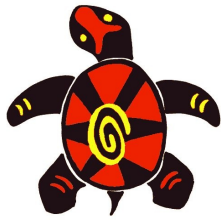




A Parent and Educator's Guide

PORTRAIT OF MY PEOPLE

Written and performed by Erin Kelley



IN THIS GUIDE:

Insight into the play and production.

Topics related to subjects across the curriculum: communication arts, social studies, history, geography, & art.

Discussion and activity ideas to stimulate interest and independent thinking.

Ideas to help students practice writing skills and encourage family history exploration.

PRODUCTION TEAM:

Director & Set Design:
John Contini

Media & Sound Design:
Larry Mabrey

Costume & Props Design:
Erin Kelley

Producer & Production Manager:
Larry Mabrey

ABOUT THE PLAY

Through personal stories and family photographs, playwright Erin Kelley, a direct descendant of noted Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, shares her experiences growing up in a multi-racial family. *Portrait of My People* offers not only a personal glimpse into Shawnee and Cherokee history, but a look at the rich identity of contemporary Native Americans.

Native people are often talked about in the past tense. However, they continue their long history of substantial social and cultural contributions well into the twenty-first century.

Portrait of My People also captures the importance of exploring personal identity. Kelley, who has an Irish name and physically differs from what is perceived as the "traditional Native American look," personifies that we "can't judge a book by its cover." How do society's



racial and cultural generalizations form not only other people's opinions of our identity, but how we view ourselves?

We hope that *Portrait of My People* and this guide encourage young people to explore their family heritage and embrace all the parts of their own unique identity.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before the Performance:

- What do you know about Native Americans? How did you learn what you know?
- Are contemporary Native people different than those three hundred years ago? What do you think has changed? What has stayed the same?
- How has the media portrayed Native Americans? Do you think this is accurate?
- What cultural elements/ experiences would you like people to know about if you were writing a play about your family?

To Think About During the Performance:

- Listen to the pre-show music. Guess what relationship the songs have to Native Americans and the play.
- There are props and costume pieces on the set before the show begins. How do you think they will be used? Did the actor use them in the way you thought she would?
- The actor begins the play in one costume and ends the play in another outfit. How does the addition of clothing pieces relate to the action of the play? What do you think the change from the first look to the final look represents?

After the Performance:

- What did you learn about Native Americans that surprised you? Why?
- Are you of blended races and/or cultures? What does this mean to you?
- Do you feel society determines identity based on generalized perceptions of physical characteristics of races and cultures?
- How would you feel if people did not believe you were a combination of cultures based on your appearance?
- What are some ways people can better understand races and cultures of which they are unfamiliar?

pow wow

One of the best ways to experience Native culture firsthand is to attend a powwow. The word powwow derives from the Narragansett word pawwaw, meaning “spiritual leader.” Modern powwows are events where both Native and non-Native people meet to dance, socialize and honor Native culture. The powwow “arena” is arranged in a circle, with a Native drum and singers in the center. Spectator seating is arranged at the perimeter of the dancing area, and the first row of seating is reserved for those dancing in full traditional outfits. There is usually a dancing competition in various categories (ladies’ buckskin, men’s fancy, golden agers, and more), which provides a wonderful opportunity for spectators to view women’s and men’s traditional dress and dance styles from a variety of tribes. Non-Native people are welcomed into the arena to participate in intertribal dances and social dances (two-step). Dancing always moves clockwise around the drum and singers. When the powwow MC proclaims “Everybody dance!,” this is your signal to join the fun. Powwow etiquette dictates that everyone be respectful of entering the dancing area. Most dancers are very happy to talk to you and answer your questions. However, it is always very respectful to not touch the dancers’ traditional outfits and to ask before taking photos. To find a powwow in your area, visit <http://powwows.com>.

Classroom Activity

Make a Family Collage

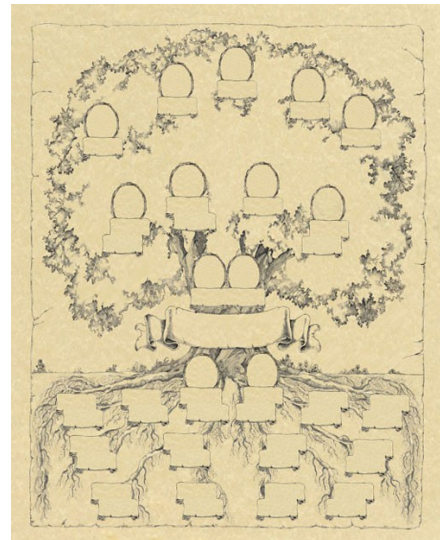


What are the first things that come to mind when you think of your family? An activity you enjoy doing together? A holiday you celebrate? A favorite family food? Family photos? A flag from the country from which your grandparents came? A favorite vacation spot? A family pet? Using art supplies, photos from magazines and newspapers, and copies of photos brought from home, create a collage to represent all the people and things that make your family special.

Activities

What Does Your Family Tree Look Like?

Native culture and history has been passed down through verbal stories as much (if not more than) the written word. Talk to your parents and grandparents about their backgrounds. Which races, ethnicities, and cultures are represented in your family? What countries did your family come from? Are there special traditions practiced in your family? What are they and what do they mean to you?



Record Your Family History!

Talk to the elders in your family and find out about their childhoods. What were their parents and grandparents like? Where did they live? Did they speak another language? What were their favorite subjects in school? What did they do for fun? Who were their friends? Ask them to tell you family stories. Everyone has them and they are very interesting and often quite humorous! Start a family journal and write down these stories. Then add memories and family stories of your own.

Do you know who the people are in your old family photos? Talk to your parents and find out. Take your own photos and add them to your family album.

Activities



Native Art

Native people are known for their exceptional artwork—everything from pottery, basket making, weaving, to contemporary oil paintings. Shapes, patterns and design are often indicative of a particular tribe. Research three different nations and the art form prevalent in their Nation. Choose your favorite art form and create a work of art in that Native style.

Traditional Outfits

There is a perception that all Native people wear the same traditional outfits. Although many women do wear buckskin dresses and many men wear bustles of feathers, many outfits are made of cloth or a combination of materials, and there are variations of these elements and accessories depending on a person's tribe and personal style. Traditional Native outfits often feature beautiful designs of beadwork and ribbonwork—artwork unto themselves. Research 3 different nations and compare styles of dress.



PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

We hope *Portrait of My People* and this guide serve as a springboard to further learning about Native people, their many tribes and nations, and their valuable contributions.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

<http://www.cherokee.org>

The official site of the Cherokee Nation

<http://www.cherokeetourismok.com>

Information on Native culture and places to visit

<http://powwows.com>

Directory of Native tribes, dance styles and powwow calendar

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com>

Read about current Native issues

The Education of Little Tree by Forrest Carter

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Inspiration



In *Portrait of My People*, playwright Erin Kelley talks about the contemporary Native people who inspired her when she was growing up. The rich contributions of these Native Americans may inspire you:

Wilma Mankiller—former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation and the first female in modern history to lead a major Native American tribe. Known for her community leadership, nationally recognized community revitalization projects, spiritual presence, and love of her people.



Wes Studi—Cherokee stage and film actor who spoke only Cherokee until he went to school. Best known for his roles in *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, he is also a Vietnam veteran, political activist, writer and sculptor.

Rita Coolidge—Multiple Grammy Award-winning vocalist with charted hits on Billboard's Pop, Country, Adult Contemporary and Jazz charts. Of Scottish and Cherokee descent, she is one of the cofounders of Walela, the Native American music trio.

Litefoot—Of Cherokee and Chichimeca (Northern Mexican indigenous) ancestry. His hip hop style, Tribalistic Funk, has earned him six Native American Music Awards. He is known for his work in the film *The Indian in the Cupboard* and his clothing line, Native Style.

Tommy Lee Jones—Cherokee Academy Award-winning film actor known for his roles in *The Fugitive*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Men in Black*, *Rules of Engagement*, and *Lonesome Dove*. He was awarded the Cherokee National Medal of Honor in 2001.



Sam Bradford—St. Louis Rams quarterback. Of Cherokee descent, he is the first Native American to win the Heisman Trophy (Oklahoma Sooners).



AVALON THEATRE COMPANY

Visit our website at www.avalontheatre.org

Or write to: Avalon Theatre Company
PO Box 39407
St. Louis, MO 63139-8407
atc@avalontheatre.org
314-351-6482

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Erin Kelley is a member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.