

# The Pow Wow

The term “Pow Wow” or Pow wow comes from the Algonquian Language. It means a gathering of medicine men and spiritual leaders in a curing ceremony. “Pauau” or “pau wau” would be more correct spellings. Early European explorers observed and recorded American Indian events. Mispronounced “pau wau” and assumed thereafter that any large gathering of Indians was a Pow Wow.

A Pow Wow, historically, has been a social gathering of Native American Indian people. It is a spiritual ceremony; a time to dance, to sing, to visit to renew old friendships and to make new ones. The entire event is a celebration of and a prayer to the Creator. Pow Wows often take place to mark important occasions. At a Pow Wow, awards and recognition are given to those so deserving. It is a time to renew thoughts of the old ways and to preserve a heritage rich with tradition.

The circle is a very important symbol to Native Americans. The Pow Wow is set up such that everything is a circle. The drums are the heartbeat of the circle. The dancers form a circle, promoting a closer relationship among all.

Pow Wows are an opportunity for American Indians to come together. American Indians travel many miles to come and participate in a Pow Wow. A Pow Wow is a wonderful opportunity to make new friends, renew old friendships and honor those you love.

American Indian Spirit is based upon the sacred unity of all things and all races of people. This reverence is symbolized by the Circle of the Pow Wow, the Drum and the ceremonies. The Drum is the essence of spirituality in a Pow Wow and is considered to be sacred. The Drum has been linked to the heartbeat of the Earth and her people, and represents life itself. The singers take on the sacred identity of the Drum for the duration of the Pow Wow ceremony. The Pow Wow dance ground, or arena, is round, representing Mother Earth and the Eternal Circle of Life.

Before the dancing begins, the drum is blessed. American Indians regard the drum as the oldest thing remembered and it is looked upon as something that has always been with us. The drum is to be looked upon with respect and dignity. There shall be no profanity around the Drum and no person shall consume alcoholic beverage, nor approach the Drum if they have been drinking. The Head Dancers begin each dance with other dancers waiting respectfully for their cue to begin. Members of the Head Staff are chosen for their abilities, such as performance, and also for their humility, compassion and generosity.

Much American Indian Culture is passed down through generations of families in the form of song. Songs are sung in American Indian Languages and have special meanings. Some are reminders of the old times and ways. Others are songs of courting, social responsibility, honor, and life and death, while others are just for fun. Although they differ in tempo, words and emotions, Pow Wow songs all follow a similar structure.

The Pow Wow is a visual and auditory reenactment of an important aspect of American Indian culture. It reflects the spiritual bond between all people and is one of the principal settings for the transmission and preservation of artistic traditions.