

The Medicine Game

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Program Synopsis

Tucked away in central New York State is the Onondaga Nation, a sovereign Native American community known to produce some of the top lacrosse players in the world. Yet, the fear of leaving their community, substance abuse, and poverty have kept far too many of these players from venturing off the “Rez” and into the collegiate or professional ranks.

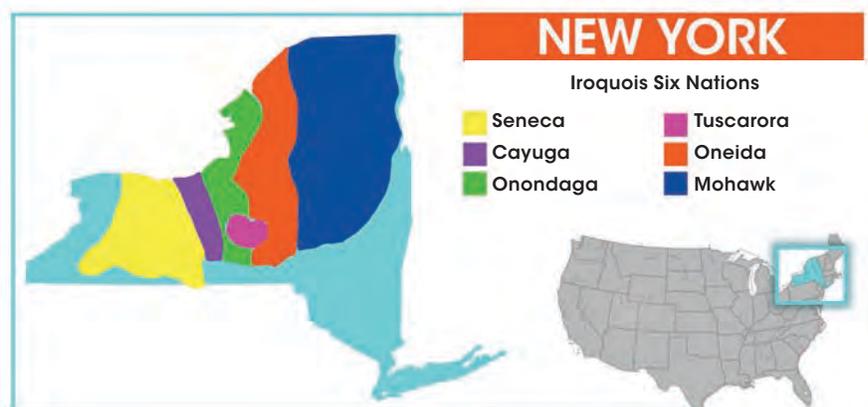
The Iroquois people play a ceremonial game of lacrosse, referred to as the “medicine game”—a very important medicine ceremony played to ward off sicknesses from the tribe. **The Medicine Game**, a film six years in the making, shares the remarkable journey of two brothers from the Onondaga Nation driven by a single goal—to beat the odds and play the sport of lacrosse for national powerhouse Syracuse University. The obstacles in their way are frequent and daunting, but the brothers’ love for the game, each other, and their family’s unyielding determination propels these young men towards their dream.

“The greatest gift you can give your children... is your time.”

— Jerome “Ji” Thompson (Onondaga), Jeremy and Jerome “Hiana” Thompson’s Father

Photos from top left: **Jerome “Ji” Thompson** watches his sons at practice; **Jerome “Hiana”** and **Jeremy Thompson**;

Photos by Korver Photography.



Producer's Notes



Lukas Korver

"Having grown-up only an hour away from the Onondaga Nation, I was always fascinated by the rumors that I had heard of what life was like there—tales of lawless territory unsafe for outsiders. I had to see what life was really like on the Nation, not only to

open my eyes, but hopefully the eyes of many others as ignorant as myself.

I was introduced to the Thompson family and was mesmerized by their story, their personalities, and their openness to a complete stranger from California with a video camera. Their openness was so deep, in fact, that I was invited to live in their home and was instantly treated like one of the family. On the Nation, I was referred to as 'the other Thompson brother,' although instead of carrying a lacrosse stick everywhere, it was a video camera.

While filming their senior year of high school and the years after, the goal was to present the life of Native American teenagers growing up with each foot firmly planted in two distinct cultures. Jeremy and Hiana Thompson show us how this can be accomplished, seemingly unfazed by the cultural issues and

controversies as they arise. The cultural angle—the element that originally drew me to this project—actually takes a supporting role beside the core story; a strong and loving family inspiring their children towards their dreams—who just happen to be Native. Although their life experiences are very unique, the audience, no matter their background, will relate to the Thompsons' many struggles and triumphs.

I titled the film *The Medicine Game* because the game has helped not only the Thompsons, but many families and communities to stay healthy both physically and mentally, to bond with one another, and to learn many powerful life lessons."



From left to right: Jerome "Hiana" Thompson, Jerome "Ji" Thomson, Lukas Korver, and Jeremy Thompson.

Photo by Korver Photography.

By the Numbers

1. Today, the Onondaga Nation (which means "People of the Hills" is about 7,300 acres and is located near Nedrow, NY.
2. The Onondaga are one of the "Six Nations" otherwise known as the Haudenosaunee or the "People of the Longhouse." The tribes are Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida, Mohawk, Cayuga, and Tuscarora.
3. History credits the "Six Nations" for effectively learning to come together to work peacefully regardless of their differences. Written accounts suggest that the founding fathers used many of their concepts to form our current democracy.
4. In 2002, the Onondaga built a 1,900-seat facility with over 40,000 square feet to host events, especially hockey and lacrosse teams.
5. The Onondaga and the other tribes of the confederacy are matrilineal cultures. A new child's "clan" is determined by the mother's line. Each clan has a Clan Mother who is usually an elder woman who is involved in the lives of the people and is responsible for choosing Chiefs who will serve the people well.
6. The Onondaga word for the lacrosse game is "Dey-Hon-Tshi-GWa'-Ehs" which when translated, means "they bump hips."
7. Although the Haudenosaunee or Six Nations have been connected for centuries, each tribe has its own language.
8. The name of the headdress of the Haudenosaunee is "Gustoweh." The fitted hat is made of strips of wood and adorned with feathers. How the feathers are arranged in the headpiece indicates which tribe you belong to. One feather pointing up and one downward is Onondaga.
9. The longhouse was a long bark house constructed of elm and was a central part of clan life. The houses could be as long as 200 feet and hold the whole clan.



Jeremy Thompson.

Photo by Korver Photography.

Reflect & Relate

1. In the film, the two boys, Jeremy and Jerome “Hiana,” have a driving goal to play lacrosse for Syracuse University. Given their strong Onondaga roots, what do you think motivates the boys to train and work so hard to achieve this goal? Be specific and explore both the family and the culture as you consider this.
2. In the fifth grade, the two boys are moved from a Mohawk immersion school into the public school system. This presents many challenges for them. How do you think their lives would have been if they had not had to make this switch? In what ways would they be stronger, and in what ways would they have been hindered? What do you think motivated the parents to make the change?
3. It is clear that Jeremy and Jerome “Hiana” and their entire family have a strong sense of their Onondaga culture. Explore all the ways this becomes apparent in the film. In your way of thinking, is a strong cultural identity important for Native people? If so, why? Is a strong cultural identity important for non-Native people? In what ways does this become apparent or not?
4. Lacrosse is a medicine stick game that has been played for centuries in the tribal groups of the Northeast. It has also become a professional and college sport. In your thinking, what are the differences? Do they think they have the same meaning to the players? Does the sport itself teach us something about how to be better human beings? Explore and explain your answer.
5. In the film, we see that the boys, even with strong family support, still struggle with things like addiction, falling in love, learning disabilities, studying, etc. Do you think that these struggles make us weaker or stronger—or both? Explore and explain your response.

Ideas for Action

1. Although the significance of hair is never explained in the film, we see that all of the Thompson boys wear a long braid and maintain their hair carefully. As a class or group, do research on the Internet or in the library and see if you can discover the meaning of this.
2. In the film, the game of lacrosse is called “the Creator’s game.” It is clear that it is connected to their traditional culture. Do an exploration of books or Internet sources to see if you can find out why it is called this and what significance the game has to the culture.
3. It is clear throughout the film that Jeremy and Jerome “Hiana” have the strong support of both their mother and father. Making them proud is part of what motivates the boys to work so hard at both lacrosse and school. Think over your own life. Who is that person or persons who encouraged you to accomplish difficult things? How did you feel when you made them proud? How did you feel when you disappointed them?
4. During their high school senior year, Jeremy and Jerome “Hiana” had a fight that landed Hiana in the hospital and caused him to miss out on the final game. This caused a serious rift between the brothers that took quite a while to heal. In your journal or as a class activity, write about somebody that you have had an issue with. What will you (or did you) do to heal the relationship? Do you think some relationships cannot be healed? For you, what action would be so extreme that you could not, or would not, forgive that action?
5. In your class or group, do a role play between a group of students/citizens who felt the boys shouldn’t wear their regalia at graduation and a second group representing the boys and their family and culture. Then, conduct a listening and mediation session in which both groups are able to see the reasoning behind the other and to reach an agreement. You may want to try doing this in a “talking circle.”



Jerome “Hiana” Thompson.

Photo by Korver Photography

Resources

Internet Resources

www.themedicinegame.com

www.facebook.com/pages/The-Medicine-Game/147497955273732

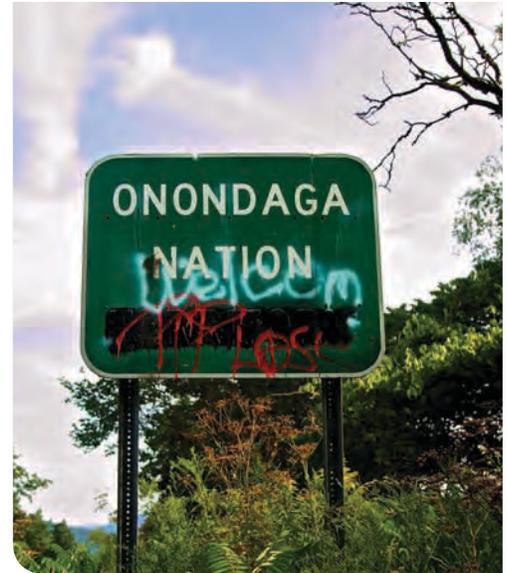
www.onondagation.org

www.www.redhawkslax.com

www.uslacrosse.org/TopNav/MuseumHallofFame/History.aspx

http://apps.uslacrosse.org/museum/halloffame/view_profile.php?prof_id=136

www.lukaskorver.com



Onondaga Nation road sign.

Photo by Korver Photography.



All content in this Viewer Discussion Guide may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational use.

The Medicine Game is a co-production of Lukas Korver and Vision Maker Media. Major funding was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Vision Maker Media.

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 Vision Maker Media. Vision Maker Media supports Native stories for Public Broadcasting. For more information, please visit www.visionmakermedia.org.

Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/medicine_game.

© 2012 Vision Maker Media. All rights reserved.