

# Celebrations – Gitxsan Gweey'ya

**Gweey'ya.** pronounced  
*GWAY-ee-ah*

Within the feast system of the Gitxsan is an event called the Gweey'ya. A Gweey'ya is a lighthearted song used by the Gitxsan to solicit extra funds from the spouses of the hosting clan. The song is sung by the host clan, “Poor, poor me, I am greedy, I want more money, so I remember, and they insert the name of the spouse.” The spouse dances up wearing a costume and presents their donation in a creative way. This portion of the feast was modified and used as a fundraiser for BC Children’s Hospital.

The Gweey'ya song was rewritten and modified for the occasion. The Ksan Performers came with their drums and singers. The Gitxsan children were listed under their clans, Frog (Lax See'l), Fireweed (Giskaast) and Wolf (Lax Gibuu). All the non-Gitxsan staff and children were divided equally among the three clans.

The theme of the first Gweey'ya was “Children are the Flowers of the Gitxsan.” Flower seeds were donated by seed stores and packages of flower seeds were mailed out with the invitations to the local businesses and other schools.

Each class had to decide a name incorporating the theme. The children decided on a costume and made a huge cheque that the entire class had to dance up with and present. The huge building was decorated with flowers that the children had made.

Since the Lax Gibuu was hosting the Gweey'ya feast, the children belonging to the clan had to bring juice and bannock and serve the seated Giskaast and Lax See'l.

This event opened the doors for the Gitxsan culture to be acted out in the school system. It has always been my belief that the Gitxsan children’s culture be accepted and recognized in the schools, in order to motivate the Gitxsan learners. Children must first know who they are and be established in their identity before they can fully appreciate and desire to learn about others.

The Gweey'ya creates the reality of the feast. The Gweey'ya brings the abstract teaching about the culture alive and allows the children to witness and be a part of the real thing. The Gweey'ya also empowers students who have participated in a traditional feast that was held for such reasons as death, name giving, pole raising, and gravestone raising. At the Gweey'ya these students are recognized for their knowledge of the proper way that events should be directed.

The Gweey'ya teaches all about the value of giving to those who are less fortunate. It has made our students aware that they must go beyond their community and help others. The students have watched their community give, and from this they will learn to help others who are in need, even if they themselves are in need. For this is the true nature of giving. At the Gweey'ya the education of the students went beyond the classroom, as they were given the opportunities to learn and value cooperation, caring, empathy, generosity and concern for others. All the students, Gitxsan and non-Gitxsan were given the opportunity to participate in an afternoon of cultural immersion. The students were a part of an event that showed them that anything is possible.

By undertaking the Gweey'ya, the children are allowed to incorporate their culture into their education. The Gweey'ya takes a portion of the Gitksan feast and allows the learners to experience a sense of identity, the importance of culture and the knowledge that we are all connected. In order that the students learn effectively they must be participants and not only spectators. The Gweey'ya connects the Gitksan curriculum to the school lives of children. The opportunity to make a contribution to BC Children's Hospital helps the children to practice meaningful involvement with the world around them.

The Gweey'ya is an event that has enhanced the education at our school. The idea that was born to comfort the friends of Matthew has been of great benefit to BC Children's Hospital and the learners at our school. In paying a tribute to Matthew's memory, our school recognized the educational value in accepting the Gitksan children as learners and teachers.