

The Dreamer

Exclusive news for the St. Joseph's Indian School DreamMakers



May 2022

Ribbon Skirt Project Encourages Cultural Awareness

During the 2021-22 school year, a very special cultural identity project took place for young women at St. Joseph's Indian School.

St. Joseph's launched an effort this year to provide a ribbon skirt to every female student. The skirts were customized to each student, uniquely representing their personalities and tastes — from bold and ambitious to classic and serene.

“We wanted the girls to have ownership of their skirts and have it not be something they have to borrow or give back,” said LaRayne, Native Studies lead. “These are their personal ribbon skirts.”

At the elementary level, staff volunteered to sew a ribbon skirt for every female student. Seventh and eighth grade girls had the opportunity to pick-out their fabric and ribbons before it was packaged into a kit for volunteers.

Daphne, a seventh grade student, chose bright and vibrant colors.

“It was fun to pick-out fabric and colors to show who I am and express myself in this way,” she said.

Patty, the Equine Specialist at St. Joseph's, happily volunteered to sew a ribbon skirt for a student. Native American herself, she said teaching moments like this are important so cultural traditions survive.

“We are all about teaching here at St. Joseph's. The girls can take this teaching moment and pass it down to their daughters or nieces one day,” said Patty. “Our culture could disappear, and if we the people can't keep the stories alive, then it will be lost.”

High school girls had the special opportunity to not only choose their skirt's elements, but also make their own skirts with the assistance of volunteers. Some girls chose many ribbons while others chose them minimally. One dress showcased neon colors and another depicted a colorful rainbow on red fabric.

“I chose red because my high school colors are red and



(over, please)

white, and I plan to wear this for graduation,” said ShyAnne, a senior.

It was the first sewing of any kind for the majority of the students. So while the day provided a rich cultural opportunity, it also provided students with a valuable life skill for the future.

As the girls laid their skirt fabrics beside their sewing machines, most stopped to smooth the shiny ribbons and pause to view the task ahead. Diligent work had taken place to choose the perfectly colored fabric with the impeccably paired ribbons. Now it was time to put the items together.

The stitch the girls chose to sew the ribbons to their fabric was the zig-zag stitch. As the sewing needle moved along the perfectly straight edge of the ribbon, the thread wove right and left — this way and that. In that moment, the stitch became almost symbolic.

As the girls move through life, especially those who are graduating this month, they will find sometimes life takes you this way and that way. Other times it stops a person mid-stitch, causing them to reverse, pull out the stitching mistakes and start again. Rarely is the path perfectly straight. But there’s beauty in that fact.

As the girls wear their ribbon skirts at graduation and on other days, they can stay grounded in the overall picture their ribbon skirt represents.

“It was told to me that **T̓hupkášila** — *Creator* — will know you by your ribbons on your skirt. As you walk through life, this skirt will show who you are and where you came from,” said Patty. “It shows your strength.”



What is a Ribbon Skirt?

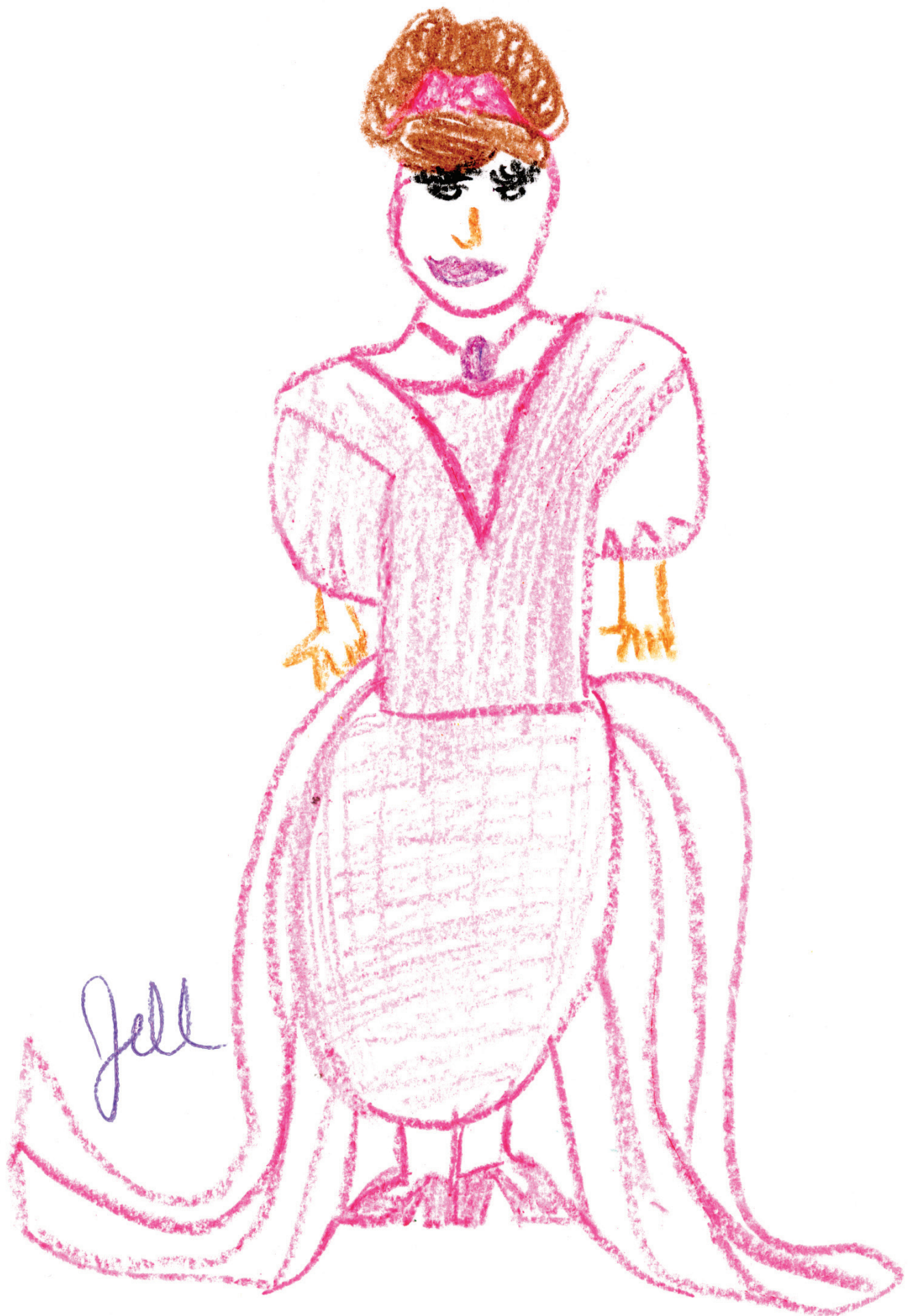
In North America, Indigenous women have adorned their clothing with ribbons for more than 400 years. Silk ribbons, brought by European traders, inspired this uniquely Native American art form.

Initially, layers of ribbons were sewn on the edges of cloth, replacing painted lines on hide, clothing and blankets. By the close of the 18th Century, Native American seamstresses created much more intricate ribbon work designs. Ribbon skirts reached their peak by the beginning of the 19th century, moving out from the Great Lakes to tribes on the Prairies, Plains and Northeast.

The skirts have continued evolving over time. Now, in the 21st Century, a renewed sense of humbly claiming one’s culture is elevating the importance of ribbon skirts to affirm Native American identity.

Although they can be worn on any particular day, the skirts are usually worn on special occasions — like an event about to take place this month: graduation.





Dear, friend

Hi my name is Shirley and I'm in 4th grade.
Thank you for donating stuff to our homes, school,
playground, classes are very nice. and what i
like to do for fun is play, hangout, writeing, homework
What I want to be when I grow up i want to
be a teacher because a teacher helps Kid's
learn, and write Math and more, so
that kids know stuff when they grow up.

your friend,
Shirley