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American
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I'm a Hoop Dancer!

Eight-year-old
R. J. Lopez is helping
to carry on a Native
American tradition.

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Brain Builder What is a "tradition"? What traditions does your family have?



Hooping It Up

Drums begin to pound as R. J. Lopez takes the stage. The third-grader moves to the beat, stomping his feet and swinging colorful hoops through the air. Every few seconds, he grabs more hoops from the floor. Soon he is dancing with 15 hoops! He spreads them across his back like wings and pretends he is an eagle.

R. J., who lives in Arizona, is a Native American hoop dancer. “We use hoops to act out stories about animals and nature,” R. J. explains. It’s a **tradition** that began long ago—and that R. J. is helping keep alive today.

Hoop History

Hoop dancing has been around for hundreds of years. Long ago, many American Indian tribes used wooden hoops in **ceremonies**.

Words to Know

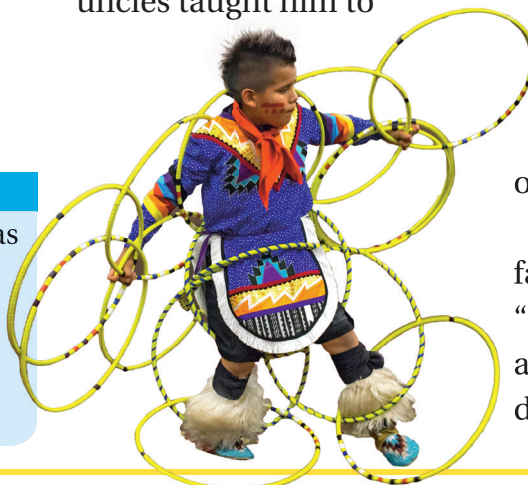
tradition: something that has been done for a long time

ceremonies: special actions performed for important events

competitions: contests



Today, hoop dancing is still a part of many Native American cultures. Hoop dances are passed down from generation to generation. R. J.’s family is mostly Pima and Apache (uh-PA-chee) Indian. His grandparents, mom, and uncles taught him to



hoop dance when he was just 5 years old.

Passing It On

To keep up his skills, R. J. practices every day in his living room. Several times a month, he performs in shows with his family. He puts on special dance clothing called regalia. His favorite outfit includes a beaded vest. It has the symbols of an Apache warrior on it. R. J. even takes part in hoop dancing **competitions**. “I’ve won three trophies!” he says.

R. J. is proud to carry on this tradition.

“I like following in my family’s footsteps,” he says. “Someday I’ll have kids and teach them to hoop dance too.”