

The Quest of Rising Sun



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The Quest of Rising Sun

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*For Mike Callaway...
A true friend and an amazing designer*

The Quest of Rising Sun

DRAMA. With the winter food supply running low, everyone in the village is hopeful that the men will be successful on their next hunt and bring back enough meat to feed the village. Rising Sun yearns to join his father on the hunt, but since he is still too young, he must stay at home with his mother and sister. Rising Sun watches with envy as another youth, White Calf, sets out with the hunting party. But when the hunters return, Rising Sun discovers that his father was accidentally killed by White Calf. Devastated, Rising Sun blames White Calf for his father's death, and his grief turns to anger and hatred. It is only when the Spirit of the Deer appears during Rising Sun's vision quest that Rising Sun is able to learn the importance of forgiveness, acceptance, and understanding and fully enter into manhood. This gripping coming-of-age story features an authentic mock hunt ceremony that will provide an exhilarating theatre experience.

Performance Time: Approximately 60 minutes.

Characters

(7 m, 4 f, 1 flexible, extras)

STORYTELLER: Elderly villager; flexible.

RISING SUN: Adolescent boy.

MOTHER: Rising Sun's mother.

GRANDMOTHER: Rising Sun's paternal grandmother.

LITTLE FAWN: Rising Sun's younger sister.

FATHER: Rising Sun's father.

GRANDFATHER: Rising Sun's paternal grandfather; village elder.

WHITE CALF: 16, youth in the village.

SPIRIT OF THE DEER: Rising Sun's vision; she is dressed in a muted green and brown costume, which is only suggestive of an actual deer. She speaks quietly and peacefully yet manages to convey a feeling of authority.

HUNTER 1, 2, 3: Dancers, perform mock hunt ceremony.

EXTRAS: As villagers and hunters.

Setting

Plains Indian village, mid-19th century.

Set

The set for the play can be extremely simple. The story might very well be played out on a bare stage. The use of the Villagers to help construct the sweat lodge alluded to in the script, can be creatively used to eliminate the need for an actual set piece. The sweat lodge can be suggested by 16 Villagers encircling Rising Sun, their arms carrying willow branches to form the dome of the structure. The lodge is enclosed on three sides, the fourth being open to the audience, with an opening on the side, preferably to the East. Another hide or blanket will later cover this opening as well. Likewise, a simple facsimile of one tepee, painted or three-dimensional, is all that is needed for the village scenes.

Costuming

Costumes are intended to be authentic-looking replicas of mid-19th-century Plains Indians. Costumes are fairly simple to make with regard to design and construction.

Props

Ankle and wrist rattles	Forked stick
Earthenware pots	White "mud"
Bows	Red "mud"
Arrows	Moccasins, for Rising Sun
Sticks	Pipe
Woven basket	River pebbles
Native American rug	Feathers
Straw doll	Cloth for medicine bundle
Stones	Knife
Breechcloth, for Rising Sun	Fire pit
Stone pot	Red coal
Buffalo skin	Prayer stick
6 Poles	16 Branches
Blankets	Blankets to cover branches
Bunch of dried grass (sage)	

Special Effects

Drum beat	Eerie sound to indicate
Fire	spirit
Smoke	Rustling sound
Wind	

NOTE: Through sound, lighting, and special effects, the impact of several scenes, particularly the appearance of the Spirit of the Deer, can be heightened considerably.

Mock Hunt Ceremony

Basic Steps

There are four basic steps used in the mock hunt ceremony.

TOE-HEEL STEP:

Begin by placing the ball of the right foot slightly forward.
Come down on the heel of the right foot.
Reverse the sequence with the left foot.

BACKWARD SKIP STEP:

Step back with the right foot.
Bend the left knee and raise the left foot.
Slide back the right foot.
Step back with the left foot.
Repeat the sequence.

CANOE STEP:

Jump forward with both feet on a "1" count.
Touch the ball of the right foot on the ground, moving slightly forward and inward on each count of "2" and "3" and "4."
Reverse and repeat the sequence.

PAWING STEP:

Hop on left foot in place on a "1" count.
Raise right foot at right angle and "paw" the air, lowering foot a little for each count of "2" and "3" and "4." By 4th count, right foot should be on the ground.
Reverse and repeat the sequence.

Mock Hunt Ceremony

Step Sequence

There are three parts to the mock hunt ceremony: Part I features three Hunters; Part II introduces the Spirit of the Deer; and Part III brings the Hunters and the Spirit of the Deer together. **Note:** All steps used are Toe-Heel unless otherwise stipulated. The three Hunters (H-1, H-2, and H-3) wear ankle and wrist rattles.

Part 1

(The drumbeat begins.)

1. H-1 rises and crosses left on 16 counts.
2. H-1 faces right on 8 counts as H-2 rises.
3. H-2 crosses right on 8 counts.
4. H-2 faces left on 8 counts as H-3 rises.
5. H-3 crosses to center on 8 counts.
6. All Hunters toe-heel in place for 8 counts.
7. All cross down center in a line on 8 counts. Place hands in small of back.
8. Go down to crouch position still using toe-heel on 8 counts.
9. Come up in one quick movement, shaking wrists in front on first count.
10. Go back down to crouch on counts 2 through 8. (2-2, 3-2, 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 7-2, 8-2)
11. Repeat step 10 once.
12. Come up on 8 counts.
13. Form circle on 8 counts. Place hands in small of back.

14. Place right hand on forehead. "Shade" eyes while looking right. Keep feet still. Shoulders lurch slightly. Hold for 4 counts.
15. Repeat, with left hand on forehead.
16. H-1 start right, followed by H-2 and H-3. Toe-step for 8 counts right. Stop.
17. Keep feet still. Look for tracks on ground.
18. Proceed through "bushes" using toe-heel, parting foliage with arms, for 8 counts.
19. All go down into crouch position on 4 counts. Bounce in place for 4 counts. Come up on 4 counts.
20. Exit right on 8 counts.

(The rhythm of the drumbeat changes.)

Part 2

1. The Deer enters from stage left with the backward skip step for 16 counts. Winds up down center.
2. Pawing step in place for 16 counts. Turn head left on counts 1-4, right on 5-8, left on 9-12, and right on 13-16.
3. Go down on all fours using toe-heel on 8 counts.
4. Move head to left on 2 counts, right on 3-4, left on 5-6, and right on 7-8.
5. Thrust head forward suddenly on 2 counts.
6. Rise quickly on 2 counts.
7. Use backward skip step to move to center on 8 counts.
8. Cross to center left, using backward skip step, on 8 counts. Graze in place.

(The rhythm of the drumbeat changes again.)

Part 3

Note: The bow and arrow used in this sequence are pantomimed.

1. Hunters re-enter from stage right, using 16 counts of toe-heel to circle up right center, then up center, then down center forming a line.
2. Hunters go to crouch position on 4 counts. Keep feet moving. Cup hands in "stream." Drink on 4 counts.
3. H-1 repeat drinking once. H-2 and H-3 repeat drinking twice. While H-2 and H-3 are drinking the second time, H-1 rise on 4 counts, using toe-heel. Point with left arm to tracks leading left and follow with 4 counts. H-2 and H-3 rise and follow on 4 counts.
4. All Hunters cross left, switching now to Canoe Step, with hands in front, on 8 counts.
5. H-1 holds arms out straight, palms to ground. H-2 and H-3 toe-heel in place for 4 counts.
6. H-2 bends at waist to left on 4 counts while H-3 bends to right on 4 counts.
7. H-1 squats on left leg. Extends right leg to front. Places left hand on ground for balance. Points slowly with right arm on 4 counts. H-2 and H-3 continue toe-heel for the 4 counts.
8. All freeze for 4 counts.
9. H-1 transfers weight to right on 4 counts. Gets "bow" from right shoulder with left hand on 4 counts. Reach right hand over right shoulder and get "arrow" out of quiver on 8 counts. Insert "arrow" into "bow." Pull back and go down on left knee on 7 counts. Release arrow, slapping right palm against left palm as it passes on 8th count.
10. All Hunters freeze. Deer collapses at center left on 4 counts.
11. Hunters jump up on 1 count, arms outstretched. Finish 3 counts with toe-heel in place.

12. Hunters approach Deer and encircle on 16 counts of double-time toe-heel. H-1 winds up to left of Deer, H-2 directly upstage of Deer, and H-3 to right of Deer.
13. Hunters go down on both knees, using toe-heel for 4 counts.
14. Hunters pick up Deer and raise over their heads on 8 counts of toe-heel.
15. Hunters exit left using toe-heel for 16 counts.

*"Spirit of the Deer,
rest in me.*

*Spirit of the Deer,
be with me.*

*Spirit of the Deer,
stay by me.*

*I have suffered,
and I have wept."*

—Rising Sun

The Quest Of Rising Sun

(AT RISE: Slow drumbeat sounds. After a few moments, the Storyteller appears.)

STORYTELLER: Only these remain...

The mournful wind through prairie grass

Where once roamed buffalo...

The buttercups in morning sun

That shone across the land...

The sage grass on the endless plains

Where trod the many men.

And voices soft of ancestors

With nights of whispered tales.

Only these remain, and I remember. You remember, too.

Listen to me, a storyteller. Walk with me now. Walk softly

on the trail of the red man, O my sisters, O my brothers. I

tell you of the yesterdays. I tell you of a village of long

ago...a small village waiting for new life.

(The scene shifts to the main stage, the site of a small Indian settlement. Several tepees are visible upstage. Mother and Grandmother are seated, decorating earthenware pots. The drumbeat fades.)

GRANDMOTHER: His time has come, Daughter.

MOTHER: Not yet. Rising Sun is still a boy.

GRANDMOTHER: Even your own mate at this time lamented
for his vision.

MOTHER: That was another day. Every morning we woke
with new hope in our hearts and a new day to walk in the
light of the Great Spirit. Today, Brother Sun seems always
to be passing toward the hills, and we are more and more
living in his shadows.

GRANDMOTHER: Do not speak so, mate of my son. The Great Spirit makes us one with all things. Remember your place.

(Little Fawn enters, running and screaming. She is being chased by her older brother, Rising Sun.)

MOTHER: See now how Rising Sun comes.

(Little Fawn seeks refuge behind her mother.)

LITTLE FAWN: He's trying to catch me! Make him stop chasing me!

GRANDMOTHER: *(Calling sharply.)* Rising Sun!

RISING SUN: Make her leave me alone, and I will not hurt her.

MOTHER: What have you been doing, Little Fawn?

LITTLE FAWN: Nothing.

RISING SUN: Spying on me across the hill.

LITTLE FAWN: I wasn't!

MOTHER: And what were you doing then so far away?

LITTLE FAWN: Only searching for the first buttercup blooms.

RISING SUN: She was spying.

GRANDMOTHER: Why so full of fire, Rising Sun? Your sister was watching you. May she not do as much?

RISING SUN: No.

MOTHER: And why not?

(Rising Sun is upset and does not respond.)

LITTLE FAWN: He was dancing.

GRANDMOTHER: And what of it? All children dance.

RISING SUN: I am not a child! And I was not dancing!

MOTHER: What then?

RISING SUN: I practice for tonight...for the dream of the hunt.

LITTLE FAWN: Since he cannot go with the hunters, he's to play the Deer in the ceremony tonight.

(Little Fawn mimics her brother practicing to be the Deer in the upcoming mock hunt. Angered, Rising Sun goes after her, tackling her to the ground. Mother rises and intercedes, struggling to separate the two as Father enters, followed by Grandfather, and White Calf, who carries his bow and arrows.)

FATHER: Rising Sun.

(Rising Sun instantly stops and rises.)

RISING SUN: Father.

(White Calf smirks at the childish actions of Rising Sun, who stands embarrassed.)

GRANDMOTHER: *(To Little Fawn.)* Go now to the creek bed and bring us more clay.

(Little Fawn runs off.)

FATHER: *(To Rising Sun.)* Are you ready, my son, for the ceremony tonight?

RISING SUN: I am, Father. I only wish that you would then allow me to go hunting with you.

FATHER: Be patient, Rising Sun. The Great Spirit will speak to you soon. Then may you hunt with us.

RISING SUN: Yes, Father.

GRANDFATHER: When he comes, you will know, and you will then lament for the vision.

FATHER: *(Referring to White Calf.)* Just as your friend, White Calf.

RISING SUN: He is not my friend.

MOTHER: *(Admonishingly.)* Rising Sun!

GRANDFATHER: White Calf is the son of Running Horse, one of our people. Though he may be not your friend, he is your brother.

FATHER: Come. Let us prepare.

(All exit. The drumbeat resumes as the focus switches back to the Storyteller.)

STORYTELLER: The time that it is white was giving way to the time that the buttercups bloom. The villagers were weary from the long, cold time of the snow. The meat prepared for the winter was nearly gone. It was time for the first hunt. That night, before the men would begin their journey, all the people of the village gathered for the ceremony.

(The Villagers enter in two formal lines, Grandmother leading one and Grandfather the other. Most of the Villagers carry sticks or rattles, which they play as they enter. One of the Villagers provides the drumbeat. The two lines meet at center. The drumbeat stops. Grandfather steps forward.)

GRANDFATHER: O Great Spirit, make us one with the fire, the earth, the air, and the water. Send to us your buffalo from the North, your mouse from the South, your eagle from the East, your bear from the West.

(Grandmother steps down alongside Grandfather.)

GRANDMOTHER: Wakan Tanka, bless our people, and grant our men all the powers of the universe as they now depart upon their hunt.

(The ritual ceremony of the mock hunt is now performed. Three male Villagers portray the Hunters; Rising Sun, wearing an ankle bracelet, portrays the Deer. After the ceremony concludes, the focus

switches back to the Storyteller. As the Storyteller narrates, we see the described action occurring on stage in mime.)

STORYTELLER: And the men of the village gathered their supplies, gave their farewells, and set out for the hunt. How long they would be gone was not known. Only were they each embraced by their families and bade the Great Spirit would watch over them and grace them in their quest. *(Rising Sun bids farewell to his father. Passing by in front of them on his way to join the hunters is White Calf, who exchanges a look with Rising Sun. Father escorts White Calf off, as Rising Sun retreats into his tepee. By this time, the Hunters have all exited. Their families drift off, leaving only Mother and Grandmother on stage.)* The night passed, and the next day, and as well the next night after that. Many times did Brother Sun travel across the sky, and still, the men did not return.

(The focus shifts back to the main stage, where Mother is weaving a basket, and Grandmother, humming softly, is working on a rug.)

MOTHER: The men have never been away so long.

GRANDMOTHER: Perhaps that is a good sign.

MOTHER: Perhaps. Still, I am anxious.

GRANDMOTHER: You worry too much, mate of my son.

MOTHER: Maybe. Maybe not.

(Little Fawn emerges from the tepee, carrying a small straw doll.)

LITTLE FAWN: When will Father return? He's been gone so long.

GRANDMOTHER: Soon, I think, the hunters return.

MOTHER: How do you know, old woman?

GRANDMOTHER: It is a feeling. I have heard the wind speaking.

LITTLE FAWN: Will we then have meat? My stomach is hurting it is so empty.

MOTHER: Where is your brother?

LITTLE FAWN: Out beyond the hill again. Where else would he be? All day he practices shooting with the bow and arrow.

MOTHER: Bring me some more reeds.

LITTLE FAWN: Why make more and more baskets when there is nothing to put in them? There is no meat, and even the huckleberry and the bitterroot are nearly gone.

GRANDMOTHER: The time that the buttercups bloom will soon be here. Then will our good Mother, the Earth, give to us again our daily bread. Now, go. Do as your mother tells you. *(Little Fawn exits into the tepee. To Mother, indicating Little Fawn.)* That one...that one is the one to cause you worry.

(Rising Sun enters, running. He is excited.)

RISING SUN: Father is coming! The hunters have returned! *(From the opposite side of the stage, slowly the Hunters appear, one by one. Rising Sun runs to greet them. Grandmother and Mother rise as other Villagers enter in anticipation.)* Father!

(Little Fawn emerges from the tepee, hurriedly.)

LITTLE FAWN: They're back! *(White Calf enters, his head held low, his gait cumbersome. He isolates himself at the far side of the stage. It is evident that the hunt has not been successful. The faces of the Hunters are sullen. Little Fawn dashes in and out of the Hunters, questioning them.)* Did you bring us meat? *(With no reply, she turns to another.)* Did you kill a deer?

(Rising Sun looks for his father. At this point, the Villagers have sensed that the hunt has failed. Several retire immediately, their hopes gone.)

RISING SUN: Father? *(Rising Sun is growing increasingly anxious. As the last of the Hunters makes his way onto the stage, Rising Sun looks at him expectantly. With no response, he goes to the other Hunters, each of whom avoids his eyes. Rising Sun then gazes offstage in the direction from which the party has returned. He calls softly.)* Father?

(Little Fawn sees White Calf and runs to him, unaware of the mounting anxiety. She is unwilling to give up hope for food.)

LITTLE FAWN: White Calf, where is the deer you have killed for us to eat?

(White Calf looks ashamed. He drops his bow on the ground. Mother has noticed her husband's absence. She goes to Little Fawn and pulls her to her side as Rising Sun yells out in desperation.)

RISING SUN: Father!

(Grandfather quietly goes to Rising Sun, who looks up at him expectantly. Grandfather places his hand on the boy's head.)

GRANDFATHER: Your father had knowledge of the hunt. He crept among the bushes, waiting for the chance to take the deer. But he was himself mistaken for the deer, the arrow finding an unknown mark. *(Pause.)* Your father is dead.

(Mother lets out a soft, low moan and clutches Little Fawn in her arms. Grandmother sinks to her knees. Grandfather goes to her.)

RISING SUN: Whose arrow took my father? *(The Hunters avoid looking at Rising Sun, who seems ready to explode with anger.)* Whose arrow?!

GRANDFATHER: Our village grows weary. It was an accident.

RISING SUN: Whose arrow!?

WHITE CALF: *(Quietly.)* Mine. It was my arrow. *(Looks directly at Rising Sun.)* I killed your father, Rising Sun.

(Rising Sun stares at White Calf. He then slowly walks over to him.)

RISING SUN: You killed my father. You killed my father. *(Rising Sun repeats this a number of times, building in tempo and intensity until finally he is screaming, beating on White Calf, who does not fight back.)* Killer! Killer! Killer!

(Rising Sun slowly sinks to his knees, overcome with grief. Little Fawn goes to him and puts her arms around him. The focus shifts back to the Storyteller. The drumbeat resumes.)

STORYTELLER: And the boy, Rising Sun, was full of sorrow. His father no longer would walk among the villagers, nor seek the buffalo and deer to feed them. And when Brother Sun had made his daily journey, the villagers began to mourn. *(The Villagers gather in the background, chanting softly and carrying out the actions the Storyteller describes.)* For three days and three nights, the whole village, all of the villagers, died. Fingers stopped weaving, legs stopped running, hands stopped gathering. No life was in the village. *(Six Villagers carry the body of Father, elevated on a buffalo skin with six poles, each of the Villagers holding one pole.)* And at the end of this time, after the spirit had left the body, it was taken to the side of the mountain. There was the Father lowered and planted in one of the aged cracks of our Mother, the Earth. Then stones were put upon the grave, so that the body might rest in peace without disruption. *(The Villagers, still chanting, one by one place a stone upon the grave until it is completely covered. Rising Sun is the last to do so.)* And when the body had taken its place in the eternal womb, all departed back to the village, all save Rising Sun.

(The drumbeat stops. Rising Sun kneels upstage of his father's grave. He places a prayer stick atop the grave.)

RISING SUN: *(Praying.)* Father. All the powers of the world...the heavens and the star people, and the red and blue sacred days, all the things that move in the universe, in the rivers, all waters, all trees that stand, all the grasses of our Grandmother, all the sacred peoples of the universe receive you now into the world, that you may be as one and live forever. *(Weeping, he lies across the grave.)* My father.

(Momentarily, Grandfather enters, unnoticed by Rising Sun. He quietly walks upstage of Rising Sun, who is lying on the grave.)

GRANDFATHER: Grandson. *(Rising Sun turns and sees his Grandfather, who now kneels down and holds him as he speaks.)* Your tears form the rivers of the earth. You are alone now, Rising Sun. And alone must you continue on your journey. Listen to the voice of your father. Hear it carried on the shoulders of the wind even now. Rising Sun, your time has come. *(Rising Sun breaks the embrace to face his grandfather, apprehensively.)* I speak of your quest.

RISING SUN: Yes, Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER: Tonight, I will lead you to the place where the earth touches the sky. Come now. It is time to prepare for your journey.

(As the focus shifts back to the Storyteller, Grandfather helps Rising Sun remove his outer clothing until he is left in a breechcloth. The drumbeat resumes.)

STORYTELLER: Before he could begin his quest, Rising Sun would purify himself, so that he might be made worthy to receive his vision. *(Rising Sun now crosses down center and remains standing as a sweat lodge is constructed around him.)* From the arms of 16 willows was the sweat lodge made until

the branches became enclosed as one. Then were blankets brought to cover the lodge and trap the air inside. (*The lodge might be literal, or the lodge can be figurative, suggested by 16 Villagers encircling Rising Sun, their arms carrying willow branches to form the dome of the structure. It is enclosed on three sides, the fourth being open to the audience, with an opening on the side, preferably to the East. Another hide or blanket will later cover this opening as well. Little Fawn enters from stage left carrying a stone pot filled with water. She places the pot directly in front of Rising Sun and then returns to stage left center and begins to tend a fire, in which rocks are heating.*) Then did Rising Sun kneel down and hollow out a central altar from his Mother, the Earth, in which to place the heated stones.

(The ceremony unfolds slowly, with dignity. The drumbeat continues to sound. Rising Sun sits back on his heels, his eyes closed. Little Fawn takes a hot coal from the fire, placing it on a forked stick. She thrusts the coal inside the door flap, placing it just inside. She removes the stick and lowers the flap on the opening, now enclosing the lodge completely except for the one side open to the audience. Little Fawn now returns to the fire at left center. With a stick, Rising Sun moves the coal to the central altar and "lights" some sage grass from the coal. He begins rubbing the smoke over his body.)

RISING SUN: O great god, Okinare, allow me worthy to be made pure. I come to this lodge that you may enter my body and prepare me for this, my quest, which soon I begin. My soul rests in the ignorance of blackness. The sweetness of the sage grass surrounds my spirit preparing to walk the sacred path of life. (*Little Fawn carries the "heated" rocks, one by one, to the lodge. She pokes the forked stick through the door and deposits each rock inside. Rising Sun, in turn, moves each of the rocks into position to make the central altar. He first drinks from the stone pot and then pours water over the rock. The light inside the lodge begins to change to red.*) Now, from the fire of

no end, from the sacred breath of the rocks, my soul is captured from the darkness. To you, Wakan Tanka, I offer myself that I may live again. From the first age of my ancestors, may your light of wisdom sweep away the darkness. Wakan Tanka, Okinare, into the light I come. *(Rising Sun and Little Fawn repeat the sequence three more times.)* From the second age of my ancestors, may your light of wisdom sweep away the darkness. Wakan Tanka, Okinare, into the light I come. *(Third time.)* From the third age of my ancestors, may your light of wisdom sweep away the darkness. Wakan Tanka, Okinare, into the light I come. *(Fourth and final time.)* From the fourth age of my ancestors, may your light of wisdom sweep away the darkness. Wakan Tanka, Okinare, into the light I come. *(Pause.)* Now I am cleansed. Now may I lament for my vision.

(The drumbeat stops. The sweat lodge is now removed. Lights revert to normal. The stage is empty, except for Rising Sun, who now stands at center. From stage left enters Grandfather, carrying a "medicine bundle." From stage right enters Mother, carrying a pot filled with white clay. Rising Sun rises. Mother and Grandfather approach Rising Sun and begin to smear the clay on his chest, legs, and arms.)

MOTHER: My son, now do you leave your village to seek your vision. Your body no longer is seen; your smell no longer with you.

GRANDFATHER: Come, son of my son. I lead you now to the mountaintop. Take with you the medicine bundle with gifts for your spirit. Let us go now.

[End of Freeview]