

## **What is a Pow Wow**

A Pow Wow is the Native American's way of celebrating together, to join in dancing, singing, visiting, renewing old friendships and making new ones. This is a time to honor the old ways and to preserve their heritage.

There are several different stories of how the Pow Wow was started. Some believe that the war dance societies of the Ponca and other Southern Plains tribes were the origin of the Pow Wow.

Another belief is that when the Native Americans were forced onto reservations the government forced them to hold dances for the public to come and see. Before each dance they were lead through the town in a parade, this is thought to be the origin of the Grand Entry.

Pow Wow singers are very important figures in the Native American culture. Without them there would be no dancing. The songs are of many varieties, religious war and social.

As various tribes gathered together, they would share their songs, often changing the songs so singers of different tribes could join. With these changes came the use of "vocables" to replace the words of the old songs. Thus, some songs today are sung in vocables with no words. Yet these songs still hold special meaning to those who know them. Many songs are still sung in native tongue they can be newly composed or old songs that have been handed down for generations. These songs are reminders to the Indian people of their old ways and rich heritage.

Dances have always been a very important part of the American Indian life. The dances seen at Pow Wows today are social dances. Some dance styles have developed from the modern Pow Wow while others can trace their origin back hundreds of years and had different meanings in those earlier days. Although dance styles and content have changed, their importance has not. The outfits worn by the dancers, like the styles of clothing today evolve over time, it is not a stagnant culture, but a vibrant and changing way of life.

Pow Wows are organized by committees that work for weeks before the event. At the Pow Wow, the MC runs the event and works with the Arena Director to keep the Pow Wow organized and running smoothly. These two individuals along with the committee work hard to bring the people together to dance and enjoy the fellowship of the circle.

The Pow Wow begins with the Grand Entry. This origin of the Grand Entry is thought to be the parade through the town where the Pow Wow was being held. The Grand Entry is led by the flags which generally include the US Flag, tribal flags, POW Flag, and eagle staffs of various tribes present. The flags and staffs are usually carried by veterans. Native Americans hold the United States flag in an honored position despite the horrible treatment received from this country. The flag has several meanings. First it is a reminder of all the ancestors that fought against this country. It is the symbol of the United States which Native Americans are now a part. The flag also reminds people of those who have fought for this country. During the Grand Entry everyone is asked to stand and remove any non-Indian head gear.

Following the veterans are other important guests of the Pow Wow including tribal chiefs, Princesses, elders, and Pow Wow organizers. Next in line are the men dancers. The men are followed by the women dancers. Once everyone is in the arena the song ends and a song is sung to honor the flag and the veterans. After a prayer, the dancing resumes usually with a few Round Dances. After the Round Dances, intertribal dancing songs are sung and everyone dances to the beat of the drum.

## Pow Wow Etiquette

1. Be on time. The Committee is doing everything possible to ensure that activities begin and run smoothly. Please cooperate in this regard.
2. Appropriate dress and behavior are required in the Arena. Anyone unwilling to abide by this rule will be asked to leave by the Arena Director. (If you are going to dance, try to wear dance clothes.)



3. Arena benches are reserved for dancers in dance clothes. Dancers wishing to reserve a space on the bench should place a blanket in that space before the dance begins. Please do not sit on someone else's blanket unless invited. Uncovered benches are considered unreserved.

4. Listen to the Master of Ceremonies. He will announce who is to dance, and when.

5. Respect the position of the Head Man and Head Woman Dancers. Their role entitles them to start each song or set of songs. Please wait until they have started to dance before you join in.

6. Dance as long and as hard as you can. When not dancing, be quiet and respect the Arena

7. Be aware that someone standing behind you may not be able to see over you. Make room, step aside, sit, or kneel if someone is behind you.

8. Show respect to the flag and honor songs by standing during "Special" songs, stand in place until the sponsors of the song have danced a complete circle and have come around you, then join in. If you are not dancing, continue to stand quietly until the song is completed.

9. While dancing at any powwow, honor the protocol of the sponsoring group.

10. Some songs require that you dance only if you are familiar with the routine or are eligible to participate. Trot dances, snake, buffalo, etc. require particular steps or routines. If you are not familiar with these dances, observe and learn. Watch the Head Dancers to learn the procedures. Only Veterans are permitted to dance some Veteran's songs; listen to the MC for instructions.

11. The Flag Song, or Indian National Anthem, is sung when the American Flag is raised or lowered. Please stand and remove hats during the singing of this song. It is not a song for dancing.



12. Powwows are non-profit. It depends upon donations, raffles, blanket dances, etc. for support. Donations are encouraged as a way to honor someone. Any participant can drop money onto the blanket to aid in the powwow expenses. Support the Committee and buy raffle tickets.

13. Certain items of religious significance should be worn only by those qualified to do so. Respect the traditions.

14. Giveaways, attributes of Indian generosity, are held at many dances. They are acknowledgments of appreciation to recipients for honor given. When receiving a gift, the recipient thanks everyone involved in the giving. NOTE: All specials and giveaways must be coordinated with the Master of Ceremonies. During the Saturday night dance, only the specials of the Principals should be scheduled. If you wish to ask for a song from the drum in honor of someone, they will be glad to announce the song with the understanding that it will be danced by all who wish in a general powwow manner, rather than as a "walking" special. Please remember that is traditional to make a monetary contribution to the Drum for this request—clear this through the MC. They will try to maintain the dancing for ALL participants as much as possible.

15. The Drums will be closed unless permission to be seated is given by the Head singer. Any drums present are invited to set-up and sing. Please check with the Arena director first.



16. If at any time you are uncertain of procedure, etc., please check with the MC, Arena Director, or Head Singer. They will be glad to help you with your questions.

17. Take a chair. Most Pow Wows are in open fields and will not have seating for the public or enough seating for everyone. Also remember that the benches in the arena are for dancers only.

18. No Alcohol or drugs are allowed at Pow Wows.

19. If taking pictures, asked the dancer first. Remember common courtesy and ask permission. Group photographs are usually alright to take, but you might want to ask the committee first.

Remember that in each area you travel to and visit, things can and will be slightly different than your area. Different groups and have different customs and methods of doing things. Different is not wrong, just different. Be respectful of the uniqueness of each area.

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# SOUTHERN POWWOW

**D**o you remember your first time at a powwow? Think back. Did you do something that you thought was nothing, yet, everyone looked at you? Perhaps you walked across the dance floor while the M.C. was speaking?

Powwow etiquette is something that must be learned by all who expect to become a part of a powwow. Without powwow etiquette any powwow would be disorganized and unruly.

Powwow etiquette is rules that common sense should tell you to follow. These rules show courtesy to others attending the dance. They allow everyone to enjoy themselves and brings about a successful dance.

To the old-timer this article is not criticizing but just reminding. To the beginners-welcome to the powwow world. We would like to tell you something about your first dance that we hope will make you feel much more comfortable.

. Don't be afraid to make new friends. The same holds true for us "old-timers." Everyone at the powwow has at least one thing in common. If you are a newcomer to a powwow make yourself known to the others. Shake hands with the people on the bench with you.

. If you plan to make any Indian dances, find out if you may attend and if you may dance. Some dances may be a society or clan dance. Find out as much as you can about the dance you plan to attend.

. If it is your first time at a powwow, be dressed in your dance

clothes well in advance of the scheduled time for the dance. Although the dance may start on "Indian Time" it is better to be dressed then to come walking in during the opening prayer or flag song like you had "bells on your toes."

. If you want a reserved seat at the dance, place a blanket on the bench before people start gathering. This will reserve that place for you. If there is a blanket on a bench, someone is not airing it out, it is reserving their place. Do not move anyone's blanket, nor sit on anyone's blanket unless you are asked to do so.

. Stand for the opening prayer and flag song.

. Never begin dancing before the singing starts. Give the head singer time to start his song and for the rest of the singers to come in on the chorus.

. If a powwow has an appointed Head dancer, wait for him to begin dancing before you begin. Usually there is a Men's and Women's Head dancer. The men wait for the Head Men's dancer to start and the women wait for the Women's Head dancer to begin. You will find, though, at most southern powwows the Head Dancers start the opening song of each set of songs and lead all the social dances: two steps, snake and buffalo, etc. During the set of war dance songs the Head dancer will start the dancing on the first song. On the other songs in the set the other dancers may start on their own.

