

Musical Ancestries: Native America Script

NARRATOR: It was a sunny spring morning when Mika and Tom headed to the **Washington University Pow Wow**, one of the largest annual native gatherings in the Midwest. Mika was excited to learn more about her **Native American heritage**. She knew there'd be drumming and dancing, new foods and native arts to explore.

Before the **gathering ceremonies**, they checked out the vendors' booths – with handmade items like jewelry, flutes and drums. The price ranges were wide -they could buy a memento, and still have money for food! Then Mika saw her... a smiling lady selling leather items.

KIOWAKAT: Hi! Are you enjoying all this?

M: Yes, Ma'am! It's our first Pow Wow.

KK: What made you want to come?

M: I've just always felt like it would be special...you know?

KK: I DO.

T: She prob'ly feels that way because she's part Indian, right Mika?

KK: Could be. Are you Indian, too?

T: No, but I think I'd like to be!

M: I never knew my Sioux family. I was adopted as a baby and Mom died when I was 3, so it's just my brother Tom, Dad and me. What's your name?

KK: I'm KiowaKat. I'm sorry to hear about your mother, but you do know her spirit *is* still with you.

M: Uh-huh. I feel her around me all the time.

T: Yeah. Me too.

KK: Well, that's because of *you!* We can all "tune in" to things around us – **the earth, sky, water, animals, trees... they're all expressions of the Creator – or Great Spirit.** But not everyone "*tunes in*". *We have to listen.*

Opening ceremonies start soon and my helper's watching the booth. Do you want to sit together? I can explain some of this to you.

M&T: Please!! That'd be *great!*

N: Mika had never really known why she felt such a strong connection with the earth and nature, but KiowaKat's wise words helped. She sensed she was reconnecting to her Native American self.

Pow Wow Opening/Grand Entry Song

The ceremonies for the Pow Wow were fascinating. They sat where they could see the dance patterns, but still see the faces of the

dancers and musicians, all dressed in beautiful **tribal garb**, adorned with beads, feathers and more.

KK: During the 1900s, **the Pow Wow** began to develop in North America. The Algonquian word “**Pow Wow**” originally referred to *healing* rituals, but then it began to be used for *tribal gatherings*. Now it means a *public* event like this...like *sharing* authentic, traditional Native American music, dance and culture. There are more than 570 tribes in the US alone!

N: The Master of Ceremonies welcomed everyone and started the Pow Wow. KiowaKat explained...

KK: Ya’ hear that? That’s the **Host Drum**. There are several drummers, but we **call the whole group a “drum” group**. They **provide music for the dancers** and are responsible for all the music during the Pow Wow.

A **Pow-Wow session begins** with a **starting song**. Then a **grand entry song** cues the **Head Dancers** to lead in the other dancers and important people. There’s a **flag song**, and then a **veteran or victory song to honor the warriors**.

Lakota National Anthem (Flag Song)

When the **Pow Wow session ends**, there’s another **flag song**, a **retreat song** and finally, a **closing song to end the Pow Wow**. In between the opening and closing, there can be many different events, like a **gourd dance**, contest dancing or hand drum contests... it all depends on the *purpose* of the Pow Wow itself.

N: As the three returned to the booth, they realized they were becoming friends. Mika was eager to know more about her Sioux

heritage. KiowaKat sensed this as she watched her young friend admiring the hand-beaded leather...

M: These moccasins are so soft and beautiful.

KK: I learned to tan hides for all kinds of things, including moccasins. Then you learn how to work, shape, cut, sew and bead them. If your Dad approves, I can teach you how.

T: Mika – that’s amazing! Thank you, KiowaKat. Dad’s gonna’ *love* this!

KK: Good! Meanwhile, go online and learn more about the mighty **Sioux Nation**. Walk proudly with your ancestors, Mika!

M: I will. Thank you.

N: A sense of belonging came over Mika, unlike anything she’d ever felt before. She wondered if her Mom had something to do with meeting her new friend. Her heart was filled with gratitude.

KiowaKat lived only two blocks away – easy walking distance.

Thinking she was just going to learn leather-working, Mika discovered an entire new *world!* As they worked, the two talked easily about the customs, cultures and many paths of Native Americans.

M: KiowaKat, what tribe are you from?

KK: I’m from the **Kiowa tribe of Oklahoma**. We first lived in northern Montana, near the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, then we were in the Black Hills of South Dakota. In the late 1700s we began to migrate south and now the tribe is in Southwestern Oklahoma. Did you look up the **Sioux?**

M: I did! There are **10 tribes in the Sioux Nation**, including mine, **Lakota**. They live in the **Northern Great Plains** and used to follow **buffalo herds**, hunting the **bison** to live.

KK: Excellent! Like the **Kiowa**, your people, the **Lakota Sioux**, are known as **fierce warriors** and **marvelous horsemen**. Do you know what your name "**Mika**" *means*?

M: No....

KK: It varies a little between tribes, but it basically means "**Wise Little Raccoon**". If you want wisdom from a **totem animal**, you might want to *start* with that **raccoon...** they're seen as **generous protectors**. A raccoon isn't greedy, it won't fight for food, but it *does* look out for the other members of its group before taking anything for itself. Its **medicine (or lesson)** is that we **help those in need**. But *not* to where they *depend on us*, because that would *weaken* them. What do you think, wise little raccoon?

M: I didn't know anything about **totem animals...just totem poles!**

KK: Well, **totem beliefs** are held by many Native Americans, and **totem poles honor** those **creatures that guide us**. The raccoon is your *namesake*, but you also like music, right?

M: Um-hmm. I sing and play flute.

KK: You might have a totem animal for your music – like a bird. Stay open and listen... your guides will come to you. Do you know the word "**holistic**"?

M: It's food and stuff that's good for you.

KK: Right. And it's *good* for you because it's **simple...natural...**like Native American life. There's almost no difference between sacred

and secular, or between spirituality, music, art, dance, or living life. They're all part of the same thing – our path. And **we honor the Creator by *the way we walk that path***. Make sense?

M: Uh-huh.

KK: Let's check out the **music** of North American Indians – including Canada. All the music comes down through **oral tradition** – nothing was written down. Like the Native American tribes themselves, there are basically **six separate regions** of music in North America. Remember, there aren't any "*border lines*" – but we'll get the general idea of those regions. How's your geography?

M: Not bad, but I don't know Canada very well.

KK: That's OK. First, the **similarities: North American** Indians **sing with percussion** instruments like **drums** or **rattles**. They use **scales** with **4, 5, or 6 tones**, and use vocal techniques and rhythms to express emotions.

Dances go with most of the songs, like **work** and **activity songs**, **story-telling** or **social events**. There are also **ceremonial dance songs**, and **healing songs**. Sacred rituals, songs and dances are given to persons or tribes by the **Creator, guardian spirits**, or **spiritual beings**. So **music, dance and ritual is a gift...** bigger than any person or community.

M: That way you always **honor** the dance or song.

K: What a good observation, Mika! Yes, it should be honored – it's sacred.

Back to the six regions. Let's start with **THE EASTERN WOODLANDS**. Start at the Mississippi River, go east to the Atlantic coast, and then from Florida up to the Great Lakes in Canada. Some

of the northern tribes are the Iroquois, Huron, and Ojibwe; and in the south, the Choctaw, Seminole, and Cherokee.

Cherokee War Song

This **Cherokee war song** is thought to be the oldest dance known to that tribe. The solo singer is accompanied by drums, and answered by shouts from the musicians and dancers...a sort of **call and response**. The dancers start with war cries even before the drumming starts.

M: That's a little scary!

KK: It IS! It's a **war song**... the **war dance** is fierce, too!

M: I'd be scared if I were the enemy!

KK: Me too!

Lakota and Dakota Sioux Sun Dance Song

The second region is **THE GREAT PLAINS**. From the Mississippi, go west to the Rockies, up into Canada...that's home to many tribes, including the Blackfoot, Comanche, and our people, the **Kiowa** and **Sioux**!

Here's a **Sioux "Sun Dance" Song**. You'll hear the singers in a **slightly different tempo from the drumbeat**. That adds interest to the rhythm.

Great Plains songs have **several performers** who sing and play a **large bass drum**.

M: At the Pow Wow they used **eight**!

KK: Yes, they did! Drums are used in almost every song – except courtship... *then* they use the soft, sweet sound of a **flute**.

The third region is **THE GREAT BASIN**, from Colorado north into British Columbia, and from the Rockies west to the mountains near the coast. The Paiute, Shoshone and many other tribes live there. A young woman sings this **Shoshone Flag Song** and accompanies herself on a hand drum. The **bells attached to the dancer's clothing** also add rhythm and tone.

Shoshone Flag Song

Shamans in the Great Basin used a **musical bow** for **healing rituals**. And another interesting instrument is **rattles** made of **deer hooves strung together**.

M: Deer hooves?! *That's* gotta' sound different!

KK: It does!

Deer Hoof Rattle

KK: **THE SOUTHWEST REGION**, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California, is home to the **Pueblo** people, like the Hopi and Zuni tribes that settled there long ago. The **Navajo** and **Apaches**, who *used to move* with the seasons, *now* live there, too.

The Pueblo use a large, **brightly-painted cottonwood drum that's shaped like a barrel, with two heads**. Navajo and Apache

instruments include the **Apache violin**, a traditional solo instrument with one or two strings. Listen to this **Navajo Hoop Dance**.

Navajo Hoop Dance

The Southwest tribes use music for ceremonies, community celebrations, feast day dances, and **Kachina (or spirit being) dances**.

KK: OK... the **NORTHWEST COAST** region is the thin strip between the coastal mountains and the Pacific Ocean. It's only 100 miles wide, but it goes all the way from northern California up to the Alaskan panhandle. It's home to the Bella Coola, Tlingit

and other tribes. Some of their songs use words, mixed with **vowel** sounds.

Their complicated rhythms can make the singers and drum sound “out of sync”, and their **beautifully carved** and **hand-painted instruments represent spiritual beings**. Music is part of rituals, seasonal ceremonies and **potlatch**, or gift-giving **feasts**. Here's a **Potlatch Song**, sung by **Billy Assu**.

Billy Assu – Potlatch Song

M: I heard the vowels! It sounded like he was thinking about what he'd just sung!

KK: Yeah...good ears!

Our last area is the **ARCTIC AND SUB-ARCTIC REGION**. It's **HUGE** ... the entire northern part of the continent, from Alaska across northern Canada, and all the way to Greenland! Its many independent communities are all related! The **Inuit** and **Eskimo** peoples – like the Copper, Iglulik and Baffin Islanders – live there.

The rhythms are very complex, and they use arctic instruments like **dance gloves** that are decorated with small objects that rattle when the dancers move. Music and dance are part of special gatherings – like the *Bladder Festival* or the *Messenger Feast*. Their songs are often humorous, and are sometimes sung in **two-part harmony**, with ornamented melodies. But most intriguing of all are the **Inuit throat-singers**. Using **special breathing techniques**, their music almost sounds like it's coming out of the earth itself! Listen!

Inuit Throat Singing

M: I've never heard anything like it! How do they **DO** that?

KK: LOTS of practice with another person... and you need to learn how to do it the *right* way so you don't hurt your voice!

Mika – your Dad's moccasins are coming along great – good bead work! Next time, we'll finish them.

N: Mika and KiowaKat loved their time together. Tom would sometimes come too, just to enjoy their company and learn.

KK: Hi! Are you two ready to learn some more culture and history today?

M&T: Sure! You bet!

KK OK. Let's talk about something you see in old westerns, where the cowboys and Indians smoke peace pipes...remember that?

M&T: Yep.

KK: We all "get it" that after resolving a conflict or planning a new path together, they'd share a **peace pipe**. But there's more to it than

just sharing. Lighting the pipe is an honored ritual, but the **smoke** is most important...it rises to **carry the new intentions or prayers up to the Creator**. Smoking a peace pipe is truly a *sacred* ritual.

M: Gosh!

T: I never knew that. That's totally amazing.

KK: There's more to peace pipes than you thought, hmm?

Let's talk about something else... ***The Trail of Tears***. Do you know of it?

T: Umm...it was about... people having to move against their will...?

KK: That's it, Tom. It's a darker chapter... but let's discuss it. The **Cherokee** originally lived on 40,000 square miles in the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains. The land was officially given to them in a **treaty** with the federal government. But five years later, the new president signed the *Indian Removal Act of 1830*, which uprooted the Cherokee and sent them to the state of **Oklahoma**. Their forced walk came through Missouri. 5,000 people died along the way, and the event became known as the "**Trail of Tears**". Other tribes were also forced to move and walk that same trail.

Now, many Cherokee descendants live on their original tribal lands again. They've also established schools where children learn their native language. Known as the ***Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians***, their **own independent land** borders *The Great Smokey Mountains National Park*.

N: Mika and Tom had never heard the full story. KiowaKat continued:

KK: Now let's talk about some of our people who served our country with great honor. Ever heard of the ***Code Talkers of World War II?***

T&M: No. Uh-uh.

KK: As members of the **U.S. military**, a group of **Navajos** and members of other tribes used their ancient language to communicate important information to units in battle. They saved many lives, because their messages were always accurate and nobody could break their code. The Indian servicemen did this in Korea and Viet Nam, too, and *still* no one could break the code.

Even as early as **World War I**, **Choctaw** Indians successfully used Native languages in battle. In all of these conflicts, the individual veterans and their tribes were greatly honored for their heroic contributions. Look up "Native American veterans" online – you'll be inspired.

T: I had no idea of all this. What incredible history! I want to be Native American.

M: Oh, c'mon, Tom!

T: No, Mika, I'm *serious!*

KK: Thank you, Tom. You *can* appreciate the culture – I know you **do** – and you can support causes that help Native Americans... but it's your ancestors – your **blood heritage** – that makes you Indian. The **Bureau of Indian Affairs** actually issues cards and documents after the *tribe* declares you're a member. That doesn't mean you can't take part in Indian events like Pow Wows and things. *And* you could listen to see if a special animal is offering you a lesson, too – like Mika's raccoon!

Speaking of Mika, look at these moccasins! They're truly a gift from your heart – your father will be very honored.

M: Thank you, KiowaKat...for helping me. Tom, maybe we can visit Sioux country with Dad one day. Can we start a new project next week?

KK: Sure! Moccasins for Tom?

T: *GREAT!*

M: Yeah, I could do that!

KK: OK! I'll leave you both with this thought ...

“Feet on the floor, prayers up, and give thanks.

Remember the Ancestors always walk with you.”

Rik Baker and the Raccoon