



Soundscape Activity

American Indian Music

Theme: American Indians celebrated life by creating music, much like we do today.

Materials Needed:

1. Various native musical instruments such as dried gourds, drums, notched sticks, and recorders. (Many websites exist where one can purchase American Indian instruments or find instructions for making simple imitations.)
2. Tape or CD of actual American Indian music, and CD player.

In this activity children are given American Indian instruments and form a circle to create their own music. The group leader should discuss reasons American Indians created music in the past and compare them with the reasons we make music today. Explain that the American Indian created music to express joy in a bountiful harvest or after a successful hunt, to celebrate the changing seasons, or for rites of passage, such as weddings, among people in the tribe. They also created music as a means to mourn a loss, such as the death of a loved one.

To set the mood it is helpful to dim the lights and ask that no one talk. Select one person to be the head drummer. This person will set the beat for everyone else to follow and when they stop, that will signal everyone else to stop playing as well. The head drummer will also determine the intensity. When he or she beats on the drum more loudly, the others can raise the volume of their instruments as well, when he or she beats more softly, the others follow suit.



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This activity is very powerful for setting a reverent mood among the children. You can repeat it several times, changing the head drummer and the rhythm each time.

Discussion:

(During the discussion softly play a tape of authentic Indian music.) The interpreter should ask the participants how it felt to make music and what it was like to participate with others in doing so. Remind them that music and ceremonies were very important to American Indian culture, possibly even more than to ours because it was a community event and a primary form of entertainment. It is also important to point out that American Indians exist today and that their culture is still active. This can lead to a discussion about respect for other cultures and, depending on the group, you can discuss the intolerance of the settlers and early U.S. Government to American Indians.



National Park Service
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The Natural Sounds Program works to protect, maintain, or restore acoustical environments throughout the National Park System. We fulfill this mission by working in partnership with parks and others to increase scientific and public understanding of the value and character of soundscapes and to eliminate or minimize noise intrusions.

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