

*When the Northern Lights
Dance in the Sky:
Creative Movement and Dance*



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

As a group, discuss memories of the Northern Lights. Following the discussion, the activity director will teach a dance based on the movement of the Northern Lights using American Indian flute music that is both soothing and relaxing. The creative motivation for both the discussion and the dance will come from images and folklore regarding the Northern Lights, as well as stories from the residents, the residents' families, and the staff.

TIME:

Ninety minutes over one session (discussion, thirty minutes; learning and performing the dance, sixty minutes).

MATERIALS:

- Large, color photocopies of the North Dakota Northern Lights (if possible, mounted on 25" x 30" display boards set on easels)
- Sound system to play a CD or digital recording
- The CD *Morning Star Whispered* by Keith Bear (also available on iTunes)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

Note: *Morning Star Whispered* can be purchased online or by contacting either the North Dakota Council on the Arts or Makoché Recording Company, Bismarck, ND.

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

This activity is designed to alleviate loneliness, boredom, and helplessness by having an in-depth discussion of our experiences with the Northern Lights and by learning a dance together. Loneliness will be addressed simply by being together. Boredom will be addressed by engaging both the mind and the body to learn something new. Helplessness will be addressed by then performing what we have learned and realizing that all of us can contribute regardless of our age.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:

In older adults, regular exercise can prevent or delay diabetes and heart trouble. It can also reduce arthritis pain, anxiety, and depression. Regular exercise leads to improved physical function and reduced disability in older adults. It also has been shown to enhance psychosocial function and to help older people stay independent.

--Ackermann, R., A. Cheadle, N. Sandhu, L. Madsen, E. Wagner, and J. LoGerfo. “Community Exercise Program Use and Changes in Healthcare Cost for Older Adults.” American Journal of Preventive Medicine 25, no. 3 (2003): 232–237.

--Belza, B., S. Snyder, M. Thompson, and J.P. LoGerfo. “From Research to Practice: Enhance Fitness, an Innovative Community-based Senior Exercise Program.” Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation 26, no. 4 (2010): 299–309.

--Buchner, D., and E. Wagner. “Preventing Frail Health.” Health Promotion and Disease Prevention 8, no. 1 (1992): 1–17.

--Wallace, J.I., D.M. Buchner, L. Grothaus, S. Leveille, L. Tyll, A.Z. LaCroix, and E.H. Wagner. “Implementation and Effectiveness of a Community-based Health Promotion Program for Older Adults.” The Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences 53, no. 4 (1998): M301–M306.

Cover photo: Northern Lights near Mapleton, ND. (Photo courtesy of Tanner Geist.)

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (90 MINUTES):

(Thirty minutes to discuss; and sixty minutes learning and performing the dance.)

1. Start this activity with a group of folks gathered in a space where they can talk comfortably to one another. Explain that the participants will talk about the Northern Lights, as well as listen to music and participate in movement (dance) inspired by the Northern Lights.

2. Introduce the Northern Lights photographs by Lyndon Anderson and Paul Meisel on page 104 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Large, color copies of these images should be displayed prominently, and, if possible, in multiple places to allow for better viewing by all participants. From page 104 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read aloud to the group folklore item “72. The Northern Lights.” Also read the text on that same page in which American Indian flute player Keith Bear is quoted.

3. Invite the group to recall their memories of Northern Lights displays that they have viewed. Ask each person to share one story about seeing the Northern Lights or any folk belief that is associated with them. Ask such questions as:

- How young were you when you saw them?
- Where were you when you saw them?
- Who were you with?

- Did the Northern Lights move, and if so, how?
- How did it make you feel?

4. The person leading the activity should tell the group they will now listen to a Mandan/Hidatsa flute tune by traditional storyteller and flute player Keith Bear, of the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. Explain that Keith’s traditional name is *O’Mashi! Ryu Ta*, meaning “Bright Lights That Wave in the North Sky” or “Northern Lights.”

Ask the participants to close their eyes, relax, and imagine the Northern Lights as they listen to Keith Bear play the flute tune “Northern Lights” (track 2 of the CD *Morning Star Whispered*).

5. A few seconds after the tune has come to an end, ask the participants to open their eyes. The person leading this activity should then explain that he or she is going to teach the group a dance, or creative movement, that is inspired by the photos of the Northern Lights, the folklore item in *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, and the flute tune “Northern Lights” by Keith Bear. Once the group has learned the dance, it will be performed while playing the flute tune “Northern Lights.”

6. The activity director will lead the group through a five-minute warm-up as outlined below:

Chair exercises:

- Wrist circles – 8 each way
- Touch shoulder, then reach to ceiling – 8 times
- Helicopter torso turns – 8 times
- Toe touches – 8 times
- Ankle circles – 8 times

7. The activity director will now teach the dance. Run through the dance a few times without the accompanying music. After the participants have become comfortable with the dance, perform it to Keith Bear’s flute tune “Northern Lights.”

“Northern Lights”

Choreography by Pattie Carr

Music by Keith Bear

Before starting, divide the group into two groups:
Group I and Group II

Stand and form a circle, facing inwards

- Lift the right arm to the front
- Lower the right arm
- Lift the left arm to the front
- Lower the left arm

- Lift the right arm to the side
- Lower the right arm
- Lift the left arm to the side
- Lower the left arm

- Lift the right arm to the front and step forward on the right foot
- Lower the right arm and step back to parallel
- Lift the left arm to the front and step forward on the left foot
- Lower the left arm and step back to parallel

- Lift the right arm to the side and step to the right side
- Lower the right arm and step back to parallel
- Lift the left arm to the side and step to the left side
- Lower the left arm and step back to parallel

- Lift the right arm to the front
- Lower the right arm
- Lift the left arm to the front
- Lower the left arm

- Lift the right arm to the side
- Lower the right arm
- Lift the left arm to the side
- Lower the left arm

Lift the right arm to the front and step forward on the right foot

Lower the right arm and step back to parallel

Lift the left arm to the front and step forward on the left foot

Lower the left arm and step back to parallel

Lift the right arm to the side and step to the right side

Lower the right arm and step back to parallel

Lift the left arm to the side and step to the left side

Lower the left arm and step back to parallel

Move in a circle to the right:

Lift the right arm to the side and step to the right side 4 times

Move in a circle to the left:

Lift the left arm to the side and step to the left side 4 times

Move in a circle to the right:

Lift the right arm to the side and step to the right side 4 times

Move in a circle to the left:

Lift the left arm to the side and step to the left side 4 times

Group I: Move in a circle to the right and weave with Group II for a count of 8

Group II: Move in a circle to the left and weave with Group I for a count of 8

Repeat as appropriate for the participants in the group

OPTIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

Other opportunities could be utilized to enhance this activity, such as having a traditional American Indian flute player perform live or asking a meteorologist to give a presentation on the Northern Lights.

AUTHOR • PATTIE CARR, MA, LRD:

Pattie is a member of the faculty of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Dickinson State University, Dickinson, North Dakota, as well as the university's Wellness Program Director. Her faculty duties for the Department of Fine and Performing Arts include directing both the Dance and Costume Programs. Ms. Carr graduated from Washington University School of Medicine and Ball State University with a Master's degree in Human Bioenergetics, from Montana State University with a Bachelor's degree in Clinical Nutrition, and from the University of Montana with a minor in Modern Dance. She has been a Registered Dietitian since 1985. Prior to returning to graduate school, Ms. Carr danced professionally in Montana, California, and New York City.