

MOVE & PLAY Through Traditional Games

Alberta



be fit for life
moving alberta



Acknowledgments

We thank the following agencies for the funding to support development of this project:

- Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association
- Be Fit For Life Network
- Elders' Wisdom Circle–Alberta Native Friendship
- Centres Association
- APPLE Schools, School of Public Health, University of Alberta
- Ever Active Schools
- Kainai Board of Education
- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Recreation and Parks Association
- Nature Alberta
- Future Leaders Program, Alberta Sport, Recreation,
- Parks and Wildlife Foundation
- Edmonton Public Schools

The Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association and the Be Fit For Life Network collaborated on this project to share traditional games with our partners in Alberta. This resource is designed to support the sharing of these games with children, youth, and families. The games in this resource link traditional culture and values to physical literacy and fundamental movement skills. Use these pages to communicate the history and culture of traditional games and note how the skills and values are still important today.

Physical Literacy Defined

Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.

International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014

Traditional Games and Culture

Aboriginal life is rich in relationships, teamwork, art, music, dance, and gaming. It is through these opportunities that education occurs. Many children and adults today are losing their abilities of keen observation and natural intuition. In previous generations, an older person often helped the youth learn the games or youth learned from their peers. After the equipment was

made and the games learned, the youth played on their own with little supervision. All tribes and all ages participated in hundreds of physical activities that kept them in excellent health. Today few people realize how important physical health is to survival and long life. Traditional games place less value on winning—by valuing a humble behavioral nature (not bragging and by sharing winnings) and by giving away any prizes won to those who were the hardest competitors (those who made the winner try harder, thus do his or her best).

Taken from the International Traditional Games Society at www.traditionalnativegames.org

The social values of the traditional games were—and still are—highly important

- Respecting the rules of the competition
- Respecting your competitors
- Having courage, intuition, and/or skill
- Being humble even when winning
- Challenging yourself to do better
- Honouring the person who gave you the most challenge

Considerations for the collection of materials:

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land is an important lesson that begins with the proper protocol being followed when harvesting natural materials (e.g., willow sticks).
- All life should be respected. For example, the willow sticks used in the games gave their life for the playing of the game. The sticks were gathered with prayers and offerings of tobacco for the life of the willow and for the safety of the people playing the game. No one should be hurt during play.

- Any kind of natural materials could be used in the creation of games. When making and playing the games, it is best to use as much natural material (e.g., willow, hide, sinew, rocks) from Mother Earth as possible. This will teach respect for Mother Earth's gifts, for the traditional protocols, for the equipment, and for the game.

Please note:

If you would like to collect your own natural game materials from Mother Earth in a good way, but are not experienced in traditional protocol, the ANFCA Elders' Wisdom Circle provides the following guidance. Anyone may collect materials in a respectful manner by offering a small amount of tobacco. Lay the tobacco gently on the ground where you are about to collect the materials and give thanks to Mother Earth for the gifts you are about to collect. If you would like to learn more about local protocols and ceremonies that are used to collect the materials for traditional games, ask Elders in your area if they would be interested in sharing their knowledge by offering the Elder a gift of tobacco.

Activity Origin and Terms

When looking at traditional games in Alberta it is important to note the variety of influences on each game, as the many indigenous peoples of Alberta may play the games with different rules. In Alberta, there are 48 First Nations among 140 reserves and 8 Métis Settlements, as well as many other distinct nations and communities not formally recognized by government. One way to be more respectful of the diversity that characterizes Aboriginal Peoples is to learn and use appropriate Aboriginal names to refer to various language groups.

Taken from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/307199/words.pdf>

The majority of the games in this resource have been shared by the Blackfoot Nations, although other variations may have been played by other indigenous people. To make links to the games played in your area, ask Elders if they would like to share some of the games they remember playing in their life.

Here is a brief overview of some of the terms you may encounter as you explore this resource.

Blackfoot (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani) concentrated in southern Alberta

Dene Saultine (Chipewyan) concentrated in northern Alberta

Dunne'za (Beaver) concentrated in northern Alberta

Plains Cree concentrated in central and southern Alberta

Michif (French) concentrated in central northeastern Alberta

Stoney (Nakoda Sioux) concentrated in west central Alberta

Dene tha (Slavey) concentrated in northern Alberta

Métis Cree concentrated in north central Alberta

Saulteaux concentrated in western Alberta

Tsuu T'ina concentrated in south central Alberta

Woodland Cree concentrated in northern Alberta

Tobacco

When approaching a First Nations or Métis Elder, protocol usually requires the offering of tobacco, a sacred traditional plant that is used to open the door to consult with Elders.

Elder

A revered member of the Aboriginal community who is a keeper and transmitter of the culture and history of the people. People go to Elders for their wise counsel, and Elders are often called upon to advise their leaders on matters of great importance for the benefit of the community. Elders are an important part of the community because they pass down the knowledge and traditions of the culture. Elders have knowledge and wisdom, which they might have received as a gift from the Creator. An Elder can also be a medicine man or woman. Chronological age is not a factor in becoming an Elder.

Taken from [www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education is Our Buffalo \(PD-80-7\).pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20(PD-80-7).pdf)

Willow

A type of small tree or shrub that is found throughout Alberta. When freshly cut, the thinner branches can be bent and woven into circles (e.g., Ring the Stick). The thicker branches are sturdy and relatively straight for use in making stronger implements (e.g., Make the Stick Jump).

References and Links to Useful Definitions

- **Aboriginal Policy Framework (APF)**, Government of Alberta: www.aboriginal.alberta.ca
- **Education Is Our Buffalo, Alberta Teachers' Association**, [www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education is Our Buffalo \(PD-80-7\).pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/Education%20is%20Our%20Buffalo%20(PD-80-7).pdf)
- **International Traditional Games Society**, www.traditionalnativegames.org
- **Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Metis and Inuit Learners**, Alberta Education: <http://education.alberta.ca/media/307199/words.pdf>
- **Walking Together**, www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/

Run & Scream

Activity Origin and Purpose

- This is a Blackfoot game
- This activity was traditionally completed by taking turns, one at a time, teaching tolerance and patience
- Lung capacity was and still is important in everyday life

Equipment

- Blackfoot marking sticks – willow sticks (15 - 20 cm long) decorated with beads and feathers or substitute painted pictograph rocks for markers
- Large open activity area with at least 100 m of running space in a gym or outside on a smooth surface
- Jackknife or box cutter (with adult supervision)

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land is an important lesson that begins with the proper protocol being followed when harvesting natural materials.
- The willow should be cut into 15 - 20 cm lengths per marking stick
- Using a knife (with adult supervision), create a point on the stick so that it can be placed in the ground easily. The knife can also be used to create markings on the stick.
- Tie feathers and beads on the end of the stick to decorate (as shown in picture)



Knife Safety

Creating the equipment for this game does include the use of a jackknife or box cutter. Depending on the age of participants, the size of the group, and the leader's familiarity with knife skills, safety considerations may impact the creation of the equipment. If knife safety is a concern, consider whittling & cutting the willow to length prior to the activity and then having participants decorate their sticks to make them unique to each player.

Activity Description

- Participants take in a big breath of air, start running, and at the same time scream out loud.
- When they can no longer scream without taking a new breath, the spot where the scream stops is marked by their marking stick.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- Running is a fundamental movement skill that is the basis for many other locomotor movements
- Running is a skill that is used in many sports and lifelong physical activities
- Lung capacity is an important indicator of health

Safety

- Be sure that the running area is free of debris
- If the stick has a pointed end, ensure participants run with the point away from their body

Activity Variations

- Have participants try to beat their previous run length after a short rest
- Use this activity as a benchmark and have participants brainstorm and participate in various sprinting activities that would improve their lung capacity in Run & Scream

Ring the Stick

Activity Origin and Purpose

- Many different people played this activity. Other versions of this game include “Ring & Pin” or “Pin & Bone”
- This activity is a great indoor or outdoor game that practices hand–eye coordination
- In addition, this game can also be used as a way to resolve conflicts, e.g., when there is a tie in a game

Equipment

- One willow stick
- Small flexible willow branches for the hoop
- A 45 cm string (sinew)
- Small activity area in or out of doors
- Jackknife or box cutter (with adult supervision) – refer to Run & Scream for details on Knife Safety

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land is an important lesson that begins with the proper protocol being followed when harvesting natural materials
- The willow stick should be cut 45 cm in length
- A hoop is created using flexible willow branches secured using the string (sinew); the hoop should be 15–20 cm in diameter.
- A 45 cm string (sinew) is attached to the willow stick and the other end is tied to the hoop. As skill increases, the size of the hoop can get smaller.



Activity Description

- Start with the ring on the floor and the stick in hand.
- Flick the stick with your wrist to make the ring fly up into the air; then attempt to put the end of the stick through the ring.
- One point is given for each ring with the stick.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- This activity will help to build agility, balance, and coordination; the ABCs are key to developing physical literacy
- Ring the Stick is similar to sending and receiving object manipulation skills like throwing and catching

Safety

- Ensure that participants have enough space in order to play “Ring the Stick” without interfering with another participant’s equipment or body.

Activity Variations

- Make the challenge more active by adding the activity to a relay where smaller teams of 3 move one at a time to an end line where they have to “Ring the Stick” before returning to their team. Have participants use different locomotor skills like skipping, galloping, and hopping to move across the activity area.
- Try using the activity as part of a tag game. Instead of having participants get tagged out, when a participant gets tagged, they move to a designated area where they “Ring the Stick” before coming back into the game.

Make the Stick Jump

Activity Origin and Purpose

- This is a Blackfoot game
- This activity was traditionally played by young boys to practise their throwing for hunting small game like birds or rabbits



Equipment

- 5 Blackfoot marking sticks – willow sticks (15 – 20 cm long) notched with markers to identify each stick as a number from 1 to 5.
- 6 Hacky Sacks, bean bags, or rocks
- Large open activity area, indoors or outdoors
- If indoors, 5 pylons with holes will be needed to keep the sticks upright

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land is an important lesson that begins with the proper protocol being followed when harvesting natural materials.
- The willow should be cut to 15 – 20 cm lengths per marking stick
- Using a knife safely (with adult supervision).
- The knife can also be used to create markings on the stick numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Activity Description

- Place sticks in a line in the ground (or in a cone on the floor).
- Sticks should be placed 1 metre apart, but can be adjusted depending on the age of the participants. (Traditionally the sticks are spaced 6 feet (about 2 m) apart.)

- 3 players stand behind a starting line, facing the first stick. The first player has 3 bean bags or rocks.
- 3 players stand behind a starting line on the opposite side of the playing area, facing the other players in line opposite to them. The first player in this line has 3 bean bags or rocks.
- Players take turns trying to knock down each numbered stick with a bean bag or rock, beginning with the closest stick.
- Each player attempts 3 throws, alternating from each starting line.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- Throwing is an object manipulation skill
- Throwing is a skill that is the basis for many activities like baseball, softball, and slow pitch

Safety

- If tossing rocks or other hard objects, ensure all participants are a safe distance from the thrower and markers.

Activity Variations

- Use a larger or smaller size throwing object
- Place sticks closer or further apart
- Have participants think about how difficult the task would be to hit a moving object like a small bird.
- If you don't have access to willow sticks what else could you use? Pylons, poly spot markers or targets could also be used.

Double Ball

Activity Origin and Purpose

- This is a team game played in the past by East Coast and Plains tribes including Cree and Chippewa.
- This game was often played exclusively by women, but now it is played by everyone.
- Respect is a key component of this game, with the goal of protecting each other from injury.

Equipment

- 1 willow stick per player
- 1 Double Ball
- Jack Knife or box cutter (with adult supervision)

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land was an important lesson that begins with the proper protocols being followed when harvesting natural materials.
- Harvest a stick as thick as an adult's thumb and a length measuring from the players' hip to finger-tip (about 24-28 inches for a child; 35-40 inches for an adult). The stick should be straight with a very slight curve at the top.
- Using a knife (with adult supervision), peel one hand width of bark from the bottom end, leave two hand widths and peel the rest of the bark up to the top (the bark forms the handle).
- The double ball is sewn from leather, hide, or faux suede. The double ball is two oblong balls attached by a thong approximately 12-20 inches in length and stuffed with buffalo hair (or balloons filled with sand or rice).



Activity Description

- Participants are divided into two teams (teams of 8 are ideal).
- Teams play on a large field with a goal at either end. Points are scored by getting the ball through the goal, over the cross-bar or wrapping around the cross-bar.
- To begin, the two teams face each other across a centre line with sticks held overhead.
- The double ball is thrown in the air between the two teams by a leader. This starts the game and play continues until one side passes the ball through the opponent's goal.
- There is no goalie for this game.
- The ball can only be moved with the stick and no rough play is allowed.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- Running, catching and throwing are fundamental movement skills that are the basis for many other games and sports.
- Team games like Double Ball are great opportunities to learn about spatial awareness and provide opportunities to practice skills like dodging, stopping and changing direction.

Safety

- Be sure that the running area is free from debris or other hazards.
- Sticks should not have pointed tips at either end. Remind participants how to safely use their sticks around others.

Activity Variations

- Score 1 point if the ball travels through the goal, 2 points for going over the goal and 3 points for wrapping the ball on the cross bar.
- Games are played to 7 points, going over 7 resets to 3, going through the goal from the back scores a point for opposing team.
- At the conclusion of the game the players on the team with the most points nominates the player on the other team that gave them the most challenge as the "Player of the Game."

Hoop & Dart

Activity Origin and Purpose

- This is a Salish Game that was originally played in the interior northwest USA (Montana).
- Children and youth were taught hoop and dart games to become skillful at hunting small animals and fish while the adult men were away hunting large game.
- The game taught truthfulness and skills for survival.

Equipment

- 1 hoop laced in a dream catcher pattern
- Each player needs a set of 4 arrows or darts, decorated the same
- Jack Knife or box cutter (with adult supervision)

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land was an important lesson that begins with the proper protocols being followed when harvesting natural materials.
- The hoop should be approximately 12-18 inches in diameter, laced in a dream catcher pattern with a reinforced hole at the center. This can be a large metal ring wrapped in hide or buckskin.
- Darts are slender peeled willow sticks 18-24 inches long. They should be as straight as possible. Each set of 4 should be decorated uniquely by marking wood or using feathers, markers, yarn, ribbon and beads.
- Using a knife (with adult supervision) create a point on the stick so that it can be placed in the ground easily.



Knife Safety:

Creating the equipment for this game does include the use of a jack knife or box cutter. Depending on the age of participants, the size of the group, and the leader's familiarity with knife skills - safety considerations may impact the creation of the equipment. If knife safety is a concern, consider whittling and cutting the willow to length prior to the activity and then have participants decorate their stick to make it unique.

Activity Description

- Two teams of 6 players line up on opposite sides of an alleyway approximately 30 feet long and 10 feet wide
- Participants attempt to throw their darts through the hoop which is rolled down the alleyway
- One point is scored for landing a dart in the hoop netting and 3 points for landing the dart in the middle of the hoop.
- Individual points are added together for a team score.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- Throwing is an object manipulation skill.
- Throwing for accuracy is a skill that is the basis for many activities like baseball, softball or javelin.

Safety

- When throwing the darts at the hoop, ensure all participants are a safe distance from the other throwers.

Activity Variations

- If you do not have a dream catcher hoop, a regular hula hoop can be used.
- Vary the size of the hoop and distance to throw to increase or decrease difficulty.
- If you have more than one hoop, have participants spread out in a field and work with a partner to increase their opportunities to practice.

Sling Ball

Activity Origin and Purpose

- A sling ball in the style of the Northern Cheyenne consisted of an irregularly shaped buckskin ball stuffed with buffalo hair and an attached braided tail about 8-10 inches long.
- This activity is a great indoor or outdoor game that uses core strength.
- There are many different types of ball games, and each game would be determined by the “lay of the land,” the types of natural materials available and the traditions, cultures and customs of each tribe.



Equipment

- Each participant will need their own sling ball

Equipment Creation

- Gratitude for the gifts of the land was an important lesson that begins with the proper protocols being followed when harvesting natural materials.
- Modern sling balls can be made from a hacky sack stuffed with a sand-filled balloon.
- A tail of approximately 8 – 10 inches of braided yarn is attached to the hacky sack.

Activity Description

- Have participants sit on the ground in a straight line facing away from the activity space.
- The tail of their sling ball is pinched in between their two big toes.
- When everyone is ready, give a signal to sling the ball. On the signal, the participants need to roll onto their back, raise their legs and sling the ball backward over their heads.
- The sling ball that travels the farthest distance is the winner.

Fundamental Movement Skills/Physical Literacy Link

- This activity will help to build Agility, Balance, and Coordination. The ABCs are important in the development of physical literacy.
- Developing core strength is an important building block for many other movement skills.

Safety

- Ensure the activity space is free of obstacles.
- Mark off a playing area to ensure there is plenty of space to play sling ball.
- Have participants sling at the same time to ensure that no one is retrieving their sling ball while another participant is throwing.

Activity Variations

- Participants can play this game by competing in heats or pairs.
- Depending on the skill level of the participants, partners could spread out in the activity area and in their own space, have one partner sling the ball and see if the other partner is able to catch it.
- The sling ball can also be used to play Kick Ball. In Kick Ball, participants line up and race across a distance while kicking their ball forward and in front of them. This Kick Ball race was played by the Northern Cheyenne.

Additional Resources

Move & Play Through Traditional Games Lesson Plans

Full lesson plans with curriculum connections for grades 4-6

www.befitforlife.ca/resources/move-and-play-through-traditional-games

International Traditional Games Society

www.traditionalnativegames.org/

Other Be Fit For Life Network Resources

www.befitforlife.ca/resources

For more information about hosting a workshop at your school or other resources to support physical literacy development, contact your local Be Fit For Life Centre.

www.befitforlife.ca | [@bfflnetwork](https://twitter.com/bfflnetwork)



The Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association supports active member Friendship Centres who, through program and service delivery, engage with and improve the quality of life for urban Indigenous people. Contact the Alberta Native Friendship Centre in your community to connect you to other cultural opportunities and teachings.

www.anfca.com

