Jingle Dress Teachings

Objective: Learn basics of the healing jingle dress
Integration: Math, Literacy, Social Studies

Background Information

Dance is the one of the most magnificent expressions in the Native American culture. A celebration of life, dancing is considered a medicinal connection to the earth and every living relative. Today, many contemporary Native people honor their culture by participating in dancing at gatherings called powwows. There are a number of dance styles found at any given powwow in the United States and Canada. One of the more recent styles, the Jingle Dress dance, also known as the Prayer Dance originated from the Ojibwe people near southwestern Ontario. A story emerged around the 1920’s when the granddaughter of a medicine man became very ill. He had a dream of a woman in a dress with jingles on it that made noise. In the dream, he was told this dance would heal his granddaughter of her sickness. He shared his dream with his community and asked a few women to make this dress. This proved to heal his granddaughter’s illness and so, the teachings of the healing dance was given to other tribes. Today, you find the jingle dress style of dance among many intertribal celebrations.

Jingle dresses are decorated with rolled up snuff can lids that are hung with ribbon close enough so they can hit together, causing a beautiful sound.

Lesson

1. Create a KWL chart with students—what they KNOW, what they WANT to know, and finally, what they LEARNED. (See back page for key questions)
2. Find local Elders to come into the class to discuss the origin of the jingle dress. If an Elder isn’t available, contact a local community member who may come into volunteer about their knowledge about the jingle dress.
3. Invite your volunteer to bring in an actual dress, music files with traditional and contemporary jingle dress dance songs. Where do jingle dress dancers go to dance? Do you think jingle dress dancing is hard work? Why or why not?
4. Have volunteer explain how the jingle dress dance came to be and what it takes to make a jingle dress and be a jingle dress dancer.
5. Using a paper cut out dress, have students practice counting, sorting, and making patterns using multi-colored paper jingles and allow students to “make” a paper jingle dress using materials onto Velcro strips on paper dress.
6. Using beadwork pattern color sheets, invite students to color patterns using crayons or other art materials.
4. Investigate your own classroom or school. There may be some Native families who have dance regalia who may be able to come in to perform a dance exhibition.

5. Have students complete individual books about what they learned about the jingle dress using drawings, sentences, and math equations.

6. Ask students who have been to a powwow to share stories, bring in photos, or even regalia if they have it to present to their class.

7. Using a paper cut out dress, place a paper jingle onto Velcro strips every morning to use to keep track of how many days of school. By the end of the school year, the class will have made a beautiful dress together.