

Wapos Bay

THEY DANCE AT NIGHT episode 3

Episode Description

The sky is a source of endless fascination for young Raven and T-Bear as they study the clouds during daylight and learn about the spiritual dimension of the northern lights. For the members of the Wapos Bay community, respect is at the centre of their relationships with each other and all they do as they balance old ways with new. Raven and T-Bear learn that listening with care to relatives, offering tobacco ties when picking sweetgrass, and expressing gratitude to the creator are some of the spiritual aspects of living life in balance. Raven and T-Bear discover that their careless behaviour may be the source of small misfortunes and even violent storms. These are signs of disrespect and require a ceremony to restore harmony and balance.



Background information on this episode

- The Cree way of life includes observing spirituality daily. Smudging is a cleansing ceremony practised by some northern Cree and many other Aboriginal peoples in Canada and North America. Smudging involves burning plant materials such as sweetgrass or sage where the smoke is lightly brushed and carried over the smudger's head and body with the hands.
- Contemporary Cree people balance older spiritual traditions with the adoption of newer technological advances, such as cellphones, and continue to assert an Aboriginal identity.
- Canadian Aboriginal peoples have particular views about natural phenomenon, such as the northern lights, that complement their overall view of the world as one that embodies enduring spirits. Corresponding beliefs and practices vary among Aboriginal peoples.

Key themes

Using resources from the land with care and expressing feelings of respect and gratitude for those resources require ethical behaviours that are expressed as an important part of spirituality, such as an offering of tobacco when harvesting sweetgrass. Conflict in life and the environment can be tempered with thoughtful care and respect.

PREVIEWING ACTIVITIES (Refer to Background Information guide for series' preview activities)

- 1 ➤ Introduce the Cree words used in *They Dance at Night*.

CREE GLOSSARY

kohkum – grandmother

mushom – grandfather

wapos – rabbit

ah ho – (expression of affirmation at the end of a prayer)

- 2 ➤ What is gratitude? What is care? What is respect? How do we show care and respect? What are ways that we show gratitude?
- 3 ➤ What are ethics? What are the ethics that you practise?
- 4 ➤ Have you ever seen the northern lights? Are there any rules that you know about them? *Note that the scientific name is aurora borealis.*
- 5 ➤ What is smudging? Have you observed or participated in smudging? On what occasion? What materials and items are used in smudging?

VIEW EPISODE

Introduce and View *Wapos Bay: They Dance at Night*.

POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 1 ➤ **A)** How did T-Bear learn about the ethics of respect? What feelings are related to respect?
B) How did Raven learn about taking care and ethical behaviour?
C) What was the response of Raven and T-Bear's family to their careless and thoughtless behaviour?
- 2 ➤ How are Northern Cree views of gratitude, care, respect and ethics related? How are these views expressed in *They Dance at Night*?
- 3 ➤ **A)** How do the notions of balance and harmony apply to the earth and the environment? (Explore ways to integrate ethics with use of land and resources.)
There is increasing evidence that personal and industrial practices, such as the use of fossil fuels for energy, contribute to carbon dioxide emissions, which in turn deplete the protective ozone layer of the atmosphere and then lead to global warming, having a harmful effect on plant, animal and human life.
B) Discuss the personal practices that contribute to degradation of the earth and environment.
C) Discuss the industrial practices in your community that contribute to the degradation of the earth and the environment.

PROJECT IDEAS

- Invite a community elder to give a presentation of smudging and how it relates to care, respect, gratitude and other ethics.
- Interview family and community members and elders about how they learned the ethics of gratitude, care, respect and how they should be passed on.
- Research and report on the aurora borealis.
- Write a persuasive piece about the ethics that are most important to you, your family and your community.