

Fancy Dancer

A boy finds new confidence as he connects to his culture.

About the Story

Lexile: 660L

For qualitative complexity factors,
go to *Scope Online*.

Learning Objective: to analyze how
an experience has affected a
character and write a letter from that
character's point of view

Key Skills: inference, character,
interpreting text, text structure,
interaction of characters and events

Essential Questions:

- What makes you *you*?
- What does “home” mean?
- How do we build confidence in ourselves?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these
Common Core anchor standards: R.1,
R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.3, W.9, SL.1, L.4,
L.5, L.6

For more standards information—
including TEKS—go to *Scope Online*.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech

Video:

- Beyond the Story

Connected readings from the *Scope* archives:

- Fiction: “Hard to Say”
- Paired Texts: “El Magnífico”
- Fiction: “Home”
- Fiction: “Aftershocks”

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Video Discussion Questions
- Writing Planner: Rory’s Letter
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

20 minutes

Watch a Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Beyond the Story** video to introduce your students to three Native American kids who, like the main character in “Fancy Dancer,” dance in powwows. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or pairs.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Words: *Cree*, *ancestor*, *powwow*, *fancy dancer*, *regalia*, *bustle*, *moccasin*, *Treaty 8 territory*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Read the As You Read box on page 12 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Point out the directions at the top of the column on the far-right side of page 13 and read them aloud to your students.
- Optionally, for students’ first read, have them follow along as they listen to author Monique Gray Smith read her story aloud. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the story again, pausing to discuss the close-reading questions that appear in the margins of the print magazine or by clicking on the bolded words on the digital story page. Have students record their answers in their own document or on the **Close-Reading Questions activity**.

Close-Reading Questions

(20 minutes)

The close-reading questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Why does Rory's mom walk differently? What does this change reveal about her?** (inference) *Rory's mom walks differently because the way she feels about herself and her life has changed. When she was married to Rory's biological father, he forbade her from speaking Cree, practicing Cree ceremonies, or doing anything related to her culture. He also convinced her to move far away from her family. He treated her as though being Cree was shameful. She must have felt sad, lonely, and oppressed by her ex-husband, and perhaps ashamed that she wasn't able to do more to keep her culture alive and express her identity. Feeling that way must have affected the way she carried herself; perhaps she kept her eyes down and her shoulders hunched forward. But now she has a new partner who treats her and her culture with love and respect, and she is able to participate fully in Cree culture. The way she now walks reveals that she has a sense of confidence and pride.*
2. **Describe how Rory's father has affected him. What would you say to Rory in this moment?** (character) *Rory's father has caused Rory to have a lack of confidence in his ability to do anything physical; he's made Rory afraid to even try dancing. Students might also offer that it's because of Rory's father that Rory doesn't know what a powwow is, because Rory's father stopped him from participating in anything related to Cree culture. Students' ideas on what they would say to Rory will vary.*
3. **Explain what Paul means when he tells Rory that he can either let others define him or he can define himself.** (interpreting text) *Paul means that Rory can be the person other people (like his father) think or say that he is, or he can decide for himself what kind of person he is. Paul is telling Rory to ignore what his father told him about not being good at anything that requires coordination and also, perhaps, to ignore his father's implication that he should reject his Cree identity.*
4. **Why does Rory feel confused?** (character) *Rory likely feels confused because some of the beliefs he has always had about himself (that he is bad at anything requiring coordination, that he should not participate in activities related to Cree culture) are coming into conflict with what he is now feeling (he enjoys dancing and is good at it, he wants to participate in Cree culture). He may also be feeling confused about whether he wants to participate in the powwow because he's worried that he's not a good enough fancy dancer, despite what Paul says.*
5. **In your own words, explain what Paul means when he says that Rory needs his mind and his body to believe in each other.** (interpreting text) *Paul is telling Rory to trust his body and let it move the way it wants to move, that he doesn't need to overanalyze or be critical of himself as he dances. Paul also means that Rory should trust his body to express what is going on in his mind and in his heart, that he doesn't have to think about how to do that but to just do it. Earlier,*

Paul told Rory, “Your body remembers how to dance. Your Ancestors have been dancing like this for generations. Trust yourself.” Paul is expressing the same idea when he tells Rory that his mind and body need to believe in each other. (Answers will vary.)

6. **How is Rory’s definition of “home” changing?** (inference) *It seems that in the past, Rory defined “home” as the place where he lived: Ann Arbor, Michigan. But now he seems to be expanding that definition, thinking of home as not just the place where he lives, but the place where his relatives and his Ancestors live and have lived—a place he is connected to, a place where he belongs and is welcome.*
 7. **Kisâkîhitin is a Cree word meaning “I love you.” Explain the importance of this moment for Rory and Paul.** (text structure, character) *We don’t know for sure, but it seems like this could be the first time Rory and Paul have said “I love you” to each other. It seems like it could also be the first time Rory has called Paul “Dad.” But even if it’s not the first time for either of those things, it’s an important moment for the two of them because they are acknowledging how much they mean to one another. That they use a Cree word to express their feelings is also important; a big part of Paul and Rory’s relationship has been Paul helping Rory connect to Cree culture, and their use of kisâkîhitin acknowledges that fact.*
 8. **How has the powwow affected Rory?** (interaction of characters and events) *Participating in the powwow has given Rory confidence and pride, both in his dancing skills and in his identity. He has grown stronger and learned to trust his body and his skills as a dancer, and he has strengthened his connection to Cree culture. In addition, participating in the powwow has been an opportunity for him to bond with his mom and her side of the family and, especially, with Paul.*
- As a class, discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Why do you think it’s important to Rory, his mom, and Paul that they participate in Cree culture?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that being Cree is part of who they are—that is, of their identity—and everyone has a natural desire to express who they are. Students may also say that participating in Cree culture is a way of connecting with others and finding a sense of belonging. Participating in Cree culture may also be a way for Rory, his mom, and Paul to explore—and honor—who they are. And it’s a way for them to honor their Ancestors and preserve their heritage, which is especially important in light of the injustices and oppression that Native Americans have faced and continue to face.*

2. Right before the Junior Boys Fancy Dance, Paul tells Rory, “. . . sometimes in life, you gotta be brave before you can be good.” What do you think of this advice? Do you agree? *Answers will vary.*

3. How do you think Rory’s fancy dance at the powwow went? Do you think he won the competition? If not, do you think he was upset? Explain your answer. *Answers will vary. Students may point out that Rory says he wasn’t expecting to win—and given that this was his first powwow, he probably did not win. But the end of the story reveals that Rory went into the dance with a prayer that his Ancestors be with him and that as soon as the drumming started, he felt alive and proud—so you can conclude that the experience was meaningful and positive for Rory, regardless of how the judges scored him.*

“Meet a Real-Life Fancy Dancer”

- Read the interview as a class.

- Then discuss: What does fancy dancing mean to Tank? What does reading his interview add to your understanding of powwows and fancy dancing?

3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Writing Planner: Rory’s Letter**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 16 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.

- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Suggested readings from the *Scope* archives for exploring themes of home, family, and identity:

- Fiction: [“Hard to Say”](#) (November 2021)
- Paired Texts: [“El Magnífico”](#) (October 2021)
- Fiction: [“Home”](#) (September 2020)
- Fiction: [“Aftershocks”](#) (February 2020)