



**NEBRASKA BY HEART** Folk Arts • Traditional Arts • Folklife Curriculum Unit • Grades 6–8

## List of Nebraska Traditional Artists

The artists and speakers on this list are only a small percentage of the tradition bearers who live in our state. Many traditional artists and knowledgeable speakers are either very new to Nebraska or for other reasons aren't able to travel, perform or demonstrate their arts, or give talks to the public. The people on this list are artists and speakers who have applied to and been included in the Nebraska Arts Council's roster of artists or the Nebraska Humanities Council Speakers Bureau and thus have indicated that they are willing and able to make public appearances. They can be contacted through those agencies.

### Nebraska Arts Council - Traditional Artists

For artist contact information go to [www.nebraskaartscouncil.org](http://www.nebraskaartscouncil.org).

#### **Charles Ahovissi, Omaha, NE — West African Traditional Dance and Crafts**

Charles Ahovissi is a professional dancer, performer, choreographer, stage costume designer, and tailor from Benin, West Africa. He has toured the world and now lives in Omaha. Through artist residencies he shares his knowledge and love of Africa through traditional dancing and drumming. Charles promotes multiculturalism and unity while offering students a fun, social and physical activity. Creating African crafts such as masks, necklaces, headbands, shakers, and ankle bells can also be incorporated into the residency

#### **Ashanti, Lincoln, NE — Ghanaian Dance and Drumming**

Ashanti is a traditional Ghanaian drum and dance group led by Michael Opoku that also performs world beat (Hi-life Music, Sukuf, Soca, Calypso, Reggae, Funk and Blues). Members of the group hail from Ghana, Kenya, Sudan and the United States. Their performance includes information about the culture and traditions of various African nations and they also can provide a display of African arts and crafts.

#### **Linda Garcia-Perez, Omaha, NE — Latino Visual Folk Arts and Storytelling**

A native of South Omaha's Mexican barrio, Linda Garcia-Perez teaches Latino folk arts and tells stories that are part of her cultural heritage. Some of the folk arts she can include are papel picado (Mexican paper cutting), amate (bark) painting, murals, Mexican tin works, milagros (votive offerings), Ojos de Dios (God's eyes), cascarones (Mexican Easter eggs), calaveras (papier mache and wire skeletons) and ofrendas (altars) for el Dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead.) She tells stories from many Latin American countries and also has a program of Abuelita (Grandmother) stories she heard when she was a girl.

#### **Willard Hollopeter, Wood Lake, NE — Western (Cowboy) Poetry**

Willard Hollopeter has spent most of his life ranching in Nebraska's sandhills. He's also done a bit of rodeoing. He writes 'For What It's Worth,' a column for cattle country newspapers, has a book of poetry entitled "So Many Winters," is a frequent performer at western poetry gatherings and is one of the

organizers of the Nebraska Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Old West Days in Valentine.

### **Kusi Taki, Lincoln, NE — Music of the South American Andes Mountain Region**

Led by Oscar Rios Pohirieth, Kusi Taki brings audiences an experience of the Andean cultures of Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Chile through music and storytelling. Kusi Taki means “enchanting music” in the Quechua Indian language. They play traditional South American instruments including the quena (flute), zamponas (panpipes), charango (ten-stringed small guitar) and bombo (goatskin drum) and sing in Spanish and Quechua to bring alive the cultures and history of the indigenous people of the Andes.

### **Chizuko Takechi, Omaha, NE — Japanese Traditional Arts and Culture**

Chizuko Takechi is a former educator who provides information, demonstrations and workshops on Japanese culture and tradition for various levels of students and adults. She provides experiences with origami (paper-folding), ikebana (flower-arrangement), manners and customs, etc. Her focus, however is Japanese calligraphy and sumi-e, a type of Japanese brush painting that aims to depict the spirit, rather than the semblance of the object.

### **Karen Tyndall, Walthill, NE — Traditional Appliqué of the Omaha Tribe**

Karen Tyndall is a member of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. She became interested in creating and sewing traditional Native American clothing and appliqué work through her grandmother’s influence. Her grandmother was well-known for her sewing skills in the local community where she resided. Although Karen’s work in appliqué designs are created from her own unique design ideas, she nevertheless incorporates these designs into the traditional style of clothing worn by Native American men and women past and present.

### **Luigi Waites, Omaha, NE — Jazz, Percussion Instruments**

Luigi Waites has played music professionally in and around the Omaha area and throughout the state of Nebraska for more than fifty years. He has actively worked with a wide variety of schools K-12 and colleges in sixteen states and has completed two European tours. He is a great source of knowledge on Omaha’s African American jazz music history and was honored with the Governor’s Arts Award as \_996 Artist of the Year by the Nebraska Arts Council.

### **Georgeann Wearin, Hyannis, NE — Western (Cowgirl) Poetry**

Georgeann Wearin writes western poetry from the woman’s perspective and her subjects range from love of family to the cowboy way of life. Along with her poetry, Wearin plays the guitar and sings some of her own songs and a few traditional cowboy ballads. Young and old alike will enjoy the humor and learn more about what it’s like to live on a ranch during her performance.

### **Joan Wells, Lincoln, NE — Western Trick Roping**

Joan Wells presents an educational and entertaining program of trick and fancy roping. This type of Wild West performance art became a part of American heritage more than one hundred years ago. Joan won the title of Women’s World Champion Trick Roper in \_979, then in \_989 was inducted to the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas. Her program includes a fast-moving 35-minute presentation with narrative and is choreographed to contemporary western music.

## **Nebraska Humanities Council Speakers Bureau — Speakers/Tradition Bearers**

For speaker contact information go to [www.nebraskahumanities.org](http://www.nebraskahumanities.org).

### **Janice Collins Brooks, Omaha, NE — African American Gospel Music and Traditional Stories**

Janice Collins Brooks tells the story of gospel music and gives life to the lesson by singing some selected examples. She also outlines the origin of the African-American folktale, tracing its roots and sharing some of the enchanting and intriguing stories from this folk tradition. Her program explores the ceremony, the ritual and the art of African American folklore.

### **James P. Cavanaugh, Omaha, NE — The Irish in Nebraska, 1850-2000**

Presented by attorney James Cavanaugh, who is a member of Omaha's Irish community, this program is a review of the Irish in Nebraska from the days before the Nebraska Territory to the present.

### **Meenakshi Nath Dalal, Wayne, NE — Cultural Practices in India**

Meenakshi Dalal discusses the many facets of Indian tradition and culture, including arranged marriage, the caste system and goddess worship.

### **Lorraine J. Duggin, Omaha, NE — Growing Up Czech in Nebraska**

Lorraine Duggin presents elements of Czech-American culture and history from the perspective of a Czech Nebraskan. She includes arts and literature, folk songs and dance, folktales and lore, traditional costumes, Czech festivals of Nebraska, Omaha's Czech neighborhoods, and Nebraska Czech cemeteries.

### **Ricardo Garcia, Lincoln, NE — The Art & Practice of Hispano Storytelling**

Professor, author and storyteller Ricardo Garcia entertains and informs by telling stories from Northern New Mexico, a major center of Hispano culture in the United States. His stories are interspersed with chistes (jokes), cuentos (legendary tales) and corridos (legendary ballads.)

**Nancy S. Gillis, Bancroft, NE — The Voice of Native American Women** Nancy Gillis, an educator and the Executive Director of the John G. Neihardt Center in Bancroft, is of Cherokee and Creek heritage. In this presentation she uses excerpts from primary documents in which Native American women have communicated their comments, pleas and advice from early colonial times to the present day. She explores the way native women have spoken out, in political, social and spiritual settings and in humor, pathos, anger and celebration, thereby passing their legacy to the next generation.

### **Mary Lee Johns, Lincoln, NE — Native American Traditional Storytelling**

Poet, historian and storyteller Mary Lee Johns is a Miniconju/Itazipco Lakota who was raised on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in western South Dakota. She relates Lakota stories told to her by her grandmother, a traditional storyteller. While sharing Lakota history, cultural values and principles used to teach the younger generations, she explains the reasons for storytelling and how they are embedded with valuable instruction. She also provides a program on Lakota history, culture and spirituality.

### **Mathew "Sitting Bear" Jones, Lincoln, NE — Kiowa Tales**

These are the stories, tales and legends of Set-Angia, Sitting Bear's Native American people. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, these stories reveal the Kiowa vision of the world—from the time of Creation to the coming of the white man. Attired in native dress, Sitting Bear brings to the audience through his storytelling the thinking and customs of his Kiowa people, legends such as why the Crow is black and how the Coyote got his yell. He also offers a program on the Otoe-Missouria Tribe.

### **Janet Lu, Lincoln, NE — Chinese Culture and Language**

A native of Shanghai, China, Janet Lu can speak on a number of topics related to China and its culture,

including the social condition, customs, religion, the political system, intercultural communication, history, music, the arts, the education system and both written and spoken language. She is vice president of the Lincoln Chinese Cultural Association. She also presents a program on Chinese immigrants in America. She prefers to speak within a 60-mile radius of Lincoln.

### **Wynema Morris, Walthill, NE — Native American Values For the 21st Century**

A member of the Omaha tribe, Wynema Morris is a scholar and educator who has also served extensively in tribal government. Her presentation provides a cultural analysis of the world view of Native American people and discusses how traditional Indian ways continue among Omaha people today. Some of the concepts she discusses include how this differing cultural understanding between Indian and non-Indian people affects views of time, nature, sharing and acquisition, work, cooperation and competition, teaching and learning, acceptance of change, religion, aging, power and recognition and law.

### **Mark & Dawn Nielsen, Blair, NE — Voices From the New Land: Danish Immigration to Nebraska**

The Niensens explore Danish immigration to Nebraska through dramatic readings from immigrant letters, journals and diaries, as well as slides of old photographs, drawings and scenes of present-day Denmark and Nebraska. The presentation focuses on the stories of individuals—what motivated them to emigrate, how they struggled with the land and faced the hardships of drought and the deaths of loved ones. The Niensens describe how immigrants experienced the joys of community and the satisfaction of realizing their dreams.

### **Olga Olivares, Lincoln, NE — Mexican American Culture, History and Folk Traditions in Nebraska**

A former museum curator and long-time resident of Scottsbluff Nebraska, Olga Olivares is a true bearer of her culture's traditions. She offers several programs; one on Mexican American sayings (dichos), one on the history of Mexican Americans in Nebraska, and one on Mexican American Christmas traditions. She relates how dichos demonstrate the wisdom, psychology, and social values of Mexican people and thus are an extremely important cultural tradition to preserve. In her Christmas presentation she brings many Mexican American items for everyone to see and touch as she explains their significance in the nine-day holiday celebration.

### **Olliver Pollak, Omaha, NE — The Holocaust: A Personal Documentary**

Olliver Pollak gives audiences a unique view of the Holocaust by telling the story of his grandfather, a survivor of the Terezin (also spelled Theresin or Theresien) Nazi concentration camp in what is now the Czech Republic. The presentation includes personal reminiscences of Pollak's grandfather and follows him through his early years through his incarceration in Terezin and on to liberation in \_9\_5 and later immigration to the U.S. Artifacts shown include family papers, the star of David that his grandfather was forced to wear under Nazi occupation and items from the concentration camp.

### **Marisela Romero, Lexington, NE — Mexican Folkloric Dance and Culture**

Marisela Romero gives an enthusiastic introduction to Mexican and Mexican-American folkloric dance with vivid descriptions, real examples of Mexican dance and stories of how the different geographical regions influence dress and dance. She also describes the cultural impact of Mexican dance on American society.

### **Ben Salazar, Omaha, NE — Latinos: Searching for the Good Life in Nebraska**

Ben Salazar, publisher of the Omaha newspaper Nuestro Mundo, uses his experiences as a Latino who was born and raised in Nebraska, as well as other experiences such as his participation as an activist during the \_960s and '70s, to educate others about Latino issues in the state. Salazar says

that “our role as members of American society continues to intrigue me.”

### **John Schleicher, Omaha NE — Germans From Russia in Nebraska**

An historian, museum curator, native Nebraskan and third-generation German from Russian, John Schleicher knows his subject well. In the 18th century many Germans migrated to the Russian empire to escape the political and religious upheaval and to take advantage of the free land, religious and cultural freedom and exemption from military service promised by Catherine the Great. After more than 100 years these privileges were threatened and the Germans from Russia began to immigrate to the plains states of the U.S. This illustrated program looks at these people and the contributions they made to Nebraska in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **David Lee Smith, Winnebago, NE — Winnebago Traditional Stories for Contemporary Times**

David Lee Smith, tribal historian and a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, is also an educator and a traditional storyteller. His four-part program deals with the oral traditions of the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) people. They include origin stories, moralistic trickster stories, myths that explain how nature and animals came to be and tribal legends, which relate to the history and law of the tribe. His presentation can be tailored for children or for adults.

### **Phyllis R. Stone, Lincoln NE — Our Plains Indian Heritage**

Phyllis Stone is a descendant of Chief Iron Shell, a peace chief of the Rosebud Sioux. She explains the uses and traditions of handmade items she brings for this presentation — items from both past and present American Indian cultures. Dressed in a traditional Sioux woman’s buckskin dress, she speaks about the life of the Rosebud Sioux as she shares artifacts. She describes life on the reservation and how her family combines their Indian heritage with other interests. In another presentation she traces the life of a typical Lakota (Sioux) woman from birth to death.

### **Antonette Willa Skupa Turner, Bladen, NE — Antonia’s Czech Tulip Quilt**

The granddaughter of Czech immigrant Annie Pavelka, who was featured in Willa Cather’s MY ANTONIA, describes the quilt her grandmother made using brightly printed feed sacks and dressmaking cuttings. Turner tells the story behind the quilt and what it illustrates about her grandmother and about immigrant life in Nebraska in the early 20th century.

### **Phil Wendzillo, Crofton, NE — Ponca History and Heritage**

Phil Wendzillo, the Director of Cultural Affairs and a member of the Ponca Tribe, speaks on the history of the Poncas in Nebraska. Among his featured topics are the Trail of Tears, Chief Standing Bear and the effect his struggles and court victory had on Native American civil rights, and the tribe’s termination and ultimate restoration to official federal status.