

## What Is Needed to Hoop Dance?



### The Hoop

Hoop dancers usually make their own hoops so that they know they will be proportional to their body. Proportional means the hoops match the size of the dancer. Dancers used to make hoops by leaving willow branches in water until they got soft and easy to bend. Now, many dancers make their hoops out of plastic tubing. Dancers can also personalize their hoops by decorating them. Many dancers decorate their hoops with red, yellow, black, and white, because these are sacred colors. Some dancers use only a few hoops while others use up to 21 hoops at a time.

### The Regalia

“Regalia” (*said "re-GAIL-yah"*) is the word used to mean the outfit that the hoop dancer wears. We never refer to this outfit as a costume, because people wear costumes when they are dressing like someone else, but the hoop dancer wears the regalia as a way to express themselves and their story. The hoop dancers personalize their regalia, just like their hoops. It is usually brightly colored and may have a loin cloth, a head band, leggings, beads, and a ribbon shirt.

## What Does the Hoop Symbolize?



The hoop is a sacred symbol for Native Americans and is called the circle of life which has no beginning and no end. We see the hoop all around us in nature. The moon, sun, and stars, seem to be circles in the sky. Originally, the natives only used four hoops which represented the directions, North, South, East, West, and four colors red, yellow, black, and white. The four colors represent the people of the world coming from the four directions. As they come together, they form a sphere using four hoops and that represents the world. Like the four seasons--spring, summer, fall, and winter, the hoop is continuous. In a circle, no one is ahead, or behind; everyone is equal. That is what the hoop dancer wants for their community and for the world. The Hoop Dance is done as a healing dance.

## Who Does the Hoop Dance?



Hoop Dancing is done by Native Americans from many different tribal nations across North America. In the World Championship Hoop Dance Competition, dancers compete in only one category, so the men compete against the women. In all other pow wow dances there is a men's category and a women's category. It used to be that only men performed the Hoop Dance, but women Hoop Dance now too. In 1997, Ginger Sykes, from the Navajo Nation, became the first female Hoop Dance World Champion in the teen division. There is even a competition now held just for women at *This is the Place Heritage Park* in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Those who learn to Hoop Dance must use the proper materials and carefully learn the dance steps. They must also show respect for the dance itself as well as for those they are learning from. Hoop Dancing isn't taught in a class or studio, like ballet or tap dance. Instead, it is passed down from older, more experienced dancers to younger ones. Those teaching others to Hoop Dance are often family members. Just like any other traditional dance, even young children can learn Hoop Dancing and participate in competitions.

## What is the History of the Hoop Dance?



There are over 500 different Native American tribes across the United States. For most of their history there was no formal written language to document or share their information, except for the Cherokees. One of the purposes of Native American song and dance is to document and pass on culture and heritage from one generation to another. No one really knows how long Hoop Dancing has been around, but we can guess that it has been practiced by Native Americans for a few hundred years. It was first done as a sacred ceremonial healing dance, thought to begin with the Taos (rhymes with house) Pueblo (PWEH-blow).

Less than 100 years ago, in the 1930s, the Hoop Dance was performed for entertainment instead of ceremony for the first time by a man named Tony White Cloud, who was a Jemez [HAY-mus] Pueblo. He became known as the founder of the modern Hoop Dance. In the 1990s, a group of Native Americans in New Mexico started hosting Hoop Dance competitions. These competitions were moved to the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona the second year. Now there is a large competition held every year where dancers try to win the title of "World Champion Hoop Dancer." There are four categories: Senior, Adult, Teen, and Youth. Even though the Hoop Dance is now performed publicly and in competitions, it is still a sacred dance of healing. When a Hoop Dancer performs, they are giving a special gift to those watching by sharing their dance and the healing power that comes with it.



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**Level of texts:**

What Is Needed to Hoop Dance?

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