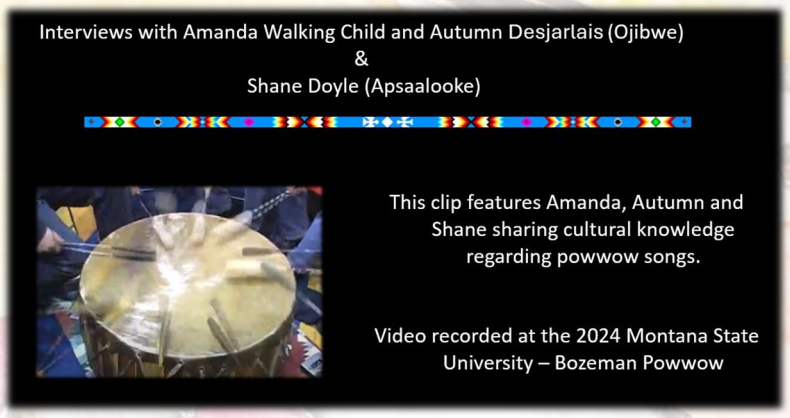
“Singing Traditions on the Powwow Trail”

This is an introduction to the drumming and singing at powwows and gives students a look into powwow songs and how they are structured, along with the meanings behind the songs.



This video and discussion guide supports instruction related to **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.

The drum is more than just a musical instrument to those who own and honor it by using it; it has its own life. Some drum groups have gone through ceremonies and have had their drums blessed and named. The drum has its own powerful spirit. Regardless of the tradition, the drum must always be treated with respect as a sacred object or entity. Many drums have their own songs, which are frequently sung as a warm-up at the beginning of the powwow/celebration. The beat of the drum is like a heartbeat, starting slowly and then beating more quickly as the singers get further into the song. The drumsticks connect the singers to the power of the drum as they sing.

Directions:

1. Pass out the worksheet
2. Remind students the importance of being respectful to other cultures.
3. Have students fill out the worksheet as you listen to the video.
4. After the video is finished, give students time to work on the reflection section.
5. After students have finished, discuss the importance of traditions and what a powwow means to Native American cultures.

Special thanks to the Music Teachers from East Helena Schools for creating the discussion guide and questions: Cole Bass, Jon Cantrell, Mathew Krantz, Traci Mazanec, and Tamika Schoppe.

Name:_____

Date:_____

"Singing Traditions on the Powwow Trail"

1. Part One- Observations

1. Do all the songs have words in them?
    a. Yes, all the songs have words in them
    b. No, none of the songs have words
    c. Some have words and some have no words.
2. There are different styles of powwow singing (Northern and Southern). What general differences exist between them?

    _____

3. What helps to identify the type of powwow song?
    a. Language
    b. Beat/Rhythm
    c. Flute
4. How many parts to the song are there?
    a. 1 part
    b. 2 parts
    c. 3 parts
    d. 4 parts
5. How many times do you usually sing through a song?
    a. 1 time
    b. 2 times
    c. 3 times
    d. 4 times

2. Listening/Reflection

6. Based on the sounds you hear in the video, which style (Northern or Southern) do you think you heard most often? Explain your answer.

    _____

    _____

7. What is the importance of sharing traditions?

_____

_____

3. Connection Questions

8. Compare powwow music to music you learn or perform in your classroom or band:

- How is it similar?

_____

- How is it different?

_____

9. How might understanding music from another culture (like powwow singing) help you as a musician?

_____

_____

Answer Key

PART I — Observations

1. Names of people featured

Introductory Details

1. Do all the songs have words in them?
    a. **Some have words and some have no words.**

2. There are different styles of powwow singing (Northern and Southern). What general differences exist between them?

   In the north they sing higher. In the south they sing lower.

3. What helps to identify the type of powwow song?

   You identify the song from the drum beat.

4. How many parts to the song are there?

   c. 3 parts

5. How many times do you sing through a song?

   d. 4 times

2. Listening/Reflection

6. Based on the sounds you hear in the video, which style (Northern or Southern) do you think you heard most often? Explain your answer.

- Most likely **Northern style**
- Higher voices and strong drum accents

✓ Explanation matters more than the label.

7. Importance of sharing traditions
   Acceptable answers:
    a. **Preserves culture**

b. **Teaches younger generations**
c. **Builds pride and identity**
d. **Educates others**

✓ Thoughtful responses earn full credit.

3. Connection Questions

8. Comparison to band music
   Similarities may include:

- **Group performance**
- **Keeping a steady beat**
- **Listening to others**

Differences may include:

- **Learned by listening instead of sheet music**
- **Cultural purpose vs. concert performance**
- **Different instruments and structure**

✓ Both sides must be attempted.

9. How might understanding music from another culture (like powwow singing) help you as a musician?

- **Builds respect**
- **Expands musical understanding**
- **Helps students become better musicians**

✓ Any reflective answer is acceptable.