

What are Pow Wows, vision quests and sweat lodges?



Posted May 2, 2018



Image <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pow-Wow_avec_les_drummers.jpg> by Missatikamekw <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Missatikamekw>> . CC BY-SA <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>

When we think of Indigenous Peoples' traditions and spiritual practices, images of colourful and intricate regalia, lively dances, and rhythmic chants come to mind. But beyond the display, did you know that these ceremonies are also replete with meaning and symbolism rooted in communal and spiritual beliefs?

There are many of these Indigenous traditions and spiritual practices that are still being practised in Canada today. But it is important to note that not all Indigenous Peoples share the same ceremonies, dances or songs. That's a common misconception. While they may share the same love for the land and connection to nature, different Indigenous groups have different languages, histories, culture, beliefs and identity.

The following are just some of those practiced by Indigenous groups in Manitoba <<https://livelearn.ca/article/living-in-manitoba/get-to-know-the-indigenous-peoples-in-manitoba/>> :

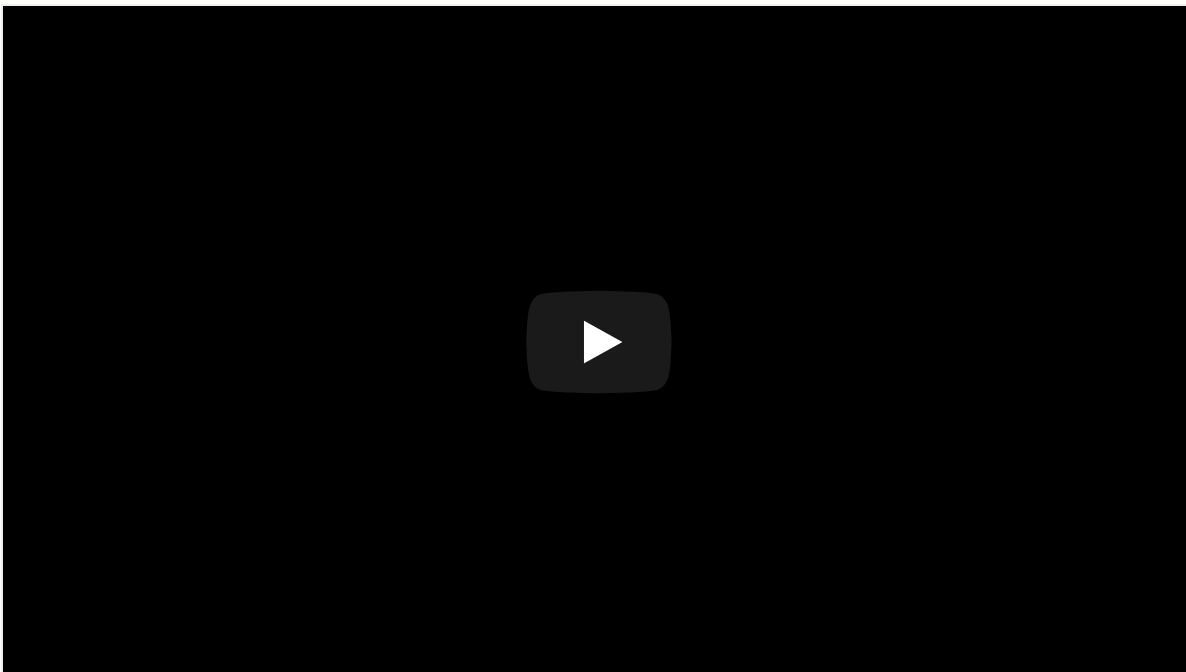
The Walking Out Ceremony (Cree)

This is the way the Cree welcomes children into their society. The group celebrates the children's first steps and introduces them to the traditional roles that they will play. Girls are dressed in traditional women's outfits and carry hand-made wooden axes and bundles of boughs on their backs. Boys are dressed as hunters and carry small hunting weapons. In the ceremony, the child walks out of the teepee led by the parents or a relative. The choice of who will accompany the child is of consequence because it symbolizes that they will guide and stand by the child for the rest of his/her life. This is a beautiful ceremony that highlights how the Cree values the worth of each person in their community.

About the Cree: The Cree is one of the five major First Nations groups in Manitoba (there are 23 Cree communities dispersed across Northern Manitoba). The Cree believe that everything is interconnected; the land, water, plant-life, animals and humans must be respected. This is reflected in all their rituals, ceremonies and songs.

Drum Songs (Dene)

In the Dene tradition, the drum is another way to connect with the Creator. Sacred drum songs are used for praying, healing and seeing into the future.



DENE DRUM SONG BY TEHTO DENEX

About the Dene: The Dene people are one the largest First Nations groups living in the subarctic region. Their territory covers the western part of the Northwest Territories, and the Northern part of Alberta. Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Like most First Nations groups. they relied on hunting for

survival. The Dene also have great respect for nature and believe that everything has a spirit that connects all things. Because of this, they observe strict hunting rules and ritual protocol. They pay respect to the life of the animal.

Sweat lodge ceremony and vision quest (various Indigenous Peoples)

The sweat lodge is a ceremony for purification, healing and praying. It takes place in a dome shaped hut with hot steam inside. The hut is a sacred place, likened to the womb of Mother Earth. The water and steam are meant to purify the participants. At the end of the ceremony, each person emerges “reborn” so to speak. The ritual is facilitated by an Elder or a healer (or sometimes called a keeper). The Elder leads the sacred rituals. Ancient songs and drumbeats may also be performed. In a sweat lodge, the steam is created by pouring water onto heated rocks in a pit at the center of the hut.

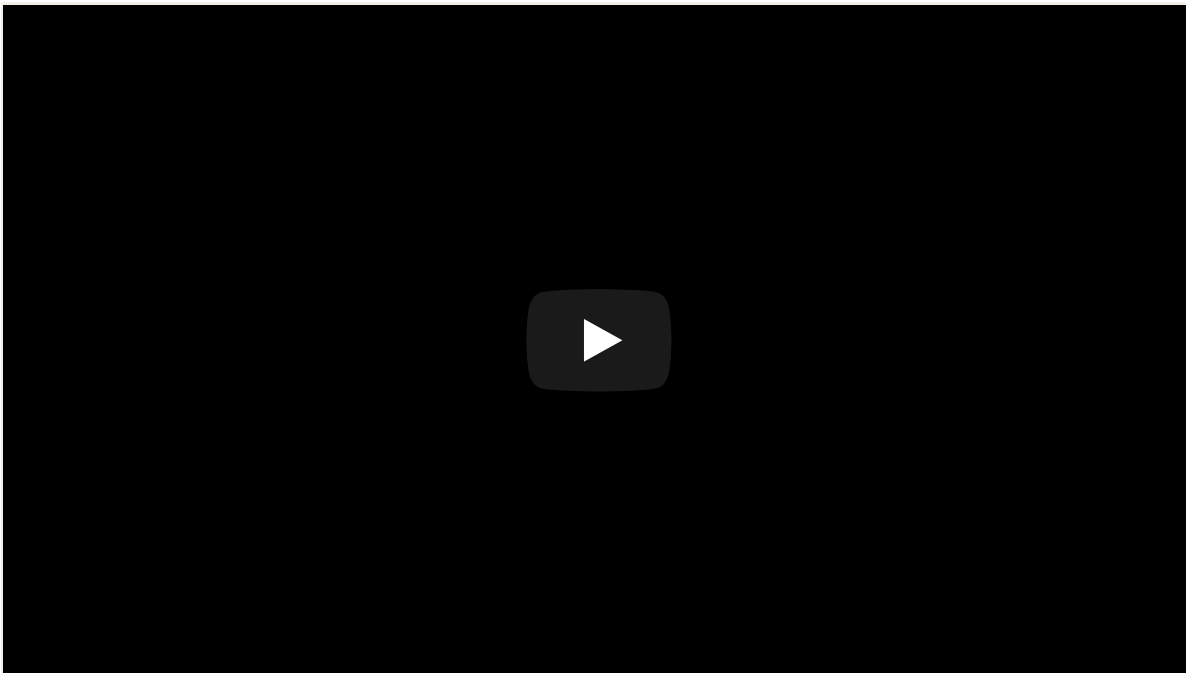
A vision quest, on the other hand, is undertaken to find meaning and spiritual fulfillment. It is a rite of passage for adolescents. It helps them develop “survival skills, gain maturity and connect with nature and ancestors” (Vision Quest <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/vision-quest/>> , Amanda Robinson, The Canadian Encyclopedia). The participant may start with purification by joining a sweat lodge ceremony or fasting. This is done before the adolescent embarks on the quest. For some Indigenous groups, the preparation starts as early as the participant is five years old. The preparation is done under the tutelage of a grandfather or an elder. When ready, the adolescent leaves the community to be alone for a certain period. Often the person goes into the wilderness or near grave sites of elders. The participant forgoes food and prepares the mind for dreams, visions or hallucinations. These visions are believed to be sacred messages from the Creator and their ancestors.

Midewiwin (Ojibway)

Midewiwin is the Grand Medicine Society. It is a religious society made up of spiritual advisors and healers who perform religious ceremonies, practise sacred healing methods, and pass on traditional teachings to the children and the community. Historically, members go through initiation rites and periods of instruction. Each initiate’s rank may be marked by face painting or by the animal or bird skins from which a Midewiwin bag or medicine bundle is made. Medicine bundles contain different items such as feathers, roots, or pipes. Each item has a different meaning, sacred myth, and song attached to it. Midewiwin ceremonies are held throughout the year but spring ceremonies are the best attended. It is when initiations take place.

About the Ojibway: The Ojibway have communities in the Southern part of Manitoba. They believe in a creator called *Kitchi Manitou* or Great Spirit. They are known for living by the Seven Sacred Teachings: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. Each of the teachings is represented by an animal which reminds the Ojibway of their connection to the land.

Pow Wow celebration (various First Nations groups)

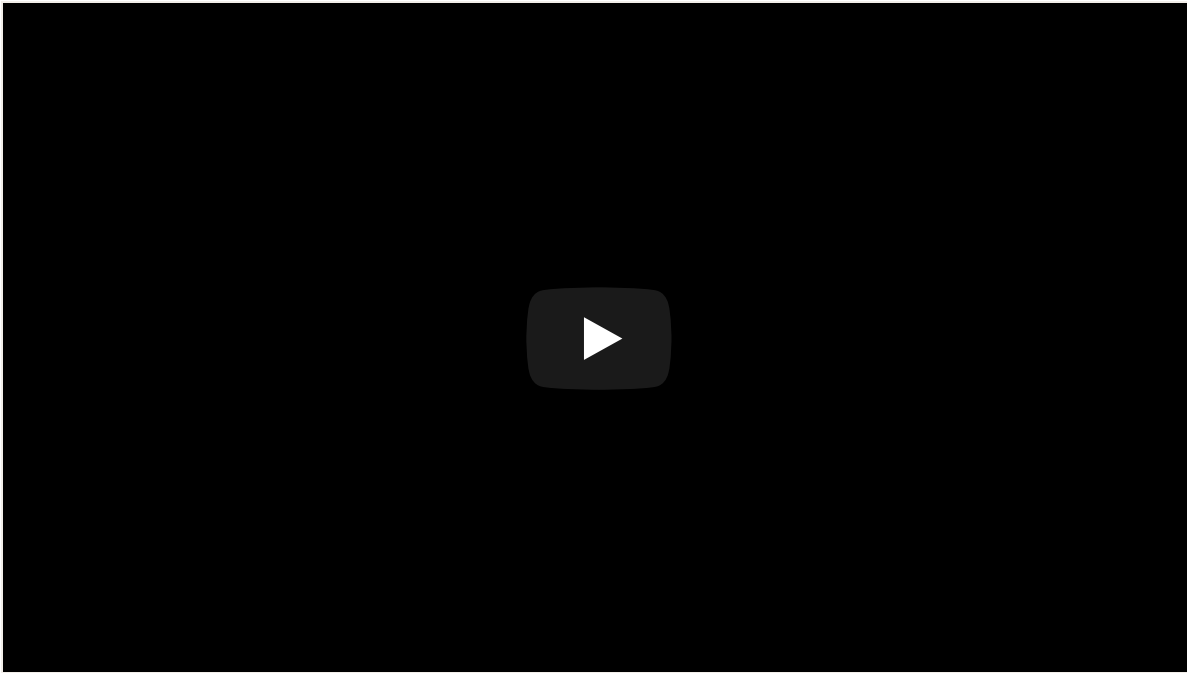


Among the biggest Indigenous celebrations in Canada is the **Manito Ahbee** <<https://www.manitoahbee.com/>> held in Winnipeg. It is a modern Pow Wow gathering that has grown into a celebration of Indigenous arts, culture, and music. It is also an international dance and drum competition. If you want to experience a Pow Wow, this is a great event to go to this summer (it is usually held in May).

A Pow Wow is “the Indigenous Peoples’ way of meeting together to join in dancing, singing, visiting, renewing old friendships, making new ones and mostly importantly celebrating and honouring traditions” (Pow Wow 101 <<https://www.manitoahbee.com/about-us/pow-wow>> , Manito Ahbee site). Not all Pow Wows have dance or drum competitions. But traditional dancers, drum players, songs, and colourful regalia are staples. Whether traditional or modern, the songs are learned through the years and have been passed down from generations. Also, while the dances and regalia may have evolved, they still carry the same meaning and importance. “Today, powwows are cultural exchanges that are used as part of healing ceremonies, and to celebrate Indigenous dance, music, food and art” (History of powwows <<http://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-powwows/>> Michael John Simpson and Michelle Fillice, The Canadian Encyclopedia)

powwows / > , MICHAEL JOHN SIMPSON and MICHELE FINCE, THE CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA.

Smudging/Smudge Ceremony (various First Nations groups)



Theresa Sinclair of Hollow Water, Manitoba, briefly explains the Smudging Ceremony (eyedzproductions <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu6lVgVTnlxeLBbVlvU_AeQ>).

Smudging is a tradition common to many Indigenous cultures. It is a cleansing ceremony using tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass (four sacred medicines). There are many ways by which it is done but generally, it involves a leader (Elder) who places the medicine in the smudge container. This is usually a shell but they can also use a ceramic or stone bowl, or a copper, brass or cast iron pan. The medicine or “smudge ball” is composed of the medicine leaves (or one of the four sacred medicines) rolled into a ball. This is burned. The smoke that rises out of it is used to cleanse the participants’ hands, heads, eyes, ears, mouth and bodies. “These actions remind us to think good thoughts, see good actions, hear good sounds, speak good words and show the good of who we are” (How do we Smudge? <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/publications/pdf/smudging_guidelines.pdf> Smudging protocol and guidelines for school divisions, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning).

Smudging allows people to let go of negative thoughts and help them to be mindful and centered. It is done to help them become grounded so that they can focus on what they need to do.

Sources: Indigenous Peoples of Manitoba, A guide for newcomers

<<https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/common/documents/indigenousguide201>

7-web.pdf> , Anika Reynar and Zoe Matties for Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba; **The walking out ceremony** <<http://creeculture.ca/content/walking-out-ceremony>> , Cree Culture.ca; Cree culture and values, Cree School Board; **Indigenous Spiritual Practices** <<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-creed/11-indigenous-spiritual-practices>> , Ontario Human Rights Commission; **Sweat Lodge**, <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sweat-lodge/>> The Canadian Encyclopedia; **Back to the beginning: A sweat lodge ceremony** <<https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/01/us/canada-sweat-lodge/index.html>> , as intended, Jessica Ravitz, CNN; **A definition of smudging** <<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-definition-of-smudging>> , Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc.; **Smudging protocol and guidelines for school divisions** <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/publications/pdf/smudging_guidelines.pdf> , Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning; **Pow Wow 101** <<https://www.manitoahbee.com/about-us/pow-wow>> , Manito Ahbee official site.



Text of this page is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>> , unless otherwise marked. Please attribute to English Online Inc. and link back to this page where possible. For images and videos, check the source for licensing information.