



ISSUE | NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

# BUILDING BRIDGES

Building Bridges to Diversity and Equity Resources & Events



Native American History Month Quote ~ Tribal Winter Stories ~ Indigenous Current Events ~ Native American Films ~ Holidays Around the World



*"Humans are vulnerable and rely on the kindnesses of the earth and the sun; we exist together in a sacred field of meaning." - Joy Harjo*

The month of November celebrates Native American History Month. To observe this historic event, the newsletter will explore current events within the Indigenous community, share two winter stories from different Native tribes, provide a list of films from Indigenous film makers, and detail international holidays that take place during the months of November and December.

Happy holidays everyone!



# TRIBAL WINTER STORIES

Native American tradition reserves winter months for storytelling, given people are busy tending to the land and hunting food during the other seasons. Both stories are told by Joe Bruchac, a renowned writer and storyteller of the Nulhegan Abenaki tribe. The first story details the origins of the rabbit.

**BRUCHAC:** A long time ago they say rabbit was one of the fastest runners in the forest, and also had a long beautiful tail. But rabbit loved one thing more than anything else. He loved to run around and play in the snow. Now this particular day, the snow had not fallen, and rabbit was disappointed but then he got an idea. His grandmother had told him

**RABBIT'S GRANDMOTHER:** "Rabbit, sometimes if you want to make something happen, if you sing a song and dance, it will happen for you"

**BRUCHAC:** And rabbit thought that was a good idea. So he made up a little song and began to dance in a circle singing

**RABBIT:** "If only it would snow, if only it would snow, then I could run around and play if only it would snow."

**BRUCHAC:** And sure enough, snow began to fall. And before long, there was enough snow that he could see his footprints going in a big circle, and he was very pleased. But then he thought to himself,

**RABBIT:** "If a little snow is good, more snow would be better".

**BRUCHAC:** And so once again, he began to sing and dance in a circle

**RABBIT:** "if only it would snow, if only it would snow, then I could run around and play, if only it would snow"

**BRUCHAC:** And indeed, more snow fell, it began to fall even harder with bigger flakes, and soon the whole ground was covered deep in snow. But as rabbit looked around, he said to himself, "

**RABBIT:** "If a little more snow is better, then a lot more snow would be even better still".

**BRUCHAC:** And so once again, he began to sing and dance in a circle

**RABBIT:** "If only it would snow, if only it would snow, then I could run around and play, if only it would snow"

**BRUCHAC:** And now huge snowflakes the size of feathers began to fall from the ground. The snow covered up the bushes, but rabbit kept singing. The snow covered up the bottoms of the trees, but rabbit still kept singing. He looked around and said,

**RABBIT:** "Hmm, if a lot more snow is good, then even more snow would be even better!"

**BRUCHAC:** And he began again to sing and dance

**RABBIT:** "If only it would snow, if only it would snow, then I could run around and play if only it would snow"

**BRUCHAC:** And now the smaller trees were covered, and soon the bigger trees were covered and finally every tree in the forest was covered with snow. In fact, all you could see sticking up from the top of that snow was the top of the very tallest tree. And that is when rabbit decided he'd done enough. In fact, he was feeling a little tired. He looked around and he said

**RABBIT:** "Oh, I did a really good job, there is snow everywhere but now I think I should go home and and take a nap and oh, my home".

**BRUCHAC:** Indeed, where was rabbit's home? It was buried deep under all that snow and he was feeling really tired. But when he looked around, what did he see at the top of that one tallest tree? The fork of that tree sticking up above the snow, and he climbed into that fork of that tree, curled up, wrapped his long, beautiful tail around himself and fell asleep. He slept for a long time. In fact, this was the time of year when the snow begins to disappear. And the sun as it shone down did just that. It began to melt the snow away, down from the tops of the trees down from the middle of the trees down below the bushes and soon all the snow was gone, and rabbit was still asleep in the top of that tree. Before long ago, he woke up, stretched and said,

**RABBIT:** "Oh, that was really good but now Oh, Oh"

**BRUCHAC:** He looked around and realized he was in the top of a tree and back then, even as now, rabbits do not know how to climb up trees or climb down. He was stuck up there and unsure about what to do next. He thought:

**RABBIT:** "Maybe I could sing and dance in a circle but not in this small space".

**BRUCHAC:** He could not make it snow again with his song and his dance. What could he do? He leaned, leaned, leaned further looking down toward the base of that tree and down there he saw a little green plant growing that looked delicious. Rabbits like to eat green plants and he thought,

**RABBIT:** "Oh, I'm so hungry if only I could reach that plant found there".

**BRUCHAC:** He leaned a little further. In fact, he leaned too far, and began to fall. And as he fell, he bounced off one branch, then another branch, and each time he bounced off a branch, a little piece of his tail came free and stuck there. And when he hit the ground, he hit so hard, his front legs got all pushed in, so that now instead of running swiftly, he had to hop and when he looked up in the tree, and saw all those pieces of his tail, and then look back at himself, all he had left was a little round tail where once that long beautiful tail had been. And so it is to this day, that rabbit has a short tail. Indeed, in the springtime, if you look up into certain trees, some say the pussy willows, others say the cottonwood trees you can see those fluffs left from rabbits tail stuck up there when long ago, rabbit made it snow more than he needed to. And that is how that tail like rabbits ends.

Information retrieved from: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2017/12/20/american-indian-winter-solstice/>



# TRIBAL STORIES CONT

This next story reminds us that children must be taken care of.

**BRUCHAC:** It is said that not that long ago, a mother and a father were out walking in the woods with their little daughter, who was only about perhaps four winters old. We reckon age in terms of winters because if you've lived through a winter, you've lived through a year. And as they walked along, I'm sad to say that mother and that father were arguing with each other. And as they argued over nothing consequential. Their little daughter noticed something. This particular tree she was looking at was really nice looking. She walked over to that tree and she felt how smooth the bark was. She thought, What a lovely tree then she turned around and said, "Mother, Father, look at this, Ooh". They were nowhere to be seen. They were arguing so hard with each other they had kept walking, leaving her behind. In fact, they kept arguing all the way back to their village. And when they got there, the husband said, "my wife, where's our daughter"? And the wife said, "my husband, I thought you were watching her", and they realized she'd been left behind. And just then, it began to snow. And just then the sun began to go down in the sky. They ran back along the trail but the snow was falling so fast they lost sight of the trail itself. They could not find their daughter, they hurried back to the village. They told everyone what had happened. And you know, one child is everyone's child in a village, and everyone in the village came out to help. They lit torches, they walked through the forest, long, long and long but they did not find that little girl. They were sure that she had not survived, for by now the snow was very deep. But the next day when the sun rose, one man who was a very good hunter had not given up, he kept walking along, and then he saw something. What he saw was the base of a hill covered with snow, and from the base of that hill through a little hole in the snow, steam was rising up. He thought he knew what it was. He went, he looked down through that hole in the snow and what he saw was just what he'd expected. It was a mother bear, her breath melted the snow and rose up through that hole as it always does in the winter time. But what he saw, in addition to those cubs made him smile broad, for there was that little girl curled up next to those cubs, warm and safe. He reached down carefully lifted her out and took her home to her parents. Ever since then, we often say when we remember that story that parents should take as good care of their children, as does a mother bear.

Stories retrieved from: <https://www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?programID=19-P13-00051&segmentID=3>

## INDIGENOUS CURRENT EVENTS



- Law makers plea to rescind medals won during the massacre at wounded knee.
- The University of California Hastings College of the Law moves to change the school name, seeing that its currently named after the man who funded the killing of Native Americans.
- California teacher on leave after mimicking Native American dance in front of class.
- The American Indian College Fund offers scholarships for Indigenous students and hopes to reach equitable enrollment rates.
- Male Native American kindergarten student punished with in-school suspension for having long hair.
- Marjorie Tallchief, a famous Native American prima ballerina, died on November 30th, at age 95.
- The first Native American restaurant in Northern California opens: Wahpepah's Kitchen in Oakland, CA.

Headlines retrieved from:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/03/us/politics/rescind-medals-wounded-knee-massacre.html>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/06/us/uc-hastings-law-name-change-trnd/index.html>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/21/us/california-riverside-teacher-video-native-american/index.html>
- <https://www.9news.com/article/news/education/denver-organization-increase-native-american-college-student-enrollment-nationwide/73-f5e1e995-f6b8-4c12-b3f1-6d632f782e74>
- <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/native-american-kindergarten-student-punished-for-having-long-hair>
- <https://www.kjrh.com/news/local-news/marjorie-tallchief-famous-native-american-prima-ballerina-dies>
- <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/first-native-american-restaurant-in-northern-california-opens-wahpepah-s-kitchen-in-oakland-ca>

# Native American Films

~“Merata How Mum Decolonized the Screen” (2018) By Heperi Mita

~“Sweetheart Dancers” (2019) – By Ben-Alex Dupris (Miniconjou Lakota)

~“Halpate” (2020) by co-directors Adam Piron and Adam Khalil

~“Brother, I Cry”(2020)

Directed by Jessie Anthony

~“The Corruption of Divine Providence” (2020)

Directed by Jeremy Torrie

~“Run Woman Run” (2020)

Directed by Zoe Hopkins

~“Sooyii” (Creatures) (2020)

Directed by Krisztian Kery

~“Indian Road Trip” (2020)

Directed by A.W. Hopkins

~“Portraits from a Fire” (2021)

Directed by Trevor Mack

~“Kímmapiiyipitssini: The Meaning of Empathy” (2021)

Directed by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers

~“Savage Land” (2021)

Directed by Campbell Dalglish & Dr. Henrietta Mann

~“Spirit to Soar” (2021)

Directed by Tanya Talaga, Michelle DeRosier

# Holidays Around the World

## All Saints Day: November 1st

The Christian holiday of All Saint's Day honors and recognizes all of the saints of the Christian church, many of which were martyrs. The church sets this day aside to celebrate over 10,000 recognized saints. Historically, All Saints Day was known as Hallow-mas.

## November 25th: Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving was celebrated between the Pilgrims and the Indians in 1621. That first feast was a three day affair. Like then, we celebrate with a huge feast. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the U.S. Congress made it a national holiday, and set the date for Thanksgiving Day as the fourth Thursday in November.

## Hannukah: November 28th–December 6th.

The Festival of Lights, (also called Chanukah) celebrates victory from Greek religious persecution. The Jewish victory was led by the Maccabees in the year 167 B.C. Upon returning to the temple to rededicate it and relight the Menorah, the Maccabees found only one small flask of oil, enough to light the Menorah for just one day. However, the flask of oil lasted eight days, Hence the celebration lasts eight days. This is also why it is called the Festival of Lights.

## Santa Lucia: December 13th

Lucia's Day, festival of lights celebrated in Sweden, Norway, and the Swedish-speaking areas of Finland on December 13 in honor of St. Lucia (St. Lucy). One of the earliest Christian martyrs, St.

## Yule: December 21st

Yule is a festival historically observed by the Germanic peoples. It is celebrated for twelve days, starting on the Winter Solstice. During the twelve days of Yule, crops are harvested to make a meal, trees are decorated with pinecones, foliage, and candles and gifts are exchanged with love ones.

## Festivus: December 23rd

Festivus is a secular holiday celebrated on December 23 as an alternative to the pressures and commercialism of the Christmas season.

## Christmas Eve: December 24th

Christmas Eve is the evening or entire day before Christmas Day, the festival commemorating the birth of Jesus. Christmas Day is observed around the world, and Christmas Eve is widely observed as a full or partial holiday in anticipation of Christmas Day.

## Christmas Day: December 25th

Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed primarily on December 25 as a religious and cultural celebration among billions of people around the world.

## Kwanzaa: December 26th–January 1st

Kwanzaa is a secular festival observed by many African Americans from December 26 to January 1 as a celebration of their cultural heritage and traditional values.

## New Year's Eve: December 31st

In the Gregorian calendar, New Year's Eve, the last day of the year, is on 31 December. In many countries, New Year's Eve is celebrated at evening parties, where many people dance, eat, drink, and watch or light fireworks. Some Christians attend a watch night service.

# **GET INVOLVED!**

## **SUBMIT TO THE NEWSLETTER**

**You can submit poems, short stories, experiences etc.  
to the Building Bridges Newsletter by emailing Kya  
Simmons at [simmonsk@olwestbury.edu](mailto:simmonsk@olwestbury.edu)**

## **STAY CONNECTED**

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**Facebook.com/[sunyowcsli](https://www.facebook.com/sunyowcsli)**

**Download the Panther Connect App**

## **SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS:**

**Mellisa Watson**