

Assignment Three: Ritual

The Grand Entry

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A pow-wow is a time for an aboriginal community to come together and showcase their culture through traditional song, dance and dress. Pow-wows give time to appreciate and celebrate aboriginal culture, as well they serve the purpose of bringing the community together to regroup and strengthen ties with friends from far away. Each year at Lakehead University the Lakehead University Native Student Association (LUNSA) holds a pow-wow which, for many people serves to kick off the pow-wow season for the year. Pow-wows include traditional aboriginal dances in traditional aboriginal dress with music provided by drum circles (a group of 7-12 people who sit around a large drum and sing while they play). Throughout a pow-wow dancers will take part in a variety of different dances and different drum circles will lead the music for the dance. Pow-wows will often take place over a weekend with dancers taking part for often more than a day of dancing.

One of the most important rituals within the pow-wow is The Grand Entry. The Grand Entry is the time when the host drum takes control of the pow-wow, and where the Eagle Staff leads in the country's flags, then the dancers, while one of the host drums sings an opening song. Grand Entries typically take place at the beginning of the pow-wow but will also occur multiple times throughout to refocus the pow-wow and allow the host drum to take over, and then one final time as the pow-wow is winding down.

The LUNSA pow-wow follows this pattern of multiple Grand Entries throughout the day. The pow-wow is set up in the gym in the C.J. Saunders Field house (see map, Appendix A, page 10). The north and south bleacher in the room are pulled out to allow spectators to watch, and additional seats for participants line the inside of the court along the bleachers. Approximately forty chairs are also set up along the eastern wall flanking the dancer's entrance, these chairs are designated as elder seating. The south-west corner of the room has eight tables set up for vendors

selling food, aboriginal art and jewelry. Along the west wall are tables for the emcee, as well as for LUNSA representatives. Immediately in front of these tables along the west wall are stands for both flags and staffs. In the North-west corner there is a welcome table where volunteers welcome attendees and answer any questions they may have about the event.

In the centre of the room are eight (total of ten, two arrive late) drum circles. A drum circle consists of a large (1.5 meter in diameter) skin covered drum and 5-10 chairs surrounding the drum, in which drummers take their seats to warm up and begin the pow-wow. The western 2 most drum circles are the host drum (the Thunder Mountain Singers on the north side) and the co-host (Shadow Creek on the south side). Prior to the beginning of the Grand Entry dancers move around the room visiting friends and talking with spectators. As the time for the Grand Entry draws closer, more and more dancers move towards the dancer's entrance located on the eastern side of the room (see Fig.1).



Fig. 1 Dancers and Flag and Staff Bearers wait for the Grand Entry to Begin

The Grand entry began with the Tommy White, the event's emcee, announcing the final call for dancers and asking the host drum, in this case a group called the Thunder Mountain Singers to begin their song, and for the crowd to rise and prepare for the entry of the flags. The staff bearers (4 male dancers in full fancy regalia) and flag bearers (two male dancers in full fancy regalia) lead the procession of the other dancers in the following order: Head Female and Head Male Dancers, Men's Traditional Dancers, Men's Grass Dancers, Men's Fancy Dancers (see Fig 2.), Women's Traditional Dancers, Women's Fancy Dancers, Women Jingle Dancers (see Fig 3.) (Blundell 1993) and adolescents and children, boys then girls. The dancers then follow the path laid out on the map (Appendix A, pg 10) around for three rounds building up their dances as they go.



Fig. 2 Male Fancy Dancers during the dance following the Grand Entry.



Dancers dance according to their costume, and the freedom of movement that they allow. Many men's costumes are elaborate, but they allow for a large amount of movement because they have free legs not bound by a skirt. Men's dances often begin with a shuffling and stomping movement where their feet take them around the circuit. The longer their dancing for the higher their steps get and their arm movements get larger and larger. In addition to the increased movement as the dance progresses, the dancers will often spread out, moving from a tightly packed group at the center of the circle (closest to the drummers) to filling the open space by moving out and making their movements larger. Some men do a quieter dance for the whole grand entry continuing a slow stomping shuffle the whole time. Some men with elaborate eagle feather bustles on their back add a lot of dancing involving bending at the waste and moving their arms to the beat of the drum.

Most women's dances are a little more subtle in their movements. Jingle dancers will pad back and forth gently on their feet, or jump slightly, making the bells covering their costume jingle with every movement. Jingle dancers do not move their arms nearly as much as the men's dances, they tend to keep their arms by their sides, or they hold fans near their faces, gently fanning themselves. Woman's fancy and traditional dancers dance in this way as well. A woman who is dressed for the shall dance (also called the butterfly dance) has a shall with bright coloured trailings on her shoulders and arms. The shall dancers will hold their arms out like wings and move their arms in motions to mimic a butterfly. Also to mimic a butterfly, the shall dancers will spin while they dance the circuit and dip their bodies as they spin.



Fig. 3 Female jingle dancers and shall dancers during the dance following the grand entry.

Following the three rounds of the circle, the staff bearers present the staffs to the emcee, and a prayer is said thanking the creator. This prayer is done in Ojibwe (or the language native to the hosts) and following the prayer the eagle staffs are placed in stands along with the flags near the emcee's table. At this point dignitaries are welcomed to say a few words of welcome. In this case Dr Brian Stevenson was welcomed to his first LUNSA pow-wow and said a few words, something which the past president did not do the previous year, as well the Vice-Provost of Aboriginal Initiatives for Lakehead University, Beverly Anne Sabourin also welcomed the crowd. Following the speakers, another final round of dancing took place, this one slower and more subdued was to honour veterans. Following the final circuit of dancing the pow-wow had officially kicked off, and pictures of the dancers could now be taken (because of the sacred

nature of the Grand Entry photos are not allowed during the ritual, as a result all of the pictures in this report are of the dance following the Grand Entry).



Fig. 4 Beverly Anne Sabourin saying her opening words next to the flags and staffs.

A ritual is defined as “the symbolic expression of the sentiments which are attached to a given situation (Kutsche 1998, pg 51).” The whole purpose of the Grand Entry is to be a celebration of the heritage that all the Aboriginal people share. This celebration is done through a recognition of many things through symbols. The Eagle staff, the object that the main procession is based around itself is a symbol, a symbol of the aboriginal nation(Sandy, 2009). The Staff represents the people as a whole and their united culture, the ritual around the staff is there to acknowledge the symbolic representation that the Aboriginal community within Canada is still a strong nation of people (Sandy, 2009).

Specifically the Grand Entry can be considered a few different types of ritual: a rite of deference and a rite of intensification. A rite of deference shows a difference in status (Kutsche 1998). Grand Entry is structured to show the status of the dancers. The flags and staffs are the first to go, showing the greatest respect for the Creator and for the country. The flag and staff bearers are then followed by the Head Female and Head Male Dancers, Men's Traditional Dancers, Men's Grass Dancers, Men's Fancy Dancers, Women's Traditional Dancers, Women's Fancy Dancers, Women Jingle Dancers (Blundell 1993) and adolescents and children, boys then girls. This specific ordering shows a respect to the accomplished dancers. In addition to the ordering of dancers, the portion of the ceremony where veterans are recognized and in this way they are put into a category apart from the rest of the participants and observers, showing their unique status in the community.

A rite of intensification serves to reestablish social relations and to strengthen these social bonds (Kurtsche 1998). By bringing together the community on such a large scale, the pow-wow brings together people who haven't seen one another since the closing of the last pow-wow season. It strengthens the bonds between clans and also allows clans to show of their best, allowing them to show who has the best dancers and who is the strongest. The Grand entry allows the people within the clan to show who their most esteemed members are, as these are selected to carry the staffs.

The Grand Entry is a ritual that is carefully observed and very sacred to the Aboriginal community. It is an acknowledgment of their strong nation and a chance to celebrate their culture and bring the community together. The Grand Entry also serves to showcase the Aboriginal culture to outsiders, giving them a chance to see the best that they have to offer.



Sources Cited

Blundell, Valda. 1993. *"Echoes of a Proud Nation": Reading Kahnawake's Powwow as a Post-*

*Oka Text*. Ottawa: Carleton University.

Kutsche, Paul. 1998. *Field Ethnography: a Manual for Doing Cultural Anthropology*. New

Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

## **Appendix A: Map of the Event**

## **Appendix B: Interview and Emcee Transcript**

### *Brent Kelso Interview*

#### ***What makes this year's pow-wow different from other years?***

I think this year's pow-wow is exciting because we're getting to show it to the new president. Dr Brian Stevenson is going to be here, hopefully for the Grand Entry, he is on the invitation list and we're told that he will make an appearance today. So I think this year is about showing another community to him.

We have a lot of people who have travelled to be here from other places, so we want to show him that the aboriginal people are convening here at Lakehead, and they're very proud to be here.

#### ***So other than Dr. Stevenson's presence, is it pretty much the same as last years?***

It's very similar to last year's pow-wow, but what I think makes each year new is every year, the dancers always come back, they want to participate, the emcee and arena director are the same as last year so its still a very unique program, it's been running for over 30 years now. It's a great way to bring the aboriginal community together and to bring out the non-aboriginal community to show them something special.

It's not plain-jane, there is something that will happen each year to make it spectacular, but it's essentially the same as last year.

#### ***Approximately how many volunteers do you have helping you out today?***

We have over 50 volunteers, last night we had about the same amount some come out for the set up, some are here all day, It's a mixture of highschool students, university students and people

from the community, adults who want to participate and also LUNSA and our group at the college. It's a very diverse group of volunteers.

This event would never take place if we didn't have volunteers, there are only so many staff persons in the university who can help with these kind of events, that at the end of the day it comes down to the volunteer base to do the planning, to reach out to the community, and also to develop the experience and friends, you know you grow a little bit more when you volunteer.

People who were here a few years ago think when is that pow-wow I want to help out again, I want to take on a larger role, and so they grow with the pow-wow

So its a very unique pow-wow and it kicks off the pow-wow season, everyone looks forward to this one to start off the season which will run to the fall. So we have a lot of people, especially the drum groups that take advantage of this pow-wow to warm up their skills for the year, some of them bring in new members into the group so they get an opportunity to warm up and get set.

***How many dancers do you think you get?***

We get about a hundred dancers, about 12-15 drum groups, with 7-10 members each. Some are larger some are smaller, some are younger some are older, we have some from in town and we have some from out of town, they are all just really proud to be here.

With some of the unfortunate things that happened during aboriginal awareness week, you know power outages, speakers pulling out because they were sick, Ethel Blondin was amazing though, i was a little bit worried though because on the radio they had said that the university was closed and i was just thinking that it's one of those times when chaos just happens. But that event, and then a week between then and now, its just really built up.



## Appendix C: News Paper Articles

*Celebrating aboriginal culture in style  
Another successful year for LUNSA pow wow*

March 16, 2010

Amy Szybalski  
News Writer

Last Saturday and Sunday, the CJ Sanders Fieldhouse was packed with dancers and observers alike for the annual Lakehead University Native Students Association Spring Pow Wow. A pow wow is a time for Aboriginal people to come together and share their culture, and the LUNSA Spring powwow was most definitely a display of Aboriginal culture at its best.

The Lakehead powwow is, a “traditional gathering of many different people. It’s the beginning of the powwow season where all these different communities and people get together and take place in traditional activities,” as described by Will Robinson, organizer of the powwow.

The LUNSA pow wow has grown significantly since its humble beginnings as a small gathering in the Agora

“We’re trying to stay with the tradition of it being a student driven powwow, by the students for the students, and encourage the aboriginal community to get involved, we want to bring everybody together,” said LUNSA president Thomas Grinnell.

The pow wow kicked off last Saturday with the grand entry, “the time when the host drum takes control of the Powwow, to kick off two or three hours of solid Powwow” described Will Robinson. The host drum, the Little Bear Singers, initiated the grand entry, with the Eagle staff leading the first dance.

Throughout all of Saturday and a good chunk of Sunday, the pow wow continued on with many dancers, young and old taking part.

Many people in the community have an image in their minds of what a powwow is, but to someone outside of the Aboriginal community, the terms and customs of a Powwow may be a little foreign.

For instance the term “Drum,” refers to a group of performers who play a large, specially designed drum and sing traditional songs. Each drum has a Lead Singer who runs his or her drum and leads the singers while singing. The number of members of a drum group may vary, but is usually at least four people, and can be far more.

Throughout the day men and women, ranging from toddlers to elders, took part in traditional dress took part in a variety of different traditional dances. Throughout the weekend smudging ceremonies also took place to purify the air in the building.

As a great kick off to the pow wow season, spectators can only wait for next year’s celebration to be even bigger.

*The Eagle Staff  
a symbol of sacredness and nationhood*

2009

ERNIE SANDY

How is an eagle staff similar to a national flag such as Old Glory of the United States and the Canadian maple leaf ?

In a continuing series of articles on Anishinaabeg (pronounced Aw'nish-naa-beg) culture and history, I submit periodically to The Packet & Times, I am proud and pleased to share with you some of the teachings I have learned about the eagle staff during the last two decades or so. My lessons came from a variety of sources such as powwows, elders' conferences and special ceremonies. Another valuable source was from conversations with elders, or the "Old Ones" as they are affectionately called sometimes, and from other traditional teachers.

The eagle staff is similar in the way it also represents my peoples' heritage, pride, beliefs, history, knowledge, language, culture, governance, geographic location and nationhood. For the Anishinaabeg peoples, the sacredness of the eagle staff is how it connects us spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally to our mother, the Earth, as nations.

A brief explanation is in order here on the word "nation." We were nations of people, in every sense of the word, for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the newcomers.

We had our own forms of governance that was based on consensus and hereditary leadership. There was an education and skills development system that was hands-on. Economic self-sufficiency was through a barter system that extended to the far reaches of the continent.

Law and justice were geared toward restoring a balance and harmony in an individual rather than punishment. It was the responsibility of the whole community in raising a child through moral values and role models. Our way of life or spirituality honoured the sacredness of land and the environment. It was up to us to keep the land and water clean for the generations that followed behind. Those were just some examples of how we were truly nations.

The foundation of our governments was sharing and caring for everyone. It was all about fairness and inclusiveness. That is, every man, woman and child had a voice. We were all part of a circle where everyone, regardless of age or position, was the same. There was no status or hierarchy where one stood in the nation. Leaders, in their humbleness, recognized that their position, while respectful and honourable, were not above anybody else. These and more came to a grinding halt within three or four generations with an imposition of an alien form of governance that was a radical departure from our lifestyle and governance. Socially, economically, politically and spiritually speaking, it was downhill from there for my people.

However, we have never lost the distinction of being the first peoples or nations in what many of us call Turtle Island (North America), nor have we ever given up our sovereignty as nations.

When my ancestors agreed to share the land and waters of our country with the newcomers, the colonial government dealt with our chiefs as nation to nation. By nations, I mean the Ojibway Nation, Cree Nation, Mik'maq Nation, Iroquois Nation and dozens of other nations across Canada.

Therefore, an eagle staff to a First Nation or organization is what a flag is to a country. The duality of these symbols is that we honour them both in the same way. To those who subscribe to the cultural philosophy, the staff represents us as Anishinaabeg peoples. Many of my people are just starting to learn and adopt the custom as we become aware of its history and value as a symbol of sacredness and nationhood.

This is another belief and practice that is slowly emerging amongst Aboriginal Peoples after three or four generations of oppressive government policies and banishment. Today, especially during special events such as powwows, staff carriers hold the eagle staff up high as if

to say, we are still here and we are getting stronger spirituality as we shed the shackles of colonialism and oppression.

This is why we hold the eagle staff in such high esteem and respect. It reminds us of our past, present and where are going as Anishinaabeg peoples.

Just like the flags of many nations, no two eagle staffs are the same. Each eagle staff reflects the honour bestowed upon it by an individual, organization or First Nation. However, all staffs are made up entirely of nature's gifts, such as the trees, animals and birds. The difference is in the way they were dressed or decorated.

Even though eagle staffs may vary from each other in the way they are decorated, all will have one or two, perhaps several eagle feathers. These are sewed or tied onto the soft leather that covers most of the staff. The actual staff would be cedar, white pine or some other kind of tree. It is usually four to seven feet in length. The staff may have colourful beaded designs on it, such as animals or birds.

At the forefront of powwow grand entries are the eagle staffs. Their beauty and elegance can be seen at these social and cultural gatherings during the early spring and summer months in almost every First Nation, urban centre, college and university across Canada and the United States.

In pride and Baa-maa-pii (until the next time.)