

A complete how to guide for reenactors portraying Native Americans.

Native Reenacting Made Easy, How to Portray an Eastern Woodland Warrior

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Native Reenacting Made Easy

How to Portray an Eastern Woodland Warrior
Revised Edition



**Axehead
Publishing**

Michael L. Pitzer

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Chapter Seven

Paint & Scalplocks

Paint Overview

Most people's individual characteristics are considered to be their facial features, hair, etc. From birth, human beings are conditioned to recognize family, friends and foes from these features. Don't believe me? Think about a friend or loved one, what was the first thing that popped into your mind? I'll bet it was their face. Native warriors figured out that by obscuring their natural individual characteristics such as the face it can send chills down the spine of an enemy facing them in battle. For centuries, native warriors used this fear to their advantage by looking so frightening that the enemy would rather flee than fight.

Good body painting can make or break your impression. Few things will ruin a reenactor's appearance faster than face painting that looks like a Tammy Faye Baker makeover. Painting on inappropriate colors and patterns not only looks horrible but is also is very disrespectful to the culture you are trying to represent. (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

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The Meaning of Each Color

Colors and symbols used in battle had significant meaning to the wearer. Unfortunately, very little factual historical information has survived as to what colors and patterns were really used and why. Color meanings varied from tribe to tribe so these color definitions are just generally accepted interpretations.

RED (Mesquaway) – Worn when seeking vengeance or retribution. Symbolically it represents the blood that a warrior intended to spill. It was the color of war. (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

BLACK (Cuttaywah) – Was applied to cut-a-hotha (condemned men) when being led to their death through Shawnee, Mingo, Delaware & Wyandott villages. The condemned prisoner was completely covered in black (Eckert 2001). Other tribes considered it the color of life and it was worn on the face to let the enemy know you may take captives or show mercy. It was revered for the terrifying presence it created (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

WHITE (Wahcanaquah) - Color of peace Indians knew that the white man respected this color as a sign of peace. (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

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GREEN (Skeporscotto) – Under the eyes makes for better night sight or extra-ordinary night vision powers. (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

YELLOW (Hoθaawa) – Signifies death because it resembles “aged bone”. It also signifies a man has lived his life and will fight to the finish (Mott & Obermeyer, 1990).

Paint Safety 101

Non-Toxic does not mean safe for your body. Acrylic craft paints are not safe for the skin. Many people have strong allergic reactions to some of the chemicals and colorants used in craft paints (such as nickel). Reactions can be as minor as a rash and as severe as death (Trusty, Date Unknown). In addition to being unsafe to use on skin, the aforementioned paints are not authentic. Chances are that you will look more like a rodeo clown than a woodland warrior if you wear some of these paints. 18th century natives made their paints from plants, berries, charcoal and minerals. If you are inclined to make your own paints, it can be done with relative ease. However, I just buy mine from Crazy Crow Trading Post (www.crazycrow.com). Their powders are good and will not adversely impact your budget. In addition, their powdered paint is all natural and safe for use on even the most sensitive skin. A jar the size shown below costs around \$2.95 and several authentic colors are available.

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Creating a Paint Kit

All serious reenactors should create a paint kit. While it seems self explanatory, here are some tips that will save you aggravation and money. Begin by finding or making a deer skin pouch or other suitable carrying case. This will go to every reenactment you attend, so put some thought into it. You will also need some small tins with secure lids or plugged cane containers to store your powdered paints in.



Battle of Blue Licks, 2006 by Graphic Enterprises

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Paint Kit Materials List

- Jar of Red, Black, Yellow, Green & White Powdered Paint from Crazy Crow Trading Post \$2.95 Jar. Small amount of olive oil, deer or bear tallow if a purist.
- Three freshwater mussel shells or other small dishes - can be wood, metal, shell, stone, etc.
- Period correct mirror - crude & homemade preferred.
- Jar of cold cream - Pond's or generic.
- Five small tins that close securely for powdered paints.
- Two small period type bottles for oil, tallow, and cold cream.
- Leather bag for holding everything.
- Sock filled with red iron oxide, aka Texas dust bag.

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How to Use Your Paint Kit

Step One - Shave all body hair that will be painted and wash all exposed skin thoroughly.

Step Two - Apply the cold cream to your bare skin and allow it to dry.

Step Three - Pull out your mussel shells and put a little powdered paint into them (one color per shell).

Step Four - Pour a little oil/tallow into the shell and mix until paint is consistent in texture and color.

Step Five - Paint as desired and apply the Texas dust on any uncovered exposed skin.

TIP: If you need to scratch while in paint, use a small stick and poke it at the offending spot. This also works for sweat beads in hot weather.

You may also choose to get a spray tan from one of the commercial tanning operations near you. This may be a good approach for a multiple day event where showering is not possible.

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Paint Kit Details

Place the powdered paints into the small tins. One color per tin. Birch or cane containers may be substituted for the tins. Put the oil into some type of water tight spill free container. Store the cold cream in a similar way.



1830s lithograph based on the last portrait of Brant, an 1806 oil on canvas painting by Ezra Ames

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Examples of Face Paint



Battle of Blue Licks, 2006 by Graphic Enterprises



Siege of Boonesborough, 2007 by Graphic Enterprises

Prosthetic Scalp Locks

Throughout history, warrior cultures have thought that certain parts of the body contain mystical powers. The American Indian was no different. They believed that the scalp was connected to their fate, therefore a warrior's scalp lock represented his life to him. (Drimmer, 1985).

In Daniel Boone's captivity among the Shawnee, the scalp-lock is described as follows: "The ceremony of adoption was pretty severe and painful. All the hair of the head was plucked out by a tedious operation, leaving simply a tuft three or four inches in diameter on the crown. This was called the scalp lock. The hair was here allowed to grow long, and was dressed with ribbons and feathers. It was to an individual warrior what the banner is to an army. The victor tore it from the skull as his trophy. Having thus denuded the head and dressed the scalp-lock, the candidate was taken to the river and very thoroughly scrubbed, that all the white blood might be washed out of him"(Abbott, 1874, Pages 198 -199).

In the mentality of the Eastern Woodland warrior a scalp lock was a dare to the enemy to "come and take it" if he could. Typically, the scalp lock would be divided in three parts. The first was a long braid extending down to the neck and the other two were wrapped with quills forcing them to stand prominently above the head (Hartman, Hudson, Lee & Heath, 2000).

Scalp Lock Materials List

- Crown weave preferably black human hair.
- Tube of spirit gum
- Three leather ties

Scalp Lock Construction & Use Details

Step One - Trim the crown weave to size (about 4" diameter circle) and Braid the hair into 3 separate tufts. One about 8" long and two 4" long braids.

Step Two - Tie off the ends of each braid with the leather ties.

Step Three - Smear spirit gum to the underside of the scalp lock and clean your head with alcohol where you intend to attach the lock.

Step Four - Smear the attaching spot on your head with spirit gum and allow it to tack for about 5 minutes. Attach the scalp lock.

Step Five - Decorate with a porkey, hackle feather or a turkey roach.

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Long Run Massacre, 2008 by Graphic Enterprises



Siege of Boonesborough, 2007 by Graphic Enterprises

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“The Whites are already nearly a match for us all united, and too strong for any one tribe alone to resist. Unless we support one another with our collective forces, they will soon conquer us, and we will be driven away from our native country and scattered as leaves before the wind.”

Tecumseh, Shawnee

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