



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

# Powwow Celebrations: Identity Through Community Gatherings

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Identity**
- **Lifeways**

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will understand that

- powwows are important cultural celebrations for many Oregon Tribes, and
- powwows help people celebrate and express themselves.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do powwows help Native American families and communities in Oregon celebrate their identity?
- Why are celebrations and traditions important to all people?

## REQUIRED TIME

- 30 minutes

## Overview

In this lesson, students learn about powwows as an important cultural celebration and expression of identity for Oregon Tribes. Through a video about powwows and photos from different Oregon powwows, students explore how these gatherings help people express their identity. Students draw and write an explanation (or add labels depending on their writing proficiency), communicating how powwows celebrate identity through drumming, dancing and regalia.

## Background for Teachers

Powwows are important social gatherings for Oregon Tribes where people come together to celebrate through traditional dancing, singing, drumming and community fellowship. Often, people from different Tribes come together at a powwow, celebrating the differences and commonalities of their cultures. Powwows are a way to strengthen community bonds, honor traditions,



reinforce the value of families and express cultural identity.

At powwows, participants often wear special regalia (ceremonial clothing) that reflects their tribal traditions. Drumming and singing are central elements, with the drum often considered the heartbeat of the gathering. Different dance styles showcase various traditions and stories.

Some Powwows are open to the public and welcome respectful attendance from people of all backgrounds, while others are private or specific to individual Tribal communities. There are numerous Powwows across Oregon every year, and you and your students are welcome to attend them.

## Considerations for Teachers

### Practices

While teaching this lesson, the following principles can help guide your decision-making and engagement with students.

- Focus on teaching the Essential Understandings through an analysis of today's powwow celebrations.
- When sharing content with students, address the why, not just the what. Why powwows are important for maintaining cultural connections and identity.
- Highlight the strengths of Oregon's Indigenous peoples today while also acknowledging their history and tradition.

## STANDARDS

### Oregon English Language Arts Standards

ELA.1.SL.1 – Engage in collaborative discussions with diverse partners about grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

ELA.1.SL.2 – Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or presented in diverse media and formats.

ELA.1.SL.4 – Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas clearly.

ELA.1.SL.5 – Use visual displays to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

### Oregon Social Sciences Standards

SS.1.1: Describe roles and responsibilities of community members, including leaders.

SS.1.3: Identify examples of fairness in decisions or actions.

SS.1.4: Identify how people work together to solve problems in their community.

SS.1.13: Identify how people make choices based on their needs and resources.



- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students.
- Individual Oregon Tribes may have different traditions. Powwows are one example of a cultural gathering.
- Avoid generalizing across all Native American groups.

## Assessment

During this lesson, observe and listen to students during discussions and as they work independently and collaboratively to determine how their learning is progressing. Write down what you notice about what students say and do in relation to the Success Criteria. Use this formative information to provide feedback to students and plan next steps.

At the end of the lesson, provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning through a self-assessment. Students can indicate their level of learning relative to specific Success Criteria. They can also write out an explanation of why they feel they are at that learning stage.

## Success Criteria

- I can explain what a powwow is.
- I can describe one way that powwows help people express themselves.
- I can draw one thing that happens at a powwow.

**For the following activities, use the slide deck to support your implementation.**

## KEY WORDS and IDEAS

- **Powwow:** A pan Native American social gathering where people come together to dance, sing, and celebrate their cultures.
- **Drum:** An important musical instrument at powwows, often called the heartbeat of the community.
- **Regalia:** The ceremonial clothing worn by dancers at powwows.

## MATERIALS

**What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?**

- Slide deck
- Drawing and writing materials
- Student self-assessment



## Opening

---

**Time: 10 minutes**

### **Step 1:**

Begin the slide presentation, "Powwow Celebrations: Identity Through Community Gatherings."

### **Step 2:**

Read the following Essential Questions to students and discuss what they might mean. Give students an opportunity to answer, question and wonder:

- How do powwows help Native American families and communities in Oregon celebrate their identity?
- Why are celebrations and traditions important to all people?

### **Step 3:**

In a circle discussion, ask students the following questions:

- What are some special celebrations or gatherings your family has?
- How does it make you feel to attend these celebrations?
- What do you like about them?

After several students share, explain that today they will learn about a special celebration called a powwow that many Native American families in Oregon participate in.

### **Step 4:**

Introduce the Learning Outcomes and Success Criteria.

Let students know that the Success Criteria describe how they will show that they have met the Learning Outcomes.

Ask them to keep the Success Criteria in mind during the lesson so that they can keep track of their own learning.

### Step 5:

Review the vocabulary words with students. Ask students to pick one vocabulary word:

1. Write it on an individual whiteboard or paper.
2. Use it in a sentence.
3. Share the sentence with an elbow partner.

## Main Activity

---

**Time: 15 minutes**

### Step 1:

Show a short video clip of the [Siletz Tribe 46th Annual Restoration Powwow 11/18/23](#), which includes drumming and dancing (3:28 minutes).

Ask students to clap along to the beat of the drum.

After the video, ask students what they noticed:

- What sounds did they hear (drumming, singing)?
- What movements did they see (different dance styles)?
- What clothing did people wear (regalia)?

Explain to students that the sound of the drum is like a heartbeat.

### Step 2:

Share the images from powwows held by other Oregon Tribes (Burns Paiute Tribe and Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians) that are in the slide deck.

With each set of photos, ask the students what they notice:

- What clothing (regalia) do they see?
- How old are the participants?
- What activities take place?

**Step 3:**

Ask students to draw a picture of the drumming or dancing they observed in the video and photos.

Ask students to write an explanation below their drawing. Provide students with sentence stems, such as

- A powwow is...
- My drawing shows...
- This is important because...

For students who are developing writers, they can add labels to their drawings instead of using complete sentences.

**Step 4:**

Ask students to turn to a partner and share their drawings and writing.

Ask partners to take turns explaining what they drew and why they chose that aspect of the powwow to illustrate.

Allow a few students to share their work with the whole group.

**Closing**

---

**Time: 5 minutes**

**Step 1:**

Help students connect to the Essential Understandings by explaining that different Native American Tribes have their own unique traditions and celebrations, just like our own families have special celebrations.

Ask students to turn to a partner and complete the following sentence:

- A powwow is a celebration where...

Ask a few students to share with the whole group.

Remind students about the definition of identity: Who you are, including your family, culture and community.

Ask students why drumming, regalia and dance are important for identity.

Reinforce for students that powwows are one way that Native American communities gather to celebrate their culture through music, dance and being together.

### **Step 2:**

Ask students to self-assess based on the Success Criteria.

Let them know they can pick their level of learning (sort of or yes) and share with a peer, or you can print out the self-assessment and ask students to fill it out and turn it in.

## **Extension Activity**

---

### **Time: 15 minutes**

Read aloud or play a video of a story about a child attending a powwow with their family. This video of a read-aloud of [Pow Wow Day](#) by Traci Sorell is one option.

During reading or video, pause to ask students the following questions:

- Who are the characters (the child, family members, community members) in the story?
- What is the setting (where the powwow is taking place)?
- What important events are happening (preparing for the powwow, different dances, etc.)?

After the read-aloud or video, ask students the following questions:

- How does the main character feel about being at the powwow?
- What did the family do together at the powwow?
- Why do you think powwows are important to the people's identity in the story?

On chart paper or a whiteboard, create a simple graphic organizer with four columns: Characters, Setting, Events, and Identity. Fill it in with student responses.

## Additional Resources

---



- Kindergarten Lesson, [The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon: A Day at Powwow](#)
- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde website: <https://www.grandronde.org/>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians website: <http://ctsi.nsn.us/>
- Burns Paiute Tribe website: <https://burnspaiute-nsn.gov/>
- Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians website: <https://www.cowcreek-nsn.gov/>
- National Museum of the American Indian website: <https://americanindian.si.edu/>



## Student Self-Assessment

**Name:**

**Directions for teachers:** Read aloud the lesson Success Criteria in the first column to students. Have them indicate if they were able to meet the criteria by marking it in the handout, with hand gestures, or by sharing aloud. Ask students to explain why they chose “not yet” or “yes” to a peer.

Success Criteria	Not Yet	Yes
		
Can I explain what a powwow is?		
Can I describe one way that people express themselves at a powwow?		
Can I draw one thing that happens at a powwow?		