

Native American Games

Native American games provide an inexpensive, entertaining and effective method to help children explore traditional Native American culture and learn to pull resources from nature to develop their own games.

Grade Level : 1st grade

Objectives:

- Students will learn how to play Native American children's games that encourage cooperative play and teach them about Native American culture.

Materials:

- One small blanket
- 2 blindfolds
- 6 small bundles of twigs representing firewood
- 50 plastic straws
- Clay
- One 12' wooden dowel, cut and sanded in three pieces
- Red paint
- 2 small stones
- Red paint or marker
- Copies of Venn Diagram from Pg. 7 of lesson (1/ student for assessment)

Time Considerations

Since preparation time and game time may vary according to each game, please see individual games

Related Activities:

Native American Myths: Why Seasons Change, Native American Animal Myths



Nevada Department of Education Standards

- **History Content Standard 5: 5.5.6—Describe Native North American life prior to European contact.**
- **History Content Standard 5: 5.8.9: Compare lifestyles of Native Americans to those of the colonists.**

Excellence in Environmental Education Guidelines

- **Strand 2.3—Humans and Their Societies (A, B, E): Learners understand that people act as individuals and as group members and the groups can influence individual actions; understand that experiences and places may be interpreted differently by people at different times, or with other frames of reference; recognize that change is a normal part of individual and societal life. They understand that conflict is rooted in different points of view.**

Background

To share Native American culture with children is to introduce them to an important part of our nation's heritage.

Each part of our nation was home to different native tribes, so through games we can explore even the heritage of the Native Americans that inhabited our particular region.

These games are easy and inexpensive to recreate. Native Americans had to find or make everything they needed. You can also find many materials needed for playing these games in your own environment, and apply your own creativity as you wish.

These games demonstrate some important aspects of Native American values and way

of life. Despite the gap in time and culture, Native American kids liked to have fun just like kids today. Some games are suspenseful, competitive, or involve true skills, just like today's game.

Children learn about aspects of Native American life through the objects of these games. People everywhere have always enjoyed making up and playing games.

Games were taught and often made up by children, who remembered them and taught them to their children. Games have been played for learning, entertainment, and even worship. Many different games have been passed down by Indian ancestors. Games were played in all tribes, by both grown-ups and children. Much time was spent creating game pieces, learning

the rules, and practicing the skills.

They liked games of chance with dice made from materials they found in nature.

They liked games played in teams, such as ball games. Games of skill kept them strong for the work they needed to do, like hunting.

One of the biggest differences between Native American games and early pioneer games is the concept of “winner” and “loser.” Many Native American games do not have a “loser.” Unlike many early pioneer games, teamwork is far more important in Native American games than the score. Sometimes only certain people were allowed to play a certain game. Perhaps it was a game only for girls, or only for warriors. And some games could only be played at certain times of the year.

Preparations

Locate the necessary supplies and materials for the games you plan to play with your students.

Doing the Activity



Above: a group of students are playing the Native American Game called Buffalo Robe

Game: Buffalo Robe

(preparation time: 5 minutes, game time: 30 minutes)

Background: This is a game of strength and agility, played among

the boys to determine who is the strongest warrior among the tribe.

Materials: One small blanket (a substitute for a buffalo hide, or you may also use an authentic deer hide or buffalo hide if you wish)

How to play: Players form a circle by holding hands around the small blanket (“buffalo hide”). An adult plays the official of the game and is in charge of starting and stopping the game as well as judging who is out. When the game starts the kids try to push or pull the person next to them onto the buffalo hide. The kids cannot let go of each other’s hands. If the circle disconnects, stop the game, reposition the circle around the hide then start again. If a child touches the hide with any part of the body they are out of the circle. The game continues until there is only one person left and they are considered the strongest warrior of the tribe. **You may also eliminate the players for letting go of each others hands on purpose if this becomes a problem.

Post-Game QUESTIONS for students:

1. why was determining who was the strongest warrior important? (answers will vary: helped determine leading warrior or hunter when they got older)
2. What game do North American children growing up in the USA play that is similar?
3. Ask if they enjoy winning a game, or knowing that they are strongest, the smartest, or most talented.

Game: Keeper of the Fire

(preparation time: 15 minutes, game time: 15 minutes)

Background: This was a game played by many native tribes in the plains, woodlands, and coastal areas of the continent. It teaches

stealth and keen listening skills, both important skills for wilderness survival.

Materials: 2 Blindfolds and 6 small bundles of twigs (representing fire-wood)

How to play: This can be played indoors or outdoors. Craft sticks bundled with yarn or even paint stirring sticks would work.

The “chief” (best if it’s the adult) will place the wood in front of the Fire Keeper, who is seated on her or his knees, hands on lap, and blindfolded.

The rest of the players (call them “Wood Gatherers”) will be seated a distance away. The chief declares “Wood Gatherers, we need wood!”, and points to one of the wood gatherers, whose job it now is to stealthily creep up on Fire Keeper and steal her or his wood without being detected and tagged by the Keeper.

One point per wood piece collected. Wood Gatherers may not “rush” Fire Keeper, as the object is stealth, and the Fire Keeper may only remove his or her hand from her lap to attempt to tag Wood Gatherers (not to blindly and randomly feel around to know if someone is there).

Once all of the wood is gathered, pick another to be the Fire Keeper and play again! Make sure everyone has a chance to be the official Wood Gatherer and practice stealth!

Post-Game QUESTION for students:

1. Why would creeping up on someone or something be important in a traditional Native American culture?

Brainstorm student knowledge about tracking and how traditional societies often have developed walking techniques that leave absolutely no traceable track on any terrain and make absolutely no sound!

Game: Trophy Snatch

(preparation: 5 minutes, game time: 30 minutes)

Background: This game represents an activity that many Native Americans participated in to settle disputes among different tribes. When disputes had to be settled, warriors from each tribe would try and sneak into the other tribes settlement and take, or snatch an artifact (i.e. loin cloth, head dress, etc) without being caught and take it back to their tribe. The tribe that collected the most artifacts won the dispute and was able to make the final decision.

Materials: One 2 ft. long piece of yarn for each player , an open field or playground area

Preparations: Make sure to cut enough pieces of yarn for each player to have one 2ft long piece.

You need to also find an open playing field (approx. 40ft X 50 ft) and set boundaries for the game.

How to Play: This competitive game is best played in a large open field with six or more contestants. Each player tucks half of the 2ft yarn into the waist of the pants along the side of the leg (make sure the contestant does not tie the piece of yarn to themselves, the yarn must be able to detach if tugged on by another contestant). Each player then places themselves inside the playing field and prepares themselves for the start of the game. When the chief (the teacher) shouts "Attack!" each player either stalks or rushes the other players in an effort to snatch the other contestants piece of yarn. Each player may dip, dive, and dodge other players within the playing field. Players may not catch, hold, push, nor strike other players in their attempt to snatch the trophy. However, attackers may crouch, feint,

jump, or try to secure other players pieces of yarn in any fair and non-violent manner. The game ends when all the players pieces of yarn are taken, and the winner of the game is the contestant with the most captured trophies.

Post-Game QUESTIONS for students:

1. What kind of skills or talents does a player need in order to do well at this game?
2. Do you think it is better to play games to settle disputes or problems rather than fighting?

Game: The Hand Game aka Stick Game

(preparation: 10 minutes, game time: indefinite)

Background: This is a very traditional guessing game still played by many tribes during traditional gatherings and celebrations.

Materials: 4 flat stones that can fit in the palm of your hand (traditionally bones were used), 10 sticks,

Preparation: On two of the flat stones make stripped or dotted patterns (see picture below)



This is a picture of the traditional stripped bones used during the stick game.

How to Play: Stick game is traditionally played with two pairs of 'bones', each pair consisting of one plain and one striped bone. Typically ten sticks are used as counters. The teams agree beforehand which bones they will be guessing - the plain bone or the striped bone. California Indians generally call for the striped bone, whereas most other tribes prefer to guess for the plain bone. The two teams, one "hiding" and one "guessing," sit opposite one another; two members of the "hiding" team take a pair of bones and hide them, one in each hand, while the team sings, drums, and attempts to distract the "guessing" team. The leader or 'Captain' of the "guessing" team, or a team member selected by the Captain, then must guess the pattern of the hidden bones. Since each hider holds one plain and one striped bone in each hand, there are initially four possibilities: both to the left, both to the right, both inside, or both outside. For each miss-guessed pattern, the calling team must turn over one stick to the hiders. If a hider is guessed she/he must surrender the guessed bones to the calling side. The side continues hiding and singing until both pairs of bones have been guessed and surrendered. Then the teams reverse roles, and the game continues in this manner until one team holds all 10 sticks.

Post-Game QUESTION for students:

1. Give one example of a way you tried to distract the guessing team and keep them from knowing the pattern of the bones?

Evaluation—

This is a lesson plan about games!
So have fun!

- Assess the students on their participation during the games.
- Ask the students to name three natural items that American Indians used as part of their games.
- Ask the students to name three similarities and three differences between traditional American Indian games and games that they play during this day and age.

Extension—

These are just a handful of Native American games that you can play with your students. You can find numerous other games to play by going to your local library and renting these books:

Games of the North American Indians Vol. 1 & 2, by Stewart Culin

Handbook of American Indian Games, by Allan and Paulette Macfarlan

Vocabulary

Contestant: a person who takes part in a contest or competition.

Game: a competitive activity involving skill, chance, or endurance on the part of two or more persons who play according to a set of rules, usually for their own amusement or for that of spectators.

Native American: any member of the peoples living in North or South America before the Europeans arrived

Sources—

Native American Games and Stories by Joseph Bruchac and Kayeri Akweks

Native American Sports and Games (Native American Life) by Rob Staeger

Stewart Culin, Games of the North American Indian. 1907; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1975.