Abegweit PowWow

Information Guide & Coloring Book
The information shared is intended as a general overview and does not focus on any particular aboriginal practices or beliefs. It is suggested that individuals wishing to learn more about cultural practices, contact the Native Council of Prince Edward Island.

We hope you enjoy the information shared and that it provides you with a better understanding and appreciation of the Abegweit PowWow and some of the cultural practices of some of your Aboriginal neighbours.
A Mi’kmaq Prayer to Our Creator

Oh Great Spirit, you have created all life.  
We know that you live in everything; in every person, in every place.  
We ask you to come to us; to be with us; to help us.

Oh Great Spirit of the East, where the sun rises.  
Who holds our life with the opportunity of each day in your hands.  
Protect us so that we do not lose our gifts and the hope of today through laziness.

Oh Great Spirit of the South,  
Whose fragrance speaks of the coming spring and warmer days of summer.  
As you speak to our hearts, remove our fears;  
dispel our hatred; renew our love for one another.  
Teach us in your wisdom they that are strong, must also be kind.  
That justice must show mercy and the brave – compassion.

Oh Great Spirit of the West,  
where the sun sets and where the mountains soar to the sky.  
Bless us with peace that comes with striving to follow a well-disciplined life.  
Teach us that dying is better than living where we die of ourselves.  
Just as the sun glories not in the ending of a day  
but the promises hope for a new tomorrow.

Oh Great Spirit of the North,  
Who gives breath to the winds that brings us the cold air  
and sends snow to cover the earth with its beauty.  
Strengthen us and let us be thankful for the cold,  
the storms and for the beauty of wintertime  
as your beauty covers over Mother Earth.

Oh Great Spirit of the heavens,  
where the blue of the sky and the countless stars of the night.  
Speak to us of your greatness.  
Where the flowering plants speak of your nearness,  
while we lift up our spirit and hearts to you.

Oh Great Spirit of our Mother Earth,  
The provider of all that we use to sustain us.  
Help us to always give thanks for your gifts.

Oh Great Spirit of my soul, which burns in our hearts.  
Speak to us so that we will always be thankful for the life you give us,  
and let us always be ready to give up this life  
and come to you without shame.
PowWow Etiquette

1) Listen to the Master of Ceremonies. He will announce who is to dance and when.

2) When in the sacred circle, dress and act appropriately. (Hot pants, halter tops, swim wear and bare feet are not acceptable).

3) If you want to take pictures or a tape recording, check with the PowWow host first, then check with the person you are taking pictures of and ask their permission.

4) Women on their moon time should stay away from the dance area because they are in the process of their own ceremony at that time.

5) Stand and men must remove their hat (unless an Eagle feather is attached) during the Grand Entry, Flag Songs, Invocation, Memorial, Veterans Songs and the Closing Song.

6) Please do not permit your children to enter the dance circle unless they are dancing.

7) Certain items of religious significance should be worn only by those qualified to do so. Respect the traditions. Never touch another person’s dance Regalia without their permission.

8) If you see a lost feather, or you yourself drop a feather, do not pick it up. Notify the nearest Veteran, Head Man Dancer or Master of Ceremonies immediately.

9) Pointing with the fingers is considered poor manners by some nations. If you must point, use your head and nod in the direction you wish to indicate.

10) PowWows do not allow alcoholic beverages. The PowWow is a time of joyful gathering and celebration of life. These “bad” spirits are not welcome.

11) Make an extra effort to walk to the trash can. Respect Mother Earth.

Remember always: Aboriginal dances are more than the word “dance” can describe. They are a ceremony and a prayer which all life encompasses and produce many emotional and spiritual reactions. Some dances are old, some are brand new, the culture continues to live and evolve.
Tipi
What is a PowWow?

PowWow time is the Aboriginal people’s way of meeting together, to join in dancing, singing, visiting, renewing old friendships and making new ones. The PowWow is a spiritual as well as a social gathering to celebrate life. The PowWow brings together all nations, from different locations, speaking many languages.

Sacred Fire
Before the PowWow begins, a sacred fire is lit at sunrise of the day the PowWow is to begin. It is the responsibility of the men to take care of the fire, so a man knowledgeable in the traditions and teachings of fire keeping is selected and given tobacco and requested to take care of the fire for the duration of the PowWow. The fire keeper is responsible for making sure the fire stays lit and people visiting the sacred fire follow certain protocols. Only sacred medicines, such as tobacco and cedar, are placed in the fire and people enter the sacred fire area through the eastern doorway, smudge themselves usually with sweet grass or sage smoke, offer tobacco containing their prayers to the fire and move around the sacred fire in a clockwise direction exiting through the eastern doorway.

Drum
The term “drum” refers to the actual big drum and the singers who sit at that drum. The drum is not just an instrument. It is considered a sacred being connecting us to the heartbeat of Mother Earth. There can be several drums at the PowWow and they are located in the cedar arbor in the center of the PowWow circle.

Eagle Staff
This staff is usually carried into the circle by whoever has been given the responsibility of caring for it; perhaps an elder, veteran or dancer carries it. This staff honours the eagle who guards the Eastern direction. The eagle is the bird who flies the highest and closest to the Creator and represents farsightedness, strength and beauty.

Invocation
This is the prayer said by an elder to begin the PowWow after Grand Entry has happened and all participants in Grand Entry are in the PowWow circle. The elder is given tobacco when he or she is being requested to do the invocation or any other duty during the PowWow.

Grand Entry
During Grand Entry, staff and flag carriers, elders, head dancers and all other dancers in regalia enter the PowWow circle through the eastern doorway, which is the only opening into the PowWow circle, also called the arena. Spectators are expected to rise and remove hats (unless an Eagle feather is attached) during Grand Entry and no pictures or videotaping is allowed at this time.
**Flag Songs**
These songs honour the flags of all the nations that have been brought into the PowWow circle during Grand Entry. The flags are usually carried in by veterans or warriors. There is no dancing during the flag song.

**Veteran’s Song**
This may follow the flag song and is sung to honour all those who have fallen in battle.

**Honour Songs**
These are special songs honouring an individual or group for some special accomplishment or contribution to the community. All spectators rise and remove hats and no pictures or videotaping is allowed during this time. The person being honoured usually dances around the circle once during the honour song, followed by their family. Then once they have danced around once, they stop at the Eastern doorway and the community comes out to shake their hand and offer congratulations then joins behind the family. Once all congratulations are received, everyone dances around the PowWow circle until the honour song is finished.

**Intertribal Songs**
At a PowWow, there will be many intertribal songs sung. All spectators are welcome to dance to intertribal songs. Entry to the arena is through the eastern doorway.

**Eagle Feather**
An eagle feather is sacred to aboriginal peoples. When an eagle feather is dropped from someone’s regalia during a PowWow, it should not be picked up. It represents a warrior who has fallen in battle and can only be picked up by another warrior. The Arena Director will stand over the feather and protect it while a veteran is asked to come and perform a ceremony to pick it up.

**Blanket Dance**
These dances are called to help with the traveling expenses of the drum or the costs of producing the celebration. During this dance, four women or young ladies carry a blanket or shawl around the arena. We encourage you to contribute and give you thanks for doing so.

**Giveaway**
Giveaway is a ceremony that is done on a number of different occasions. There will often be a giveaway during a PowWow. Giveaways are normally done when someone has something special happen to them and it is to express their gratitude for this gift.
Singers and Drummers

PowWow singers are very important figures in the Aboriginal culture. Without them there would be no dancing.

The songs are of many varieties, from religious to war to social. As various tribes gathered together, they would share their songs, often changing the songs so singers of different tribes could join. With these changes came the use of “vocables” to replace the words of the old songs.

Thus, some songs today are sung in vocables with no words. Yet they still hold special meaning to those who know the song. Many songs are still sung in native tongue whether newly composed or revivals of old songs. Their songs are reminders to the Aboriginal people of their old ways and rich heritage.

Dancers have always been a very important part of the life of the Aboriginal peoples. Most dance seen at PowWows today are social dances which might have had different meaning and importance. The outfits worn by the dancers, like the styles of clothing today, evolve over time. It is not a stagnant culture, but a vibrant and changing way of life.

One of the most important things in the life of some Aboriginal peoples is the drum.

Our whole culture centers around the drum. Without the drum and the singers around it, the Aboriginal peoples could not have PowWows. The drum brings the heart beat of our Earth Mother to the PowWow for all to feel and hear. Drumming brings everyone back into balance. Whether dancing, singing or just listening, people around the drum can connect with the Spirit.

Being Head Singer is a great honour. The man who receives this honour is chosen for his experience and then that singer has the right to lead all songs unless he chooses other men to lead and help him carry the load. Songs are started with a lead line sung by the Head Singer. This lets the drum and the dancers know what song is coming. After the lead line, the second (another person at the drum) will take up the lead line, and everyone will join in with him. At this point the dancers begin to dance. The loud beats during the songs, sometimes called “Honour Beats” as a time for dancers to honour the drum. The Head Singer has the first and last word and has complete control of what goes on at the drum.

A closed drum means the Head Singer has chosen the singers he wants to sing with him. The dance arena could be filled with good singers but they should not sit at the drum unless they are asked by the Head Singer.
Drummers
Some additional things to remember:
Liquor is never permitted at the drum.

Women, usually do not sit at the drum and beat the drum, if women sing, they may sit in the second row behind the men singers. There are some women’s drums emerging now.

If a special song is called, those asking for the song should donate to the drum. Taping of songs will only be done with permission of the Head Singer.

Dancers
There are many different dancers that perform in PowWows. There are men and women’s traditional dancers, head dancers, grass dancers or fancy dancers to name a few.

Head Dancers
Male and female head dancers are a tradition. The head dancers have the responsibility of leading all the people through all the dances that take place during the gathering, with the exception of exhibition dances. These individuals have to know all the dances and usually have been learning the different dances for many years.

It is an honour to be asked to undertake this responsibility and many of these people are handpicked for the task. These people usually carry the momentum of the dance and usually have to possess a great deal of stamina.

Men’s Traditional Dancer
Traditional dancers usually have quite elaborate regalia of feathers and bead work. They are dressed in bone beaded breast plates, war shields and faces painted in an array of different patterns. Some of these dancers spend years assembling their regalia, gathering different accessories to wear on their outfits. This regalia is well respected by the individual that assembled them. Many of the regalia include sacred articles and is the dancer’s most valued possession. Some traditional dancers try to recount the hunting methods of old tell stories during their dance.

Women’s Traditional Dancer
A women’s traditional regalia most often consists of leather but can also be made of fabric. Leather regalia is often adorned with lots of extensive heavy Bead work. These women will often have a full length breast plate going almost to the ground. The skirt comes to the top of her moccasins. Dresses are often decorated with beadwork, shells and/or ribbons. Traditional women’s dancers usually carry a folded shawl over one arm and an Eagle feather fan and possibly a small bag. The fan is held up during the Honour beats of a song to give thanks to the Creator. Beaded hairpieces, earrings, chokers and/or full bone breastplates can also be worn.
Blanket Dance
The traditional women dancers represent the connection that all women have with Mother Earth. When they dance, one foot is always in touch with Mother Earth. This is why they barely lift their feet above the ground when they dance. Traditional women’s dancers move with slow, rhythmic steps that allow their fringes to swing and sway representing the slow, steady movement of life on Mother Earth, such as the rhythmic movement of water.

**Men’s Grass Dancers**
Over the last decade, the grass dance has grown in popularity and is fast becoming a favorite for the young boys and teens. Their regalia is made of bright colored yarn or ribbon fringes. Most dancers have stunning beadwork, but some are making the transition to colored fabric to accent their regalia. This type of dancing also requires a great deal of stamina and flexibility. Many of the movements are precise and intricate, which allows the viewer to catch a glimpse of some of the footwork these dancers use. This style of dance is also favored because the dancer can develop and exhibit his own individual steps, which makes each dancer differ from another.

This dance was introduced by the western tribes. The dancer tries to imitate the grass as it moves in the wind or the mane of a horse’s back as it gallops across the plains.

It was the responsibility of the grass dancers to be the first ones out in the dance area and to pack down the grass for the rest of the dancers who were to follow.

**Women’s Jingle Dress**
The Jingle Dress dancers are healers. Tradition and the teachings say that this dress came from a man from the Lake of the Woods area whose daughter was ill. He had a vision of the Jingle Dress which was originally made of shell. His vision was for this dress to be given to the Aboriginal people for the purpose of healing. The jingles are rarely made of shell anymore, instead the shells were replaced by cones made from snuff can lids that were used early in the 20th century. The regalia consists of a knee-length cloth dress with rows of jingles sewn onto the fabric. Dancers wear beaded moccasins with matching leggings, a belt, a bandana around their necks, a feather fan, a beaded bag and an eagle feather held in their hair with a beaded hairpiece. Dancers do a beautiful hopping step in a zigzag pattern to the drumbeat to make the jingles tinkle and their steps stop precisely when the drum stops.
Male Dancer
Fancy Feather Dancer
These dancers are dressed in bright colored regalia’s. Most wear the multicolored neon feather bustles on their back. Many of the younger men and boys begin their dancing as fancy dancers because it is a high energy style of dance. This regalia also exhibits amazing beadwork and handiwork. Fancy dancers usually begin their dancing at a young age and perfect their style over the course of their lives. The fancy dancers exhibit an explosion of energy that would impress any aerobics instructor. Stamina and agility play major role in the life of the fancy dancer and more are in tip top shape. Fancy dancing was introduced to the eastern provinces from the western tribes. The fancy dance is also recognized as a war dance because at one time the dancers used to dance in pretty much the same manner to ‘psyche’ themselves for the battle. Today these dancers are known for their high flying, quick spinning style of dance, combined with a multitude of different dance steps.

Women’s Shawl or Fancy Shawl
Many young girls and teens start out as shawl dancers. This style of dancing requires a lot of movement and therefore a lot of stamina. The dancing itself requires high stepping, twirling movements. Shawl dancers represent the butterfly which is why the dancer is supposed to move her arms with the shawl draped over them in movements representative of the fluttering of the butterfly. Women’s shawl dancing came to the east from the western tribes where the dancers are also referred to as Women’s Fancy Shawl Dancers. Traditions in the west say that the women’s shawl dancers are similar to the men’s grass dancers in that they represent a warrior’s dance. The reason that the women were given the right to dance a war dance is because long ago the women used to be runners who ran from village to village warning of danger, which in return earned them the title of “warrior.”

Women’s shawl dancers regalia consists of outfits made of colorful fabric and ribbons, often adorned with bead or sequin work. This is made up of a skirt, leggings, beaded moccasins, beaded hairpieces, a yoke and shawl which is draped over the shoulders. It is made of colourful fabric and ribbons, often adorned with beadwork or sequins. The dancers move with quick, fancy high-stepping foot work accompanied by constant movement of their arms.
Female Dancer
**Songs**

The songs that are sung at many of the gatherings are unique to the Aboriginal representatives that sing them. Many of the songs are presented in the language dialect the drum group presents. Some songs have been shared or passed on from group to group as singers interact over the course of the PowWow season.

Some of the songs are chants and have no word arrangement. These songs are sometimes referred to as vocals. Some of these songs are centuries old and some are newly composed by individual drum groups. Songs that have lyrics describe the actions of the dancers and sometimes describe the dance itself. All songs dictate who should be dancing and some songs fall into special categories. As an example, Honour songs are speciality songs.

The Honour song is offered for many reasons and should be respected by standing and removing of the hats (unless an Eagle feather is attached). Some examples of Honour songs are Grand Entry, Flag and Veteran songs. These last few examples are songs used to open a gathering and should be acknowledged and respected.

PowWow dancing and songs are more than just keeping the old way alive, because it brings out the meaning of what it is to be aboriginal. It brings the aboriginal people closer to one another, and helps them to recognize the links between the bands and groups, and makes them more aware of the good things of the past which they will be able to pass on to their children and grandchildren. It is part of making an Aboriginal people feel proud of what they are and what they represent, and feel hopeful of the future. It is the very heart and soul of life for the Aboriginal people.

**Remember**

In each area you travel to and visit things can and will be slightly different from your area. Different groups have different customs and methods of doing things. Different is not wrong, just different. Be respectful of the uniqueness of each area.
Drum
Cultural Practices

The Eagle
The Eagle is symbolic to Aboriginal peoples spirituality beliefs. With its great ability to soar high in the sky, it is believed that the Eagle serves as a messenger between all people and the Creator. To see an Eagle is thought to bring good luck or happiness. The Eagle shows great courage, strength and vision. These qualities enable the Eagle to hunt and fish - skills that are important to the aboriginal culture. Eagle feathers are used during spirituality practices and great respect must be shown at all times. Eagle feathers are presented to individuals for their wisdom, talents or other reasons deemed important by the giver of the feather and it is one of the greatest honours.

Importance of Elders
Elders are individuals who are respected for their wisdom, vision and understanding of the culture. Although most Elders are normally older, they may also be younger in age. Individuals will seek out an Elder and meet with them to seek guidance. A person may also have several Elders in their life’s journey depending on the guidance they seek. Showing respect to an Elder is one of the most important facets of the Aboriginal culture. It is the teachings of Elders that we have come to learn that an Elder who demonstrates humbleness possesses one of the unique gifts provided by the Creator and seen as one of the most important teachings.

Smudging
Smudging, a common name given it the burning of sacred grasses, is a powerful technique derived from the Aboriginal tradition. It is a ritualistic way to cleanse a person, place or an object of negative energies or influences. The theory behind smudging is that the smoke attaches itself to negative energy and as it clears it takes the negative energy with it, releasing it into another space to be regenerated back into positive energy. Remember that when you smudge, you are asking the spirit of sacred plants for assistance and you must pay proper respect to their healing power.

Sweat Lodge
Sweat lodges are circular shaped structures designed for the purpose of cleansing the mind, body and spirit. Through the use of heated stones, known as grandfathers, water is sprinkled to create a steam needed to cleanse. Sweat lodges are conducted by a leader who has earned the right to hold sweats by gaining the necessary wisdom and knowledge taught by the Elders. Sweats can be for general prayer time or for specific healing of a person or community.

The sweat lodge ceremony is a ceremony that is very humble and starts with Mother Earth. The sweat lodge teaches us how to have respect for the women in our community and in the world. It teaches us respect, patience, endurance and speaking our minds freely.
Eagle
Sacred Herbs
Aboriginal people utilize many kinds of sacred herbs in various ways. The most commonly used herbs are sweet grass, cedar, sage and tobacco. Sacred herbs are symbols of Aboriginal spirituality practices and whether burned or given as a sprinkle offering, respect must be shown at all times. When the herbs are burned, the rising smoke helps take messages or prayers to the Creator. In sprinkling, herbs are spread around an area that is being used as a sign of respect. Sacred herbs can be carried in a medicine pouch or offering bag.

Medicine Pouch
The medicine pouch, or sometimes referred to as an offering bag, is seen as a sacred object. The pouch can be of various sizes, colour and design. It can be worn around the neck, the waist or carried in the pocket. The items in the pouch are deemed for being good medicines and can vary depending upon personal preference. Some may choose to carry sacred herbs, stones or other significant items that are important to an individual. Medicines can change depending on the circumstances for which it is being used. It is very disrespectful to touch or open someone’s pouch without their permission.

Drum
The most common drums used in the Aboriginal cultures are the round drum and the hand drum. Both drums are used in community gatherings and for other ceremonial purposes. The hand drum or small drum, is usually played by an individual and can be played alone or with others. The round drum, or big drum, is played by a group of individuals during special gatherings. All drums are cleansed with sweet grass or sacred herbs before playing. The beat of the drum symbolizes the heart beat of Mother Earth and helps to send messages to the Creator. The drum has power way beyond “making music” and to understand some of this power is to understand some of what it is to be Aboriginal. One never “beats” or “pounds” on a drum. Instead, one makes a drum speak with power and conviction.

Talking Circle
The talking circle is a method used for communicating in a group setting. Conducted by a leader, a talking stick or item is passed to individuals in a clockwise direction, allowing them to share their thoughts. Although the leader of the circle will mention the expectations of the circle, the most important aspect is to ensure that the person holding the talking item is the only person allowed to talk. All others must show respect and wait their turn. The circle, sometimes referred to as a healing circle, is an opportunity to speak about something specifically or talk in general. The circle formation enables everyone to be treated equally.
Sweat Lodge
**Medicine Wheel**
The medicine wheel is a concept used for teaching how to live a balanced lifestyle. It represents wholeness and teachings may vary depending on personal practices or beliefs. Generally, the teachings are found within the four directions and takes into consideration the four races of the world - red, yellow, black and white, the four elements, four sacred animals, four seasons, four sacred herbs and the four aspects to our nature - the spiritual, physical, mental and environmental well being of a person. As an item, the medicine wheel is a reminder of the teachings and that one must try and show respect to the creator and all creations at all times.

**Pipe**
The pipe is a sacred item earned by participating in a number of spirituality practices such as attending sweat lodges, fasting, and other practices deemed necessary by an Elder of the person wishing to earn a pipe. Normally, the pipe carrier will perform a sweet grass ceremony and make offerings to the creator. The pipe is filled with tobacco and passed in a clockwise direction to other participants. The sharing of the pipe is a sign of friendship and respect and helps to open the heart and spirit. To participate in a pipe ceremony. It is a great Honour for the participants and to the pipe carrier.

**Dream Catcher**
The dream catcher is symbolic to Aboriginal culture and can vary in size, design and colour. It is believed that the dream catcher helps to prevent bad dreams and encourages good ones. There are several legends written about the dream catcher and the following is a commonly used story. One day there had been an old woman and a spider had caught her eye. She was fascinated with the spider spinning its web. For several days the woman returned to that spot and each day the web grew larger. The woman’s grandson came to visit and she showed him the web. The grandson wanted to destroy the web and kill the spider, but the woman would not let him harm either. When the boy had left, the spider spoke to the woman, “because you saved my life, I am going to grant you one wish.” The woman replied that her only wish was to learn how to weave a web like the spider. So, using a ring and thread, the spider taught the woman how to weave. The spider explained that the circle of the web meant continuous life and the hole in the center would help get rid of bad dreams. The bad dreams would get caught in the weave and parish at the first light of dawn.
Pipe
Thank you for your interest in the Abegweit PowWow. If you would like more information on the PowWow or any of the services of the Native Council of Prince Edward Island, contact us at any time.

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