



Beaver C'Bearing and his fellow Chiefs want to bring the high school state basketball championship trophy back to Wind River Indian Reservation and make their people proud. But while struggling through his senior year, he is forced to re-evaluate the importance of basketball. Following two years in the lives of Beaver and his teammates, the film explores what it means to grow up Native American at the turn of the 21st century.

# CHIEFS

(90 min. documentary) by Daniel Junge and Donna Dewey

“Some days, it’s a good day to die.  
Some days, it’s a good day to play basketball.”

— Victor Joseph in *The Lone Ranger* and Tonto  
Fistfight in Heaven, by *Sherman Alexie*

## Little Brother of War, song by Julian B. Watson

My Brothers and Sisters  
They Wanna be like a Red Mike  
I can sit in the bleachers  
And watch the Spirits play along side  
Momma told me to show ‘em how  
She could see what the announcers could not  
My people play for the elders  
We must play for the Medicine given

Rebirth of a Nation  
Rebirth of Tradition  
Rebirth of Communities  
Reclaim our Families

After the Invasion  
Many wondered how?  
How could these (savages)  
Make Little Brother of War  
Look so Good?

Grandfather, Creator  
Gave us this so our people could live  
We sing the songs to our souls  
Prepare ourselves for Connection Old

Rebirth of a Nation  
Rebirth of Tradition  
Rebirth of Communities  
Reclaim our Families

— *Native Peoples Magazine, Spring 1997*

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## Introduction

Basketball is like a religion in some communities. Michael Jordan, Shaquille O’Neal, and Dennis Rodman are all household names, their posters plastered on the walls of many a young man’s bedroom. And why not? Who doesn’t long to shoot the perfect outside shot? Who wouldn’t want to reap the economic rewards and to revel in all of fame’s promises? For many youth across the country, pride in accomplishment is sorely needed. Parents and community members are singing the chorus in the stands, shouting encouragement for every point, anointing their team’s chosen ones with affection and support.

In the film CHIEFS, young men play ball and the community rallies around them. The young men work hard and they struggle, but what are they grasping for? Probably the same thing most men desire and need as they journey through life—spiritual connection, pride in accomplishment, strong male role models, a sense of fulfilling roles and responsibilities, a sense of connection in an increasingly unconnected world. They want to be warriors. They want to be Chiefs.

## About this Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is intended to serve as a tool for creating a constructive dialogue among diverse members of a community, a family, a classroom, or any special group who wants to look into the film a little deeper.

The guide provides a sense of what the filmmakers were after in making this film and it shares what they learned from making CHIEFS. It provides many ideas for talking about the film, from capturing a group’s feelings and reflections immediately after the first viewing to moderating a deeper discussion circle using the questions posed here. We have included a reading bibliography that individuals or teachers may find helpful to link with class assignments.

There is also a resource section of organizations that serve Native youth, promote dialogue across racial and ethnic difference, or work to improve the quality of our communities. We hope you can find ways to link with these organizations to develop public forums around issues raised in CHIEFS.

We want to know how you are using the guide so we have included an evaluation form at the end. Your insights about this guide will help us sort through ways to be of service as we continue to share native stories and develop community voices.





# CHIEFS

## Filmmakers hopes and dreams for CHIEFS:

### Daniel Junge:

I hope CHIEFS is seen by the largest contingent of young Native Americans possible, obviously. But, as a person who grew up in Wyoming, I hope the film also reaches non-Indian communities near reservations, as there are still a great deal of misunderstandings between the two cultures which perhaps the film could help to bridge. I hope that some (Native people) are encouraged by seeing people on the TV screen facing the same obstacles and choices they too encounter. Also I hope they consider what is important in terms of achieving balance, self-awareness, and defining success. Finally (and this goes for all those young rez ballers) I hope they know that there is life after basketball, and that choices they make now will affect that not-so-distant future.

### Donna Dewey:

We are so pleased that CHIEFS will be broadcast nationally on the PBS series, *Independent Lens*, because this will reach a very wide mainstream audience that has little knowledge of life on the rez. We hope that CHIEFS will inspire and inform people everywhere, but especially young Native Americans. We hope that the message of Beaver's story—that is, growing up to learn you can turn defeat into self knowledge—will be an inspiration to other young men. Not to be too preachy, but the lessons imparted by the two teams [are that] the first year's players, flush with talent, were brought down by hubris, whereas the second year's players were committed to teamwork and discipline, and walked away with a championship.

### *What did you learn in the process of making the film that you feel is important to share with others?*

### Daniel Junge:

I came to the reservation, perhaps naively, with an eye for *DIFFERENCE*. My attention was focused on the specifics of this culture, what made them different. In time, what I came away with was a sense of our shared humanity. Those moms wanted the same for their kids as any in the world. Those players experienced the same hopes and dreams felt around the world, and the same problems and choices (with a few additional ones thrown in by "rez life") we all felt at that time in our lives.

### Donna Dewey:

I expected some of the stereotypical situations on the rez...poverty, hopelessness, and loss. Instead, I was struck by the warmth of extended families, the sense of humor, and the unending hospitality for complete strangers. I was intrigued by the cultural differences, envious of the sense of place and tradition, and amazed by our similarities.

## Planning Primer

Before you read through this guide, you may want to consider how you may end up using it. Please allow yourself to think through these questions to plan something special. The questions below are designed to help you with your planning.

- 01 Describe your community's ideal event for the film CHIEFS.
- 02 Who would you want to partner with?
- 03 How can you engage and involve youth in these activities?
- 04 What kind of budget would you need? Equipment? Food? Where will you have the event or activities?
- 05 How are you including diverse members of your community? How? Who might you be overlooking? (The team bus driver: the coach, the non-athlete, etc.?)
- 06 How will you ensure that you have fun?
- 07 How will you judge the success of the event? Who will be involved in evaluating? How will it be carried out?

## Conducting a successful film & forum experience

While each film and each audience presents unique opportunities for discussions and actions, here are some general strategies for using film or video in your classroom, organization or community, as well as specific guidelines and questions for your consideration. These suggestions are meant to help moderators and conveners prepare, reflect and lead community or classroom discussions.



### Guidelines for the discussion:

It is important to ensure the discussion is moderated in a neutral way. Be sure to get a respected facilitator who is able to make sure that all voices are heard. Feel free to use these guidelines as a starting point:

- Moderator serves as a neutral guide.
- Weigh your words before speaking.
- Listen to each other attentively and respectfully.
- Speak from the heart.
- Focus on the topic/question at hand.
- Respect one another in speaking.
- Silence is respected but "courage is encouraged"
- Consider your ancestors, future relatives, and those not present.

## Prepare, Reflect, Discuss

### Before showing the film: PREPARE

- Preview the film yourself before showing it to your group. What do you think of it? Why is it important? How can it be useful to a group?
- Be clear about the purpose of showing the film to your group. Make it clear what you hope will come from watching it and talking about it together.
- Films often produce strong emotional reactions in the audience. Be prepared to embrace and discuss these.
- Prepare a plan for showing and discussing the film.
- Introduce the subject matter. If you have time, consider a preview activity such as having the group pair up in twos or threes to share their knowledge of the subject matter prior to watching, or to give them a chance to meet someone in the audience who they may not know.

### Before talking: REFLECT

After screening the film, allow a few minutes for quiet reflection, and then ask for general reactions to or things viewers appreciate about the film. This is often most effective to conduct in a circle fashion to give each person a chance to speak.

## General Film Discussion Questions

To prepare to lead a discussion it would be very useful for the moderator to answer these questions below before asking them of the group. These questions are great discussion starters to ask before you get into the specifics.

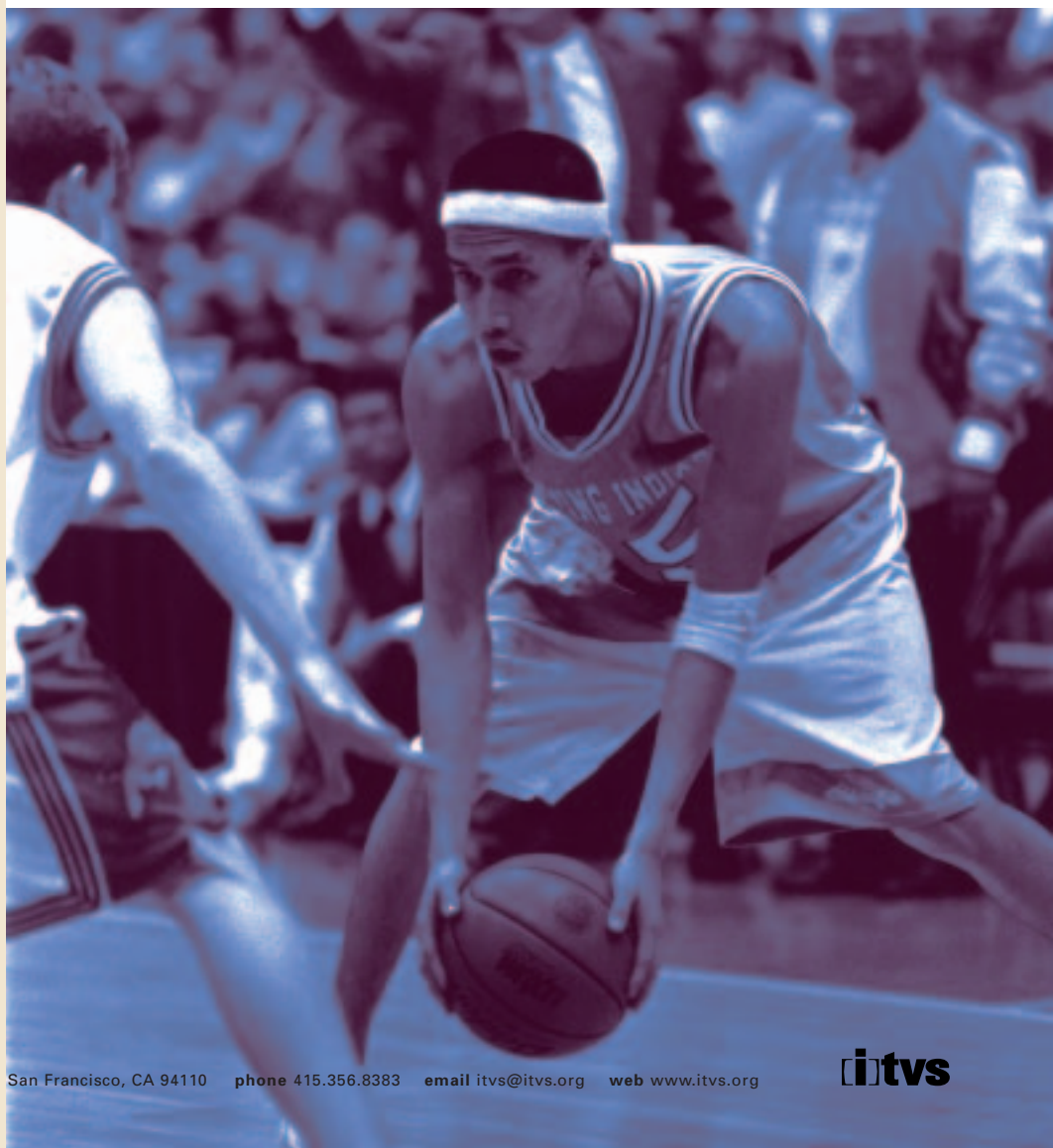
- What feelings were evoked in you while watching the film?
- What image(s) and statement(s) have stuck in your memory and why?
- What parts of the film were unclear?
- How do you feel about the characters/people/places in the film?
- How does the film connect with your own life?
- Can you imagine how others might react to this film?
- What issues does this film raise for you? Can you see some common themes in the film?

### Point of View:

Each of us has a unique way of seeing. It is important when we discuss issues or view films that we recognize our individual vantage points and our limitations in seeing the fullest possible picture.

Point of view can shape the questions we might consider together. For instance, some questions that may allow us to address diverse perspectives include: Can you imagine how Native filmmakers might approach this subject matter differently? What considerations should we keep in mind when "outsiders" come into a community to film, document or write? What do they bring? What risks must a community take in opening up to them?

Some folks are more comfortable with their questions being served up very directly; others prefer a broad stroke inquiry. You may want to pose some questions differently in order to get at specific concerns. For example, in addition to the question "Which of the scenes in the film disturbed you the most?" you might ask: "How would you describe the connection between Beaver and his classmate's use of drugs and their fates on and off the court?"





## Engaging Youth in the Conversation

- Sponsor a writing contest: “What basketball means to me” with area youth. Create a youth-led series of forums, with both male and female discussion leaders.
- Play ball: Organize a community basketball game with youth and adults teaming up together. Talk about what that’s like.
- Run a sensory program allowing youth the chance to describe what it feels like, smells like, looks like, sounds like, and tastes like to be a champion in sports.

## Focused Discussion Questions

### Racism and history

- While the filmmaker is interviewing local tribal people on whether or not the Chiefs will make it to State, an elder women makes the statement “They’ll make it again....*if* they don’t get cheated.” What did she mean by that statement ?
- What obstacles do the Chiefs face that off-reservation teams don’t?
- Why do you think the assistant coach, Owen St.Claire, makes the following comment: “Every place we play is a non-Indian place. No matter where we go, we’re going to encounter racism somehow.”
- Many of the players, including Beaver C’Bearing, express that they want to “get off the Rez.” Why is it that the players want to leave the reservation after they graduate high school?
- Give some reasons why you think it is difficult for reservation high school graduates to “make it” in off-reservation colleges and universities?

### Expectations and Success

- How do their traditional tribal cultural practices and ways play into the lives of the Chiefs’ players and coaches?
- What are some of the differences between the two Chiefs teams? How did these differences affect the outcome of their seasons?
- How does family support play into the lives of the players? What family support do you find in common with the Chiefs players?
- How do the Chiefs prepare for their games? How does this compare to your experiences? How is it different?

### Passions and Concerns

- Of all the characters in the film, with whom do you most identify? Whom do you feel the most different from?
- Which of the scenes in the film disturbed you the most?
- Which scenes in the film left you with a sense of pride?
- Why do the Native American adults portrayed in the film fear for the future of their youth? What do they fear?

## Coming to your senses.

Paying attention to the natural world through our senses is a gift we seldom use in our everyday lives. The following questions are formed with the intention of engaging youth to use their senses. This circle exercise will help youth reflect on shared experiences that they can express after watching CHIEFS.

### Gather youth in a talking circle. Make it clear that youth will talk one at a time.

The facilitator should begin by setting the stage and encouraging the participants to open up their senses: think about the gym, the sounds, the excitement, the murals on the walls, the smell of the popcorn, the sound of the school band playing your school song, or the local drum group performing the National Anthem. Put yourself in that space before beginning your discussion. Here are some questions to consider while your senses are open:

In the film CHIEFS, you can see and hear the crowd cheering for the players at the games. What do you think that felt like for the players? for yourself as a player? as an observer? Recall a time in your life when your community cheered you on, shook your hand, and supported you as an individual. Describe it.

In the film several players came back to the gym to watch a game or to play independent ball. They seemed drawn to their “old haunt.” Speaking from your heart, how do you see this play out in your community?



## Bibliography

*Counting Coup: A True Story of Basketball and Honor on the Little Big Horn*, Larry Colton, Warner Books, New York, 2000.

*Falling From Grace: Can Pro Basketball be Saved?*, Terry Pluto, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1995.

*Hoop Dreams: A True Story of Hardship and Triumph*, Ben Joravsky, Turner Publishing Inc., Atlanta, 1995.

*Hoop Roots: Basketball, Race, and Love*, John Edgar Wideman, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 2001.

*Keepin' It Real: A Turbulent Season at the Crossroads with the NBA*, Larry Platt, Avon Books, Inc., New York, 1999.

*The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams*, Darcy Frey, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1994.

*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Sherman Alexie, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.

*To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools*, John Bloom, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

*Sports, Abuse and Our Children: And What We Adults Must Do About It*, Peter S. Pierro, Peregrine Press, Oklahoma City, 2000.

## Resource Organizations

The following organizations serve Native youth, promote dialogue across racial and ethnic difference, or are working to improve the quality of our communities. We encourage you to discover ways to link with these organizations in screening CHIEFS.

### Center For Restorative Justice and Peacemaking

Dr. Mark Umbreit  
Phone: (612) 624-4923  
rjp@tlcmail.che.umn.edu  
<http://ssw.che.umn.edu/rjp>

**Indigenous Issues Forums**,  
a Program of Rural Alliance Inc.  
Lily Mendoza and Ruth Yellow Hawk,  
Phone: (605) 574-2165  
kfyellowhk@aol.com  
lmarlai@rap.midco.net

**MCC U.S. Peace & Justice Ministries**  
Iris deLeon-Hartshorn, Director  
Phone: (717) 859-1151  
peace&justice@mccus.org  
[www.mcc.org/us](http://www.mcc.org/us)

**Native American Sports Council**  
Maurice "Mo" Smith, Executive Director  
Phone: (719) 632-5282  
[www.nascsports.org](http://www.nascsports.org)

### Youth (R)

Lauren Finkelstein  
Phone: (703) 550-2123  
info@indianyouth.org  
[www.indianyouth.org](http://www.indianyouth.org)

### Standing Tall Tennis

David Dantzer  
Phone: (805) 937-0213  
stt@pronet.net

### United National Indian Tribal Youth, Inc. (UNITY)

J.R. Cook  
Phone (405) 236-2800  
unity@unityinc.org  
[www.unityinc.org](http://www.unityinc.org)

### USTA/Northern Section Multicultural Tennis Program

Tony Stingley  
Phone: (800) 536-6982 ext. 19  
stingley@northern.usta.com

Running Strong for American Indian



## Evaluation

Thank you for your time in reading through the CHIEFS guide, and in sharing what you are learning. Your feedback will help all of us as we continue to make community connections.

- 01 Tell us who you are, and how you came to hold this guide in your hands.
- 02 Please let us know how you used this guide in planning or conducting activities around CHIEFS.
- 03 Please describe the specifics of your event. Who came, how did they engage, what happened?
- 04 What was your best mistake? (The one you won't do again!) Share what you learned.
- 05 How was this guide useful to you? What would make this guide more useful?

### Please return evaluation forms electronically to:

Ruth Yellow Hawk, [kfyellowhk@aol.com](mailto:kfyellowhk@aol.com)

or Jim Sommers, [jim\\_sommers@itvs.org](mailto:jim_sommers@itvs.org)

Online evaluation forms are available at [www.itvs.org/outreach](http://www.itvs.org/outreach)

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To purchase a tape: Dewey-Obenchian Films: 303-722-6065 or [ddewey@rmi.net](mailto:ddewey@rmi.net)

An *Independent Lens* premiere, April 1, 2003 at 10:00 PM on PBS.

Check local listings at [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org).

For additional resources and story updates, check out the website at [www.pbs.org/chiefs](http://www.pbs.org/chiefs).

For more information about ITVS's Community Connections Project, contact Jim Sommers, National Outreach Manager, 415-356-8383 ext 242, [jim\\_sommers@itvs.org](mailto:jim_sommers@itvs.org), [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org)

This discussion guide was prepared for ITVS by the Indigenous Issues Forums (IIF), a program of Rural Alliance Inc.: Nora Antoine, Harley Eagle, Lily Mendoza and Ruth Yellow Hawk. For skill development in moderating discussions, preparing non-partisan discussion guides and curriculum, and learning more about tribal issues: Indigenous Issues Forums, Co-Directors Ruth Yellow Hawk & Lily Mendoza, 605-574-2165, [kfyellowhk@aol.com](mailto:kfyellowhk@aol.com). Edited by Eric Martin and Jim Sommers, ITVS.

