

# NATIVE AMERICAN GAMES

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Traditional games were played by adults and children of both genders. Some were played only by one group or the other and others were played by everyone. While some games were simple past times others were taken very seriously, much like football, basketball, or other sports today. Being known as a skilled player gave a person a certain status, like being a star football player might today.

Traditional games had many purposes. Unlike today's high tech games these games were not meant to be played alone. The games brought people together, stimulated social interaction, and strengthened social bonds. They also taught skills, patience, and endurance—virtues that would be important in adult life.



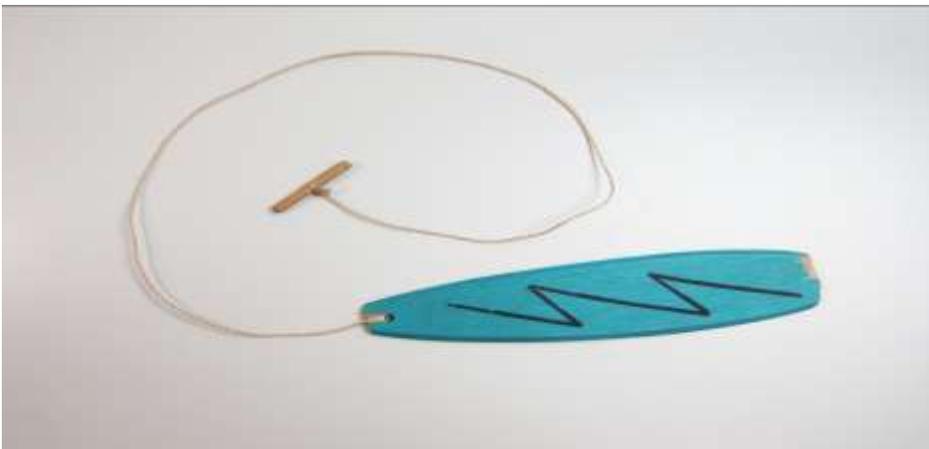
# BULL ROARER

Used as toys, ceremonial objects, and musical instruments bull roarers are found all over the world. They are made from wood or bone on a sinew string with a small wooden handle. The toy makes a loud whirring or roaring noise that sounds like wind, rain, or a wild animal.

In North America, Bull Roarers were used by Apache, Dakota, Lakota Hopi, Navaho, Omaha, and Zuni.

(Lakota name *Tateka Yuhmunpi*)

Place the wooden handle between your fingers and let the bull roarer dangle down. Set it spinning on the end of the string then twirl it over your head. BE VERY CAREFUL that no people or objects are in the way.



# GAMES OF CHANCE

There is a huge variety of traditional games of chance involving dice made from decorated sticks, bone, or pottery discs. Often they involved betting but have modified to awarding points. Similar games were played by the **Ojibwa, Meskwaki, Potawatomi, Arapaho, and Cheyenne.**

To play this game hold all three sticks in both hands. Toss them in the air. Scores are based on how the dice fall.

All plain sides up = 4 points

Two snakes and one plain=6 points

Two plain and one snake=6 points

Two men and one snake=6 points

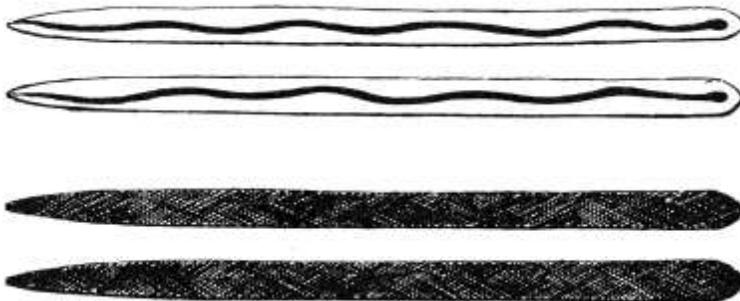
One plain, one snake, one man=0 points

One man and two plain=4 points

Two snakes and one man=4 points

Two men and one plane=4 points

Take turns until someone reaches 50 points.



Chippewa stick dice.



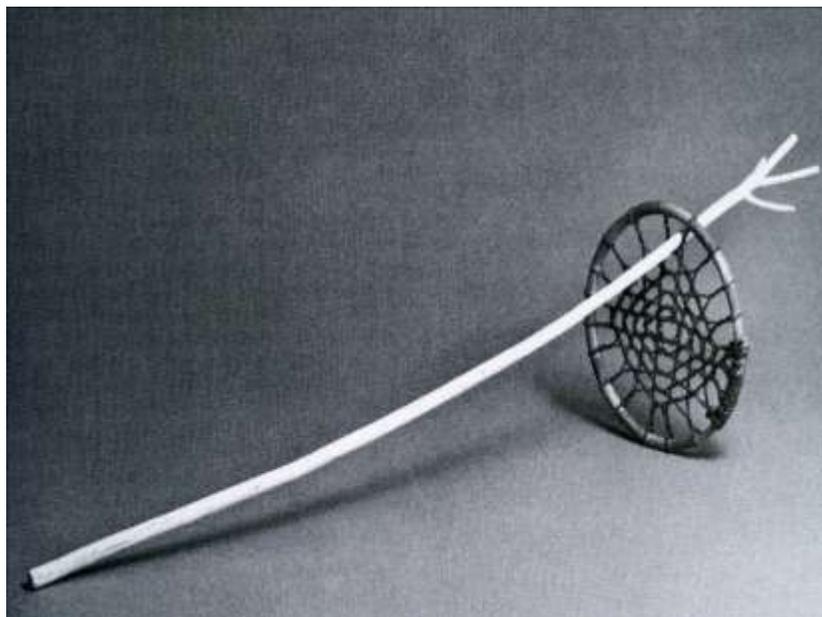
## TARGET PRACTICE

There are many traditional games that involve

throwing spears or darts at a target.

Chunkee stone (many varied spellings) involved hitting a rolling stone with a throw of the spear. Found throughout North America this game was most often played by men and older boys.

Hidatsa game: spear the rolling hoop.



# Stick-Catching and other coordination games

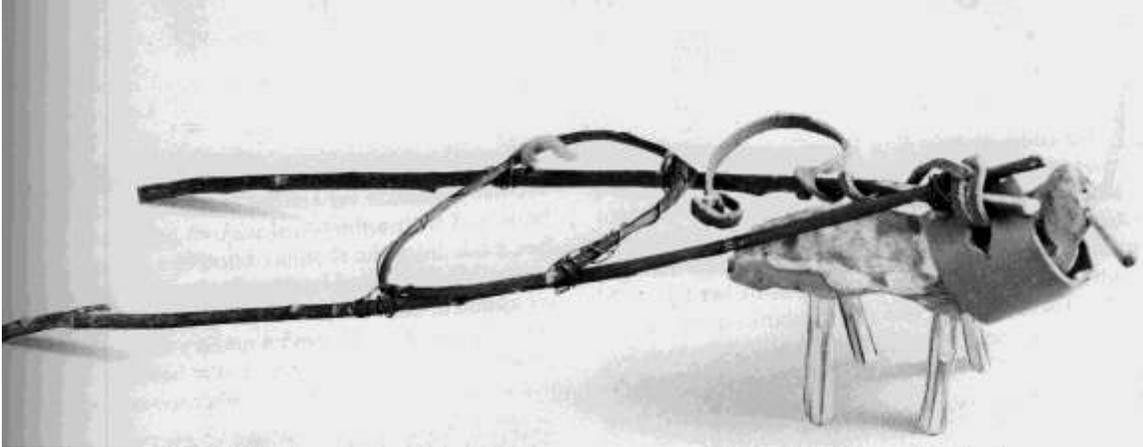
Versions of this game are played by the Pima and Papago in Southwest and Eskimo and Haida of Alaska.

The first player balances a single stick on the back of his hand. The stick is tossed into the air and caught in the same hand. The player continues adding sticks one at a time until he misses one or more on the catch. Points are awarded according to how many sticks a player had on his last complete catch.



# TOYS:

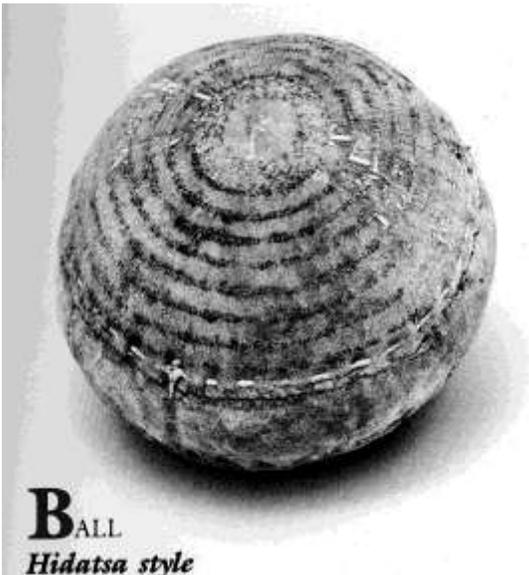
## Dolls and Balls



Hidatsa dog and travois made with sticks and a plant root.

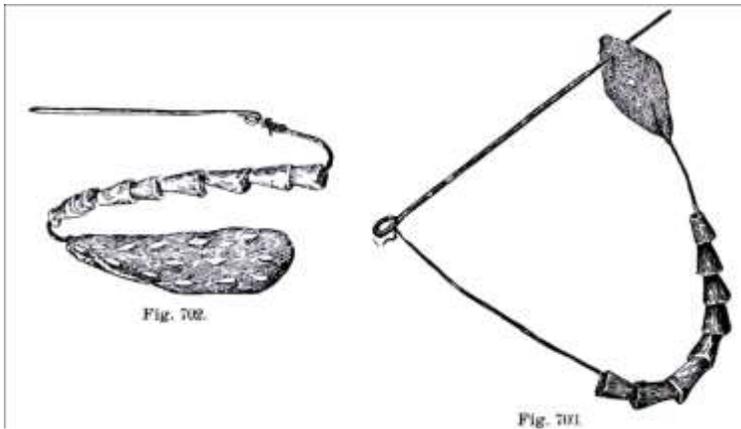
Dolls and toys made from bending and shaping twigs, leaves, corn husks and other bits of plants were made for small children by parents,

grandparents,  
siblings and other  
loving relatives.



Hide decorated with dyed quills

**B**<sub>ALL</sub>  
*Hidatsa style*

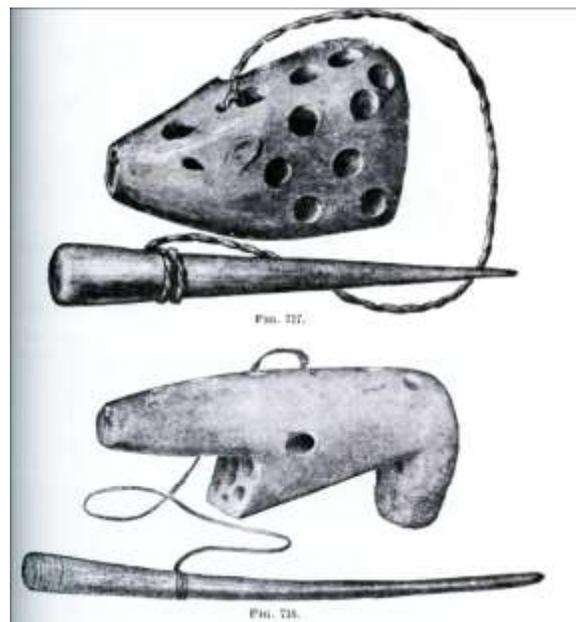


Cree version of bone and leather

# RING AND PIN GAME

The object of this game was to impale the swinging target on a long bone pin. Many versions of this game are found throughout North America. It is often played by women and older children. Cheyenne women played very seriously, often for high stakes.

Eskimo version of carved ivory.



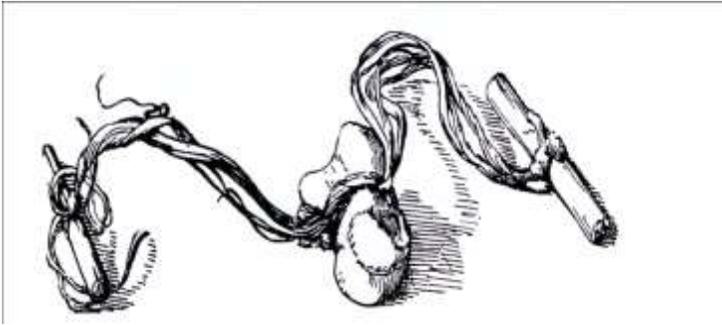


# Double Ball Game

This game was played by nations of the Eastern Woodlands including Meskwaki, Ojibwa, and Ho-Chunk.

- ❖ The game is played by 2 or 3 opposing teams and the goals could be up to a **mile** apart.
- ❖ The object is to pass the double ball from stick to stick down the field to a goal post.
- ❖ It is most often played by women and girls.
- ❖ Female athletes were admired in these cultures and star players had high status





Ogalala Dakota made from a bison bone

## SPINNERS OR BUZZERS

A whirling toy made of a flat piece of bone, pottery, shell, gourd, or other material tied with a loop of sinew or twine. Versions of this toy are played with by children all around the world.

Examples come from the Arapaho, Crow, Dakota, Eskimo, Gros Ventres, Hopi, Maricopa, and Zuni.

Prehistoric Anasazi— from Canyon de Chelly  
made of stone



# Snowsnakes

This is a winter game played by many nations throughout the North American snow belt,



Canadian arctic and Greenland.

Some of the nations who play include:

Sac

Meskwaki

Dakota

Ojibwa

Mandan

Hidatsa

Iroquois

Often it is exclusively played by men or older boys but it is sometimes also played by everyone.

The "snowsnake" is a long slender, polished wooden stick with a head carved from wood, horn, or bone. It is often shaped like a bird or snake head. A track consisting of a shallow ditch in the snow is laid out and competitors see who can get their snowsnake to glide the farthest.

*Many of the items used in these games may be fashioned from everyday items. Sticks for the games of chance, for instance, can be made from wooden tongue depressors or popsicle sticks.*

## Sources

### Literature

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*All Bureau of American Ethnography materials are available to read for free on line.*

### Movies and Video

**Lost Nation: The Ioway**

2007 Fourth Wall Films, Kelly and Tammy Rundle

**Meskwaki History Interactive CD Rom**

2004 State Historical Society of Iowa

### Web Sites

**Oneida Cultural Heritage** – You Tube Video of Snowsnakes Game (7 minutes) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfn5LE88JPc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfn5LE88JPc)

**American Museum of Natural History web site**  
[Anthro.amnh.org/anthropology/databases/north\\_public](http://Anthro.amnh.org/anthropology/databases/north_public)