

## Approved for use in Honors English III

### Summary of the Work:

From the Sioux culture of her people, Susan Power tells the story of Native Americans on a North Dakota reservation today. While the characters hold to traditions, living in the modern world, they yet reach for their past. Harley Wind Soldier realizes the power of his long-ago great uncle, Ghost Horse, who had loved a strong warrior woman of his people, Red Dress. Red Dress's way of warfare pitted her cunning against the encroaching, abusing whites, priests and soldiers, who abused Indians at the fort. Harley learns from the spirit of Red Dress that in the grass dance he is "dancing a rebellion."

### Rationale:

*The Grass Dancer* takes the reader into the culture of the Sioux on the reservation today, in a pow-wow, a vision quest, and a sweat lodge ceremony. Powerful forces from the past speak to the Dakota people today, and in complex and subtle ways influence their actions. Dakota phrases add depth to the story; the grass dance occurs on many levels, physical, spiritual, and metaphorical.

Students can identify with the search for identity and independence which is part of the novel's story. They can recognize the power of the culture of the Sioux on tribal members today.

From *Roots and Branches* (Susag 176): Themes: Remembering the Old Ways, Between Two Worlds; Change and Growth; Cultural and Personal Loss and Survival, Lifeways and Stereotypes

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- School Library Journal 05/01/95
- Book Links (A.L.A.) 11/01/95
- Notable/Best Books (A.L.A.)
- Wilson's Fiction 04/01/01
- Wilson's Senior High School 11/01/02

\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

### Noted Distinction:

- Reviewed in *Roots and Branches*, by Dorothea Susag, NCTE, 1998.

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: 890
- Readability Level: 7.2

### Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

### Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

### Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2007

### Notes on the Text:

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

A complex work of great symbolism, *The Grass Dancer's* powerful characters, rituals, and stories jump through time, interweave connections, and reveal hope as a healing force. Realistic as to the difficulties and fears of Indians on reservations today, the novel portrays romantic rivals, the pain of broken dreams, and the search for self and a good life.

### Connection to the Curriculum:

*The Grass Dancer* is currently assigned to Honors English III students as required summer reading.

It provides background and knowledge of Native American traditions and themes, as well as a fresh perspective on how Native Americans of today carry on the traditions and ways of their people.

### Additional Connections:

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*

The *Grass Dancer* complements study of the history of American Indians as shown in *A History and Foundation of American Indian Education Policy*, by Stan Juneau.