

# Native American and Pioneer Children’s Games

Refer to your state social studies standards regarding Native American culture and pioneers/settlers.

## I. Games Played by Native American Children

Native American children played games including versions of football, soccer, basketball, bowling, racing, and wrestling. American Indians invented the game of lacrosse. Although the games were fun, many of them helped Indian children develop skills that made them better hunters and fighters, too.

### **TOE TOSS STICK (APACHE)**

You will need one or more short sticks and a piece of chalk. Make a mark on the floor or playground with chalk. Each player takes a turn balancing the stick on his or her toes and tossing it in the air using only the foot. There are two goals—to make the stick go as high as possible and to have it land on the mark. Give 1 point if the stick reaches a height between the player’s knee and waist, 2 points if it reaches a height between the waist and the top of the head, and 3 points if it goes higher than the head. Give 4 points if the stick lands touching the mark.

### **BUFFALO ROBE**

This game is a little like Tug of War. Use a small blanket unless you have an actual deer or buffalo hide. Place the hide on the ground and have 8–10 students form a circle around it holding hands. When the game starts, students will tug on the circle, trying to get the players around them to step on the hide. If children touch the hide with their feet or bodies, they are out. You should also send students out if they let go of the other players’ hands or if they get too rough. The last student left “in” is considered the strongest warrior of the tribe.

### **KEEPER OF THE FIRE (MANY PLAINS, WOODLANDS, AND COASTAL TRIBES)**

Each group of 6–8 students will need a blindfold and three craft sticks. Blindfold one student, the Fire Keeper, who will sit or kneel on the floor in the center of the circle with hands held loosely in his or her lap. Another player, the Chief, will place the sticks on the floor in front of the Fire Keeper. The Chief will say, “My people, bring us fire!” and point to one of the students in the circle. The Fire Bringer will quietly sneak up and try to take one of the sticks without getting caught. The Fire Keeper can tag an approaching Fire Bringer, but can only put his or her hands out in response to actually hearing something, not by hoping to hit someone randomly. The Chief will continue to give different students turns to try to take the sticks. If all three sticks are captured, the Chief can choose which of the Fire Bringers will become the new Fire Keeper. If, however, all of the Fire Bringers have had a turn and have been tagged, the Fire Keeper will choose his or her replacement. Then the game begins again.

### **HOOP AND POLE**

#### **(COMANCHE AND MANY OTHER TRIBES)**

You will need a hula hoop and lawn darts or sticks. Students will take turns rolling the hoop as another student tries to throw the stick through the hoop. If the stick misses, the hoop roller gets to keep it. If the stick goes through the hoop, the stick thrower not only keeps the stick, but also gets to roll the hoop for the next player. The player who collects the most sticks wins. Tell your students that the original hoops were made of reeds and had a rawhide net across the center. Hitting different parts of the net meant earning different numbers of points.

### **THE MOCCASIN GAME**

#### **(SHAWNEE AND MANY OTHER TRIBES)**

You will need a small stone, 20 craft sticks, a drum, and four shoes. Choose teams of 4–6 players and give each team 10 craft sticks to use as points. Turn the four shoes upside down on the floor between the two teams. A player from Team One will hide a small stone under one of the shoes, pretending to put it under different shoes both before and after actually hiding it in order to confuse the opposing team. Meanwhile, the other players on Team One will sing songs, tell jokes, and play the drum, trying to distract Team Two. (You can leave out the noisy part if you prefer.) When the drum stops—or a selected student calls time—a player from Team Two will turn over the shoes one by one, looking for the stone. If the stone is found on the first or second try, Team Two wins a point (stick) from the first team and gets to hide the next stone. If the stone is found on the third or fourth try, Team One gets a point from the other team and the player who hid the stone chooses a player from his or her team to hide the stone again. The game ends when either team wins three points in a row.

### **SCREAM AND RUN**

Establish a starting line on the playground and then mark a second line about 15 feet past the starting line. Have students line up to race. When you say “Go!” they will run towards the second line. As they cross that line, students should start screaming. They will run and scream as far as they can without taking a new breath. When they stop screaming, they have to stop where they are and freeze. The student who runs the farthest while screaming wins the race. You might want to warn the other teachers about this game in advance so they won’t be surprised when your students scream.

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## II. Games Played by Pioneer Children

Children on the American frontier played many games that are still played today. They skipped rope and played games like Drop the Handkerchief (Duck Duck Goose), tag, marbles (originally made from clay), hopscotch, hide and seek, checkers, jackstraws (pickup sticks), string games, knucklebones (jacks), and noughts and crosses (tic tac toe). The following games they played may be less familiar to your students.

### LEAPFROG

Divide students into groups of 5–6. Players line up and bend over, placing both hands on the knees. There should be a space of about 4 feet between each set of players. The last person in line comes running up behind the next to last player and vaults over his or her back by placing both hands on the upper back of the shoulders and swinging the legs out to the side like a frog. The process is repeated until the leaper has reached the front of the line and crouches down like the others. Then the new last person in line leaps his or her way up the line. And so on. Of course, some children will eventually miss their leaps or get tired, but they should have fun along the way.

### HUNT THE SHOE

Each player must take off a shoe and prepare to pass it. Students should stand in a circle, with one player in the middle as It. The students in the circle will pass their shoes around the circle, but behind their backs. They will also pass the shoe of the student who is It. That student will wait a moment or two and then say, “Stop!” The other students must stop passing the shoes, and the student who is It will try to guess which student in the circle has the match to his or her own shoe. If It is wrong, the shoe passing resumes. If It is right, the person holding Its shoes must hand it over and become the new It.

### TWO KINDS OF TAG

On a sunny day, have your students try playing Shadow Tag, in which the person who is “It” tries to step on the other students’ shadows. When a student’s shadow is stepped on, he or she becomes the next It. If students find a shady spot, they can only hide there till It counts to ten; then they have to come out into the sunlight again.

Another tag variation is Chain Tag, which starts with two students chosen to be It. The partners hold hands and chase the other children. When they tag someone, that person needs to link hands and join them. The chain should grow longer and longer until the game is over.

### LAST PAIR OUT

Students are divided in pairs and lined up, still in pairs, behind a leader. When the leader yells “Last pair out” the pair at the end of the line splits and runs up the sides of the line toward the front. Meanwhile, the leader tries to catch one of the running pair. If the leader tags one of the

two, that person becomes the new leader. If, however, the pair from the back of the line makes it to the front of the line without getting tagged, they get to stay in their new place while the leader tries again.

### DARE BASE

Divide the students into two teams. Each team has to choose a home base on the playground that can be circled entirely (e.g., a flagpole or handball backboard). Daring players can go and run around the home base of the other team. If they are caught, the new team can choose someone from the prisoner’s team to join their team. The team with all of the players on their side by the end of the game wins. To play a second round, mix up the teams and start over.

### BLIND MAN’S BLUFF

Blindfold one student and have the rest of the students form a circle around him or her. The Blind Man or It will try to tag the other students, and they must run around, calling out things like “I’m over here!” and coming as close as they can to the student who is It without being tagged. When It does tag someone, he or she is given the chance to gently touch that person’s face and hair and then guess who it is. If the student who is It guesses correctly, the tagged person becomes the new Blind Man.

### I HAVE A BASKET

Players sit in a circle, and the first player says, “I have a basket.” The next player asks, “What’s inside?” The first player names something beginning with “A.” Then the second player says, “I have a basket,” the third player asks, “What’s inside?” and the second player must name something beginning with “B.” And so forth. This game should move fairly quickly. It ends when a player gets stuck trying to think of something in the basket that starts with the next letter in the alphabet. You might want to define getting stuck as waiting 4–5 seconds to answer.