

OKICHITAW

Indigenous Martial Art of Canada



Martial Arts Manuscript

OKICHITAW – CANADA

Member of the World Martial Arts Union

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OKICHITAW Indigenous Martial Arts

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Warrior's Honor Page

Historically, our warriors protected our communities and watched over us. They were always truly respected by their respective tribes because they possessed unique physical, mental, and spiritual strength. One primary condition in being a warrior was that they always had to be prepared to overpower the enemy and face death head-on.

Native warriors have always been devoted to the survival of their people and their homeland. It was also understood that if required, a warrior would lay down their life for the preservation of their culture, for death to the native warrior was only but another step in the advancement of life.

"Life is not separate from death. It only looks that way." – Blackfoot

Indigenous warriors do not fear death, but rather regard it as the ultimate sacrifice for their people's continued survival.

The warrior seeks a path of wisdom and for the warrior; wisdom is the total sum of all of their personal experiences. In times of conflict, warriors had to learn how to survive, often using skills that were handed down through generations by their fathers, brothers, uncles, mothers, sisters, other family members even including the warrior society.

"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave." – Dakota

Warriors, our Ancestors; we thank you for your teachings and skills, for without it, we would be off our paths of success and enlightenment.



Introduction

To truly understand the name application of Okichitaw, one must also appreciate where it comes from. Historically on the lands now known as Canada, the Plains Cree and Assiniboine Indians used a name such as "*Okichitatawak*". This name was used to describe the "Warrior Council" which was within the Indian community that possessed special skills that were utilized for survival and warfare. Better known as the "*Worthy Young Men*", a person would not achieve the name of Okichitatawak until he had proved himself through participating in many raids or had engaged himself adequately in a fight or combat. The term Okichitatawak also means a group of men who is foolhardy, otherwise known within the Warrior Society as a person of "Reckless Bravery". The singular individualized name for the fighting system is known as "*Okichitaw*", where as the name of a single Warrior in the Plains Cree language would be "*Nahayawak*".

Historical Overview and Understanding

It should be noted that older men (who were always of Warrior stature) within the community were always the ones to refer to this group of men as Okichitatawak. They would apply it to anyone who had accomplished brave acts in warfare. Once other members of the community noted this, it became apparent that the person was a part of the entrusted warrior society.



As well, Warriors were organized into various societies and had definite duties and responsibilities. A person only became a Warrior when they were formally invited to sit in the Warrior's Lodge and to participate in the dances and various ceremonies.

Warriors are held on a higher prestige level than the noted "Worthy Young Men". In tribal practice, however, most Worthy Young Men were soon asked to join the warrior society. Since membership in the warrior society entailed considerable expenses, Worthy Young Men did not usually become warriors until they had acquired a number of horses, hides, and other material possessions before they could move in rank.

Each Tribal Band within an aboriginal community had only one warrior society. Each one of these societies also had their own unique insignia, songs, and dance.

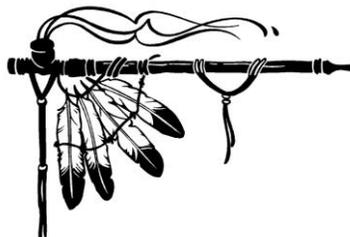
And as always, in the case of an enemy attack, these Warrior Societies were required to be the first to respond and defend the camp at all costs and to pursue the attackers upon their retreat.

Most indigenous people throughout the Plains had a variety of warfare and combat systems and forms which were directly taught to them through their respective Tribal community. Harvesting and combative training began at childhood and continued well into adulthood. All First Nations men who were called upon were referred to as a “Warrior”. This was only after they had proved themselves in battle. Weaponry such as the bow & arrow, knife, lance, spear and war club were used extensively throughout a person’s early adolescence and one would eventually come to master many of these weapons. The distinct war club was found to be the preferred martial arts weapon not only because it was extremely effective in close quarter combat but it also raised a warrior’s social status as a result of them dealing with an enemy in single close quarter combat face to face. It should also be noted that warriors continued to train to master their weapons and hand to hand skills which also included scouting and stalking techniques through their entire life.

Distinctive Features of Okichitaw Martial Arts

The Okichitaw Martial Art System of Canada is an “Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous or Native” Martial Art system that has been designed and structured to be more modernized (sort to speak) that is similar to other martial arts that are being taught today. Okichitaw uses basic, but aggressive combat movements that were used by Aboriginal Warriors and particularly by the Indians of the Plains distinctly known as the Assiniboine and Plains Cree Indigenous Nations.

Okichitaw is a martial art that is based on movements derived from specific aboriginal weaponry. Having said this, the concept of reckless bravery is also adopted into the art, meaning that a full commitment to any engagement will be applied. This concept allows the Okichitaw practitioner to strike and take their opponent down to the ground and finish them out as quickly as possible.



“Make My Enemy Strong, Courageous and Brave for if I defeat him, I will not be Ashamed.” – Assiniboine Warrior Proverb

Historically, Aboriginal Warriors employ a very direct approach in the area of combat which allows us to achieve lethal results. This philosophy is practiced through the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. In the area of Indigenous Combat, one must come to the understanding of the Medicine Wheel especially with respect to its teachings and thus the implication that it has to a person learning Okichitaw. Generally speaking, the Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol that has been, and continues to be used by many Native people throughout North and South America.

The medicine wheel for us, teaches us that we have four aspects to our nature: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. The Medicine Wheel is our way of looking at our individual differences and the impact of our actions in the world. The Medicine Wheel calls on elements of the natural world which also describes the four different styles of how we interact with others. The four directions of the Medicine Wheel differentiate styles and has an animal associated to it as well as a color and a season. The medicine wheel teaches us that the four distinctive and powerful elements are all a part of the physical world. All must be respected equally for their gift of life.

Below are the four main objectives of Okichitaw as they are applied through the four directions and colours where each specific direction represents an action with respect to it being initiated from an indigenous warrior.

WHITE/NORTH – PRESERVATION: Body skills to maintain a positive pattern and view life and death as an on-going system.

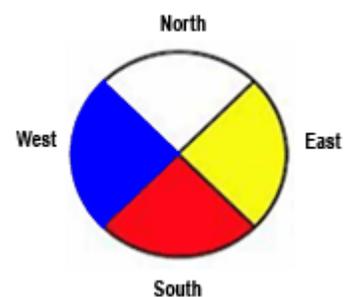
YELLOW/EAST – AWARENESS: Ever-increase the understanding of one’s self and the world.

RED/SOUTH – STRUGGLE: Change negative life experiences into positive behaviours that influence all our Relations.

BLUE/WEST – BUILDING: Continue to develop the mind and gain Knowledge.

Further to this, here is a specific breakdown for clarity;

- East Represents – Balance, Confidence, Creativity
- South Represents – Strength, Focus, Success
- North Represents – Courage, Energy, Knowledge
- West Represents – Change, Choice, Proof



Plains Medicine Wheel

When applied in combat, the teachings of each specific direction are then structured and used in the following manner;

Eastern Action: Locate, set up and develop a solid attack position

Southern Action: Challenge your opponent aggressively and bravely

Northern Action: Control your opponent with surprise or overwhelming force

Western Action: Takedown, finish out and move on to the next adversary

All hand, foot and body mechanics are a reflection through specific Plains-Cree Aboriginal weaponry and their respective movements. Indigenous weaponry such as the Tomahawk, Lance, Gunstock War club and Knife are still utilized throughout the system today. In relation, all hand-to-hand techniques are conducted by a practitioner in such a fashion that they appear to be holding a weapon even if they are not.

Spiritually the martial art of Okichitaw continues to embrace historical teachings known as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings honour the traditional applications of our Grandfathers, which include Respect, Honesty, Love, Bravery, Truth, Humility and Wisdom.

As participants of Okichitaw, we maintain the emphasis on the importance of spirituality. By doing this, we allow the spirit to motivate us and keep us in balance of our body, mind and spirit. As we receive these traditional teachings on our journey through life, they will only help us discover our purpose as we learn from each one of these experiences and the challenge that may be before us.

By following and living the Seven Grandfather teachings of Respect, Honesty, Love, Bravery, Truth, Humility and Wisdom, only then will one be able to obtain the nourishment for strength, passion and the indomitable spirit of their Ancestors.

The following are the teachings and provide a clearer understanding on what each component of the 7 Grandfather Teachings represent;

Respect - / Meyo tota'wew to honour all of creation is to have respect.

Show regards for the value of persons or things through continuous courteous consideration and appreciation. Honour your traditional roles and teachings. Honour your family, others, and ourselves. Don't hurt anything or anyone on the outside or the inside.

Honesty - / Kwuyusk wait siwin to walk through life with integrity is to know Honesty.

Be truthful and trustworthy. Tell the truth. Accept and act on your truths through straightforward and appropriate communication.

Love - / Sake-hi-towin to know love is to know peace.

Have strong affection for another formed out of kinship or personal ties; attachments based upon devotion, admiration, tenderness, unselfish loyalty, benevolent concern. Feel and give absolute kindness for all things around you. To love oneself is to live at peace with the creator and in harmony with all creation.

Bravery - / Napeh Kasowin to face life with courage is to know bravery.

Gain the personal strength to face difficulties, obstacles and challenges. Have courage, make positive choices. Stand up for your convictions--show courage in communicating and decision-making.

Truth - / Tapwe'win to know of these things is to know the truth.

Faithfully apply the teachings of our seven grandfathers and trust in the creator. Provide sincerity in your actions, character, and utterance. Be faithful to fact and reality.

Humility - / Tapah-ti-mowin to accept oneself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility.

Reflecting, expressing or offering in a spirit of deference or submission. Balance of equality with all of life. Recognize the human need for balance in life.

Wisdom - / Ayinese'win to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.

Have sound judgment with the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships. Use good sense and form a good attitude and course of action. Listen and use the wisdom of the Elders, tribal leadership and spiritual leaders.

Once a student warrior adorns the Seven Grandfather Teachings, they will have acquired an abundance of knowledge and commitment to becoming a warrior of peace. As a warrior of peace, they will not be afraid to step into darkness for they have come to know true success and personal victory in their life.

Characteristics of Okichitaw

Okichitaw is a martial art that utilizes full body mechanics to deliver the maximum amount of impact to an opponent. This action is in conjunction of using one's own body weight to deliver strikes and takedowns is also significant to the Martial Art of Okichitaw. Jumping, rolling and leaping are used to initiate attacks, Rotational striking applications similar to how the arm and body move when holding an impact weapon such as a war club, lance, tomahawk or knife.

Simply described, imagine a slash conducted with a knife in your right hand starting from above your right shoulder and then diagonally swing it across the front of your body to your lower left. Now, imagine this same movement without actually holding the knife, but still applying the same delivery of the movement with a closed fist (hammer fist). The movement is identical. Much of Okichitaw's movements are simply attributed to this type of process. However, as the techniques and deliveries become more challenging, the application and impact of the strikes into the opponent severely increase in speed, lethality, commitment and accuracy.

The attacking movement in Okichitaw would be considered a very committed one. The biggest challenge for the Okichitaw practitioner is to truly understand their own limitations and to not over commit themselves to an attack or retreat for that matter. In applying this understanding they will not place themselves in position that they simply cannot recover from.

This is one of the biggest training challenges in Okichitaw as only after constant training and persistence will one be able to understand what they can do to themselves and to another when using the aggressive nature of Okichitaw in a combative application.

Okichitaw Miche che Kiske (Hand Fighting)

Okichitaw employs a variety of hand techniques which are all a derivative of various weapon applications. This practice and movement is noted when these weapons are being yielded by a student. All hand positions and movements in Okichitaw are very similar, if not identical to that of a student holding their weapon(s) (tomahawk, gunstock war club, knife, etc.), either in one or both of their hands.

In comparison to other martial arts, Okichitaw would be considered a "hard style" martial art being that it tends to direct much of its energy outward to meet energy with energy. At times, Okichitaw also trains on uneven surfaces and utilizes unorthodox manoeuvres to meet its objective of defeating an enemy.

Okichitaw tends to strike hard and more if necessary, and will deliver more force and commitment with each strike and movement. Okichitaw students will often damage their adversary with their blocks by turning them into physical attacks. Due to the fact that Okichitaw delivers its technique with much power, it also makes it very challenging if not difficult to move out of the way or defend oneself from a aggressive, committed or launched attack.

It's important to understand that due to the aggressive nature of force, Okichitaw ends up requiring a higher commitment from the student. Due to this fact, unless the student embraces humility, tolerance and empathy, they will not recover well from their actions or mistakes. As indicated earlier, the style of Okichitaw has a tendency to emphasize body mechanics, surprise, leverage, and applied force. In Okichitaw we tend to use weight, strength, positioning, and anatomy to our optimal advantage when challenging an adversary.

One of the first things that any student learns when they start a martial art is how to stand. It is the basis of all Martial Arts and probably one of the most important lessons a student will ever learn. When one refers to a stance, we're talking about a few concepts:

- Where the feet are positioned?
- How far apart are your legs?
- What is the weight distribution between your two sides?

The Okichitaw stance will define a person's balance and root. Too often, martial artists first focus on the techniques of the hands. In principle, even if a technique (a punch, strike or throwing a weapon) is delivered wrong, even if the stance is solid it will be very difficult for an opponent to gain advantage of an attack.

Unlike other martial arts, Okichitaw uses a "right leg forward stance" instead of the standard "right leg back stance" which is well practiced in many martial art systems.

The right front stance has two specific applications, first it indicates the aggressiveness of the attack and second it shortens the distance between you and the adversary. It also allows the practitioner to perform "bursting forward" movements quickly, thus forcing one to engage immediately and forces the opponent off balance.

Arm and Hand Positioning

The positioning of the hands and arms while embracing weapons are the concept that establishes the hand techniques of Okichitaw.

Therefore the application of wielding a tomahawk in one's right hand can be easily adopted into a hand technique such as a hammer fist if there is no tomahawk present.

At the same time, the left hand which usually holds a long knife, now becomes a forearm block or a clenching hand with the absence of the knife.

Okichitaw Weaponry and General History

Historically, as Plains Warriors we relied heavily upon our weapons as well as the art of hand to hand combat and any respective fighting style. It should be well known that Tribes were prepared to defend their land, their women, and their children and were very well trained and prepared for the task. In modern day Okichitaw, we use and train with weapons such as the tomahawk, lance, knife, tomahawk and gunstock war club which were a part of our historic weaponry. These native weapons continue to be an important part of the fighting style of Okichitaw.

Knife – Moh Kô mân

Knives are not unique as a warfare or battle instrument. Although most other cultures have used some form of knife technique when engaging in battle, the design and purpose of the Indian knife has always had an individual use, both as an effective instrument of combat and as a ceremonial piece to a warrior's regalia. During warfare, we used the knife to defend ourselves against invaders and enemies. The knife holder, better known as the sheath was either attached to a sash along the hip, or simply hung from the neck with hide or leather for immediate reach. The neck sheath was more of an effective reaching point if in fact a hand to hand fight went to the ground with an adversary. Another important note is that historically, rarely did a warrior possess only one (1) knife, but actually possessed multiple blades which were always kept at the ready throughout various locations on his person (e.g. neck, ankle, hip, back).

Tomahawk – Che kiyi kunis

Tomahawks are probably the most well known of all the Native weapons. Like an axe or hatchet, the historical Tomahawk was made of wood with metal blades. During the early times, the association of the Tomahawk for aboriginal people changed somewhat as white frontiersmen (traders, trappers and explorers) came to rely on the tomahawk as standard equipment. Some of these early pieces were crafted in a most elaborate manner, with fancy engraving and pewter or silver inlaid blades and handles, for presentation to important chiefs in order to commemorate treaties and seal friendships.

Today, the combat tomahawk has a great advantage as a close quarter combat weapon. In Okichitaw, one is trained to hit, hook, block and trap any individual attack including their weapon.

Tactical defensive and offensive movements using the tomahawk may include parrying, blocking, locking the blade and sweeping as well as fierce attacks, which may involve swinging the tomahawk forward or from side to side and even vertically and horizontally not to mention effective throwing with accuracy. As with any form of weapon combat, extensive and persistent practice makes the Okichitaw fighter more efficient.

Lance / Spear – Chikah'kwan / Tahka'chikun

Lances and Spears were used by warriors in battle in various applications from foot and horseback. The shaft was 6 – 8 feet long, or 10 – 12 feet long if used from horseback. These heads were made of iron, stone, carved and edged to a pointed tip. The shaft of the spear was usually made with a wooden stick while the head of the spear was an arrowhead, piece of metal such as copper, or a bone that had been sharpened. Spears were the weapons of choice for many warriors.

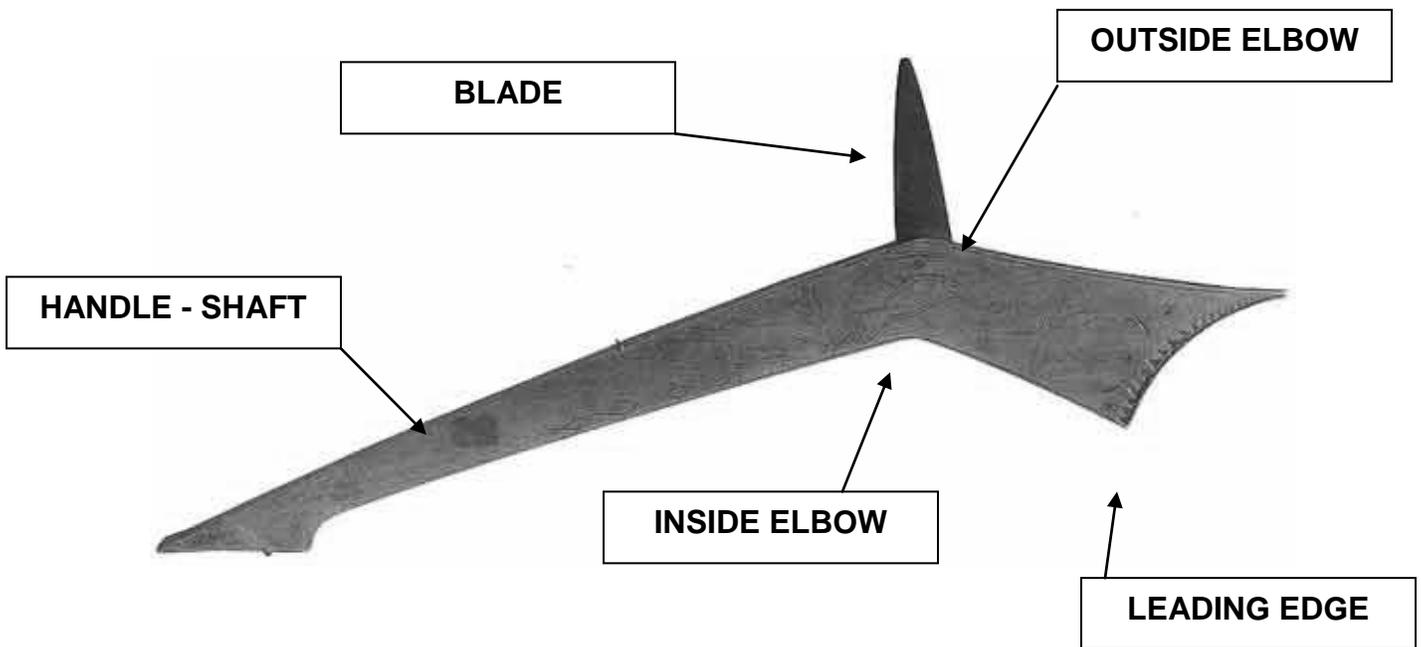
The lance is fairly inexpensive to make and is easy to use and train with. It requires less training for use in combat than many of the other weapons used in Okichitaw. Similar to training with a long staff, the Native lance has similar battle tactics. However with the adoption of the double edged Buffalo blade at one end, it makes the lance very effective in the art of throwing as well as swing through attack applications (e.g. cutting, slashing and spearing) towards an opponent.

Gunstock War Club (*Notini towin mistik*)

Indigenous warriors in the early sixteenth century began fashioning gunstock war clubs as a practical combat weapon based on visual examples that were seen during this era. The name of the weapon was derived from the shape and design of the instrument. Warriors often observed the effective impact power of a spent musket (which could weigh anywhere between 3.5 to 5.5 kilograms (8 to 12lbs) when wielded by the weapon's barrel during hand-to-hand engagements.



Here is an illustration of components of a Gunstock War club:



This style of War Club became incredibly popular because of its resemblance to a firearm as well as its very intimidating appearance. Each person who carried it also often personalized them. This customization also continues to this day. Designs include items such as feathers, leather, paint, beads, brass tacks, hair and carvings. These weapons hit with incredible force and prove to be extremely lethal weapons as their impact power is often enhanced by the addition of a blade, spike or short lance on the reverse elbow of the weapon.

Historically, the gunstock war club became a very common weapon among indigenous peoples from the Great Lakes and Woodlands regions right across to the Great Plains and was in use up unto the 1880's.

Out of all of the above mentioned weapons, the Gunstock War Club continues to be the primary and most consistent weapon of Okichitaw and being such; all hand techniques of Okichitaw are based on the hand positioning and attack applications of this specific weapon.



The Structure of Okichitaw

The system of Okichitaw is broken down to four directions (East, South, North and West) which include 12 levels.

Once a student adorns up to four level teachings and techniques, the next direction is taught. So for example, the student would have to learn, grade and pass levels 1, 2 and 3 to ensure that they have passed through the “Eastern Doorway”. Following this level, they would then have to learn, grade and pass levels 4, 5 and 6 to ensure that they have passed through the “Southern Doorway”, etc.

The training and testing in Okichitaw varies throughout various physical training applications and techniques. Below are some examples of the various practices that could commonly be seen throughout the system in Okichitaw:

OKICHITAW Various Physical Training Applications

- Hurdle Jumping over Various Objects: *Adjust height and length of jumping distances as the class training progresses.*
- Obstacle and Barricade Running Drills: *This drill is to force the student to take evasive action or change direction rapidly.*
- Rolling and Tumbling: Forward, Backwards, Sideways. *All done throughout different positions as well as running into the roll.*
- Heightened Jumping and Running Drills: *Jumping off and onto an elevated area.*
- Uneven Terrain Training Drills: *Ensure the ground level changes throughout the process.*

OKICHITAW Various Training Techniques

- Rolling Attacks: *Use of attacking rolls into an opponent.*
- Forearm/Hammer/Slash Strikes & Kicking Attacks: *Use focus pads for strike training.*
- Weapon Target Focusing: *Use weaponry for throwing to test and challenge hand/eye co-ordination. Set up targets/barricades to trap and catch weaponry.*
- Leg Pressure Take Down Tactics: *This focuses on attacking the opponent by crushing the legs by focusing on the side of the knee and driving it down.*
- Throwing / Tripping: *Tripping or throwing an opponent to the ground through applying techniques #1 to #20.*
- Restraints: *Being held by an opponent and applying a technique from #1 to #20.*
- Hand to hand Techniques: *3- Step as well as 1-Step Sparring #1 through to #20*
- Leg and Body Trapping Takedowns: *Focus on securing the opponent’s legs or body to challenge their movement and bring them down to the ground....*

Ranking / Teachings of Okichitaw

Unlike other martial arts, Okichitaw does not include or use an extensive belt ranking system. In fact, the only colored belts we use are white, red, red/black and black. Each one of these represents a direction and embraces the teachings of that direction. Having said this, Okichitaw is truly based on the philosophy and physical attributes of the Four Directions and the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

So for example the East represents balance, confidence and creativity, whereas the South represents strength, focus and success. If we look to the North which is the direction of strength for the Warrior, we notice that it represents courage, energy and knowledge. Finally the West represents challenge, choice, and proof.

All of these teachings take a significant amount of time to learn and to become instinctive with time. If we look at the four levels of Okichitaw the following applies to a student's experience as they move throughout the system.

Level 1 (EAST); This direction represents a student who is a new learner that has no previous knowledge or experience in the art of Okichitaw. A new student with a white belt is a very daunting experience; everything they do is brand new. They may feel clumsy and awkward as they try to perform the techniques as we consistently go through them. These students see the Senior Belts within the class who may look intimidating because they appear so confident, committed and quick.

As a white belt, the student will learn all the basic fundamental movements in Okichitaw. Stances, basic attack and defense techniques are drilled out, all in preparation for the next phase of their training. As the student participates more frequently, they begin to feel more confident. They get to the point where they have been training for several months and the training is becoming a part of their weekly routine. They are learning more about Plains-Cree culture, traditions as well as techniques of Okichitaw.

Level 2 (SOUTH); This is the point where Okichitaw and the development for the student starts to become intriguing and exciting. They are now developing strength, control and are also beginning to notice that they have started using their entire body while training in Okichitaw techniques. This is where we really see the student taking hold of their training and embracing all the teachings that we have to offer. They now become hungry to continuously participate in Okichitaw.

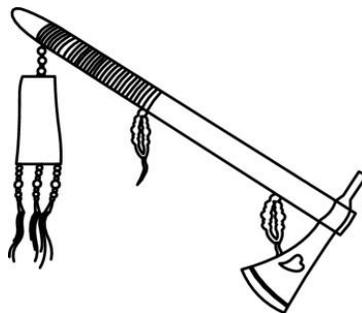
Level 3 (NORTH); When the student reaches this point, we notice that their progress begins to slow down slightly and their original reason for joining Okichitaw Martial Arts have been long since forgotten. It's also noted that Okichitaw has become much more than a hobby for them – it's now a way of life. The Red/Black belt signifies danger, cautioning the student to exercise self control. The Red/Black Belt student now has the goal of becoming a Black Belt firmly in their sights.

The goal of senior rank for the student can be a very humbling experience as the student will have to wait until Summer Solstice for their test if they qualify. Often the student who believes that they deserve their Black Belt is the one who is probably a long way from it. Many students see it as the end of their training, the highest achievement in their art. It is easy to understand this misconception because it is the last color belt the student will receive in Okichitaw.

Level 4 (WEST); We call this the New Beginning for the student. At this point the student has undertaken their grading, teachings and has also proven their worth. They have demonstrated maturity and a solid understanding of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. They may not actually feel different, but we know from their training for so long that in fact they have changed.

These Black Belt students will look back on the time that has passed since they were that new white belt when they first started. They remember the faces of the training partners that have come and gone and the people that inspired them along the way. They remember the challenges that they faced and how these challenges don't seem that difficult anymore.

While reviewing their own journeys, every one of these students will see that the Black Belt itself is not as important as the lessons that they have learned along the way.



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