

• VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE •

# Apache 8



Early crew (1970s)--Marjorie Grimes at bottom right. *Image Courtesy of Sue Levy.*



Butch Gregg, left, and Ericka Hinton, right, on Helitack crew. *Image Courtesy of David Hocs.*

***“You never knew what you were going to face. You were with a bunch of women who could handle anything.”***

— Katy Aday, Apache 8 crew member.

The all-women wildland firefighting crew from the White Mountain Apache Tribe has been fighting fires on the Reservation and throughout the United States for more than 30 years. With humor and tenderness, four extraordinary women from different generations of the Apache 8 crew share their personal stories.



This Viewer Discussion Guide is designed to encourage deeper exploration and conversations about the film and explore issues surrounding obesity, poverty and heritage.

**PRODUCER'S NOTES**

**Sande Zeig, Producer**



**Sande Zeig, Producer, Apache 8**  
Image Courtesy of Sande Zeig.

I'm deeply honored to bring to the public the story of the women firefighters of Apache 8. I first encountered these firefighters in the Phoenix airport in 2006. When I went to the Tribal Council to request permission to film them on the White Mountain Apache Reservation, the Council granted a resolution because its members felt it was in the best interest of the Tribe. I am grateful for their trust and for the help I received from members of the Tribe. When we first started making Apache 8 there was little information available about the all-women crews from Fort Apache. A significant discovery was NBC television footage from 2002 about Apache 8 during the Rodeo Chediski Fire.

The Fort Apache Indian Reservation is located in Eastern-central Arizona and spans 1.6 million acres. Approximately one third of the land is forest. As a non-native filmmaker given the privilege of making this film, I felt it was essential to include the beautiful landscape of the Reservation and the language of the Apache people. The personal stories of the women featured in Apache 8 emerged as the film was being produced. We filmed more than 20 firefighters, and I did not have any prior information about the four women who, in the end, were featured in the film. I did not know that there is a statue of Cheryl Bones in Boise, Idaho; that Nita Quintero's Sunrise Ceremony was featured in National Geographic; that Katy Aday is a Commander in the US Navy; or that Ericka Hinton would become one of the first women to become a member of the Fort Apache Hotshot Crew in its 27 year history.

Some of my most precious memories from making the film are the Sunrise Dances, the coming of age ceremony for girls, and the time spent in the firefighters' homes. The women of Apache 8 are an inspiration to me, and I hope others will be similarly inspired by the strength and courage of the women of Apache 8.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

The White Mountain Apache Reservation includes 1.67 million acres, about 2600 square miles. The land has mountains, deserts, and canyons with the lowest elevation of 2600 feet above sea level in the Salt River Canyon to 11,400 feet at the Top of Mount Baldy, considered a sacred peak to the Apache people.

The White Mountain Apache Tribe owns and operates The Sunrise Park Resort, one of the largest ski resorts in the Southwest. The resort has 65 ski runs as well as sleigh rides, tubing and other winter activities. It is also open in the summer for backpackers and hikers.

The White Mountain Apache Tribe has 15,000 tribal members with the majority of them living in or around the town of Whiteriver.

Beginning on June 18, 2002 two fires, the Rodeo and the Chediski, eventually joined into one devastating fire that burned over 470,000 acres total with 275,000 acres on the White Mountain Apache Reservation.

Following this devastating fire, immediate steps were taken to cut erosion and further damage. From July 22 to August 6, a stunning 4.6 million pounds of winter wheat and native grass seed were scattered by airplanes over 179,000 acres.

The Apache Sunrise Ceremony or na'ii'ees is a four-day ceremony that Apache girls experience when they begin menstruating. Though almost lost, the ceremony continues today. It is believed that during the ceremony the young girls are given special physical and spiritual powers by White Painted Woman to help them embrace their role as women of the Apache nation.

In the early 1900's when the U.S. government banned Native American spiritual practices and rituals, conducting the Sunrise Ceremony was an illegal act. The ceremony was openly reestablished when the American Indian Religious Freedom act was passed in 1978.

In Apache communities between 2001 and 2006 youth suicide was 13 times higher than the US rates for all races and 7 times higher than that of Native Communities. Strong efforts are underway to identify and work with high risk youth.

The first women's crew Apache 6 started in 1974. The celebrated Apache Hotshots started eight years later in 1982.

In 2004, there were over 6,000 American Indian firefighters nationwide.

## EXPLORING THE FACTS

1. Public opinion often portrays our Native women as living in poverty, living in ill health, beaten down by oppression and abuse. In what ways does the Apache 8 Wild land Firefighting Crew dispel these stereotypes of Native women?

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2. Firefighting is a tremendously dangerous career. Lives are lost as our firefighters go bravely into mayhem. What feelings and thoughts do you have about Apache 8 being an all-womane crew—sisters, mothers, and even grandmothers—risking their lives to fight fire?

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3. Having strong role models is an important way for young people to shape their own characters as they grow and develop. What specific qualities or characteristics do you think the women of Apache 8 are modeling for other young women?

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4. Currently, more and more young women are joining the military—even taking on direct combat duties. The roles of men and women seem to be shifting. How would you compare or contrast the Apache 8 all-women crew or women in the military with women of one to two hundred years ago? How do you feel about the changing roles of women?

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5. Perhaps unlike other firefighters, the women of Apache 8 have a strong personal interest in protecting their homelands, the White Mountain Apache Reservation. What role do you think “place” plays in our lives? Is there a place to which you feel a direct and personal connection? If there is, why do you think that is?

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6. After a major forest fire major efforts are extended to reduce erosion and further damage to the land. Do research to learn more about what those efforts entail. Find the definition of the following items and how they are used: water bars, wattles, and K-rails.

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7. In the film, we learn about the traditional Sunrise Ceremony that is done to bring a young girl into womanhood. Nita Quintero shares her story with us. In your culture, what was done to help bring you into a stronger adulthood as a young woman or man? How does it compare with the Sunrise Ceremony?



Katy Aday's husband and her father pin on her Lieutenant bars. *Image courtesy of Katy Aday.*



Apache 8 crew on a fire. *Image Courtesy of Aurelia Tate.*

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. The packs the Apache 8 women must train in and carry weigh 45 pounds. In your class (or on your own) fill a backpack with enough stones or canned goods to equal this weight and then run or walk one mile while wearing the backpack. How does that feel? Can you imagine doing this for many days at a time?
2. Do research in books or on the internet and identify three to five women who you would consider courageous and strong. This might be either physical strength or spiritual/psychological strength. On what specific qualities or characteristics did you base your choices?
3. Go and visit an elder in your family or community and ask her to tell you stories about something that she had to endure or get through in her life. Ask her what qualities or strengths she had to draw on, and how did she find those qualities or strengths.
4. Choose a woman in your community who is a firefighter, an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician), in the military, or a law enforcement officer and ask them if you can shadow her during part of her shift. If she is not allowed to do this for legal reasons, ask her if you can interview her. Try to discover what motivated her to take on this job, what obstacles she may have encountered while training for this career, and what she gains from doing this work.
5. Write a short story about a brave, young woman firefighter. Have her encounter a dangerous situation such as a trapped animal or person, or danger to a crew member. Then, as the writer, help her to succeed at solving the problem or rescuing the one in danger. Use your words to build tension and excitement as you bring your story to conclusion.



The Apache 8 crew pauses during another long day. *Image Courtesy of Bernita Brooks.*



Irene Hinton, left, and Nita Quintero, right, members of the Apache 8 crew. *Image Courtesy of David Hoc.*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



**Nita Quintero at her Sunrise Ceremony.**  
Image Courtesy of Bill Hess, National Geographic Stock Images.

**Official Website of the White Mountain Apache Tribe**  
[www.wmat.nsn.us/](http://www.wmat.nsn.us/)

**History of American Indian firefighting**  
[www.foresthistory.org/publications/fht/fhtspringfall2004/2004firerwarriors.pdf](http://www.foresthistory.org/publications/fht/fhtspringfall2004/2004firerwarriors.pdf)

**About the Apache Sunrise Ceremony**  
[www.webwinds.com/yupanqui/apachesunrise.htm](http://www.webwinds.com/yupanqui/apachesunrise.htm)

**Apache 8 Website**  
[www.apache8.org](http://www.apache8.org)

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