

Summarized and Revised by Lorene Willis
From Opler's Jicarilla Childhood and Youth

The Adolescence Rite

Coming of Age

When a young girl becomes 12 to 13 years old, she comes of age. She experiences her first menstrual period. The family prepare for the her ceremony by gathering large quantities of food, wood, a large tipi, corn for tiswin (Apache brew) and other items such as buckskin, buffalo hide, and ceremonial paints. The ceremony is to start on the first new moon. "Iyanee ma nni dee". The buffalo came to visit her.

Tobacco is rolled from corn husk into a cigarette that is given to a singer (Go ka lii) of the puberty rite songs. These ceremonialist are not shaman, but custodians of a traditional rite. Usually the girl's father hires the singer. The father also looks for a young male to dance with her, not a relative or a distant cousin.

The boy who is selected stands for Water's Child or Monster Slayer and the girl stands for White Shell Woman or White Painted Woman. The parents of the boy know the stories and present their boy for the blessings and prayers that will give him long life and a leadership path.

The ceremony begins at dawn of the new moon and will continue for four days. A tipi is erected when the sun rises. Twelve spruce poles are used. The singer blesses the ground with corn pollen. Grama grass is normally used when tying the first three poles together to keep lighting away and to keep the poles from slipping. Sunflower,

wormwood or snakeweed can also be used. Four mahogany wood pegs are used

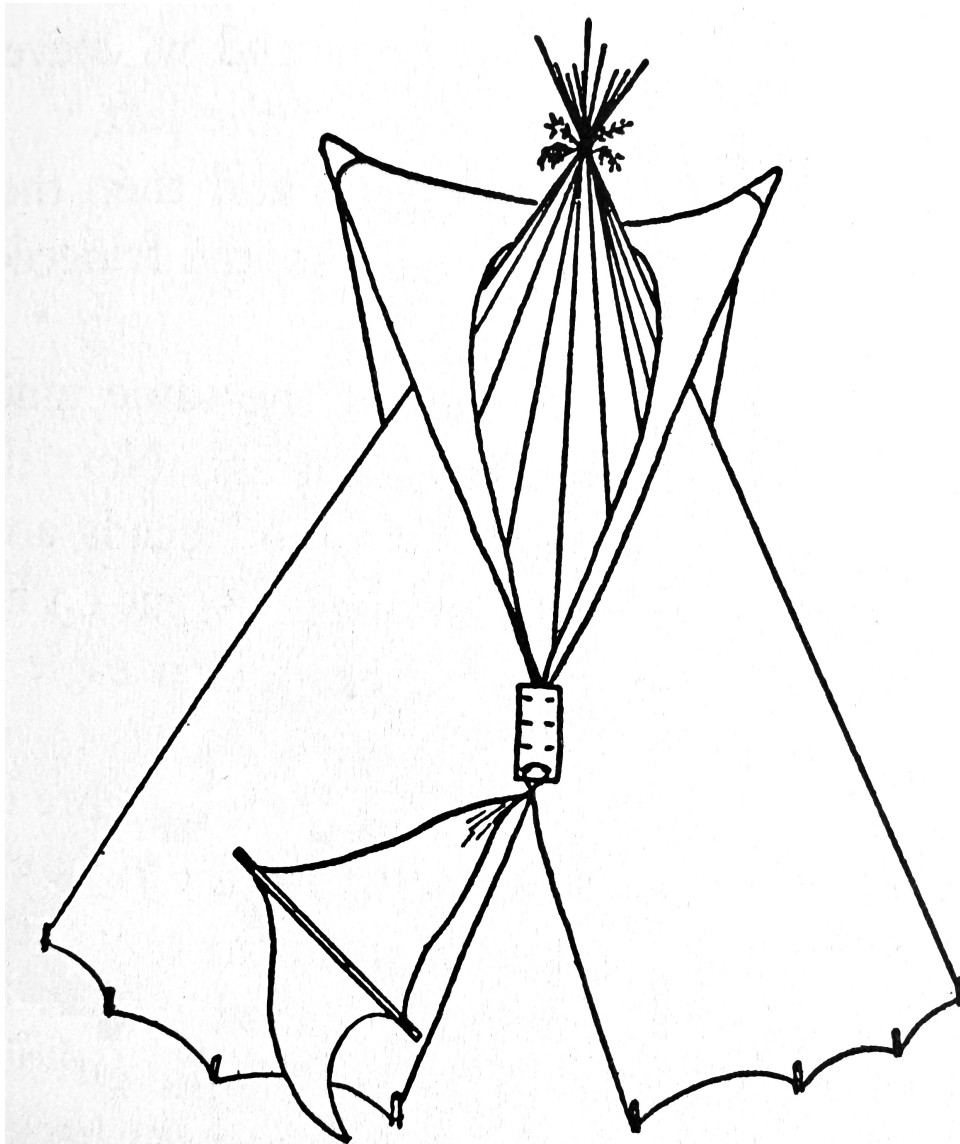


FIG. 3. Tipi of adolescence rite.

above the door to tie the canvas together and the door faces east.

A elk-skin blanket is laid at the back of the tipi for the girl and boy to sit on. If elk skin is not available, a buffalo hide is used. In the center of the tipi a fire is kindled using sunflower as starter. This is called the fire from the north star.

The boy and girl are dressed appropriately in buckskin and a magpie feather in the girl's hair and an eagle feather for the boy's hair, and then their faces are painted: yellow-brown for the girl and white for the boy.

A scratcher is given to them that is made from mountain mahogany. And reed tubes for drinking. The singer tells the young participants that they must use the scratcher for itches. Using their own fingernails will cause scarring. They are instructed to not look at the sky or up into the air or to look into water or rain may come. They are not to smile or they will get wrinkles before they are old. They cannot sleep on their backs with their faces upward, they must sleep to their side. And, they are instructed in proper behaviors because what they do during the ceremony will decide their natures through life. Further, they are told that if they don't believe in the songs, the ceremony won't do them any good.

On the first morning, the singer instructs the girl and boy on how to run in the appropriate ceremonial sequences starting with the east. During the running exercise, a older woman yells into the girl's ear that is indicative of the call given at the war dance, scalp dance and racing ceremony. The girl gives out corn kernels to the women lined up in front of the tipi facing east. This corn brings good luck to those who receive it.

For the rest of the day, the girl and boy are expected to not be lazy. The girl grinds corn on a metate, the boy tends to the animals. He also shoots his arrow and runs after it so he can stay in shape. The families cook and feed the guests all throughout the day to show their generosity and to receive blessings from the ceremony.

Singing and dancing occurs at night inside the tipi. The singer offers prayers and songs for the two adolescents and ends around midnight and can be at two in the morning. Families are present to dance with their loved ones. This happens for four nights with the last night dancing all night till morning. On the final morning, the girl and boy are undressed and their hair washed with yucca. The feasting is now over.

The families line up in the tipi to receive a face painting from the singer. The face painting ritual is for each individual of the family of the girl and boy to have a long life and live in a good way. It is expected that the paint remain on one's face until the sun begins its descent to the west. At this time, the family pay the singer with a horse (in the old days) and food. Today he/she is paid with U.S. dollars and food.

After the ceremony, the girl is considered a woman and marriageable. She can now style her hair as a woman, shaped into a bun like an hourglass.

KEESDA COMING OUT FEAST PROTOCOLS

Keesdas are put on by the families of a young girl who has begun her menses. A young man is requested to aid in the keesda by dancing with the young girl for four nights. There is more to the significance of the young man's participation. These puberty ceremonies are undertaken to provide a long and good life for the young pair.

- ✓ The tipi is a sacred place. The young and old should behave accordingly. People should show respect by looking, listening, and learning.
- ✓ Families should eat out of one bowl to strengthen family ties. The language is passed on to the children this way.
- ✓ Families should bless their food by offering a portion to Mother Earth and praying for the young maiden and brave.
- ✓ A widow/widower should stay out of the tipi in respect for the family unless he/she has been properly returned to their family, and to the tipi by a medicine man.

- ✓ It is disrespectful to run in and out of the tipi when the medicine man is singing, praying or telling stories.
- ✓ It is disrespectful to run around the tipi. It is like running in a circle and calling the whirlwind.
- ✓ Do not flash your flashlight or headlights on the tipi. It may call lightning.
- ✓ Parents and extended families must show respect by keeping their children in line and teaching them proper behavior.
- ✓ One must not go just to eat, but also to pray and dance in the tipi for the maiden and the brave and give thanks for the food.
- ✓ One must be thankful for whatever they are given to eat and not ask for more or for anything else.
- ✓ Out of respect and gratitude, one is expected to dance in the tipi during the night.
- ✓ Non-Indians may go to a keesda when invited or accompanied by an Apache.
- ✓ The morning after the last night of praying, the family paint their faces for protection and as a blessing. It is proper to wash your face only after mid-morning and before late afternoon. Children must be taught not to make fun when they see this, but to be proud.
- ✓ In the old days, families bring their own eating utensils, bowls, etc., and eat off the ground or on their vehicles.
- ✓ Do not use cell phones, tablets, video games, or other electronic devices at a keesda or ceremonies.
- ✓ Many elders say that the midnight "give-away" during the fourth night of the keesda is improper. Give-away means boxes of candy, chips, fruit, crackers, etc.
- ✓ Photos or recording devices are NOT PERMITTED.