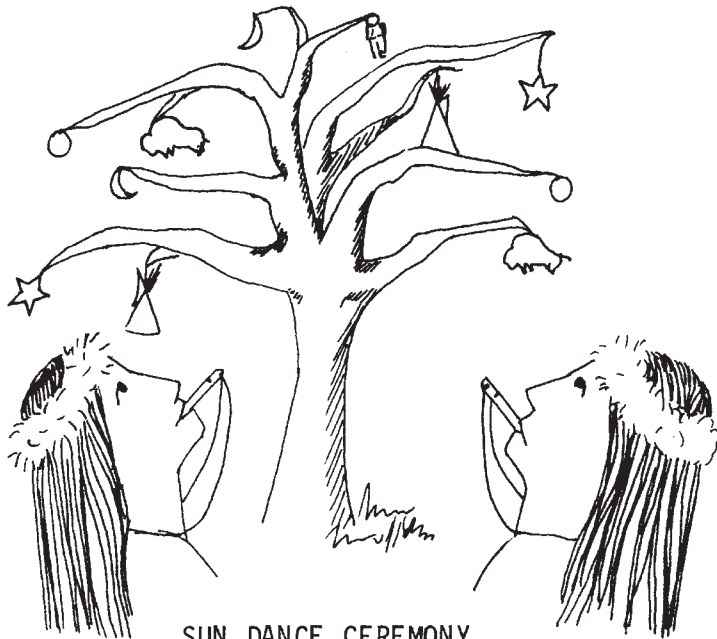


Tree of Life

AIM ➡ To understand the importance of the Sun Dance to Plains Indians. Picking out important events in life that help you grow.

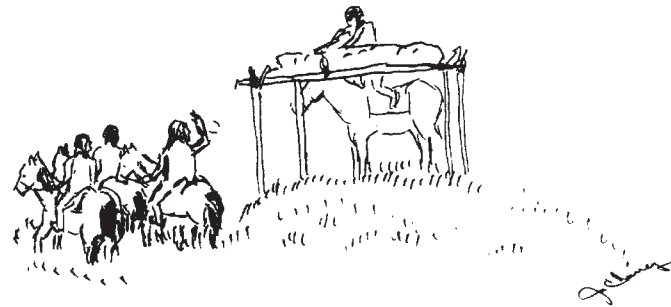


SUN DANCE CEREMONY

The Sun Dance of the plains Indians is held each summer. It is a special time to pray. Each person prays for the renewed strength of all the people. This ceremony lasts for several days and many people take part. Very careful preparations are made since the Sun Dance is sacred - special.

Those who take part in the dancing do not take food or water. They face the sun and the sacred cottonwood tree. Sometimes as an act of bravery a dancer may pierce the skin of the chest and insert small ropes. The other end of the rope is tied to the tree. The dancers may blow on a special whistle while dancing. "Oh Wakan Tanko (Creator, Great Mystery, Great Spirit) be merciful to me so my people may live." As a dancer speaks he pulls on the ropes until they break through the skin, freeing the dancer.

The Sun Dance Whistle was taken by the older boy in A True Story of a Ghost.



- Why do you think the whistle was so important to the dead man?
- What is your most treasured object? Why?
- Write or Firetalk about what made that object seem so special to you.

The cottonwood tree represents the tree of life. Sometimes in order to see if we are working towards our interests or life goals it is good to look at the path we are following. Usually certain events or turning points can mark the growth you are making. Things like becoming a new brother or sister add some responsibilities to your life. Maybe you received your Indian name, received an award, joined Little League or was asked to do something within your religion. All of these things represent a measure of your growth.

YOU ARE A TREE

Fill out this tree except for the top branch, with events that mark your growth. After doing this ask yourself these questions.

- Have I set an attainable goal?
- Does my tree of life reflect a path towards those goals? If so, color the trunk of the tree red.
- What might be the next step in attaining those goals? Fill in the top branch with your answer.

