



VISION QUEST

Introduction

In earlier cultures, the "vision quest" was a method to gain awareness and insight into oneself. Typically, a person would go on a quest in times of personal or group crisis, as a rite of passage into adulthood, or for self discovery. Often, the person would wander in the wilderness alone, or go on a journey, searching for a sign: an insight that might reveal an important truth. In some cultures, the person would deprive himself of food, water and shelter for days at a time, which would induce an altered state of consciousness, and the combination of the intense desire for discovery, with the altered consciousness of the seeker, caused an experience (or a sign), which resulted in an important insight. Perhaps there are some features of the practice which might encourage psychological insight.

Experimental Activity: The Vision Quest

- 1 "For a period of at least 4 hours, leave your room or home and go out somewhere, anywhere. Don't plan ahead much as to where you will go or what you will do. Don't do anything in particular (e.g. don't go bowling, to the movies, to visit friends, etc.) Just go where your instincts tell you to go. Let your "intuition" carry you. Just wander. **Dress for the weather!!**
- 2 Do this alone. This is very important! If you meet people you know, you may talk to them for a few minutes, but no longer than that. Continue on your way.
- 3 While you wander, **concentrate on some question about yourself, something you want to know about yourself, or some problem you have been experiencing in your life.** You could simply focus on the question "Who am I?" or any similar question. Think, reflect, ponder this question— but also let your mind drift. You will look to nature to answer the question you are pondering.
- 4 The whole time keep in mind that you are on a "quest". You are looking, waiting, expecting something. Something will happen. There will be a sign that will give you insight into your question. It could be something that happens to you, something you see or hear. The world out there will give you the sign!
- 5 Take along a notebook or some paper, and a pen. Every half hour sit down and write. Note the time, the place, and what has happened. Write about your reactions to what is happening to you. Write about your thoughts, feelings and insights. During the exercise, if you are anxious, frustrated, or bored, ask yourself "why" and write about it. If nothing important has happened, think and write about why that is so. How could you make the exercise more effective?

WRITING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

Vision Quest Reflective Guidelines

(take this sheet with you on your quest)

1. **A SUMMARY OF THE EXERCISE:** Summarize what happened to you during the exercise. What did you think about, do, feel? Where did you go? Describe as much detail as you think seems important. What were your reactions to this exercise? What did you learn from it?
2. **THE SIGN:** In this section focus on the SIGN. Did you receive one, more than one? How did it happen? What did it reveal to you? If you didn't receive a sign, talk about that. Do you think there was a reason why you didn't? What do you think about the whole idea of "receiving a sign?"
3. **A THEORETICAL EXPLANATION:** Propose a theory about how such practices as the vision quest might work. (or use an existing theory such as Jung's or Maslow's to describe it). Use ideas we have read about. Consider these questions when you write this section: What psychological processes are involved in this exercise? How does a quest lead to insight? What factors would weaken or intensify its effect? What role does the environment play? What role does the "sign" play?

NOTES FOR YOUR VISION QUEST

- Dress appropriately!!!
- Bring this sheet.
- Bring a notebook and a pen.
- Do not talk to other people.
- Go ALONE.
- Approach the exercise seriously, but Do ENJOY.
- Review instructions #1–4 listed earlier.

This exercise was taken from Dr. John Suler's article: "Teaching Clinical Psychology–The Vision Quest." He originally created this exercise for his clinical psychology classes to encourage appreciation of several concepts related to psychological change, including self-actualization, free association, meditative awareness, and the confrontation of basic existential issues.



"I typically do something like this once a month. I generally just walk into the forest and 'wait for something to happen'. If I have the time, I go camping for a weekend. The best experiences were in Colorado in the Rockies - magnificent scenery, physically taxing hiking, and jolting swims in glacier runoff streams. I am interested in how different cultures perform this exercise and the methods used to gain insights or remove the searcher from everyday reality." - Jesse Thorn