

# WORD OF THE WEEK:

## POWWOW

pow-wow (pou'wou')

### PART OF SPEECH/DEFINITION:

**NOUN:** 1. An informal conference or gathering.

**VERB:** 1. To hold a powwow.

**SENTENCE:** At first we could hardly believe our eyes when we came across the informal powwow of the neighborhood gnomes.



**Word History:** Because trances were so important to the Native American shaman as a means of getting in touch with spiritual forces beyond the ken of the normal person, the title *powwow*, literally meaning "one who has visions," was accorded him. An occurrence of this word in an early piece of propaganda designed to bring more settlers to New England represents fairly well the Puritan attitudes to the religion of the native inhabitants of the New World: "*The office and dutie of the Powah is to be exercised principally in calling upon the Devil; and curing diseases of the sicke or wounded.*" The word whose spelling was eventually settled in English as *powwow* was also used as the name for ceremonies and councils, probably because of the important role played by the shaman in both. Eventually the newcomers decided that they could have powwows too, the first reference to one of these being recorded in the Salem, Massachusetts, *Gazette* of 1812: "*The Warriors of the Democratic Tribe will hold a powwow at Agawam on Tuesday next.*" The verb *powwow*, "to confer," was recorded even earlier, in 1780.