

Fun and Games

Wisconsin DPI Standards Alignment:

Social Studies B.4.10 – Explain the history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Wisconsin.

Social Studies E.4.8 -- Describe and distinguish among the values and beliefs of different groups and institutions.

Social Studies E.4.3 – Describe how families are alike and different, comparing characteristics such as size, hobbies, celebrations, where families live, and how they make a living.

English Language Arts A.8.1 – Establish purposeful reading and writing habits by using texts to find information, gain understanding of diverse viewpoints, make decisions, and enjoy the experience of reading.

Goal: Students will understand Woodland Indian games as a means of recreation and as a means of teaching skills used in warfare, hunting, and other everyday activities.

Objectives:

- 1) Students will play two Woodlands Indians games.
- 2) In a think-aloud discussion, students will brainstorm about the practical applications of skills learned in the games.
- 3) Students will each select a game with which they were already familiar. In a journal entry, they will describe the game and explain what life skills, if any, it is meant to teach.
- 4) In small groups, students will make up their own games that are meant to teach a skill as well as to be fun. They will then teach their game to the rest of the class.

In Woodland Indian culture people play games for several reasons. Like us, Woodland Indians play games to have fun, to relax, and to be active. However, in traditional Woodland culture, games also carried religious meaning – they were meant to honor the spirits and cure the sick. Games and sports also taught skills that would help the players with their everyday activities. For example, a pine cone tossing game would teach boys good aim, which would help them on the hunt. A game like Lacrosse, which might have goal posts a mile apart, could take several days to play. Such a game would build endurance on the part of the players.

Read the following descriptions of two Woodland Indian games and play them with a small group of your classmates. Many Woodland games, including these two, are still played today.

The Hand Game

The hand game was a guessing game. Several players passed around two small objects (like a pebble sewn into a piece of cloth or a horseshoe nail would with a piece of string.) One player would chose to hide one of the objects in his or her fist, but would pretend to pass it along to the next player. This also happened with the second object. The opponent then had to guess the correct hands in which the objects were hidden. The Woodland Indians stuck sharpened sticks into the ground to keep score. You can play this game using two pennies. Keep score on a piece of paper. Whenever the opponent guesses correctly, he or she gets a point. When the other players fool the opponent, they earn a point for each incorrect guess.

Dice

Dice was a game of chance, mostly played by women in the wintertime. A woman in the community would hold the game to honor her guardian spirit; she started the game and offered prizes to players, but would not play herself. Men watched the game, cheering on the players. When a player won a prize, she would offer it to one of the men in the audience, who would return the favor by giving her a gift in the future. Sometimes, players ate a feast before starting the game.

The women divided into two teams and sat on the floor facing each other. Each side sat in a semicircle. There was not a limit on the number of players, but there were only four prizes (usually brightly colored pieces of cloth). In order to play the game, the women needed a wooden bowl and eight dice. Six of the dice were shaped in thin circular discs, a seventh was carved in the form of a turtle, and an eighth represented a horse's head. Blue or red dye colored one side of each die. The other side remained white. The women placed the dice in the wooden bowl and, holding it with both hands, shook the dice to the far side of the bowl. They then flipped the bowl over, spilling out the dice. The score was counted as follows:

All dice of same color except two	1 point
All dice of same color except one	3 points
All dice of same color except the turtle	5 points
All dice of same color except the horse	10 points
All dice of the same color	8 points
All dice of the same color except the turtle and horse	10 points

Each woman kept her own score using beans placed in front of her. Each woman shook the bowl until she had two turns that did not earn any points. She then passed the bowl to the person on her left. The first woman to score 10 points won the game, and she gave her prize (the fabric) to one of the male spectators. He would later give her a gift of equal value.

After you have tried each game once, come back together as a class and discuss how each game taught life skills or honored the spirits. As you brainstorm, record your ideas on the blackboard or overhead projector.

After the discussion, each student will write a journal entry in which he or she focuses on a game with which he or she is already familiar. In their journals, the students will describe their game and tell what life skills it teaches or how it helps us to honor someone or something.

Next, in small groups, students will brainstorm what skills they believe a Woodland Indian would need on a daily basis one hundred or more years ago. (Example: keen eyesight when hunting, quiet movement in the forest, etc.) They will make up a game that could help to foster those skills. The group will write a description of their game and its rules and then teach it to the class.