

Educator Guide

Jingle Dancer

By Cynthia Leitich Smith

Illustrated by
Cornelius Van Wright
and Ying-Hwa Hu



About the Book

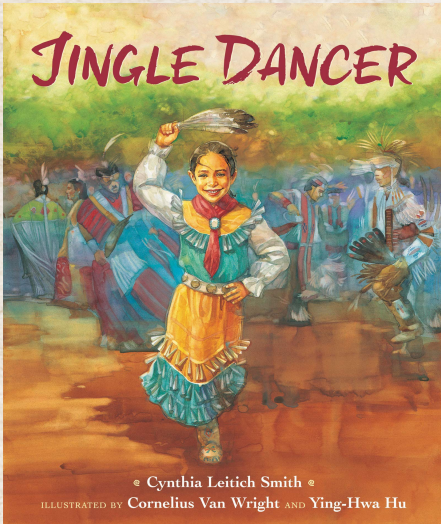
Jenna (Muscogee) wants to dance in the next powwow but doesn't have regalia that sings with her movements. Grandma Wolfe explains how rows of jingles make the noise, but there is not enough time to buy tins for rolling to finish a dress. Nature sets the stage for the day when Jenna borrows jingles from her auntie, neighbor, cousin, and grandmother. She reciprocates by dancing for them at the powwow. This story incorporates important Native symbols and traditions, as well as kinship and community.

Cynthia Leitich Smith

Cynthia Leitich Smith is a bestselling, acclaimed author of books for young readers, including *SISTERS OF THE NEVERSEA*, *RAIN IS NOT MY INDIAN NAME*, *INDIAN SHOES*, *JINGLE DANCER*, and *HEARTS UNBROKEN*, which won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award in YA fiction. She also was named the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate and is the anthology editor of *ANCESTOR APPROVED: INTERTRIBAL STORIES FOR KIDS*. Cynthia is the author-curator of *Heartdrum*, a Native-focused imprint of HarperChildren's. She is a citizen of the Muscogee Nation and lives in Austin, Texas.

About the Illustrators

Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu are a husband and wife team that illustrates and writes children's books and publications. Though they both have illustrated numerous projects and books individually, they have also worked on many assignments together. Their work has appeared on "Reading Rainbow" and "Storytime," and has been exhibited with the Society of Illustrators and at The Bologna Art Show. They make school visits and hold workshops for students, teachers and librarians. Most importantly, they're always looking for new ways to bring stories and adventure to life for kids through the magic of pictures. They are based in New York City.



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Discussion Questions

1. While previewing the book, what pictures are forming in your mind when you look at the front and back cover? How do the pictures in your mind change as you flip through the rest of the illustrations?

2. The author introduces the main character, setting, and conflict within the first pages of a picture book. In *JINGLE DANCER*, the author begins with, *"Tink, tink, tink, tink, sang cone shaped jingles sewn to Grandma Wolfe's dress. Every Grandma bounce-step brought clattering tinks as light blurred silver against jingles of tin."*

Jenna daydreamed at the kitchen table, tasting honey on fry bread, her heart beating to the brum, brum, brum, brum of the powwow drum." What do you find out about the main character? Where is she? What do you think she's daydreaming about?

3. The author embedded Native cultural details in this story. On the first page, Jenna is *"tasting fry bread"* and *"her heart is beating to the brum, brum, brum, brum of the powwow drum."* Identify two parts of the story that include Native cultures. (hint: use the information in the author's note for help.)

4. Authors use different transition strategies to lead from one part of the story into another. Re-read the beginning sentences of each page to see how Cynthia Leitich Smith used nature and strong verbs to lead the reader from place to place. Choose one transition you liked the best and be ready to share why it stands out.

5. The main character is an active participant in the story. Jenna has a goal—what is it? And she solves her own problem—how did she do that? Family members assist Jenna in crafting a jingle dress. What else does she do to prepare for the powwow?

6. Each time Jenna arrives at the next family member's home, she asks to borrow enough jingles to make a row but does not want to take so many that a dress *"would lose its voice."* What do you think that means? How can you connect this act to your own life?

7. Grandmother Wolfe and Jenna complete her regalia in time for the powwow. How does Jenna honor all the family members who helped her?





Discussion Questions

8. In the author's note, Cynthia Leitich Smith explains that "a new dancer is a cause for joy and honored by family members." Describe something your family celebrates joyfully and honors young people for striving for and accomplishing the first time.

Curriculum Connections

Literacy (previewing to build background knowledge, visualizing using illustrations, predicting, goal/problem/resolution, interpretation, vocabulary like regalia and powwow), Native cultures (Muscogee, Ojibwe, relationship with nature, nature as a character, oral storytelling, Four Directions, foods like fry bread and Indian tacos, regalia, kinship, generosity, honor, reciprocity, characters as role models for Native students), writing (transitions, sensory details, dialogue, author's note provides supporting facts).



About the Guide

Written by author-educator Andrea Page (Lakota - Standing Rock). Andrea is Co-President of the Rochester Area Children's Writers and Illustrators (RACWI) group and a member of SCBWI. Andrea lives with her husband in Rochester, NY. Visit www.WriterAndreaPage.com.

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