

A two-part public television series exploring issues facing contemporary Native Americans.

INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES

Viewer's Guide



Today, Native Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America.

Up to 15 million people identify themselves as Indians today, and according to the *New York Times*, that number is growing quickly. Native Americans live in communities across the country – in urban centers, suburbs and rural reservations. No matter where they live, they face issues of identity, health, economic survival, family and cultural preservation, and governance.

“**Indian Country Diaries**” is a two-program series exploring the issues facing Indians today.

- “Spiral of Fire” explores the challenges faced by the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians on their reservation in North Carolina. Through the eyes of Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe, we see how tribal members are retaining their sense of identity and culture in the midst of America.
- “A Seat at the Drum” looks at the imperfect process of assimilation of Native people into an urban American culture. Ojibwe writer Mark Anthony Rolo guides us through the history of the Urban Indian Relocation program of the 1950s and the lives of some of the 280,000 Indians living in Los Angeles.

Some issues are unique to Indian experiences. Yet, many non-Native communities may confront the same issues. This guide suggests ways in which you and your community can continue the discussion of the issues.

This discussion guide will help you use Indian Country Diaries to explore the issues in the two programs. For more information & resources, go to the web site indiancountrydiaries.org.

"Spiral of Fire"

"Spiral of Fire" takes author and playwright LeAnne Howe to the North Carolina homeland of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. There she discovers how a fusion of tourism, cultural preservation and spirituality is key to the tribe's health in the 21st century.



What to Watch for

Identity

Before airing the program think about your tribal or ethnic affiliations. Many Indians may have ancestors from several tribes. Many non-Indians have ancestors from several countries.

- How do you decide which strains of your ancestry you choose to identify with?
- How do the members of your group define their ethnic identities?
- What are the facts, signs, symbols, or stories that you use to identify yourself as a member of a specific group?
- Watch the documentary and see how Native Americans construct their own sense of identity.

In the program, narrator LeAnne Howe strives to

Discussion after the Show

- reconnect with the Cherokee half of her heritage.
- Do you think blood or environment is a more important influence on a person's identity?
 - What do Cherokees use to identify themselves as Cherokee?
 - The Cherokee (and many other tribes) are debating the political implications of "thinning" blood quantum in tribal members. Are there better ways to measure or validate an individual's membership in a tribe?

What to Watch for

Sovereignty & Economic Development

Indian tribes are legally sovereign nations within the larger United States. Watch for how the Cherokee govern their nation.

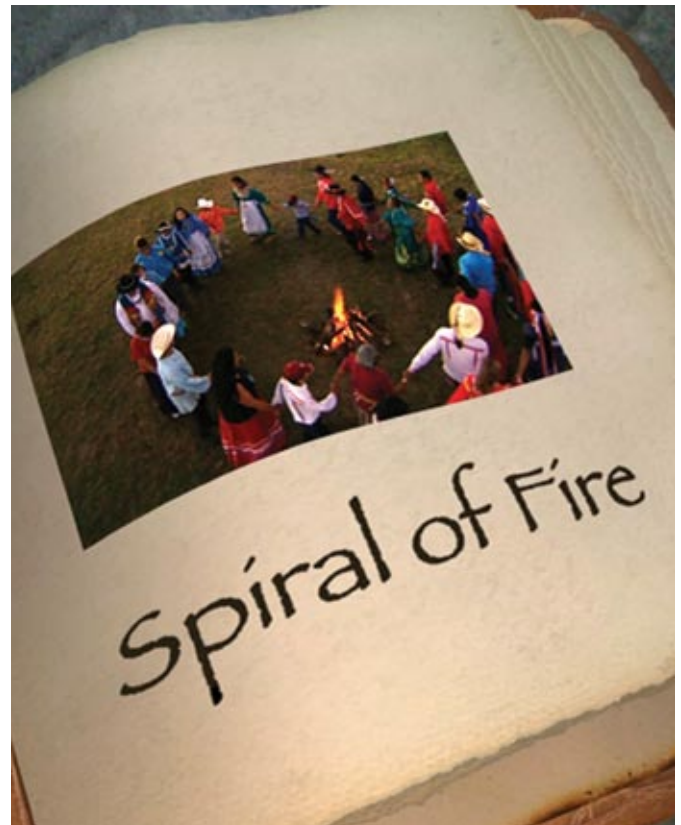
- What are the limitations on tribal power?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your community? Are these factors economic, cultural or governmental challenges?
- How have the Eastern Cherokees provided for their economic future?

The Eastern Band of Cherokee face hurdles trying to

Discussion after the Show

modernize their school buildings and provide a strong economic future. Tribes, like the Cherokee are both dependent on economic aid from the U.S. government and independent nations.

- Can they be both independent nations and dependent on federal aid? What is your definition of tribal sovereignty?
- How do the strengths and weaknesses of your community compare with those of the Cherokee?
- Should Indian nations be allowed to open casinos? Do casinos reflect the cultural values of the tribes?



“A Seat at the Drum”

In “A Seat at the Drum,” journalist and playwright Mark Anthony Rolo learns how Native Americans in Los Angeles preserve tribal identity, survive economically and cope with the pressures of assimilation in a challenging metropolis. On his quest to come to terms with these issues, he meets Native community leaders, relocated reservation Indians, boarding school students, Native business leaders and single parents – all urban Indians.



What to Watch for

Relocations

Everyone, whether Native or non-

Native, probably has been uprooted at one time or another. Federal relocations of Native peoples are some of the most dramatic and traumatic.

- Before the program, think about your own relocation story. How has it affected your life?
- Watch the program for the stories of how rural tribal members were “relocated” to urban settings during the 1950s.

Mark Anthony Rolo says to be out of touch with one’s tribal homeland “is a homeless nightmare that won’t end.”

Discussion after the Show



- Where are your ancestors from? How much are you in touch with home? Does someone have to live on a reservation to be a member of the tribe?
- Rolo also says, “It used to be that language, land, ceremony and family equaled identity.” Does relocation alter that formula?
- What makes you feel like you still belong to a place, even if you may have left it long ago?
- Do you believe that individuals should have the right to choose his or her own identity?
- If someone chooses an Indian identity, are there rights and responsibilities that follow that choice?



What to Watch for

Language & Identity

The dancer above is wearing a bright lime green costume – a color that’s not found in nature let alone the costumes of traditional Native Americans. Yet, as “A Seat at the Drum” points out, powwow dances like this are important methods of maintaining tribal identities. Language is another method.

- Do you still speak the language of your ancestors?
- How do you think language impacts a sense of identity?
- Watch for the attitudes of various characters in the program toward their language.

Many Natives in the program are working hard to

Discussion after the Show

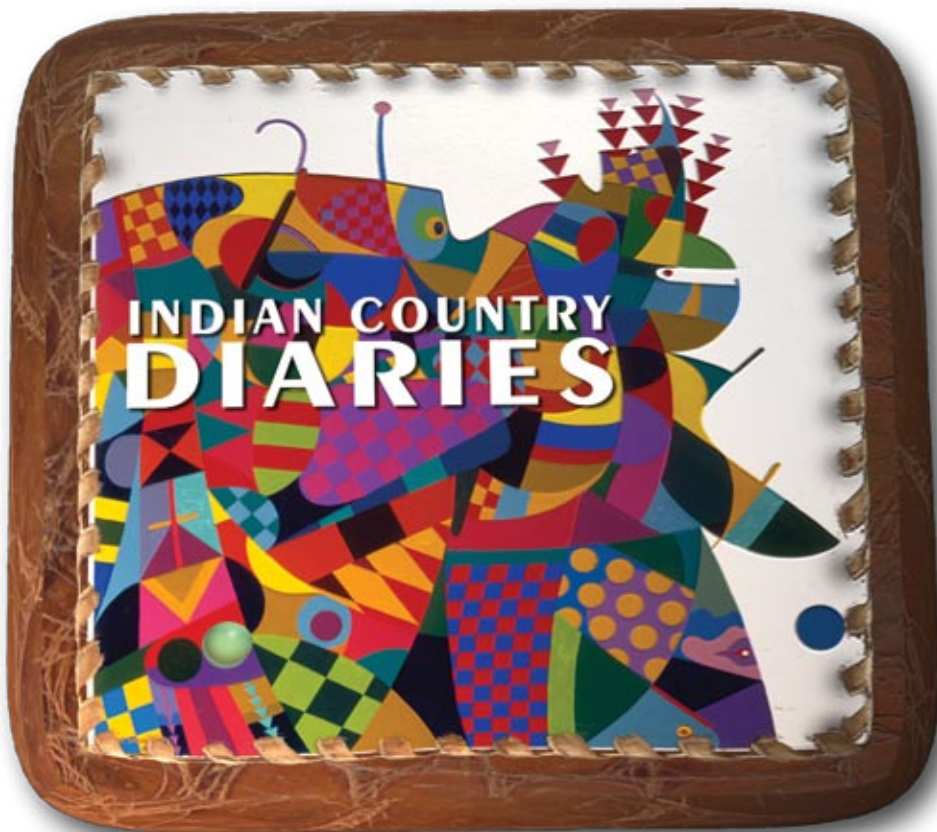
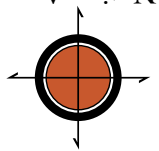


maintain or revitalize their traditional language. Mark Macarro of the California Pechanga Indians says, “Language is the key to the soul.” Some tribes are going back to ancient missionary letters to reconstruct a dead language.

- How far should a tribe go to restore or preserve its language?
- Should everyone in America be forced to speak English only?
- Should new immigrants or indigenous people be forced to learn the dominant language?



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"Without Reservations" by Benjamin Harjo, Jr.

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