



(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/>)



My Daughter Wore A 1960s-Inspired 'Indian' Costume — And Here's How I Took Care Of That

BY JOSEPH WILSON

PHOTO © LJBS/TWENTY20

One of the best things about Sunday lunches at *grand-maman's* house is “the closet.” In the basement, a non-descript door opens up onto a mountain of costumes, cast-offs and accessories. As the adults sip aperitivi and eat cheese upstairs, the kids lose themselves in the archive of Halloween costumes that date back to the '70s

Halloween costumes, in particular, were made with care and attention back when she was a kid.

My wife is one of five siblings for whom homemade clothes and costumes were the norm. Halloween costumes, in particular, were made with care and attention back when she was a kid. They were made with bits of used clothing and textured samples from the bottom of the discount bin at the fabric store.

They were made to withstand the rough-and-tumble behaviour of children playing outside, with double stitching and extra padding in the knees and elbows. They were also made warm enough to keep their occupants comfy on a cold October evening.

Read an Indigenous father's perspective on what it's like when you appropriate his culture for Halloween: My Culture Is Not Your or Your Kids' Halloween Costume (<http://https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/my-culture-is-not-your-or-your-kids-halloween-costume>)

After eight years of exploring that closet, the kids still come up from the basement dressed in something I've never seen before. Bumblebees, dinosaurs, lions and princesses have all made appearances in the dining room, culled from an epic collection that started 40 years ago.

Every now and then, though, a costume will appear that has not aged well. Last year our eldest daughter, Sonia, appeared at the dining room table in a faux-Native costume: a beaded leather vest with feathers plus a leather headband that read, "White Cloud."

Our usual coos of approval were replaced with raised eyebrows and muted smiles. She was baffled at our reaction.

"That costume is a little different than the rest," I said.

We didn't want to spoil her fun but also didn't want her to unwittingly participate in a system that treats objects from Indigenous cultures as the spoils of plunder.

"Why? I like it," said Sonia.

"I know, but it's not really fair. Indigenous people are real people, not costumes."

We didn't want to spoil her fun but also didn't want her to unwittingly participate in a system that treats objects from Indigenous cultures as the spoils of plunder. When meaningful symbols and signs are remixed into Halloween bling, it is at the expense of a people whose culture has been systematically dismantled over time.

The “costume” was a pastiche of pop culture versions of “Indians” from the ‘60s; a simulacrum far removed from the experiences of an actual Indigenous person, the kind who were driven off their land and penned up in reserves across the continent. Even though we often dress up like other people on Halloween, they should either be fictitious people like Harry Potter or Wonder Woman, or real people who have not experienced a several-hundred-year history of violence and displacement. Dressing up like a firefighter, sailor or a farmer is different because those people are not joining the conversation from a position of weakened power.

Well, I might have said it a bit differently to my daughter.

A mother's approach to discussing Indigenous history with your kids:

Sharing the Message of Truth and Reconciliation With Your Kids

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/sharing-the-message-of-truth-and-reconciliation-with-your-kids>)

We let Sonia run around a little while longer with her cousins and then suggested some other costumes she could wear. Everybody loves dinosaurs! Ladybugs never experienced a cultural genocide! There are safer choices.

She shrugged when I told her it wasn't appropriate to wear and reluctantly took it off.

I reminded her of the work they've been doing at school by using First Nations values to structure each month of their school year. Indigenous artists and teachers have been visiting the school to help recast their culture as contemporary and dynamic, and not something confined to history textbooks (or Halloween costumes).

There is a real paradox here that requires reflection. It's important for our kids to know that the costume was made with love and care by a compassionate member of the family. When I was a kid, I too ran around and played “Cowboys and Indians” with my friends, including one who was Anishnaabe, although at the time we didn't make the connection. I don't think he did either.

This year we're in less murky ethical territory. Our three kids have decided to go dressed as a witch, Pippy Longstocking and a Minion.

But actions born of love, or innocence are not mutually exclusive with actions born of ignorance that can end up hurting someone. It is imperative that we sit with this paradox. To know that intent doesn't override impact. Things can be two things. A costume can be a tool for play and imagination and at the same time can be a source of pain and frustration.

This year we're in less murky ethical territory. Our three kids have decided to go dressed as a witch, Pippy Longstocking and a Minion. And the school's policies have helped clarify costume policy for the kids in a manner way deeper than what we got when we were kids. Those lessons are sinking into how our kids think about Canada. The other day our whole family was walking through Winchester Park just off Sherbourne Street in Toronto when we stumbled upon a beautiful mosaic, horizontal on the ground, over twelve feet in diameter and painstakingly made with pebbles. There was a turtle depicted in the centre. (*Milestone* by Red Dress Productions (<http://artbridges.ca/community/profile/192>).

"Don't you know what that is dad?" asked Sonia pointing at the turtle.

This dad feels Canadians are responsible for teaching kids about the MMIWG report. Read his thoughts here

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/all-canadians-have-responsibility-to-talk-their-kids-about-mmiwg-heres-how>).

"Uh, it's a sea turtle." I ventured.

"No, the turtle is the animal that represents the country for the First Nations; he holds us all up on his back. We live on Turtle Island. See how it's round? That's what this is." She schooled me.

She continued to point out that fact that the Turtle was "swimming" in between a row of pebble-made high-rises on its left and a row of old-growth trees on its right, trying to navigate through two worlds. Sonia identified the cardinal directions by extending lines worked into the mural and explained that the Turtle was swimming due North. From now on I'll be the one asking my daughter about my Halloween costume before I wear it outside.

SHARE



You Might Also Like



Easy No-Sew DIY Parrot Costume



ew/easy-

Easy No-Sew Costumes: Salmon
Sushi

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/play/view/easy-no-sew-costumes-salmon-sushi>)
