

• VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE •

# GRAB



Laguna Pueblo children grab the food items being tossed from the rooftop above. *Image Courtesy of Idris + Tony.*



**GRAB** is an intimate portrait of the little-documented Grab Day in the villages of the Laguna Pueblo Tribe, who annually throw water, food and household items from the rooftop of a home to people standing below. A community-wide prayer of abundance, thanks and renewal, Grab Day exists at the intersection of traditional Native and contemporary Western cultures. Billy Luther's film follows three families as they prepare for the annual event, chronicling their lives leading up to this day.

This Viewer Discussion Guide is designed to encourage deeper exploration and conversations about *GRAB*, and to explore issues surrounding family, place, and the places where modernity and tradition intersect.

## PRODUCER'S NOTES



Writer/Producer/Director Billy Luther (Navajo/Hopi/Laguna Pueblo). Image Courtesy of Idris + Tony.

### BILLY LUTHER, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

"I first approached *GRAB* when I was working on *Miss Navajo* (my first documentary). I thought about the images I remembered while growing-up and taking part in the Grab Day celebrations during the summer months. But, then I also sat around one day without the Internet or cell phone reception at my grandparent's home on the Laguna Reservation. Time seemed to stand still when I was there—a completely different than the life I was living in Los Angeles.

"I worked with a lot of the same people who had worked on my doc *Miss Navajo*. We knew the story was going to be mostly about the lives of the people preparing for this one day—the Grab Day/Feast Day celebration. I started with open calls for interviews with people in and around the Laguna community. I wanted to know what they knew about the origins of the Grab Day. The response was incredible and the stories were diverse and very personal. I think my most memorable and favorite part was listening to the stories of the elderly from the local senior center on the Reservation. These were people who grew up with my grandfather and experienced a similar upbringing.

"Was this going to be a tough sell to funders, organizations and general audiences? Yes. But, I was going to make this film no matter what.

"When I was traveling with *Miss Navajo* around the world at various film festivals, I saw so many stories of war. Sometimes they become so similar that films start to morph into each other. I wanted to make a film that celebrated life and the Laguna people—a film that showed how cultures and traditions can remain intact regardless of obstacles or past conflicts. Life isn't about remembering suffering and pain, it's about moving forward with what we're surrounded with. And with *GRAB*, it's community and family."

**BY THE NUMBERS**

The name of the Pueblo, Laguna, is a Spanish word that means “lake” and it was named after a lake on the reservation.

The Laguna Pueblo is **55** miles west of Albuquerque, NM along the Santa Fe Railway. It was founded in **1799**.

In the late **1800s** the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad reached the Laguna Pueblo which both invaded the privacy of the people but also provided jobs and a trade route. The Pueblo people often sold their pottery to the travelers at the train station.

Uranium was discovered on The Laguna Pueblo in the **1950s**, and at one point over **800** people from the Pueblo were working in the mines. While this period introduced a time of economic stability, the mines also took a toll on the health of the miners.

The Laguna Pueblo covers **777.227** square miles of land and has **6** villages: Laguna, Pagate, Encinal, Mesita, Seama and Paraje. Besides the Laguna Pueblo, there are **18** other Pueblos in New Mexico: Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zia and Zuni.

The Laguna Construction Company owned by the Laguna Pueblo is one of the largest U.S. contractors in Iraq. Their reconstruction contracts have grown to over **\$300 million** since **2004**.

Laguna Pottery, once almost a lost art form, has made a big comeback since the **1970s** and many Pueblo people have relearned this art.

The original language of the Laguna Pueblo was Keresan (Keres, Queresan, Queres). This language is shared by **seven** Southwest Pueblo people and it is estimated that approximately **8,000** people still speak this language as well as English.

The Keresan language was originally an oral language only with no written alphabet. There has been some disagreement about whether to develop a written language, but many feel that without a written form, the children will not learn the language, so some have developed their own orthography (spelling system) for the language.

After years of cruelty and domination by the Spanish, in **1680** a medicine man named Popé led a revolt against the Spanish. He organized the many Pueblos by giving the leaders a length of knotted leather. When the last knot was untied, the different Pueblos would join the revolt.



**EXPLORING THE FACTS**

1. In the film, it is clear that the family is at the heart of Laguna Pueblo life. We see that preparing for Grab as a family is as much a part of Grab Day as the rooftop toss. How do you think Laguna family life compares to families of other cultures? Do you think the changing times are affecting the core of the family in American society? In what ways?
2. The tradition of a “give away” is common not just to the Laguna Pueblo people but many other Native American Tribes as well. Where do you think such traditions got their start? What purpose does the “Grab” serve in Laguna Pueblo village life?
3. As we explored above, the redistribution of food and goods was—and still is—a common practice as illustrated by traditional events such as Grab. How do you think this practice compares with our current economy where it is estimated that 80% of the people hold only 15% of the wealth?
4. In the film, Rebecca and her daughter Jessica grew a garden in order to participate in Grab Day. How did you feel when you heard that they did not, after all, feel prepared to do a Grab?
5. If you put yourself in a much earlier time—before there were supermarkets and big box stores—how do you think this traditional event has changed over the centuries? What do you think has remained unchanged? When you realize that Native American people suffer from high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, how did you feel about the goods that were being thrown?
6. In early Laguna Pueblo life, pottery was a mainstay. Pots were used to carry water, store precious foods, seeds for next year’s planting, and to hold precious healing herbs. With the usage of modern containers, the art of pottery making nearly died. In the film, Josie spent many hours creating and painting her beautiful pot only to throw it from a rooftop. What do you think was the importance of this gesture and how does it relate to the Laguna Pueblo culture?

**IDEAS FOR ACTION**

1. In books, articles or on the internet, do research to learn about the “give away” traditions of four other tribes besides the Laguna Pueblo Grab. How are they the same? How are they different?
2. In 1680 after many years of Spanish domination, the Pueblo people banded together and revolted. The Spanish fled, although they later returned. Do research to discover what have been some of the main influences the Spanish had on Pueblo life? What influences have been rejected by the Laguna Pueblo people?
3. The designs of the Laguna Pueblo pottery are all carefully linked geometrical lines. Using a ruler, draw your own potter design. To further challenge yourself, purchase a fine brush and ink and paint your “pot.”

## IDEAS FOR ACTION (CONTINUED)

4. In your class or with your community group, organize your own Grab Day. Rather than purchasing new items, take the opportunity to re-distribute items you no longer need or use. Use this opportunity to explore the idea of economy and community life and how they are related.
5. Explore your own ancestral roots to see what traditions or ceremonies share similar qualities as the Laguna Pueblo Grab. Are there any traditions that have been lost that you could reinstate?

## RESOURCES

## THE FILM

<http://www.grabthemovie.com/press/Grab-EPK.pdf>

## HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE LAGUNA

The Laguna Pueblo official website:

<http://www.lagunapueblo.org/>

Indian Pueblo Cultural Center:

<http://www.indianpueblo.org/19pueblos/laguna.html>

Countries and Their Cultures:

<http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Pueblos.html>

Native Languages website:

[http://www.native-languages.org/pueblo\\_culture.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/pueblo_culture.htm)

## ORGANIZATIONS

New Mexico Informational website:

<http://www.newmexico.org/nativeamerica/pueblos/laguna.php>



Production crew filming **GRAB**.  
Image Courtesy of Idris+ Tony.

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



Production still.

Image Courtesy of Cybelle Codish & Idris + Tony.

To find out more, please visit:  
<http://www.nativetelecom.org/grab>

Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc. (NAPT). NAPT shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media. For more information, please visit [nativetelecom.org](http://nativetelecom.org).



© 2011 Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc.