life to a Powwow. Have a "Show and Tell" day, where the students bring in something they may have made at a birthday party, or family reunion, and compare them to the things that may be made at Powwows. The students will discuss what they do at their gatherings. Students will also discuss the traditional foods of the American Indians that are made or brought to the Powwows. They can be compared with the "traditional" foods that they might eat.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

Students will be assessed based on their participation in class discussions, their drawing of the mural and understanding of Powwow activities.