

All-Time Favorite Native FILMS

By ROSCOE POND

(Confederated Tribes of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla)

When I was a kid in the 1970s, my parents told me that every movie had a story to tell. I have been a moviegoer ever since because of the great stories films told me. I never cared about genre or race, as long as a film told me a story. The Native and Indigenous tales were always powerful to me, even though they were often secondary themes in a film. Native culture was a welcome sight to see within a movie, but I enjoyed them all.

Here's a list of my personal all-time favorite films with a Native theme or strong Native elements in them, numbered from 1 to 15 according to my preference. Native actors are indicated in bold.

1. Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2002)

Worldwide box office: \$5,998,310; U.S. box office: \$3,789,952

There is an Inuit legend about a shaman who leaves a curse upon a small clan of families. That curse spans two generations of unrest, jealousy and murder. Atanarjuat (**Natar Ungalaq**) escapes death and sets upon a journey to reclaim himself and his family, and to face the curse that was thrust upon his life.

2. Smoke Signals (1998)

U.S. box office: \$6,745,362

Victor (**Adam Beach**) and Thomas (**Evan Adams**) take a road trip to the Southwest after the death of a distant father, Arnold (**Gary Farmer**). Meeting Suzy Song (**Irene Bedard**), they find out the truth about themselves and the abuse that may have been real or imagined. By the end of their journey they ask the universal question, "Do we forgive our fathers?" Also with **John Trudell**, **Elaine Miles**, **Tantoo Cardinal**, **Cody Lightning**, **Michael Greyeyes** and many others.

3. Flags of our Fathers (2006)

Worldwide box office: \$65,900,249; U.S. box office: \$33,602,376

Six men raised the American flag on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. Three of these men, including Ira Hayes (**Adam Beach**), return home to the U.S. and are forced to publicize the famous picture of the event. That image labels them heroes and changes their lives forever.

4. Powwow Highway (1989)

U.S. box office: \$283,747

Two boyhood friends, Buddy (**A. Martinez**) and Philbert (**Gary Farmer**), take a road trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico to bail out Buddy's sister (**Joanne Romero**). One finds the spiritual "warrior" within and the other finds that there are many Natives who are more lost than he is. It's about friendship, brotherhood and a little bit of sanity.

5. Maverick (1994)

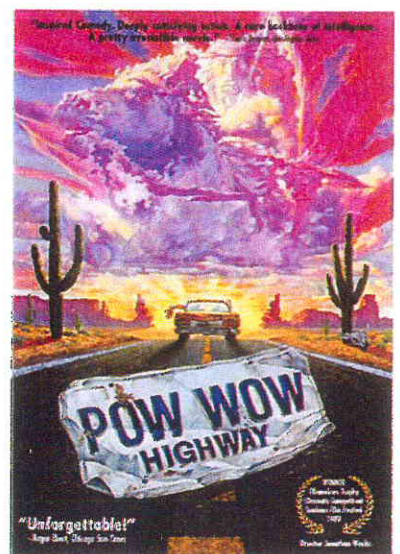
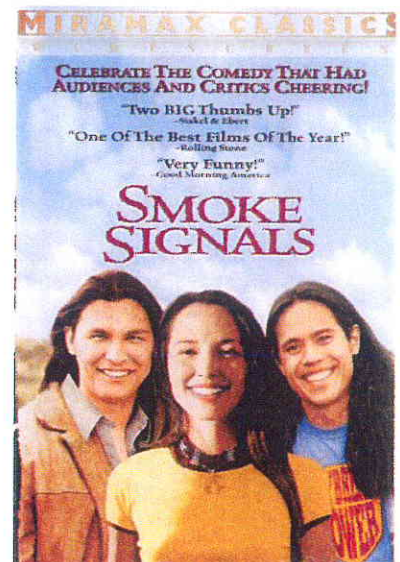
Worldwide box office: \$183,031,272; U.S. box office: \$101,631,272

Bret Maverick (**Mel Gibson**) is the greatest gambler in the West until he meets his match in Annabelle (**Jody Foster**). On the way to a gambling tournament, Bret runs into comic mischief

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Atanarjuat, played by Natar Ungalaq.





Keisha Castle-Hughes as Pai in *The Whale Rider*

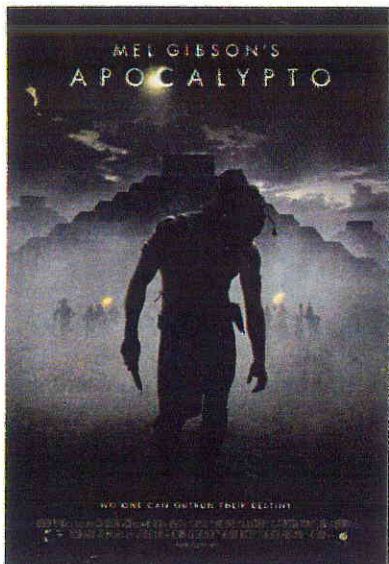
with his friend Joseph (**Graham Greene**). They make fun of the American West, including Native stereotypes.

6. *Whale Rider* (2001)

Worldwide box office: \$41,442,113; U.S. box office: \$20,779,666
 An 11-year-old Native New Zealand (Maori) girl, Paikea (**Keisha Castle-Hughes**) believes she is the new chief of her tribal clan. Her grandfather Koro (**Rawiri Paratene**), is determined to choose a male to lead the people and become the Whale Rider. Paikea is then led on a personal journey to become more than what her family expected her to be.

7. *The Missing* (2003)

Worldwide box office: \$38,364,277; U.S. box office: \$27,011,180
 After 20 years of living with Indians, Samuel (Tommy Lee Jones) returns to his daughter, Magdalena (Cate Blanchett). She throws him out. One of her daughters is kidnapped by a frightening outlaw Apache (**Eric Schweig**). Magdalena seeks Samuel's support to track down the Apache and his renegade band. Also with **Jay Tavare** and **Steve Reevis**.



8. *The Last of the Mohicans* (2002)

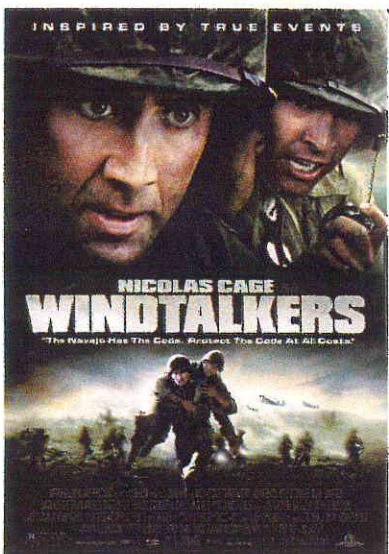
U.S. box office: \$75,505,856
 Chingachgook (**Russell Means**), Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Uncas (**Eric Schweig**) are thrust into the French and Indian War of 1757 in this sprawling epic. They are the "last" of the Mohican Tribe. Hawkeye and Uncas protect two British sisters, Cora (Madeleine Stowe) and Alice Munro (Jodhi May), from various threats, including the fierce Magua (**Wes Studi**).

9. *Apocalypto* (2006)

Worldwide box office: \$120,175,290; U.S. box office: \$50,866,635
 The Mayan culture and its tribal rulers believe their race is in decline. They decide to sacrifice their own to the Sun God. Jaguar Paw (**Rudy Youngblood**) makes a daring escape, pursued by the awesome Zero Wolf (**Raoul Trujillo**), to save his life and the lives of his wife (Dalia Hernandez) and their unborn child.

10. *Legends of the Fall* (1994)

Worldwide box office: \$160,638,883; U.S. box office: \$66,638,883
 One Stab (**Gordon Tootoosis**) narrates this story about William Ludlow (Anthony Hopkins) and his three sons, Alfred (Aidan Quinn), Tristan (Brad Pitt) and Samuel (Henry Thomas), set in the early 1900s. The focus is on Tristan, who can't control the grizzly spirit that lives next to his soul. That grizzly came for him as a child and then claimed him at the end of his life. Also with **Tantoo Cardinal** and **Karina Lombard**.



11. *Dances with Wolves* (1990)

Worldwide box office: \$424,208,848; U.S. box office: \$184,208,848
 John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) is stationed on a desolate Civil War outpost. He befriends a Sioux tribe—including Ten Bears (**Floyd Red Crow Westerman**), Wind in His Hair (**Rodney Grant**), Black Shawl (**Tantoo Cardinal**), Stone Calf (**Jimmy Herman**) and Otter (**Michael Spears**)—and learns to live among them. A line by Kicking Bird (**Graham Greene**), "...to be the best human being," is what this movie is all about. To live among a Native people that roam the Great Plains completely free is extraordinary.

12. *Windtalkers* (2002)

Worldwide box office: \$77,628,265; U.S. box office: \$40,914,068
 It is World War II. Joe (Nicholas Cage) and Pete (Christian Slater) are two marines assigned to protect Navajo Code Talkers Ben (**Adam Beach**) and Charlie (**Roger Willie**). The code must be protected at all costs against the Japanese.

Jack Nicholson in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*



13. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)

U.S. box office: \$108,981,275

McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) convinces a court that he is insane and is assigned to an asylum. He tries to bring to life the other inmates, including Chief (**Will Sampson**), whom he befriends. Standing in his way is Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher), who only wants order. Amidst the in-fighting, Chief realizes he is not insane and finds freedom in more ways than one.

14. Windwalker (1980)

U.S. box office: \$18,000,000

An elder Cheyenne named Windwalker (Trevor Howard) believes himself to be dead, but has to return to the living to bring his twin sons (**Nick Ramus**) back together after an enemy tribe kidnapped one of them. The film is spoken in Cheyenne, and the cinematography captures a wonderful sense of spirituality in the dead of winter. With a large Native cast.

15. Jim Thorpe: All-American (1951)

Box office unknown

Jim Thorpe (Burt Lancaster) comes off his Oklahoma reservation as a promising all-around athlete. He marries his college sweetheart (Phyllis Thaxter) and becomes an Olympic and professional champion. After his Olympic

Public Picks

In a survey of visitors at Roscoe Pond's much-visited Web site, some 1,350 readers recently selected the following 15 Native films as their all-time favorites (in descending order): *Pow-Wow Highway*, *Smoke Signals*, *Imprint*, *Apocalypto*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *Jim Thorpe: All-American*, *Whale Rider*, *Thunderheart*, *Dance Me Outside*, *Dead Man*, *Little Big Man*, *Skins*, *Four Sheets to the Wind*, *The Fast Runner*, *Dances with Wolves*.



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