

Red Sky presents Caribou Song



Artwork: Mary Intven Wallace

Study Guide

Discussion Questions • Classroom Activities • Curriculum Connections

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Produced with the support of:

The J. P. Bickell Foundation, The George Lunan Foundation, and The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Artistic Director: Sandra Laronde



About Red Sky

Red Sky is a Toronto-based company renowned for its artistry and innovation. Red Sky shapes contemporary Aboriginal performance in dance, theatre and music. Established in 2000 by founding artistic director Sandra Laronde, Red Sky creates and produces original works for family and adult audiences on local, national and international stages.

Artistic Director: Sandra Laronde

Caribou song

www.redskyperformance.com

Story by Tomson Highway and music by Rick Sacks, *Caribou Song* is about two Cree children in Canada's north who follow the caribou by dogsled with their family. When a herd of caribou thunders through their camp, the parents worry that the children have been trampled. Instead, the children find a way to magically embrace the spirit of the caribou.

This adventure dance story for family audiences is a tale about the transformative nature of love and power of the natural world.

Red Sky's inaugural production of *Caribou Song* (large orchestral version) was performed in February 2000 with the Scarborough Philharmonic Orchestra, then, notably with 70 musicians of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra at the Roy Thomson Hall in February 2002. *Caribou Song* has since toured to Switzerland, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Banff, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Whitehorse, Dawson City, Mississauga, Halifax, Newfoundland & Labrador, Washington, D.C., Connecticut, San Diego, Australia and China.



Caribou Song

Story by: Tomson Highway

Composer: Rick Sacks

Director: Mark Wilson

Collaborative Choreography:

Peter Chin, Sandra Laronde, Carlos Rivera

Costume Design: Cheryl Lalonde

Lighting Design: Steve Lucas

Original Caribou Song Performers:

Sandra Laronde

Carlos Rivera

Original Caribou Song Musicians:

Rick Sacks

Rick Shadrach Lazar

Jonathan Fisher

Setting the Scene:

Background information on the people and the stories

Caribou Song By Tomson Highway

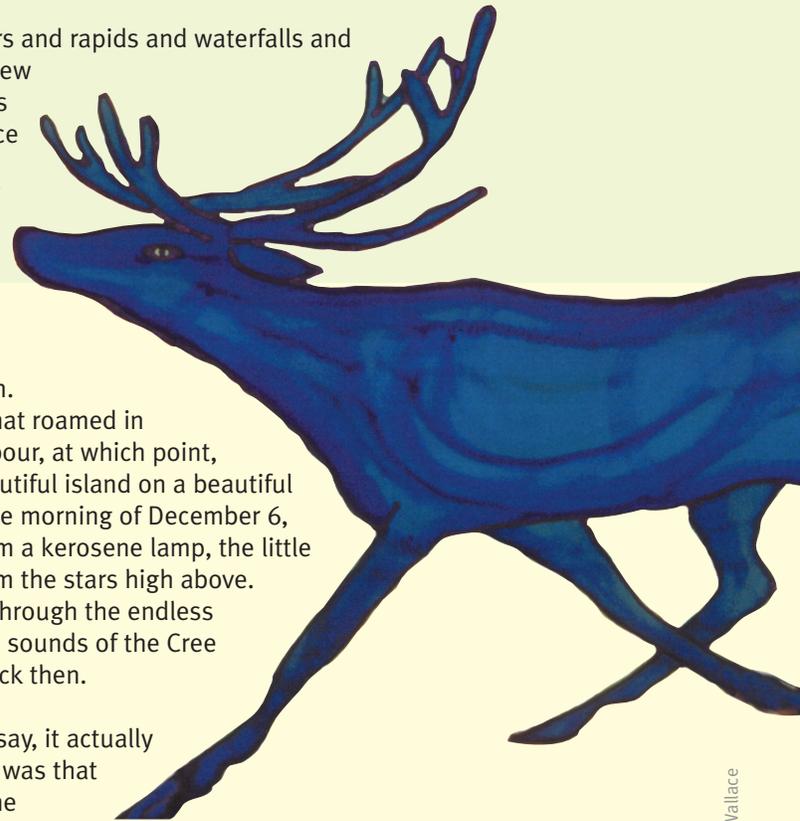
My beginnings were magical beyond belief. I was born and grew up in this fabulous, unbelievably beautiful garden that truly was a paradise, a garden of Eden.

I was born and grew up in a part of the world that few people on Earth will ever live to see because it is so distant, so remote, so impossible to get to, that just the bush-plane charter from Thompson, the nearest town of any size whatever, would cost close to \$2,000 for a return trip. I was born and grew up in a part of the world that is so remote, it would take the average person two months to get up there either by canoe in the summer, or by dogsled in the winter (by skidoo, you would run out of gas very quickly and thus freeze to death). The reason for all this is that, to this day, there are no roads that go that far north.

I was born and grew up in a land that has so many lakes and rivers and rapids and waterfalls and forests for thousands upon thousands of miles. I was born and grew up in that part of the world where the province of Manitoba meets the province of Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories. Since 1999, of course, it is now where Manitoba meets Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and the new territory called Nunavut. If you yourself were to go up there today, you would find neither a hotel nor a house to stay, so you would have to live in a tent, which is what we did back in the 1950's when I was born.

My parents were traveling across this magnificent, snow-covered landscape by dogsled early one winter with their younger children. In those days, they crossed the tundra in pursuit of the caribou that roamed in herds of thousands. Suddenly, my pregnant mother went into labour, at which point, my father had no choice but to stop and pitch their tent, on a beautiful island on a beautiful lake called, "Maria" (pronounced "Ma-rye-ah"). And there, on the morning of December 6, 1951, I was born. With no electricity, all we had for light came from a kerosene lamp, the little tin-can woodstove they used to travel with in those days, and from the stars high above. And all we had for sound was the north wind whispering its way through the endless stands of spruce, pine, leafless birch, poplar, and willow...and the sounds of the Cree and Dene languages, for English didn't exist; not up there, not back then.

Caribou Song is based on a true story. In part. In part, that is to say, it actually happened, and in part, it didn't. The part that actually happened was that my younger brother was five years old when he got "caught" in the middle of a caribou stampede, in May of 1960. As I was already 8 years old in the spring of 1960, I was away at residential school 700 kilometers to the south. The stampede happened to my little brother and one of my seven elder sisters who, at the time this story takes place, would have been 21 already. My little brother and I, being the two youngest of a family of 12 children (only 7 of whom, by the way, survived to adulthood), grew up like peas in a pod, like two little princes, our dad the King of the North. So, yes, of course, in the years before my brother passed away he shared this story with me many, many times. Until, eventually, over the years, the story became "transfigured" in my memory and in my dreams until my younger brother and I both were inside that stampede. The other part that is not true is that I didn't start learning how to play the accordion until I was ten, and the piano even later. But therein hangs another tale entirely.



Artwork: Mary Intven Wallace

*“My beginnings were magical beyond belief.
I was born and grew up in a garden of Eden,
a northern paradise that was pure and magical.”*

- Tomson Highway on Caribou Song, Globe & Mail

Discussion

- * Caribou are on the Tundra, in the very far north. Discuss the interdependence of the Indigenous people and the environment in which they live.
- * Discuss why animals play such an important part in the lives of these people.
- * Explain how these stories are used to explain elements of nature.

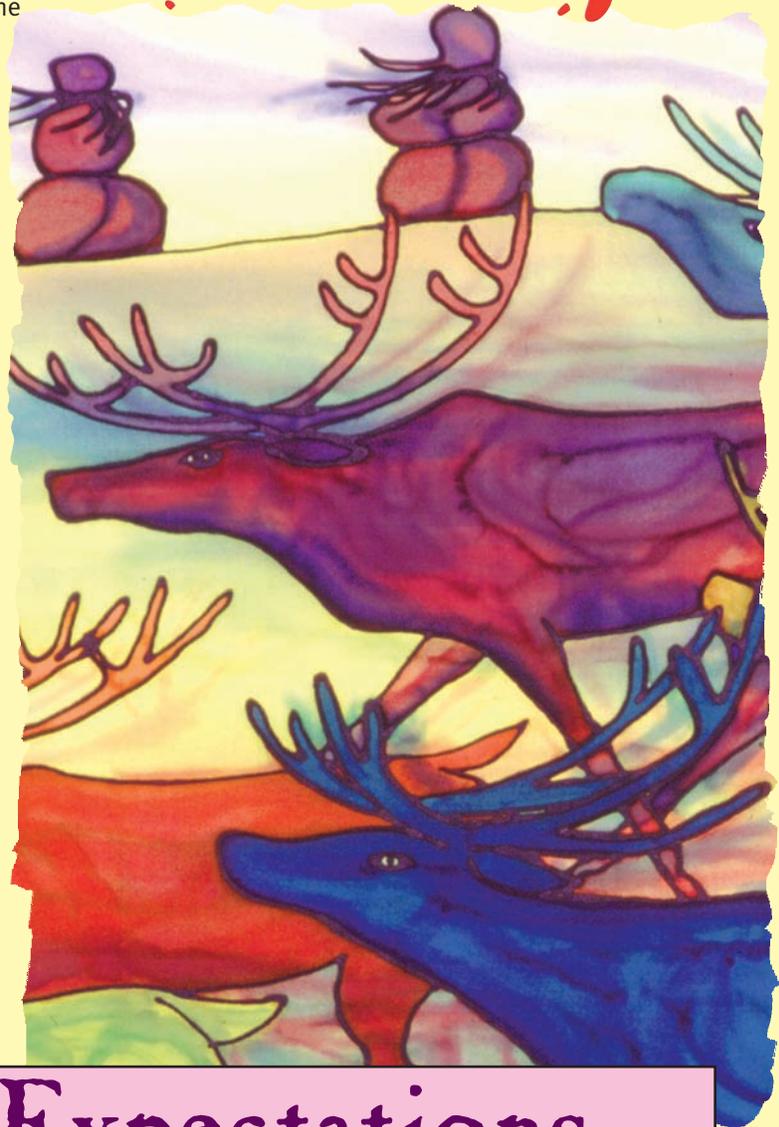
Activities

1. Locate the lands of the Cree on a map of North America
2. Trace the migration of the caribou across the north.
3. Name the different First Nations that the caribou pass through along their migratory routes, (ie. Cree, Dene, Inuvialuit, Tutchone, Gwich'in, etc).
4. Name some other animals that migrate.
5. Research what animals, birds, and plant life would live in each of these regions.
6. Write the names or draw pictures on a map.
7. Discuss the term "tree line", and draw it on a map.

"...the wildly successful children's show."

- Dance International

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Curriculum Expectations

Social Studies

Grades 1 - 3

By the end of Grade 3, students will:

- Identify the Aboriginal peoples located in Upper Canada at the time of first settlement;
- Describe the influence of Aboriginal peoples and pioneers in the area of farming methods (e.g., the use of crop rotation).

Grades 4 - 6

By the end of Grade 6 students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the theories related to the origin of the Aboriginal peoples (e.g., migration and settlement);
- Describe the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and their environment (e.g., with respect to food, shelter, cultural practices);
- Locate relevant information about the relationship between the environment and Aboriginal lifestyles, using primary sources (e.g., interviews, field trips) and secondary sources (e.g., maps, illustrations, print materials, videos, CD-ROMs).

See also Science

Grade 1: Characteristics and Needs of Living Things

Grade 2: Changes in plants and animals

Grade 4: Habitats and Communities

Pre-Show Discussion

About Dance

- * Discuss how dance can help to tell a story. Do the students know any stories that are told in dance (e.g., Nutcracker, Swan Lake or any story from their respective cultures)?
- * In the dance sequences, how do they imagine that the choreographer and the dancers will tell the story without dialogue (e.g., movement, facial expression, gesture and narration)?
- * What other elements will help to bring the story to life (music, setting, costumes etc.)? (Introduce the terms costume, lighting, sound, music and set designer)

What to Watch for During the Performance

- * Introduce the idea of contemporary dance. Talk about how dance does not have to tell a literal story, but can "speak" in metaphors and symbols, expressing ideas and feelings.
- * Suggest that the students look for the following during the performance:
 - * How the dancers use body language and movement to tell the story.
 - * How the costumes and props help to tell the story.
 - * How music helps to create the mood of the piece.
 - * When the dance is "acting out" the story and when it is suggesting the feelings and emotions of the character.
 - * How the characters are portrayed through dance and costume.
 - * Is there a specific musical theme for any of the characters?



About the Stories

- * Discuss the following with the students:
 - * The main characters in each of the stories.
 - * Explain that there are human and non-human characters in the stories.
 - * Caribou Song is a story. How are stories used to teach aspects of the culture and beliefs of the people?
 - * In Caribou Song, the dance is used to tell the story, along with the storyteller.

Curriculum Connections

The following are some of the Specific Expectations that are addressed when completing the above activities.

Grades 1 - 3

By the end of grade 3 students will:

- Describe their own and others' work in dance, using appropriate vocabulary (e.g., character, rhythm, harmony).
- Identify the themes and subjects found in drama and dance works, and make links between these and their own experiences.

Grades 4 - 6

By the end of grade 6 students will:

- Describe the meaning and evaluate the effect of the work of others, using drama and dance vocabulary correctly.
- Identify the significance of symbols in dance explorations.
- Explain their preferences for specific drama and dance works.

Post Show Discussions AND Activities

The Characters

- * Talk about the characters in terms of the role that each of them played in the story.
- * How did the performers create the different characters through the choreography
- * How did the movements of the Dancer help to make you believe in the character? (The children in Caribou Song, moved like young people)

Note: primary children may enjoy demonstrating their answers.
How did the costume designs help to create the characters?
Did any of the characters have their own musical theme?

Caribou Song

- * How do the movements (the choreography) help us to imagine the various characters in the story?
- * Compare the movements of the performers when representing people, to the movements when they are representing animals or other objects.
- * What instruments are used to create the different characters and events in the story?
- * How is the dogsled portrayed?
- * How do the music and sound effects add to the suspense when the children are caught in the stampede?

“Red Sky has everything to do with theatricality and the imagination... remarkably evocative.”

-Edmonton Journal

The Plot

Caribou Song

- * Where and when does the story take place?
- * How was the family travelling through the north? How many dogs were attached to the sleigh?
- * What were the commands that the father gave to the dogs? (Mush=straight forward, Cha=right, and U=left).
- * How did the children and parents get separated?
- * How did Jo want Cody to call the caribou out of the forest?
- * How many caribou were in the herd that surrounded the children?
- * How did Jo rescue her brother when he was lost in the caribou herd?
- * Where did she take him to be safe? How did they get there?
- * After the children embraced the spirit of the caribou, what did the children hear the caribou say?
- * When the caribou herd left, what sound did the children hear? Why was the mother crying? What did she think had happened to the children?
- * What did Mama see when she looked up at Papa?



Curriculum Connections

The following are some of the Specific Expectations that are addressed when completing the above activities.

Dance: Grades 1 - 3

By the end of grade 3 students will:

- Describe their own and others' work in dance, using appropriate vocabulary (e.g., character, rhythm, dynamic, harmony).
- Explain the importance of symbols used in specific dances.
- Distinguish between a variety of dance forms, using specific criteria (e.g. steps, music, costumes).
- Identify effective uses of drama and dance elements in performances (e.g., form, space, pattern, energy) and compare their own responses with those of their peers.
- Identify the themes and subjects found in drama and dance works, and make links between these and their own experiences.

Grades 4 - 6

By the end of grade 6 students will:

- Describe the meaning and evaluate the effect of the work of others, using drama and dance vocabulary correctly (e.g., focus, energy, style, balance).
- Identify the significance of symbols in dance explorations.
- Explain and demonstrate the use of different patterns in creating effects in drama and dance (e.g., patterns of pace and direction, symmetry, asymmetry).

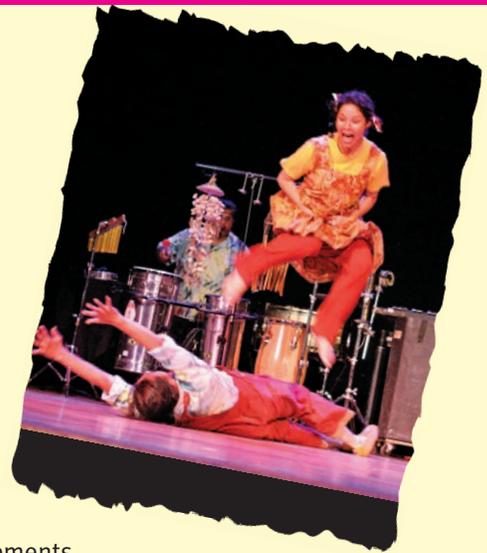
Activities

1. Exploring Movement

Grades K - 3

Whole Group:

- Students, working in a space by themselves, respond to verbal cues to perform a variety of action words (e.g., twist, shake, swing, explode, melt, shrink, etc.)
- Students repeat this exercise combining two or more actions together.
- Teacher directs students to perform the action following a verbal image (e.g., you are moving in a windstorm; you are swimming through a swamp etc.)
- Students choose an animal and then with just the hands and arms, imitate the movements of that animal. They then carry through the same type of movement with the other parts of the body (head, legs /feet, back etc.)
- Explain to the students that they can turn this into dance, by exaggerating the movements and giving them a pattern.
- One half of the group performs their animals for the others.
- The audience guesses what animals are being portrayed.
- The other half of the students then show their animal dance.



Grades 4 - 6

Small Groups:

- Students moving in their own space follow the teacher's direction to move as if: happy, sad, afraid, etc.
- Then challenge them to use movement to convey more abstract ideas such as: heavy, light, the colour red, peace, etc.
- Teacher calls out a number into which the students quickly group. The teacher calls out an action or a shape for the students to perform (e.g., a bird, a rushing river, a herd of caribou)
- This activity continues, with the students in pairs, being challenged to show a short non-verbal scene such as: how do the brother and sister interact.

Note: Emphasize the use of movement and gesture to portray the character and the plot, as well as the emotions.

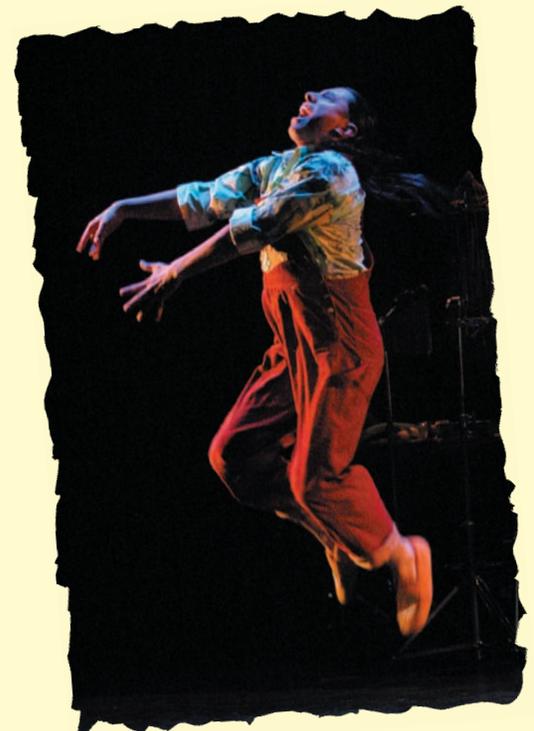
- One half of students perform while the other half watches and comments what they observe.
- Students form new groups and continue to explore communicating through movement.
- Each group performs their finished piece for the audience.
- Recall the different instruments and common objects used to create the different music and sound effects.
- Create a soundscape of different environments: a city, a forest, a river, a storm etc.
- Using some percussion instruments and common objects, create music and sounds to accompany the scenes they have created.

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“The piece de resistance was Red Sky’s performance of Caribou Song... a rousing performance.”

- TANSI, Toronto's Aboriginal Newspaper



2. Story-Telling: Grades 1 - 3

- In small groups, decide on four or five scenes that would retell the story.
- For each scene, have the children act out the story, as the teacher tells that part of the story.
- The teacher retells the whole story, in sequence, as each group acts out their part of the story.
- The children each take one event in the story and draw a picture to combine into a Big Book.



Photo: Fred Cattroll

3. Story-Making: Grades 4 - 6

- Read a number of trickster tales from different cultures and discuss the common elements. (Raven, Anansi, Coyote)
- Make a chart with the characteristics of a trickster character. (curious, mischievous, able to change shape, loves to play tricks etc.)
- Make a second chart with the elements of a trickster tale. (a trickster character, a trick played on the other characters, an unforeseen outcome of the trick, an explanation of a natural phenomenon etc.)
- In small groups, use the elements to create a new Trickster tale.
- Use movement and narration to tell the story to the rest of the group.
- Make masks for the various characters in the story.

Curriculum Connections

The following are some of the Specific Expectations that are addressed when completing the above activities.

Dance: Grades K - 3

By the end of grade 3 students will:

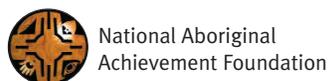
- Demonstrate an understanding of a character's point of view through using body movement in role.
- Recognize and choose appropriate elements of movement for dramatizing their responses to different stimuli or ideas.
- Communicate, through movement, their thoughts and feelings about topics studied in other subject areas. (e.g. telling familiar stories through movement).
- Solve artistic problems in dance in co-operative work groups. (e.g. discuss the effects of using one dancer or several to convey a message).

Grades 4 - 6

By the end of grade 6, students will:

- Interpret and perform some types of dances.
- Create drama and dance productions in which they make effective use of the principles of harmony, balance, and contrast.
- Evaluate drama and dance performances, with reference to their own experiences in daily life.
- Solve artistic problems in drama and dance, individually and in groups, and evaluate the solutions.

Red Sky gratefully acknowledges the generous support of:



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