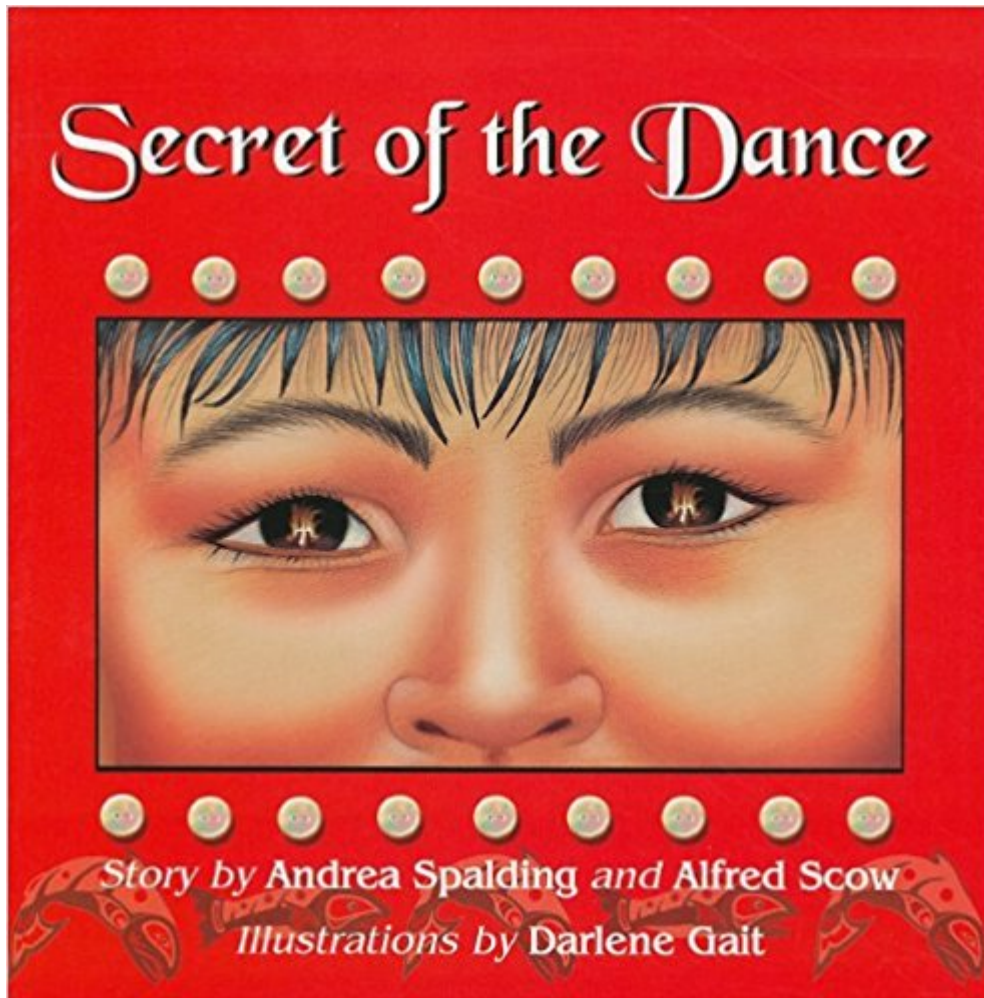




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Secret Of The Dance



Synopsis

In 1935, a nine-year-old boy's family held a forbidden Potlatch in faraway Kingcome Inlet. Watl'kina slipped from his bed to bear witness. In the Big House masked figures danced by firelight to the beat of the drum. And there, he saw a figure he knew. Aboriginal elder Alfred Scow and award-winning author Andrea Spalding collaborate to tell the story, to tell the secret of the dance.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

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Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

Grade 4 Up
•This picture book is based on an incident from Scow's childhood. In 1935, a Native boy and his family are spirited away by boat to a secret location where he witnesses a Potlatch ceremony-outlawed with severe consequences at that time by the Canadian government. This story gives readers barely a taste of the culture and vast history around the topic. Bold and colorful acrylic illustrations do serve to add drama and interest; they are interlaced with ghostly Native imagery. Names (e.g., "Watl'kina" and "Tlakwetl") and vocabulary are difficult to read and pronounce without a guide. A historical note is included, although it's at the end of the book rather than at the beginning. Younger children who gravitate to picture books may find the abstract concepts of government and prejudice difficult to comprehend. The story is far more suited to older children who would empathize with and appreciate what Native Canadians endured at this challenging time in their history.
•Corrina Austin, Locke's Public School, St. Thomas,

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In defiance of an 1885 Canadian law, the Aboriginal people held their traditional ceremonials in secrecy, risking prison and the removal not only of their masks and cultural artifacts but also of their children. Based on the experience of Scow's grandfather (who went to prison for his defiance), this large, handsome picture book tells the tale from the perspective of eight-year-old Watl'kina, who steals out at night to watch the masked dancers at a secret Potlatch. The terse, plain narrative ("My parents and I never spoke of that night") is dramatically illustrated with full-page acrylics that juxtapose black-and-white scenes of daily life (including pictures of a bullying government agent) with brilliantly colored, elaborate art and costumes of the traditional ceremonies. This child's view of brave adults engaged in a secret rebellion will introduce young readers to a new piece of North American history; an appended note gives a bit more background. Give this to children who enjoyed Louise Erdrich's *The Game of Silence* (2005). Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Great book. Great price. Quick delivery. I was pleased when I got it so soon and in such good condition. I will buy from this site again.

Picture a man whose life's work has been to uphold the law. Picture that same man with a childhood secret that could have sent his family to jail. Now picture Canada in 1935 when Aboriginal cultural practices like the Potlatch were forbidden. Award-winning children's author Andrea Spalding and Judge Alfred Scow, a Kwakwa'ka'wakw Nations elder have teamed up to tell a story based on the judge's childhood, *Secret of the Dance*. It is beautifully illustrated by Darlene Gait whose blend of high realism and native motifs enrich every page. "Many years ago, when the world and I were younger, my family defied the government." begins Judge Scow's story. The narrator, Watl'kina tells us that in 1935, an Indian Agent (government representative) warned his parents that the Potlatch and the dancing that were a part of a Potlatch ceremony were illegal. Watl'kina's family knew that the Potlatch was an essential part of their cultural identity. They used a fishing trip to disguise a visit to family in a nearby village hosting a Potlatch. They were careful to keep the reason for their visit secret even from their children. Their attendance at a Potlatch ceremony could result in the adult members of the family being jailed and their children being taken away. As the oldest child, Watl'kina was charged with looking after his younger siblings while his parents attended the village

long house. But, the drums from the long house called him and Watl'kina could not resist. He crept through the night to the long house where he witnessed not only the unforgettable ceremony, but a familiar figure dancing. It was his father. The great joy in reading quality picture books lay in the many levels that they can be read at. *Secret of the Dance* definitely resides in this quality picture book category. A young child could simply enjoy the adventure of a trip and sneaking out at night to witness something special but forbidden, while the more experienced reader will understand the historical and cultural importance of bearing witness and yet having to hide that knowledge.

Furthermore, First Nations readers can take tremendous pride in being part of a culture able to withstand repeated and often times brutal attempts to destroy it. While *Secret of the Dance* is fictional, the danger of being caught at a Potlatch would have been all too real. It created a blanket of silence during Judge Scow's childhood and a climate of secrecy. *Secret of the Dance* is another step in throwing off the blanket of silence over a shameful chapter in our history, and one that nearly destroyed the rich cultural heritage of Coastal First Nations. Healing can only happen when a wound is exposed and treated. Stories like Judge Scow's are a long needed medicine for wounds too long covered up. It is a compelling story that brings recent history to life.

For young Watl'kina, taking the fishing boat with his family to a small village nestled in an inlet starts out as an adventure. He's not sure why they're going, or what the strangely wrapped bundles contained that were hidden on board the boat during the night. When he and his siblings are put to bed while his parents meet with the Elders, Watl'kina is disappointed to not be part of the feast and festivities. He knows, though, that if an Indian Agent were to have followed their boat from home, there would be trouble. After his younger siblings are asleep, Watl'kina is unable to resist the lure of the drums and chanting he hears outside his window. He sneaks away, only to meet masked figures who allow him entrance into the Big House. There, he's able to watch the ceremony, the dancing, and the chanting. He even sees, for the one and only time in his life, his masked father dancing. *SECRET OF THE DANCE* is based on history, when the Canadian government instituted laws forbidding the Aboriginal people to hold their ritual ceremonies. Offered a choice between prison and having their ceremonial garb and regalia confiscated, many chose prison. Although this story might be too complicated for younger children who don't understand true oppression or the Aboriginal customs, it's still an interesting look at how the world has come full circle. Reviewed by: Jennifer Wardrip, aka "The Genius"

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