The Dream Catcher
By Joyce Furstenau

Have you ever had dreams that frightened you? Have you ever had dreams that you enjoyed? Native Americans believe dreams are important. Dreams are said to play an important role in Native American spiritual and religious beliefs. Native Americans believe dreams come from the spirit world. The dream catcher is said to have originated with the Ojibwa/Chippewa tribe. It was created to catch and separate the good dreams from the bad.

Dream catchers are usually made from wooden hoops that are about three and a half inches in diameter. The hoops were originally made from willow branches. The inside of the hoop is strung in a spider web-like design with twine or sinew. The webbing was originally made from plant fibers or sinew string that had been dyed red. One or more feathers was always hung from the netting. The feather is a symbol for breath or air.

Originally grandmothers or mothers made the dream catchers for each new child. Dream catchers were hung on the baby's cradleboard or at the head of the bed. The Ojibwa believed that good dreams passed through the hole in the center of the web. Like a spider's web traps insects, dream catchers were created to catch and hold bad dreams. The web traps the bad dreams until morning. When Father Sun rises in the morning, the bad dreams vanish.

There are many Native American legends about the origins of the dream catcher. In one version Asibikaashi, or Spider Woman, was its creator. The legend says that at one time the Ojibwa people lived together in a place called Turtle Island. An Ojibwa spirit called Spider Woman took care of her people there. Legend says that she brought the sun to them each morning. Before long, the tribe grew. They soon moved away from the island and became "scattered to the four winds." Now there was no way Spider Woman could bring the sun to her people every day, so she spun a web to catch the sun's rays for her scattered people. Later, mothers and grandmothers helped her out by weaving sun catchers. The circular webs were placed above the heads of sleeping children. The sun catchers were said to also chase away bad dreams. Because of this, the webs were eventually to become known as dream catchers.

You can make your own dream catcher using some twisted paper for a hoop, string or jute for the webbing, and a feather. Perhaps your dream catcher will bring you many happy dreams.

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Questions

1. The history of the dream catcher began with what Native American tribe?

2. What is said to be the purpose of a dream catcher?
   A. to catch bad dreams and let the good dreams through
   B. to catch fish
   C. to catch spiders and insects
   D. to protect sleeping children from insect bites

3. The feather is believed to be a symbol for what?
   A. the Earth
   B. water
   C. flying
   D. air or breath

4. According to legend, what happens to bad dreams caught in the dream catcher?
   A. They are eaten by spiders.
   B. They are washed out of the web by the morning dew.
   C. They are kept captive in the web forever.
   D. They vanish when the sun comes up.
5. What is the Ojibwa name for Spider Woman?

6. Besides the circle and the web, what else is placed on a dream catcher?

A legend is a story that often tells about supernatural events involving humans. Write your own version of how the dream catcher came to be.
Do you remember any dreams you have had? If so, write a story about your most interesting dream.