

## THE BEAR DANCE AS AN EXPRESSION OF UTE CULTURE

### TEACHER BACKGROUND

The Utes say that the Bear Dance came from a bear just emerging from hibernation who encountered a young hunter. The bear described the dance, which would ensure successful hunting for the Utes. The dance is a celebration of spring and an opportunity for Ute bands to join together after the long winter months.

### OBJECTIVE

The student will learn about Ute culture by investigating the Bear Dance tradition.

### TEACHER MATERIALS

*At a Glance:* The Bear Dance and Ute Community

*The Night the Grandfathers Danced* by Linda Theresa Raczek and illustrated by Katalin Olah Ehling  
If you do not have access to a copy of this book, a PowerPoint of the story is available at [www.UtahIndians.org](http://www.UtahIndians.org).

*We Shall Remain: The Ute* (chapter 2, 2:00–3:55; chapter 6, 25:22–end)

Ute Bear Dance Chart Answer Key

Additional footage available at [www.kued.org/productions/weshallremain/ute/culture](http://www.kued.org/productions/weshallremain/ute/culture)

### STUDENT MATERIALS

Ute Bear Dance Chart  
Bear Dance Photographs

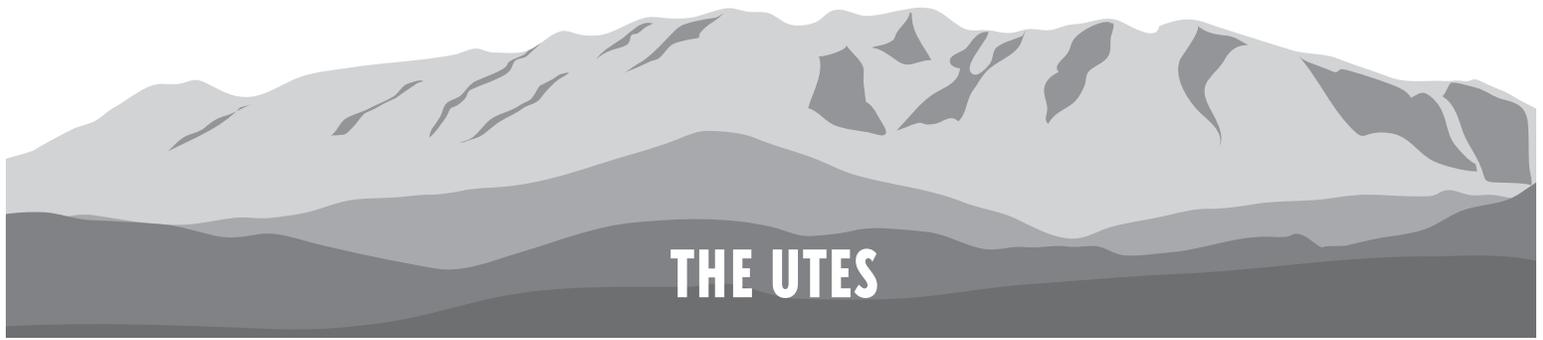
### TIME FRAME

Two thirty-minute periods

### PROCEDURE

Read *The Night the Grandfathers Danced* to your students. Ask them to share their favorite parts of the story in an informal discussion. Ask the students if they are ready to take a test about Ute culture. Once they are calmed back down, offer to read through the story again, page-by-page, having them look for clues as you go along. Pass out a copy of the Ute Bear Dance Chart for the class to take notes on as the story is reread. Allow students to work with a partner in completing the Ute Bear Dance Chart.

Conclude with a clip from *We Shall Remain: The Ute* to show students a contemporary example of the Bear Dance.



## **ASSESSMENT / PRODUCTS**

Discussion participation  
Completed Ute Bear Dance Chart

## **VARIATIONS / EXTENSIONS**

If you do not have access to the book or the excerpt available on [www.UtahIndians.org](http://www.UtahIndians.org), the chart can be completed from watching the film clips and leading a discussion on Ute culture.

Have students share dances that have meanings within their own cultures and compare them to the Bear Dance.

Use the stories in *Weenoocheeyoo Peesaduehnee Yak:anup: Stories of Our Ancestors*, available at [www.UtahIndians.org](http://www.UtahIndians.org), to find other clues about Ute culture.

Compare and contrast with *Coyote Steals Fire: A Shoshone Tale* and *Pia Toya—A Goshute Indian Legend*, both available on [www.UtahIndians.org](http://www.UtahIndians.org).

## **ADDITIONAL REFERENCES**

Conetah, Fred A. *A History of the Northern Ute People*. Ed. Kathryn L. MacKay and Floyd A. O'Neil. Fort Duchesne, Utah: Uintah-Ouray Tribe, 1982.

Krudwig, Vickie Leigh. *Searching for Chipeta*. Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum, 2004.

Lyman, June, and Norma Denver, comps. *Ute People: An Historical Study*. Ed. Floyd A. O'Neil and John D. Sylvester. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970.

*Weenoocheeyoo Peesaduehnee Yak:anup: Stories of Our Ancestors*. Fort Duchesne, Utah: Uintah-Ouray Tribe, 1974.

## **STANDARDS ADDRESSED**

State Standards

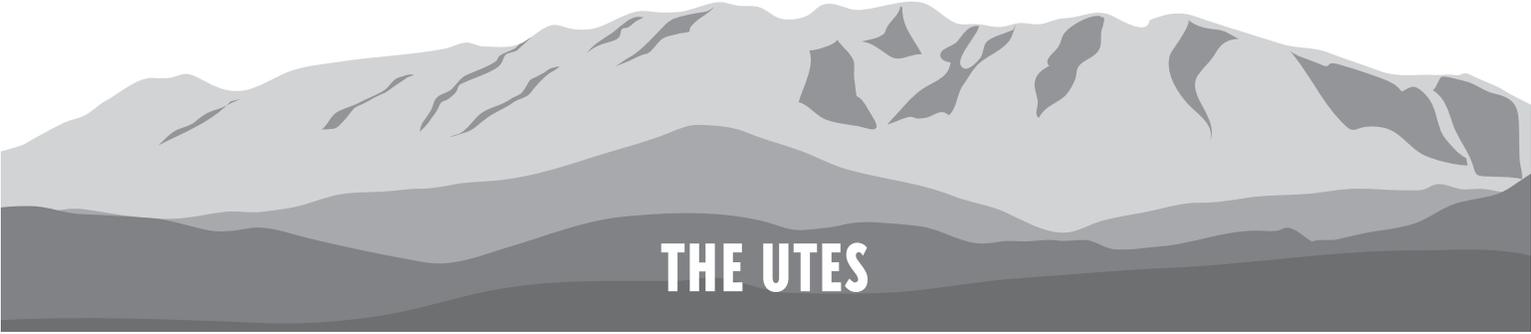
Fourth Grade Social Studies – Utah Studies: 2/1/c; 2/2/a; 1/1/c&d; 1/2/b; 4/1/c&d

Accreditation Competencies

Social and Civic Responsibility/Demonstrates an appreciation of diversity and interdependence of all people/Willingly recognizes different points of view in a positive manner

NCSS Standards

Early Grades: 1/b&d; 2/a,c&e; 9/b



## THE UTES

### **AT A GLANCE: THE BEAR DANCE AND UTE COMMUNITY**

The Utes say that the Bear Dance came from a bear just emerging from hibernation who encountered a young hunter. The bear told the hunter never to kill bears and described the dance. Performing the dance ensured that the Utes would always be successful hunters.

The Bear Dance became a celebration of spring, and a symbol of the importance of Ute community. In the fall, members of Ute bands separated into extended family groups and found places to settle for the winter. The scarcity of food in the winter made maintaining large communities difficult, so Ute family groups spent the season scattered far from other members of their band. The Bear Dance expressed the Utes' joy at being able to return to the larger community. Bears, which live in the mountains of the Utes' homeland, are also alienated from the benefits of community in winter.

Many elements of the Bear Dance lend insight into Ute beliefs and values. The dance ground is prepared by creating circular wall of sticks. This wall represents the bear's den. The Utes leave an opening on the eastern section of the wall because the bear likes his den to face east so that the sunlight can warm him. Other symbols of the bear appear throughout the dance. The dancers move to the sound of moraches, notched sticks that are rubbed together. This sound symbolizes a bear growling, the sound of thunder that wakes the bear from hibernation, or the sound of the bear scratching his back on a tree after his long sleep.

The sound of the bear sticks opens the dance, and women use a special dance shawl to pick their partners. Men are not allowed to refuse a dance partner because it would be considered very rude, and

a master of ceremonies, called Cat Man or Moosuch, makes sure that every woman's request for a dance is honored. This custom reflects the matriarchal structure of the Ute household. Traditionally, Ute women were responsible for all household equipment and organization. Though this household power did not translate into political power for women, it did guarantee them social esteem. A woman's choice of partner was important, as couples frequently formed at the Bear Dance.

The Bear Dance is an important social occasion in the Ute year, but all Ute dances and songs hold deep cultural meanings. Dancing represents the connection of the dancer to nature and the forces of life. It is a spiritual experience, and some dances are vital to the celebration of certain spiritual observances. For the Utes, to dance is to place oneself in harmony with the universal forces.

As Utes gathered for the Bear Dance, they also looked forward to sharing great meals together. After making due with the roots, seeds, and dried meats that could be easily stored for the winter, spring was a time to celebrate with fresh foods, including fish, young jack-rabbits, birds, and other fresh meats.

Contemporary Utes continue the tradition of the Bear Dance. Though travel is much easier now, the Bear Dance still represents an opportunity to get together with friends and family that live far away. The songs, instruments, and dance moves are the same. People still dress up and celebrate. Some Ute bands now host their Bear Dance celebrations at different times of the year so that people can travel to all the dances. This adaptation to the tradition has helped bring people together more often and strengthened cultural ties.

# UTE BEAR DANCE CHART

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to the story *The Night the Grandfathers Danced* and find clues about Ute culture to fill in the boxes.

**FAMILY**

**ART**

**BELIEFS**

**ENVIRONMENT**

**AGE**

**GAMES**

**CLOTHES**

**FUN**

**RESPECT**

**RULES**

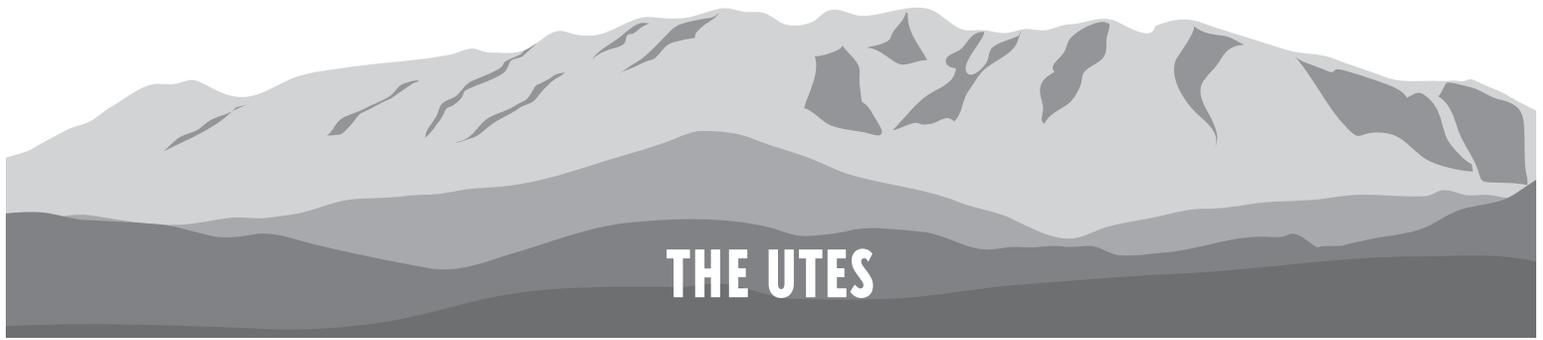
**GIRLS**

**BOYS**

**ANIMALS**

**LEARNING**





# THE UTES

## ANSWER KEY: UTE BEAR DANCE CHART

### FAMILY

Respect of Elders  
Love and Care of Children  
Babies in Cradleboards

### ART

Colorful Clothing      Geometric Shapes  
Animal Imagery      Beadwork and Ribbons

### BELIEFS

Giving Thanks      Bear Taught Dance to  
Great Spirit      Ancestors  
Dance Has Meaning

### ENVIRONMENT

Mountains      Trees  
Bears      Cold Winter  
Warm Spring

### AGE

Respect of Elders  
Children Well Cared For  
Different Responsibilities for Different Ages of People

### GAMES

Gambling Games      Stick Games  
Hand Games      Card Games  
Tag

### CLOTHES

Special Dance Outfit      Cowboy Boots  
Dance Shawl for Women      Ribbon Shirts  
and Girls      Skirts and Dresses  
Cowboy Hats      Colorful Clothing for Men  
and Women

### FUN

Dancing      Games  
Music      Teasing  
Singing      Friends

### RESPECT

Respect of Elders      Dance Partner  
Men Must Respect      Children Respect Parents  
Women's Request for a      Respect for Ute  
Traditions

### RULES

Must Dance with Whomever Asks You  
Must Take Care of Family

### GIRLS

Dance Shawl  
Dance Dress  
Get to Ask for Dance Partners

### BOYS

Cowboy Hats  
Cowboy Boots  
Must Dance with Whomever Asks

### ANIMALS

Bear Habitat  
Pets

### LEARNING

Culture Passed Down through Families

## BEAR DANCE PHOTOGRAPHS



*Ute Women Performing the Bear Dance*



*Bear Dance Moraches*