



The Healing Power of the Ziibaaska’iganagooday (Jingle Dress)

By Paula Maday, Staff Writer

The Jingle Dress is known throughout Ojibwe country to bring healing to the sick. There are many different origin stories about this powerful dress and the beautiful ceremony of dancing it. Here is one such story that comes from the Mille Lacs community. The late Larry “Amik” Smallwood, learned this story from elders:

A Mille Lacs man kept having a recurring dream of four women dancing in red, blue, green and yellow dresses featuring metal cones, traditionally crafted from snuff tobacco tins. After he told his wife the dream and showed her the springlike dance steps he saw, she and other community women created the dresses. Later the man shared his dream more widely, and the women demonstrated the dance. At the same time, the man’s daughter was very sick, hardly able to move. When the women began to dance, the girl stirred and watched, and by the end of the evening, she was up and dancing with the women.¹

The jingle dress and dance are said to have first appeared around 1918-1919, at a time when a sickness (influenza) was making its way around the world. In the wake of this illness, and the fear of its destruction, came the dream of the jingle dress and its healing power.

The tradition of the jingle dress lives on in Ojibwe culture today. Recently, dancers from St. Croix, Lac Courte Oreilles, Turtle Mountain, Bad River, Red Lake, and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation, Canada, came together virtually to dance “old style” in a video published on Facebook.

The caption to their video reads, “We respect this dress and the teachings we were given. Together we dance and pray for all of those affected by this sickness that has come to Mother Earth. We also pray for the frontline workers to be strong, and we pray that love and happiness touches everyone.”

On March 21, another group of women put on their jingle dresses in Bad River to dance for healing. As they danced, three eagles flew in and circled overhead. That day, migizi saw that the Ojibwe people are still living in a good way.

What does a jingle dress look like?

Traditional jingle dresses were often made from old formalwear or plain cotton dresses. They were sewn with rows of round, metallic snuff tins, rolled into a cone-shape.

Today, jingle dresses are made from fabrics in every color imaginable, including bright yellows, deep reds, even neon! Many dancers choose shiny, sparkly materials that reflect light off of the jingles as they move.

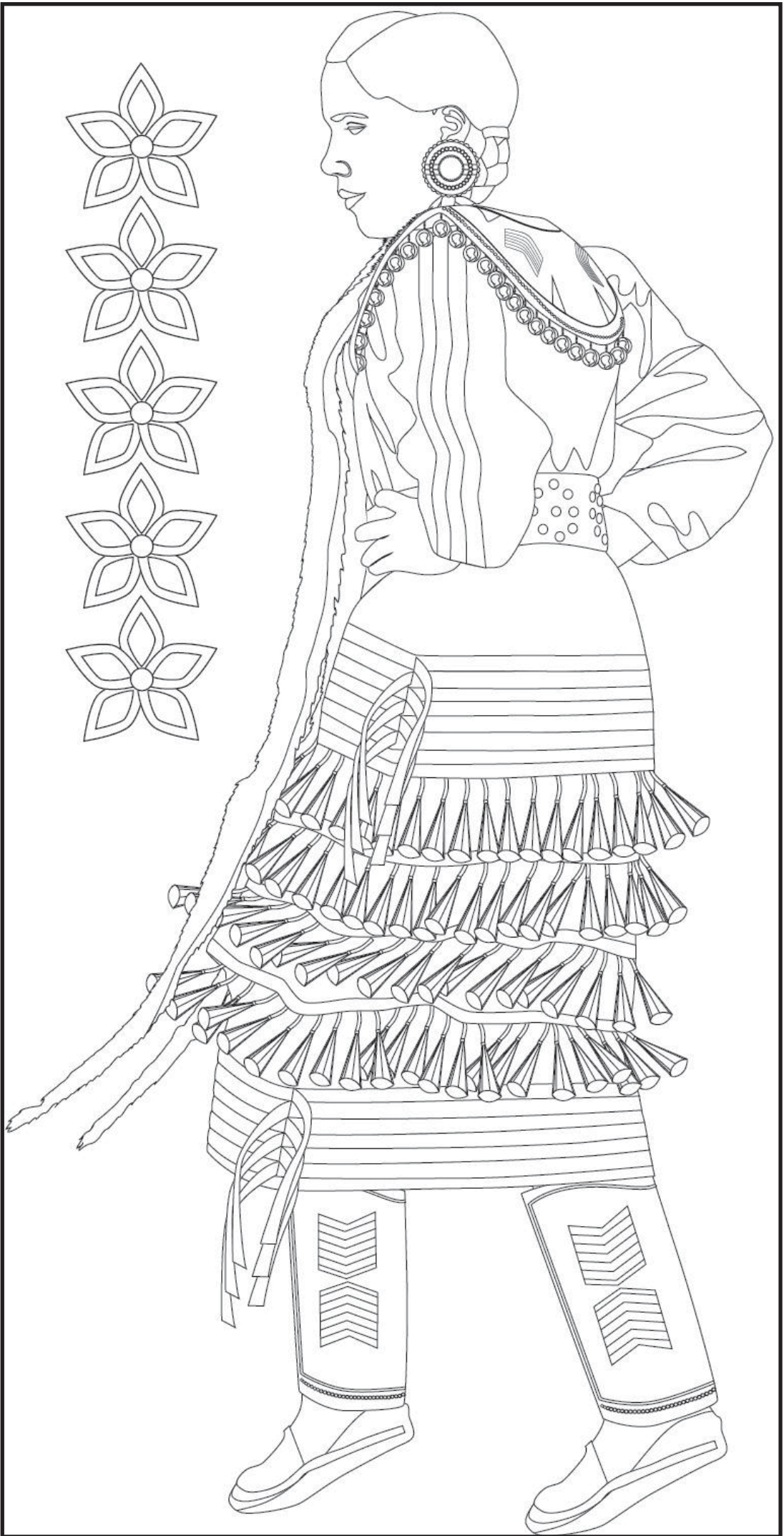
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Traditional jingle dresses didn’t have a lot of decoration beyond the jingles, but today’s dresses feature fringes, beading, embroidery and more. Some contemporary dresses even use colored jingles in place of silver ones!

Whether traditional or contemporary, jingle dresses are usually long, falling to a dancer’s calf or ankle. The sleeves are long as well. A thick belt secures a dancer’s dress at the (see **Jingle Dress**, page 22)

Let’s Speak Ojibwemowin!

- ziibaaska’iganagooday—jingle dress
- ziibaaska’iganan—metal cones
- ikwe-niimi—she dances the women’s dance
- niimikaage—she dances for people (for a purpose)



Jingle dress coloring page image courtesy of Jamey Penney-Ritter. Additional regalia coloring sheets available free, for personal and educational use, here: www.bemusedposters.com/regalia-series

Did you know?

Old style jingle dancers move in a specific way. They do not cross their feet, do not turn in a complete circle, nor dance backwards.