
LET THE IMAGINATION RUN, AND THE BODY WILL FOLLOW

A visit from the Lakota Dance Troupe, Deer Chaser

Despite his imposing stance and deep voice, Marvin Clifford has soft, kind eyes and a warm disposition. He invited the students at the Vanguard School to watch the majestic tribal dances of the Lakota Dance Troupe, Deer Chaser, as they put words into a fluid, kinesthetic context we can all understand, no matter what language we speak.

The rich Lakota heritage was evidenced by their colorful, enchanting costumes and traditional dress. All of the dances tell a story, all captivating in their spirituality and representative of their ancestry. There is obvious and caring honor of nature and community, a sense of respect for all humans, life and Earth.

Mr. Clifford prefaced each dance with its history, how the dance was created and who the intended honoree was. Much of the dances have evolved into representations of gratitude for love, sacrifice, providing and protection. Since family and community are such strong supports in the Lakota tribe, they take care in reminding one another how important they are -as care is unequivocally reciprocal - expressing creatively ideas and sentiments around which we cannot wrap words.



Far Right: Marvin Clifford, accompanied by the young dancers

The artistic and acrobatic talents of the dancers reaches beyond the metaphorical and echoes the openness of their hearts as well as the freedom of their spirits. Since 1995, this tribe has sought to not only honor and revitalize the ways of their elders, but provide a positive network for children and teens. The dancers must prescribe to a life that is free of the influences that plague many American tribes today, which include alcohol & drugs.

They must also stay in school and remain active members of their community, so as to be role models for other youth.¹

Encouraging Vanguard students to further comprehend this vital and passionate message, Deer Chaser invited them onto the stage to become part of their Sacred Circle of Life. In the Circle, the students and dancers held hands and participated in a dance with small movements, moving clockwise to the steady rhythm of the drum. This is meant to symbolize community and family, a notion that we are accepted, all equal, all important.

With grace and ease, these young dancers proudly demonstrated their dance and Vanguard students readily responded accordingly, and were later treated to the opportunity to dance on their own! The dancers offered their instruments and artifacts to Vanguard students, who willingly reciprocated the kind gesture with the steps they were shown, keeping pace with the ethereal song.

It would be difficult not to feel a deep connection after witnessing such dedication and responsibility toward the preservation of one's family, heritage and culture. One of the students said, on exiting, "I get the feeling that we should all be more grateful." We are indeed grateful for the opportunity to learn from these young people, and grateful for the reminder that we need to be caretakers of the earth.

For Your Enrichment: Symbol of **The Deer**: Hunting prey animal, sacrificial and sometimes mentioned as "first helper" in a few emergence stories, also family protection and of course speed.

The Vanguard School

Founded in 1959, The Vanguard School in Paoli, PA is a non-profit day school which takes pride in providing an innovative, comprehensive curriculum to support students with Special Needs, and encourages them to become productive, contributing members of society. Exceptionalities served at Vanguard include those on the Autism Spectrum, Neurological Impairment and Severe Emotional Disturbance. Please find us on the web at: www.vanguardschool-pa.org.

¹ www.languageoftheearth.org