



# Racing the Rez

## Viewer Discussion Guide

### SYNOPSIS

In the rugged canyon lands of Northern Arizona, Navajo and Hopi cross-country runners from two rival high schools put it all on the line for Tribal pride, triumph over adversity and state championship glory. Win or lose, what they learn in the course of their seasons will have a dramatic effect on the rest of their lives.

*“To obtain something good,  
there’s always something in the  
way that we have to overcome.”*

— Thomas Hitathli (Navajo),  
Tuba City High School  
Cross-Country Assistant Coach

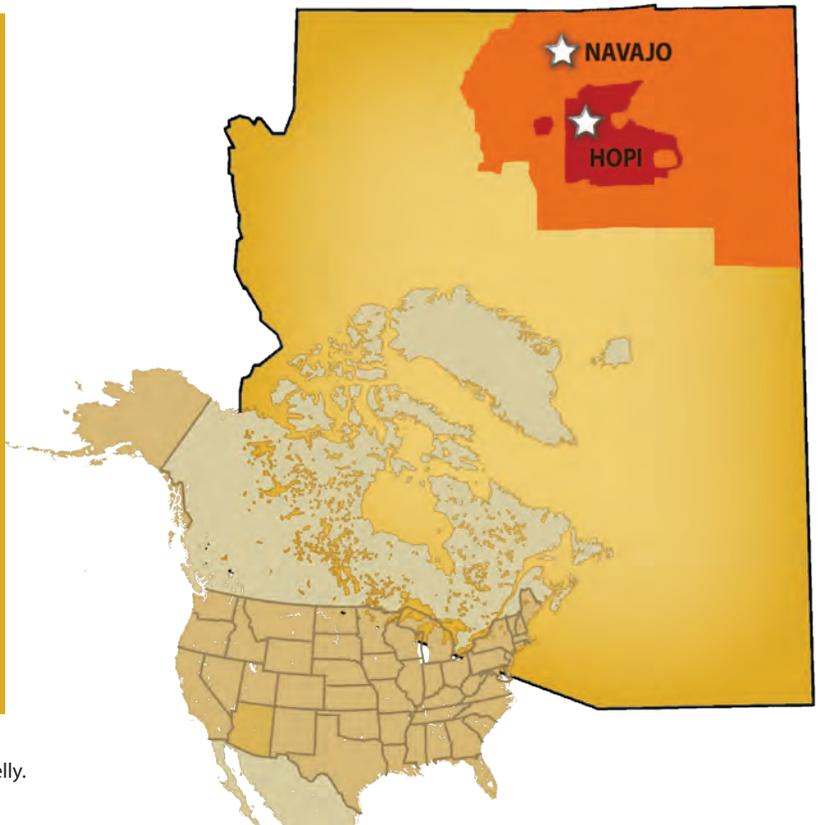


Chinle High School cross-country runner Darrick Joey.  
Image courtesy of Carl Perry and Shaun Martin.



Chinle High School cross-country runner Johnathan Yazzie and Tuba City High School cross-country runner Ryan Yazzie. Image composite courtesy of Margot Kelly.

## ARIZONA



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### PRODUCER'S NOTES: Brian Truglio

"This documentary is a personal journey. I ran cross-country at Watchung Hills Regional High School in New Jersey and in 1989, I lost a very close friend and teammate, Chris Drewry, in a tragic boating accident. Our school and our community were devastated. For our team, running began to take on a new meaning. It gave us time and space to try and come to terms with our loss, and I soon discovered that running was strengthening me in ways I never expected.

I first traveled to the Navajo and Hopi Reservations as part of a college assistant teaching program in 1991 and I've been continually drawn back ever since. Knowing both the many challenges the young people face growing up on the Reservation and the long Navajo and Hopi tradition of running, I set out to see if cross-country was having the positive impact on Navajo and Hopi boys that it had on me. After two years and two seasons filming, *Racing the Rez* is the story of that impact."



Producer, Director & Camera: Brian Truglio.  
Image courtesy of Wolf Hill Films.

### BY THE NUMBERS

1.	In <b>1966</b> , the Navajo Nation opened the <b>first</b> Tribally controlled elementary school in the nation. It was the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Chinle. Reservation day schools began in <b>1869</b> , while Indian boarding schools began in <b>1875</b> when Lt. Richard Henry Pratt, the officer in charge of a group of Indian prisoners at Fort Marion, Florida, began to teach the Native prisoners the white man's language.
2.	The Hopi Reservation stretches <b>over 1.5 million acres</b> and is based around three mesas rising <b>up to 7,200 feet</b> . The San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, Arizona, are considered the Sacred Mountains of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and fellow Arizona Tribes.
3.	The Navajo Reservation (including both Chinle and Tuba City) is the <b>largest</b> Reservation in the United States. The land stretches <b>over 17.25 million acres</b> into Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. The average rainfall is <b>between 10 and 14 inches</b> per year.
4.	Like many Native American Tribes, early U.S. government expansion policies were not kind to the Navajo People. In <b>1846</b> , Colonel Kit Carson enacted "The Scortched Earth Policy." Navajo fields and homes were burned and crops and livestock were destroyed. <b>Over 8,000</b> Navajos were forced to march <b>300 miles</b> to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, in what became known as "The Long Walk."
5.	The vast lands of the Navajo Nation are beautiful, red earth areas that contain <b>more than a dozen</b> national monuments, Tribal parks, and historical sites. <b>Three major rivers</b> cross the Navajo Reservation—the San Juan, the Gobernador, and the Largo.
6.	The Hopi population consists of <b>about 10,000 people</b> who are spread out into <b>12</b> traditional self-governing villages.
7.	The Navajo and Hopi People, both past and present, excel in farming and animal husbandry. <b>Over hundreds of years</b> , they have continued to thrive in the desert landscape. The word, Navajo, actually comes from the language of the Tewa Indians and it means, "great planted fields." However, the people call themselves "Diné" which means "The People."
8.	The <b>original</b> homes of the Diné People were circular or cone-shaped dwellings made with wooden poles and tree bark covered with mud. They were called Hogans and some of the people today still prefer the Hogan to more modern houses.
9.	In <b>2007</b> , Jacoby Ellsbury became the <b>first</b> Navajo to play major league baseball—playing for the Boston Red Sox. When Ellsbury attended Madras High School in Oregon, he lettered in five sports including cross-country.

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### DELVE DEEPER

1. In *Racing the Rez*, we follow two cross-country teams from different communities on the Navajo Nation with one of the runners coming from the Hopi Nation. How do you think being involved in athletic activity is helping these young men become stronger adults?
2. Consider for a moment the earlier lifestyles of the Diné. They were farmers and raised livestock. To keep the grazing lands fresh, the people often lived at a distance from one another in small groups. How do you think today's runners compare to their relatives from an earlier time?
3. Health is an issue on all of our Reservations with skyrocketing diabetes, heart disease, addiction, etc. Early training as cross-country runners will help to change this pattern of ill health. What other ways do you think it could help?
4. In the film, Leigh Kuwanwisiwma (Hopi), director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, says that running is not just a physical activity but a psychological and spiritual activity as well. Can you explain what he might have meant by this?
5. Competition has always been a part of Diné and Hopi life. Explain how you think competition can be healthy. Explain in what ways you think it could become unhealthy.

### IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. What is something that you have done that was challenging and felt like it took real effort to push on? What obstacles did you have to overcome? What inner or outer resources did you have to overcome? What inner or outer resources did you use in order to accomplish the goal? Write the story and share it with others.
2. On the Internet, create a "virtual tour" of the lands and people of the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Nation. Take a moment to notice any differences between the communities and the lands on which you live and this place. How are they the same? How are they different?
3. In the film, the coaches of both teams are very much about their runners. They push them, support them, and confront them when necessary. Who in your life has been a "coach" that did the same? Take a piece of paper and write them a thank you note and explain what you learned from him or her.
4. At some time, we have all taken on a challenge that seems too big to accomplish and may have had the urge to just give up and quit. Think of a time like this for you. What did you do to keep yourself going? Did you do it alone—or were there others there to help you? If you gave up and quit, do you have regrets?
5. The film focuses on two Native high schools, one with mostly Navajo students and the other with a mix of Navajo and Hopi students. As a class or group, explore the relationship between the Navajo and Hopi people over time. How are they different? How are they similar? What are the main issues they have had to deal with together?

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### RESOURCES

1. Official website for the Navajo Nation—<http://www.navajo-nsn.gov>
2. Official website for the Hopi Nation—<http://www.hopi-nsn.gov>
3. Economic development—<http://www.navajobusiness.com/fast->

### CULTURAL INFORMATION

1. Culture—<http://navajopeople.org>
2. Culture—[www.lapahie.com/Dine\\_Clans.cfm](http://www.lapahie.com/Dine_Clans.cfm)
3. Hopi Cultural Center—<http://www8.nau.edu/~hcpo-p/links.html>

### FILM INFORMATION

1. Official website—<http://www.racingtherez.com>
2. Interview with the Producer— [http://www.nativetelecom.org/producer\\_profile\\_brian\\_truglio](http://www.nativetelecom.org/producer_profile_brian_truglio)



Tuba City and Chinle trophies at State 2008.



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*Racing the Rez* is a co-production of Wolf Hill Films and Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc. (NAPT). Major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and NAPT. Also, a special thank you goes out to the film's private donors, especially those who supported the film's Kickstarter campaign.

This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by NAPT. NAPT shares Native stories with the world through the support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media. For more information, please visit <http://www.nativetelecom.org>.

Educational resources for this film available at [http://www.nativetelecom.org/education/racing\\_the\\_rez](http://www.nativetelecom.org/education/racing_the_rez).



Tuba City High School cross-country runner Dennis Klain (Hopi). Image courtesy of Wolf Hill Films.