stages theatre company

OUR STAGE, YOUR STORIES

2026-27 SEASON

RESOURCE GUIDE

BOWWOW POWWOW

SEPTEMBER 16-27, 2026

Adapted by Benay McNamara and Blossom Johnson
From the book by Brenda Child, Bowwow Powwow © 2018
Illustrations by Jonathan Thunder
Translation by Gordon Jourdain
Music by Bizhiki and Keith Secola
In collaboration with Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble
Directed by Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha

Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble is a newly formed theater company that brings together three active, accomplished Native theatre professionals Adrienne Zimiga-January (Oglala Lakota), Sequoia Hauck (White Earth Anishinaabe/Hupa), and Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota) working in a collaborative leadership model that honors the circle of our communities. The company celebrates the stories specificity in Mni Sota Makoce while making our productions accessible and nurturing to Native audiences in the Twin Cities and throughout Indian country in the midwest region. Our name – Mni Giizhik – which translates in English to Cedar Water is reflective of our drive to bring together and celebrate our respective cultures. Mni from the Dakota/Lakota word for water, and giizhik from the Anishinaabe word for cedar, is evocative of the living, changing, and healing properties of live performance. We strive to work within the values of relationality, ethical creative practice, humility, and commitment to our community.

mnigiizhiktheatre.org

ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS: Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble

Since our founding in 1984 **Stages Theatre Company** has put the well-being and growth of youth in the center of everything we do—on stage, backstage, in the audience, and in the classroom. When a youth enters any of our spaces, they are the center of not only why we do what we do, but how we do it.

Through our Productions, our Education Programming, our Fundraising Initiatives, the Development of New Work for the TYA Stage, and our Mentorship Programs we strive to center youth in the stories we tell, the plays we create, the curriculum we develop, the activities we initiate, and the decisions we make. As a company and a community of artists and teachers, the youth and families we serve drive what we do first, last, and always.

stagestheatre.org

FACEBOOK: @StagesTheatreCompany

INSTAGRAM: @StagesTheatreCo

Synopsis

Windy Girl is blessed with a vivid imagination. From Uncle, she gathers stories of long-ago traditions, about dances and sharing and gratitude. Windy can tell such stories herself—about her dog, Itchy Boy, and the way he dances to request a treat and how he wriggles with joy in response to, well, just about everything

.

When Uncle and Windy Girl and Itchy Boy attend a powwow, Windy watches the dancers and listens to the singers. She eats tasty food and joins family and friends around the campfire. Later, Windy falls asleep under the stars. Now Uncle's stories inspire other visions in her head: a bowwow powwow, where all the dancers are dogs. In these magical scenes, Windy sees veterans in a Grand Entry, a visiting drum group, and traditional dancers, grass dancers, and jingle-dress dancers—all with telltale ears and paws and tails. All celebrating in song and dance. All attesting to the wonder of the powwow.

Director's Notes

During a recent conference panel, I was asked what my dream for the future of Native theatre is. I said that my hope is that my son, who is seven, will be able to see a Native play any month of the year without ever leaving the Twin Cities. We are getting there, but are not there yet. Among other things, it takes partnerships with organizations who want to support Indigenous artistry to make it happen. I'm so grateful that when I brought the book of Bowwow Powwow to Sandy, she just said yes. And even more grateful that when we went to Brenda and Benay, they also said yes. Stages has always been committed to making sure all kids can see themselves represented on stage, and I'm thrilled that my kiddo, and other Native youth, get to see themselves, and their community, in this story and in partnership with an organization committed to the work.

My son was very little when we started reading this book together, and we both fell in love with it right away. Even though my family is Dakota, and Windy Girl, as a reflection of Brenda's own childhood, is Ojibwe, we saw our family reflected back at us. It was also impossible to look at the book and not see the possibilities for a stage adaptation. Brenda's story is engaging, inventive, and warm, and Jonathon's illustrations are joyful, vibrant, and familiar. It is a book that lets our whole family's imaginations soar! I hope you are similarly inspired today.

Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble, the company I share with my partner-collaborators, Adrienne and Sequoia, is committed to telling stories indigenous to this land with those who are Indigenous to this land. Bowwow Powwow, highlighting the Red Lake community specifically and featuring an entire team of Indigenous artists from Minnesota, fulfills our mission. I'm grateful to do this work, grateful for my co-dreamers, and grateful to all of you for supporting local, Indigenous, artistry. Wopida.

Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha, PhD
Director

SPECIAL THANKS:
Danielle DeLong, Thomas Draskovic - Hand Drum Instructor,
Fire Mountain Fabrics, Dianna Johnson, Brian Joyce,
Rickymae Littlest Feather, Brian Warzeha

Meet the Creators

Brenda Child
Author
Brenda Child (Red Lake Ojibwe) is a professor of American Studies at the University of Minnesota and the author of Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940; Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community; and My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation, 1900-1940.

Jonathan Thunder
Illustrator
Jonathan Thunder (Red Lake Ojibwe) is an award-winning painter and digital media artist living in Duluth, Minnesota. Jonathan Thunder attended the Institute of American Indian Arts - Studio Arts Program in Santa Fe (1999-2000) and received a B.A. in Visual Effects and Motion Graphics from the Art Institute International in Minneapolis (2005). His epic animated mural Manifest'o was installed in the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, 2021 - 2023.
https://www.jonthunder.com/

Gordon Jourdain
Translator
Gordon Jourdain (Lac La Croix First Nation) teaches at the Misaabekong Ojibwe Language Immersion program for Duluth Public Schools.

Meet the Creators

Benay McNamara
Playwright
Benay is Red Lake Ojibwe from St. Paul and teaches art and Ojibwe language in Minneapolis. She was raised in the Twin Cities theatre community and is an alum of the Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists. Her work is grounded in a deep commitment to storytelling, shaped by her background in theatre, ceramic sculpture, and language. This marks her debut as a playwright. She draws inspiration from her everyday life, including her dog, Ricky Baker. Her mother is the author of Bowwow Powwow.

Blossom Johnson
Playwright
Blossom Johnson is Yé'ii Dine'é Táchii'nii, and her maternal grandfather is Deeshchíí'nii. She is a playwright whose work has been developed and supported by New York Stage & Film, Perelman Performing Arts Center and Playwrights Horizons, Bag&Baggage and Native Performing Arts Network, Mixed Blood Theatre, Durango PlayFest and many others. Her work has earned support through First Peoples Fund, The Playwrights' Center, UC Berkeley's Arts Research Center, and the Minnesota State Arts Board. She is currently a 2025-28 Jerome Hill Artist Fellow, a 2025 Democracy Cycle recipient, and is thrilled to be a 2026-29 Core Writer at the Playwrights' Center. www.blossomjohnson.com

Bizhiki
Music
Bizhiki is a Wisconsin-based band that fuses traditional Ojibwe songs into an expanded musical palette. The music of Bizhiki blends the ethereal vocals and visceral drumming of Dylan Bizhikiins Jennings (Bad River Ojibwe) and Joe Rainey Sr. (Red Lake Ojibwe) with contemporary soundscape multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and producer S. Carey.

Meet the Creators

Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha
Director
Dr. Sara Pillatzki-Warzeha is a theatre director, scholar, and educator. She is a co-founder of Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble along with Adrienne Zimiga-January and Sequoia Hauck. Sara's directing work has been seen across the Twin Cities with the Jungle Theatre, Full Circle Theatre, Stages Theatre Company, Minneapolis Musical Theatre, Guthrie Theatre, and others. Favorite directing credits include High Fidelity the Musical (Minneapolis Musical Theatre), 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (St. Olaf College), Fly By Night (Northern Fort Playhouse), SIXPACK (Jungle Theatre), and Men on Boats (UMN). Sara holds a PhD in Theatre Historiography from the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on intercultural collaborations between Indigenous artists and PWIs. In addition to her directing work, Sara serves on the Native Advisory Council at the Guthrie Theatre and has worked as an Indigenous consultant, advocate, and scholar with organizations such as the Jungle Theatre, the Stratford Festival, Native Voices, History Theatre, New Harlem, and UMN. She is an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate from the Big Coulee District and currently teaches in the Theater Department at St. Olaf College.

Mni Giizhik Theatre Ensemble
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Meet the Characters

UNCLE / DOG FRY BREAD NATION VENDOR: full of stories and songs

WINDY GIRL: Curious

ITCHY BOY: A puppet. Inspired by a real dog on Red Lake Reservation in Northern MN. Curious, brave and never quiet.

MINDIMOOYENH / BLUE BERRY SNO CONE VENDOR: Ice fishing woman, language keeper and Old Lady

POWWOW ANNOUNCER / YOUNG UNCLE/ ENSEMBLE: Comedic.

HAND DRUMMER / RED LAKER: plays live music and various roles, and Hand Drummer #1

TRADITIONAL / ENSEMBLE: a Turtle, a Dancer and a Dog

GRASS / ENSEMBLE: a Rabbit, a Dancer, a Dog

JINGLE / FIRST CRUSH / ENSEMBLE: a Raccoon, a Dancer, and a Dog

FANCY / ENSEMBLE: a Porcupine, Dancer, Dog

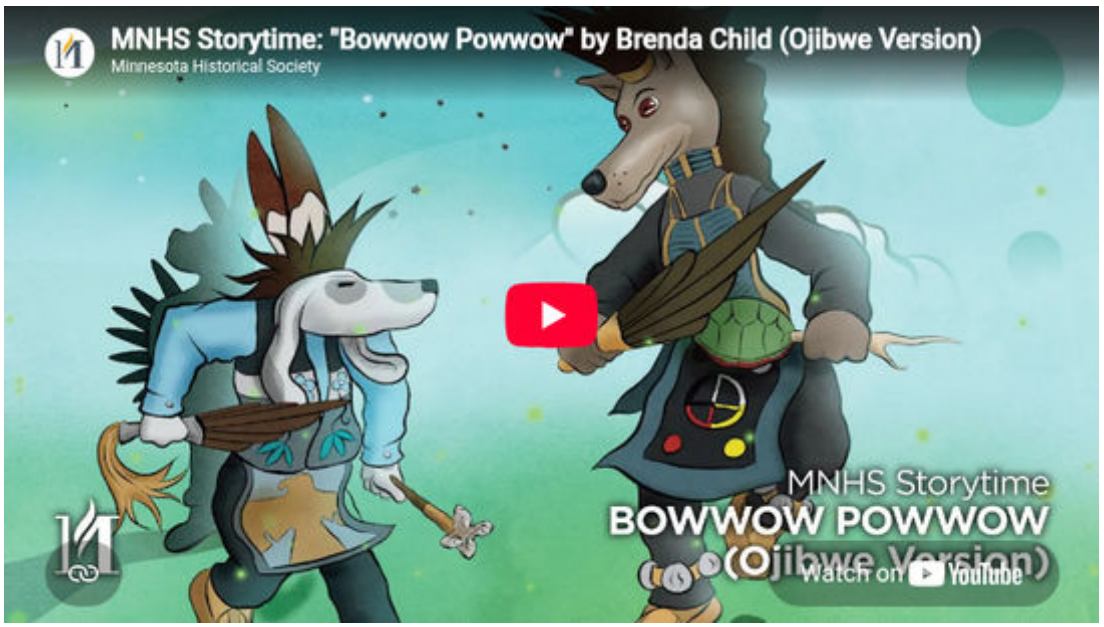
TINY TOT 1/ ENSEMBLE: a Mosquito, a Dancer, a Dog

TINY TOT 2 / ENSEMBLE: a Suckerfish, a Dancer, a Dog

DRUMMER 1 (cat) / ENSEMBLE: a Walleye # 1, Hand Drummer #2

DRUMMER 2 (cat) / ENSEMBLE: Walleye #2, Hand Drummer #3

Follow Along with Brenda in English and Ojibwe



Meet an Actor

Meet the Director

Begin to learn Ojibwe

Bowwow Powwow is written and performed in both English and Ojibwe. Our cast will teach some Ojibwe during the show, and you can begin exploring the language with the help of this short video.

Ojibwemotaadidaa! is a children's show highlighting Ojibwemowin and Anishinaabe culture. Go on an adventure with the Waasabiik Ojibwemotaadiwin Immersion Program in Red Lake, meet artist Jonathan Thunder, and visit kids from the Leech Lake Head Start and Cass Lake Elementary. This program is made possible by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment and members of Lakeland PBS. Go to lptv.org/ojibwe for more.

Grass Dancer

©Jonathan Thunder

Jingle Dancer

©Jonathan Thunder

Discussion Questions

Before Seeing *Bowwow Powwow*

- What do you already know about powwows?
- What's something special about your community? Who is in your community? Does your community include beings other than humans?
- What does the word community mean to you?
- What are some traditions that are important to your family or community?
- Who do you go to for advice or when you want to know something important?
- Do you know any words in Ojibwe or Dakota? Have you ever heard a Native language before?

After Seeing Bowwow Powwow

- What did you learn from the play that you didn't know before?
- What did you notice about the music, dancing, clothing, language, or traditions shown in the play?
- What role did imagination play in the story?
- How did the play show the importance of family and community?
- What did the characters learn from one another?
- Did anything in the play surprise you?
- What questions do you still have after seeing the play?

Digging a Little Deeper

- Why do you think it is important for Indigenous artists to tell Indigenous stories?
- What does Bowwow Powwow teach us about the connection between traditions and the present day?
- How can music, dance, storytelling, and language help keep traditions alive?
- What are some ways we can respectfully learn about traditions that are not our own?
- How can a celebration bring people from different generations together?
- Are there important songs, dances, or traditions from your family's culture that you know? Who taught you those things? How do they make you feel grounded or like you belong?

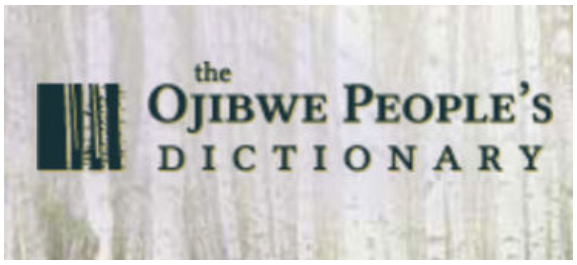
Connecting It to Students' Lives

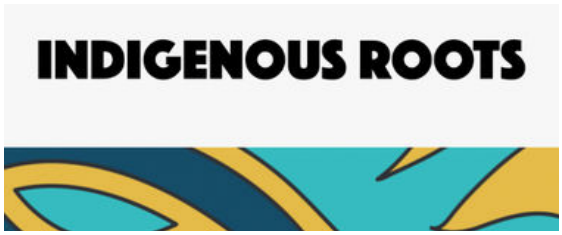
- Is there a celebration or gathering that is important to your family or community? What makes it special?
- What is something you have learned from a parent, grandparent, elder, or other important person in your life?
- What is one thing from Bowwow Powwow that you would like to learn more about?

ACTIVITY

Resources

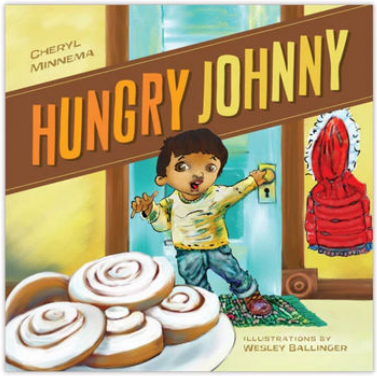
Click on the images below to access these resources and find out more.

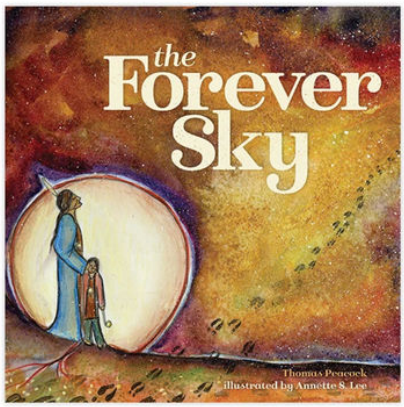


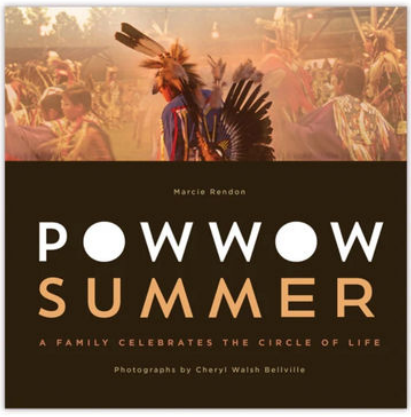


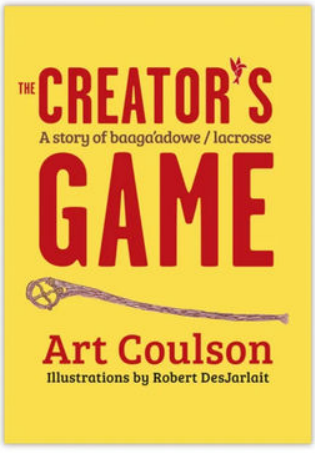
Recommended Reading

Click on the images below to find out more about these books, published by Minnesota Historical Society Press.









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OUR STAGE, YOUR STORIES

2026-27 SEASON

General Information

Ticket Policy: Ticket orders will not be processed without full payment. We do not issue refunds. Exchanges can be made up to 24 hours prior to a scheduled performance. Exchanges can only be made for another performance of the SAME TITLE. Subject to availability.

Box Office Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. and one hour prior to all performances.

Mainstage: Unless otherwise noted, performances take place in the mainstage theatre. Seating is reserved and begins 30 minutes prior to showtime.

Jaycees Studio: All performances of Señorita Mariposa, When You Trap A Tiger, and Tell Me Your Dreams will be in the Jaycees Studio, a versatile space located in the Hopkins Center for the Arts. Seating is general admission and begins 30 minutes prior to show time. Come early for the most seating options!

Land Acknowledgment

Stages Theatre Company acknowledges with respect and gratitude that the land on which we live and work is the unceded, traditional land of the Dakota Nation. We are committed to learning from the past and critically examining the implications of colonial histories in our day-to-day lives.

To honor the traditional custodians of this land, complimentary tickets to every performance are available specifically for our indigenous community. We hope these resources can move us in taking collective action towards land repatriation.

Please call our box office at (952) 979-1111 to secure these complimentary tickets.

This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Accessibility

At Stages Theatre Company we believe that theatre experiences are for everyone! We are working towards a fully inclusive environment where all programs and performances are accessible to all.

Sensory-Friendly Performances
Relaxed performances designed for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Sensory Processing Disorder, or others with sensory sensitivities.

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreted Performances
American Sign Language interpretation by certified interpreters for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Audio Described (AD) Performances
Audio Description services are intended to enhance the understanding of and access to visual information, primarily for but not limited to people who are blind or have low vision.

Pay What You Can Performances (PWYC)
These performances have no minimum price, and patrons are asked to "pay what you can" the day of the show to support the theatre's programming.

Open Door Program
The Open Door Program provides free and reduced-cost tickets, bus subsidies, and tuition assistance to families, schools, and social service agencies. An application and further information can be found on our website: stagestheatre.org/access

Additional Services Available
- Assisted Listening Devices are available for all Stages Theatre Company's Mainstage productions.
- Wheelchair Accessible Seating is available at every Stages Theatre Company performance.
- Accessible Parking and Accessible Restrooms are available at the Hopkins Center of the Arts.

Accessibility Performances are available for all season subscription options.

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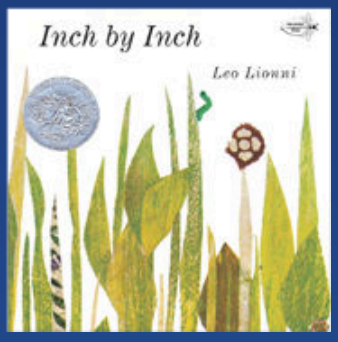

1111 Mainstreet, Hopkins | StagesTheatre.org | 952-979-1111