

Mary Pickford Film Center
DOCTOBER DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL, 2017
Discussion Guide

SPIRIT GAME: Pride of a Nation (2017)

Directed by Peter Spirer and Peter Baxter

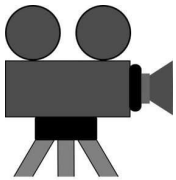
Produced in conjunction with the Haudenosaunee and One Bowl Productions

STORY: The documentary follows The Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Team on the road as they compete in the 2015 World Box Lacrosse Championships. For the first time ever, the Championship Games were held on an Indian Reservation, in Onondaga in upstate New York, the Capitol of the Iroquois Confederacy.
—Chris Brewster, imbd

CAST, abbreviated list:

Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper, Hall of Fame, Onandaga Nation
Richard Hill Sr, PhD, Indigeous Historian, Tuscarora Nation
Betty Lyons, President American Indian Law Alliance, Onandaga Nation
Ansley Jemmison, Exec. Dir., Iroquois Nationals
Leon Nolan, Former Exec. Director, Iroquois Nationals, Mohawk Nation
Tracy Shenendoah, Iroquois Nationals Spiritual Adviser, Onondago Nation
Tadodaho Sid Hill, Haudenosaunee Spiritual Leader
Freida Jacques, Turtle Mother, Onandaga Nation
Alf Jacques, Stick Maker, Hall of Fame, Onandaga Nation
Steve Beville, Field Head Coach, Iroquois Nationals

Vince Schiffert, Iroquois National, Board of Directors
Rick Kilgour, Head Coach, Iroquois Nationals, Tuscarora Nation
Rex Lions, Retired Iroquois Nationals, Onandaga Nation
Thompson Brothers (4), Iroquois Nationals, Onandaga Nation
Taylor Smoke, Iroquois Nationals, Mohawk Nation
Tom Montour, Iroquois Nationals, Mohawk Nation
Travis Hill, Iroquois Nationals, Tuscarora Nation
Brett Bucktooth, Iroquois Nationals, Oneida Nation
Cody Jaimeson, Iroquois Nationals, Mohawk Nation
Jeff Shattler, Iroquois Nationals, Ojibwa
Jim Brown, WILC Hon. Chairman, Lacrosse & Football Hall of Fame



DOCUMENTARY STYLE:

Bill Nichols, film educator, has written many texts on documentary styles and his analysis is distilled in the article cited here. He categorizes documentaries into 6 styles.

[https://www.videomaker.com/article/c06/18423-six-primary-styles-of-documentary-production.](https://www.videomaker.com/article/c06/18423-six-primary-styles-of-documentary-production)

ADD DESCRIPTION



USING THIS GUIDE:

This guide has been produced to enhance students' viewing experiences. Questions reinforce CCSS for ELA, Social Studies PE and OSPI standards for Native American Education.

- What are the ways in which Tribes respond to the threats and outside pressure to extinguish their cultures and independence?
- What do local Tribes do to meet the challenges of reservation life; and, as sovereign nations, do to meet the economic and cultural needs of their Tribal communities?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

- ✓ What scenes captured your attention? Which did not?
- ✓ Were you more interested in the sport or in the human rights struggle?
- ✓ What questions about sports or Native People did the film answer? What new questions do you now have?
- ✓ What incidents gave you feelings of joy, or feelings of sadness and anger?

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE:

Called the ‘Iroquois’ by the French and the ‘6 Nations’ by the English., the Haudenosaunee people are a confederacy of 5 (then 6) Indian Nations: the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora Nations. Territories have shifted over time due to treaties, forced relations, and land sales; they now live in small sections of their former woodlands located in New York, South Quebec and South Ontario Provinces.

The confederation invented the oldest, continuously operating democratic government in North America. Their consensus democratic processes and their Great Law of Peace may have influenced the foundations of US government—the US Constitution and League of Nations. (See Resources for more information)

If you were to describe the Haudenosaunee, what adjectives would you use?

LACROSSE:

Lacrosse is one of the oldest sports in North America. It was first recorded in 1100 but surely was in play centuries before. Although it may be difficult to prove that the Iroquois invented the sport because closely related stick sports were played by many Native American groups throughout the eastern sections of North America, modern lacrosse rules are based upon the Haudenosaunee’s historical game. Interestingly, the women’s version of the game still closely parallels the historical sport, while the men’s official game has changed a great deal since historical times with most of the modifications made by non-native Canadians.

1. Do you play lacrosse? The film doesn’t tell its audience very much about the rules of the game. If you play lacrosse, please answer your classmates questions about the game or together visit the Resource section of this guide for links to the US Lacrosse.

2. In historical times, the game was loosely constructed. Teams agreed to play by rules they made up the night before. The original outdoor game was unrestricted; it could range across miles of uneven terrain with goal posts indicated by natural features such as tree trunks or rocks. Players wore no protective equipment and injuries—even serious one-- were expected. . Lacrosse is a very lengthy game, and it is played very fast and very aggressively. A tournament is 9 days long, with top teams playing 8 of those days. Describe the athleticism that is required and the kinds of injuries that can happen.

3. The sports commentary that we heard in the film describes the Nationals as having “unbelievable firepower everywhere...unique handling of sticks and ball...making passes they shouldn’t have been able to make....They have a “sixth sense and know where their teammates are at all times. The have trust and they take chances. It’s a beautiful thing to watch. It’s not your typical type of lacrosse.”

- ✓ As you watched the lengthy footage of the Nationals playing various teams during the 2014 and 2015 world championships, did you notice any “style differences” between the Nationals and other teams? Describe the stick play that you observed? Describe the National’s use of their sticks (overhand, underhand, striking)? Their offensive strategies? Their defensive strategies?
- ✓ Did you notice any differences in coaching style between the Iroquois and either Team USA or Team Canada?
- ✓ The Iroquois say that their game is different because their attitude is different. They play with calm, and a right mind/right attitude. They don’t play for the “number on the back, but for the name on the front.” Did you see evidence of this “right attitude” in their style of play?

4. The historic game was originally designed to toughen a young man for battle, as a rite of passage into manhood, to settle tribal disputes, and as a creative outlet for aggression.

- ✓ Can you name other sports that are similarly aggressive and dangerous?
- ✓ Why do you think that some team sports are so combative while other team sports are not?
- ✓ Does any game reflect the character, values or aspirations of its players? Is the game that you choose to play a reflection of yourself?

5. Mythic beginnings: According to tradition, the first lacrosse game was played between the land animals and the winged animals. You can find that story-- and other versions-- in the Resource section.

6. Nike is the official sponsor of the Iroquois Nationals team. At Nike headquarters, a huge banner honoring one of the Thompson brothers hangs alongside banners of other elite athletes. He is one of four brothers—part of the “Thompson Brothers revolution.” Do you recall his name?

PURPOSES OF THE GAME:

1. At the beginning of the film, Iroquois players explain why they play the game. What reasons do they give? What do their reasons communicate about their character, their values?

- ✓ Entertain the Creator
- ✓ Heritage and History
- ✓ Community
- ✓ Ambassadors to the World
- ✓ Medicine

2. **Haudenosaunee boys receive their first stick when they are little and some keep that stick for the rest of their lives. To them, the stick symbolizes the “right relationship” of respect with the earth and the Creator.** Explain. What spiritual symbolism is imbued in the traditional handmade wood-and-gut stick? What does the hickory handle symbolize? What does the gut represent?

3. What is the role of ceremony in the spiritual lives of the Haudenosaunee?

4. Beyond winning a world title, **what else is at stake?** What is the ultimate purpose of the Iroquois National team according to Chief Lyons? For decades he has been patiently implementing elements of his vision. Can you define that vision and identify any of his actions?

Chief Lyons: *“There’s a big story taking place here; it’s beyond a contest. It’s about the original people of this land. It’s about us--the Haudenosaunee and all of the work that we’ve done prior to this, work that began with the Continental Congress....”*

Chief Lyons: “Sometimes they [the team] don’t comprehend what the big picture is in all of this, they just love the game....they played their hearts out...The Iroquois Nationals have lost many games but we’ve never been defeated.”

SPIRIT GAME: The Haudenosaunee people express their values and beliefs in the game of lacrosse. In earlier times, the game was highly ritualized. The night before the game, players obeyed certain food restrictions, they painted their bodies with charcoal, wore regalia, performed special dances, and made sacrifices. The next day, after praying, singing and chanting, they would shout to let the gods know that they were about to begin the game—a game enacted for their pleasure and amusement. Even the ball itself is woven into this mythic narrative as it symbolically represents the to-and-fro motion of the sun and the moon mapping time in the cosmos. In this sense, “spirit” refers to the religious and cultural traditions/history of the people. It reinforces community and thus is fundamental to survival.

1. The game has been described as “medicine.” Medicine is a healing agent. Define what needs to be healed and what types of medicine the people are using to heal their communities.
2. Freida Jacques, Turtle Clan Mother: “Sometimes the Others, those who are not allies, decide that we need to go away... we are being wished away...But we are here!” Native Americans often feel invisible and thus de-legitimized. This feeling is common to anyone who has been marginalized and not accepted by a dominant group. Have you ever felt that way? Explain how that feels.
3. In the film, there is frequent reference to the inter-generational nature of the sport. It runs in families--sons, father, grandfathers—all have deep histories in the game. Is there any “medicine” in this lineage?

NATIONHOOD: In 2010, the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team was stopped at England’s border as it attempted to play in the World Finals because England didn’t recognize the Haudenosaunee passport. By extension, it seemed like they did not recognize the Haudenosaunee’s nationhood, even though the Iroquois Nationals already had been vetted. They were accepted as the 5th National member of the Federation of International Lacrosse.

Shuttleworth, England Lacross Association: *They [Iroquois Nationals] would have been better served by traveling on US or Canadian passports because “you know, they are Americans and Canadians. I can’t see how they would ever become a Nation. There isn’t even a geographical entity.”*

Hill, Haudenosaunee Spiritual Leader: *“We don’t have borders. We don’t put a line up and say this is mine. We never had a border-line between the confederacy. Nobody owns the woods. It’s our ultimate struggle as we are a people with our own language, with our own culture, our own songs, our own identity.”*

1. What constitutes a Nation?
 - ✓ Can a Nation exist within the boundaries of another Nation? (Consider Lesotho within South Africa)?
 - ✓ Does a nation have to be of a certain size? Have a National flag, anthem, sport, etc?
 - ✓ What criteria must be met before an entity can achieve Nationhood?
 - ✓ What special benefits and privileges are given to Nations?
2. Which US treaties or laws guaranteed sovereignty and nationhood to Native people?

3. Are Native Americans also citizens of the US? Do they enjoy the benefits of US citizenship such as the right to vote in US elections?

DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY:

1. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI gave authority to explorers from Europe to claim newly discovered lands in the name of the Catholic Church. Under what circumstances? What loophole did the Pope use to claim the lands inhabited by 16 million indigenous people?

2. During the 2015 World Lacrosse competition, Pope Francis visited New York City. Indigenous spiritual leaders from north and south America journeyed to NY to protest the effects of the Doctrine of Discovery and to form an Indigenous Continental Congress to fight the Doctrine of Discovery. While the Haudenosaunee's spiritual chief had been invited to stand on stage with other world religious leaders, that invitation was rescinded, his congregation had to stand in the back, and his headdress—regalia that confirmed his responsibility to his people--was confiscated.

- ✓ Betty Lyons spoke at length about the hypocrisy, the disrespect, and the feelings of 'erasure' that she felt. Are you sympathetic?
- ✓ If the Haudenosaunee spiritual delegation had been able to meet with Pope, what do you think they would have asked him?

3. Unfortunately, the precedent established by the Doctrine of Discovery is deeply institutionalized in US laws today even as it contradicts the principles, laws, and values established by our law of the land, the US Constitution. The Doctrine of Discovery violates which constitutional rights?

4. Could the Doctrine of Discovery be the basis for all Civil Rights movements?

5. Can you demonstrate a connection between the Doctrine of Discovery and the US government's historic policies against the native people that promoted genocide, cultural/religious suppression, enforced assimilation (e.g. Indian Boarding Schools), broken treaties, and institutionalized racism? Explain.

6. Native Americans strive for recognition and autonomy within an American context. Do you think they will ever win their long struggle? Over his lifetime, Chief Lyons persevered to create and promote the Iroquois Nationals team onto the world stage and then to use this accomplishment to communicate a message to the world. What is his message? How is the documentary, Spirit Game, part of his plan?

Chief Lyon: Twelve participating countries are going to go home and they're going to talk about what they saw and they're going to talk about today's reality. They're going to go a lot farther than the arenas we're playing in. It's going to resonate. It's going to be helpful to our people. It's going to be helpful to the earth.".... "If this game can unite the world in the four corners as it's trying to do, that's our gift, that what we offer the world."

HOME GAME:

1. The film builds towards the international box-lacrosse tournament played finally on home turf—in Onondago, the capital of the Haudenosaunee Nation. Bringing players, spectators and press from 13 countries

to the reservation was a huge challenge but presented many additional opportunities to make friends and change perceptions. What are some of the ways the Nation tried to communicate goodwill through its gracious hosting of this event? List “all the little details” that you saw that likely made a favorable impression? What impressions do you think the participants and observers may have taken back to their own countries?

Jim Brown, Hall of Fame: *“The energy, the spirit, and the TRUTH that’s here is fantastic. I’m very happy to have opportunity to be part of history.”*

2. Lacrosse athletes from around the world entered the US using their national passports. As they entered the borders of the tiny nation of Haudenosaunee, they had to have their passports stamped again. Why? What did this symbolize? Comment on one of the quotations below:

Noah Miller, Team Israel: *I think it’s very important that the Israeli government recognized the Haudenosaunee nation. It’s only natural for us as Jews, who have been strangers in our own land, to help those who have felt shunned. Our culture really knows how it feels to be an outcast. We have not been given the proper rights historically.*

Jimmy Butler, Team USA General Manager: *Sports leads the way on this issue [sovereignty]. It provides a great platform to start the conversation, and as long as conversation is being had, change can be made.*

4. Members of Team Canada were told by their leadership not to have their passports stamped. Any ideas why not? FYI--The Canadians claim to have invented the game of box-lacrosse. They adapted field-lacrosse into the game of box-lacrosse in order that their ice hockey stadiums were being used year round. Canada has two national sports: ice hockey and lacrosse. Canada also has many indigenous groups called First Nations people. What is the relationship between the Canadian government and the First Nations?

5. As part of the event, Team New Zealand performed a Maori *haka* to commemorate the Six Nations’ people. The Maori are Polynesians who settled New Zealand long ago and then were conquered and colonized by Europeans. Chief Lyons presented the New Zealand team a gift of a traditionally handmade wood-and-gut lacrosse stick. What is the larger significance of this exchange?

Chief Lyons: *“It’s important for the human species to recognize itself for what it is, a family. We’re a family. It doesn’t matter what color we are... In order to survive, we have to look out for one another. Circumstances change but fundamental principles never change. Not only to the people, but to all life. You go back to that lacrosse stick—that hickory—representing all the trees around us. All the trees of the world are in that stick, and the gut that makes the net is the deer and now all the animals are represented in that stick. That’s why that stick is so important. That’s our direct relationship to the earth.”*

Nolan: *“Representing your Nation, literally, is sort of like the Olympics for us...It’s really our national sport, so being able to participate in the National’s organization is key to how we see ourselves as a sovereign people...and it transcends to the other 565 [Indian] nations recognized by the federal government. This will push forward native sovereignty--not only in this country, but around the world.”*

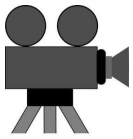
6. At the end of the film, the Canadian team won the world title once again and the Canadian coach had a few words to say about it. Do you see any irony in the Canadian’s coach last words?

✓ After praising the Iroquois Nationals for their skill, he says “they refused to die.”

- ✓ He turns to the camera with this challenge: “I want to tell you something. We heard a lot this week that it’s the Haudenosaunee game...but when it comes to box-lacrosse, the Canadians invented the box-lacrosse game and it’s our game and sometimes people need to speak up for that, too. We’re competitors, as well.”

7. Final Words: Chief Lyons opened the tournament in the name of friendship, healing and world peace. Now he closes them by giving a gift to his Canadian brothers. He gives them an ancient, prized artifact dating back to the time of the Confederacy. It’s a wampum belt referred to as “one dish, one spoon.”

Lyons: *The Confederacy came up with a metaphor “One dish, One Spoon” to help everybody share equally and everybody work together. “This bowl is the world and we each have a spoon. If we can teach 7.3 billion people in the world to share, then this is well worth it....”*



FILMMAKERS’ PURPOSES:

Filmmakers’ Concept: Interview with World Geek

<https://worldfilmgeek.com/2017/05/24/interview-with-peter-spirer-and-peter-baxter-co-directors-of-spirit-game-pride-of-a-nation/>

Filmmakers’ Process: Interview with Borrowing Tape

<https://borrowingtape.com/interviews/spirit-game-pride-of-a-nation-qa-directors-peter-spirer-and-peter-baxter>

1. According to the Borrowing Tape interview with the filmmakers (see article link), this film was first conceived as a sports documentary. After meeting with Chief Oren Lyons and the Onandago people, the film became more complex. Filmmaker, Peter Baxter, reported that one of the things that he learned from making Spirit Game is...

“how hopeless the USA is at recognizing its imperfections and inconvenient history. It loves to... record how well its done but can't deal with how often its "success" is based on the misery and destruction of those around them. The Iroquois remind us, as incredible survivors, the extent that one civilization needs to truly recognize another in acknowledging historical truth and healing in order to progress. For if we can't do that we are lost. I hope Spirit Game can play some part in this type of conversation. I hope it can help support positive change for the Haudenosaunee and show a younger generation how vital knowledge around this subject is for everyone.”

In turning their cameras from the sport to the telling the story of the Native American’ continuous struggle for civil rights, sovereignty and self-determination, what directorial decisions did they make? Which footage communicates the Native American narrative? In your opinion, which footage told this story most convincingly?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING:

OSPI STANDARDS : *Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State*

Middle School Grade Levels

<http://www.k12.wa.us/IndianEd/TribalSovereignty/MiddleSchool.aspx>

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE PEOPLE: aka The Iroquois or Six Nations

- **EXCECELLENT Introductory Resource**, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Guide for Educators:

See pg. 9 --for Hiawatha Belt symbol used for flag

See pg 19--for Territory pre-contact to present

See pgs 4- for ideas about Peace and Democracy

See pg 11—for Lacrosse and other games

<http://nmai.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/HaudenosauneeGuide-2016.pdf>

- **Another good resource** is a website produced by the Confederacy, telling its own story:
<http://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/>

THE GAME OF LACROSSE: History

<https://www.uslacrosse.org/about-the-sport/history>

<http://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/winter10/lacrosse.cfm>

<http://iroquoisnationals.org/the-iroquois/>

George Catlin's paintings of Native Americans, including some playing lacrosse, 1796-1872

<https://www.georgecatlin.org/>

LACROSSE: Origin Myth—The First Game

The first medicine game between the winged animals and the land animals.

<http://iroquoisnationals.org/the-iroquois/the-story-of-lacrosse/>

Picture Book--Great Ball Game, Muskogee

https://www.amazon.com/Great-Ball-Game-Muskogee-1994-09-01/dp/B01FGOOQFM/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506130295&sr=1-2&keywords=the+great+ball+game+a+muskogee+story

Additional myths and legends about lacrosse

<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/winpe.htm>

<http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/ManabozhoPlaysLacrosse-Menomini.html>

LACROSSE—Traditional Stick-Making

<https://reporter.rit.edu/sports/creators-game>

DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

<https://www.thoughtco.com/doctrine-of-discovery-4082479>

http://ili.nativeweb.org/sdrm_art.htm

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/imperial-rivalries/resources/doctrine-discovery-1493>

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS—Educational Resources

NATIVE AMERICANS—Themed unit

American Indian leaders and culture. Study essays, music, maps and images related to the treatment and portrayal of American Indians by European explorers and settlers. Examine treaties dating from 1778-1842 and images and documents relating to assimilating American Indians through education.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/native-americans/>

ASSIMILATION THROUGH EDUCATION—Library of Congress, Primary Resource Set and Teacher's Guide, gr 6-12

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/assimilation/>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/indianschools/>

TREATIES—primary documents

<https://www.loc.gov/search?new=true&q=treaties%20indian>

RESERVATIONS—Lesson Plan, gr 9-12

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/reservation/>

WESTWARD EXPANSION—Presentation with Activities, gr 4-12

Impact of the Lewis and Clark survey on the growth of a nation and on Native Americans

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/lewisandclark/>

NATIVE CIVIL RIGHTS, IDENTITY and SOVERIGNTY—The Future

Video Lectures--Various Native Scholars—EXCELLENT preparation for teachers

https://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=7118

NATIONAL ARCHIVES—Compendium of Resources on Native America

<https://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/native-americans.html>

