

ART NAPOLEON - STUDY GUIDE

SHORT BIO

Art Napoleon, also known as Travelling Sun, is a recognized cultural educator, storyteller, performer and recording artist. He has been featured on many radio and television programs including *BASIC BLACK*, *DEAD DOG COMEDY*, *BEYOND WORDS*, *THE NEW CANOE*, *CREE for KIDS*, *WINNIPEG COMEDY FESTIVAL* and *CBC ROUND UP*. As former Chief of his home community in northeastern BC, keeper of traditional knowledge and cultural rights activist, he is considered an ambassador and is called upon to lead events and ceremonies normally performed by Elders. As a musician and storyteller, he has been a mainstay on the Canadian folk festival circuit since the early 90's and actively tours the country. Art has also written a few publications, dabbled in film-making and is currently working on a new CD of original songs. He enjoys making a living doing the things he loves.

In his own words...*a lot of gifts I've developed are vehicles to the broader aim of sharing my beautiful culture with the world for it has been hidden for too long...*

He lives in Victoria and sometimes performs with his daughter Niska, who would rather be a rock star. For more info visit his website www.artnapoleon.com

PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION

It's First Nations studies with a twist - a one man educational variety show consisting of inter-tribal roots music performed on guitar, harmonica & hand-drum, stories & personal anecdotes, and introductory lessons on Cree history, geography and world-view. Art was raised by his grandparents, living a northern subsistence life-style until he was a teenager. He refers to these lessons, taught to him through oral tradition, as *Cree life-way teachings*. With his disarming wit, sly humor, down-to-earth sincerity and wonderful ability to improvise, Art has an ability to connect with youth from various cultures and often gets kids (and teachers) to perform with him on stage for some cross-cultural jamming! With his versatility and vast repertoire, his shows are never the same. Art connects especially well with kids from grades 1 to 8. With senior students who are interested in First Nation culture, environment, world music and human rights issues, Art is very well suited to the intimacy of the classroom. As a former youth worker, he also has a soft spot for youth struggling with addictions and identity issues. Performance durations usually vary from 30 to 45 minutes but there is room for flexibility.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Requirements are very minimal but schools should have a PA system preferably equipped with a multi-channel board and 2 or 3 microphones with boom stands. A flip chart stand with paper and markers is also required. If a school has a music program, it is also nice to have a collection of percussive instruments on hand. Art will need about 30 minutes of set-up time including a sound check. A change room is nice but not essential. Drinking water on stage is always appreciated.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

A variety of promotional DVD's introducing Art Napoleon, recordings of his songs with lyric sheets, press clippings and Cree life-way teaching handouts are available at the request of schools. Teachers are encouraged to introduce students to concepts such as, *oral tradition, the role of storytelling, subsistence life-style, globalization, traditional Cree music* and topics related to cultural survival and revitalization.

Teachers might introduce the traditional music of pow-wows and Round Dances. Large music stores often have sections for First Nations music and there are many singing groups that specialize specifically in Cree music. Groups such as *Northern Cree* and *Red Bull* are safe places to start. Many CD liners come with descriptions and explanations of the music form. Art Napoleon's music is strongly influenced by these traditional music forms but he arranges the songs with modern stylings so they can be appreciated by larger audiences. Art sings in Cree and English so students are introduced to basic Cree words and chanting lessons. After reading the hand-out on traditional music, students might want to try a basic chanting song of their own. The *Cree sunrise song* is a great one for beginners (included as a handout).

One good preparatory film, although somewhat dated, is *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* by the NFB. Available through most libraries, this video follows the life of a traditional Cree family who spend a season out on the land. The documentary will introduce audiences to subsistence livelihoods, importance of the land and animals, Cree values, cultural blending and the role of stories and music.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Teachers and students can go in whatever direction they feel inspired as there is much to explore about Cree and Indigenous cultures, stories and music. Older students can use the performance as a springboard to learning about many aspect First Nations history, geography and current events. Younger students may benefit from a trip to local museum providing that culture is presented as adaptive and transformative and not static. It's always important for students to learn about the important roles and contributions of First Nations in Canada as this has historically been neglected by schools and media. After hearing Art's *Bannock song*, younger students may also want to try making Cree-style bannock. There are now many useful websites for obtaining valuable information on just about any aspect of Aboriginal Peoples. Some of these sites are:

www.nativetech.org , www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca , www.turtleisland.org ,
www.bcfm.org , www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet , www.native-languages.org ,
www.nativedrums.ca

SOME USEFUL TERMS

Bannock - derived from a Scottish word, Native peoples of Canada borrowed the European method of making biscuits or scones began making their own rustic form of bread known as bannock. This hearty bread was very popular to early voyageurs, hunters, trappers and traders because it was very filling and easy to pack on expeditions. Today bannock and its cousin *fry-bread* continue to be popular in Aboriginal communities throughout Turtle Island. Hand-out with traditional bannock recipe attached.

Nihiyaw - Pronounced *nee-hee-yo*, this is the proper term for the Cree Peoples of Western Canada. Used from the Maritimes to the Rockies, Cree is the most widely spoken of all Native languages in the country. Related to languages such as Algonquin and Ojibway, there are several distinct dialects across Canada. The Cree Peoples from Saskatchewan to the Peace Region of northeastern BC are known as *Nihiyawak*, people of the 4 directions.

Oral Tradition - A tradition of most Indigenous peoples, important information such as histories, ceremonies, rites, songs, stories, teachings; all aspects of traditional knowledge, were passed on not through books but through word of mouth. This is one of the reasons that First Peoples placed great importance on the art of story-telling and on the art of listening. Teachings were passed on first through words and followed by watching then doing.

Round Dance - Partly a sacred rite and partly a festive social gathering, Cree round dances take place between fall and spring. Traditionally, the event began with a sacred pipe ceremony and feast. This was followed by singing and dancing into the long hours of the night. Round dances are an affirmation of kinship and community connection to the ancestors and spirits. It is believed that the ancestors dance and celebrate with the people during round dances.

Tansi kiya - Cree term for “how are you?” which is often answered by the term *Manantaw* (mun-nan-doe) meaning “I am fine”.

Turtle Island - The First Nations term for what is commonly known as North America. It was believed by some nations that the lands of North America were built on the back of a giant sacred turtle. There is a long story about this belief.

Wisakecak - One of many folk figures in the Cree world, Wisakecak is the central trickster figure. His character is that of a less-than-perfect big brother, always playing jokes and getting into mischief. He has the power to transform and to put spells on his brothers and sisters in the plant and animal kingdoms. He is one of the main reasons that animals and plants have the characteristics they do to this day.

STUDENT READING LIST

The Keeper series by Michael J. Caduto with Joseph Bruhac are the most comprehensive texts useful to children and educators alike. They are filled with stories from various nations, useful teachings and fun activities for both home and classroom. Good for students grades 3 to 9. The three books in this series are titled:

- *Keepers of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children*
- *Keepers of the Earth: Native American Stories and Environmental Activities for Children*
- *Keepers of the Night: Native American Stories and Nocturnal Activities for Children*

A useful, well illustrated book on the traditional hunting-gathering lifestyle of northern First Nations people is *People of the Trail: How the Northern Forest Indians Lived* by Jillian and Robin Ridington. It is good for grades 3 & 4.

A good book for younger children is *My Kokum Called Today* by Iris Loewen.

For older students and teachers I would highly recommend Jack Weatherford's *Indian Giver: How the Indians of North America Transformed the World* and Phyllis Cardinal's *The Cree People* by Duval House.

For other useful books on Cree and Aboriginal cultures visit Pemmican Publications at www.pemmican.mb.ca , www.theytusbooks.ca or www.duvalhouse.com

ON CREE LANGUAGE

Did you know that you might already speak some Cree?

...Words such as *moose*, *wigwam*, *chickadee*, *whiskey-jack*, *muskeg*, *moccasin*, *toboggan*, *saskatoon*, *wapiti*, *pemmican* and *Manitou* are all derived from Cree words.

Place-names such as *Ottawa*, *Saskatchewan*, *Manitoba*, *Winnipeg*, *Wetaskiwin* and even *Canada* are also borrowed from the Cree or Nihiyaw language.

Cree was once the main language of the fur trade which laid the foundation for the Western settlement of Canada. Cree is also the most widespread Native language which explains why there are so many place-names throughout the country.

BANNOCK RECIPE

4 c. flour (3 cups white, 1 cup whole wheat,) It's healthier, eh...
5 tsp. "magic" (baking) powder
1 tbsp. some kind of sweetener (sugar, syrup, etc.)
½ tsp. salt
½ c. lard or oil
2 c. water or milk

Mix all dry ingredients together. Slowly mix in the lard or oil until it looks like coarse oatmeal. Make a hole in the centre of the bowl, gradually pour in the water or milk mixture. Mix all ingredients together. Knead for a few minutes but not too long as it makes the bannock tough. Pat out with hands to about ¾ inch thickness and press into an oiled pan. Prick with a fork and bake in the oven at 360 degrees until golden brown. Cool it off before you eat or you'll burn your tongue, eh. Miciso! (Eat, enjoy!)

CREE SUNRISE SONG (can be found on *Miyoskamin*, Art's latest CD)

This traditional Plains Cree song was once used by "camp criers" to awaken all the residents of campsites or tipi villages years ago.

Waniska pitapan oma
(arise) (the sun is rising) (don't you know)

asay pisisak inikamowak
(already) (the birds) (are singing)

imiyonakwan kitaskinan
(it is beautiful) (throughout our land)

Nihiyaw Drumming Handout



- ⊕ Drums are symbolic of the circle of life, medicine wheel and other sacred life-way teachings.
- ⊕ Drums are considered to have a sacred life-force and are to be treated with special care.
- ⊕ Drums are one of the Nihiyaw connections to the spiritual world and are used for praying, healing, celebrating and giving thanks.
- ⊕ Drums are used in many different circumstances... weddings, feasts, ceremonies, funerals etc.
- ⊕ One never “beats” or “pounds” a drum. One makes a drum speak. Some speak softly, others speak with power and conviction.
- ⊕ Drums from different nations have different tones, shapes, and sizes. These drums will have different symbols and stories they are not all the same.
- ⊕ Some drums are so sacred they are only brought out for certain rituals.
- ⊕ In some areas, before a drum is made, there may be certain ceremonies that accompany “bringing a drum to life.” Some ceremonies include having sweats, prayers, fasting, blessing of the materials, etc.