



Native American Games: Nez Perce Stick Game

The National Park Service [NPS] *Teaching with Museum Collections* provides lesson plans for teachers to use NPS museum collections in student-centered educational activities. Collections tell the story of America; its peoples, cultures, varied habitats, significant events, and ideas that continue to inspire the world. *Teaching with Museum Collections [TMC]* emphasizes the links between the ‘real things;’ the collections, and the sites where those collections were found, collected, or used. NPS collections include cultural objects, natural history specimens, archival documents and photographs. Lesson plans link to national education standards.

A. Header

- Lesson Unit Plan Title: Native American Games: Nez Perce Stick Game (Lopmix game)**
- Developers:** Carrie Card, Northwest Children’s Home, Education Center, Lewiston, ID
- Grade Level:** Middle grade
- Length of Lessons/Lesson Unit:** Each activity is approximately 55 minutes in length. There are 6 activities total.

B. Overview of this Collection-Based Lesson Plan

- Park name:** Nez Perce National Historical Park
- Description:** The purpose of this lesson is to allow students to investigate the role of games in Nez Perce culture. The culture of the ancestral Nez Perce people was dependent on their knowledge and use of natural elements and working together as a group. To this end, games were useful for more than recreation but also as ways to teach expectations and etiquette.
Prior Knowledge and Relevance: Game play and team work. People need to work together in order to produce goods and services for each other and develop social function for building cohesion.
- Essential Question.** Why is it important to learn to play games as a team and fairly?

C. Museum Collections Used in this Lesson Plan

- NEPE 81,82,83,84 Bone game pieces
- NEPE-HI-33759 Playing Stick Game at Night, c 1955

D. National Educational Standards

From Curriculum and Content area standards: Social Studies Standards.
Performance expectations:

Section 1: Culture: social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Middle Grades

- a. Compare similarities and differences in ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
- b. Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

Section V: Individual, groups and institutions: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the interactions among individuals, groups and institutions, so the learner can:

Middle grades



- a. Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, social class in describing the interactions of individuals and groups.
- b. Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events and elements of culture.
- f. Describe the role of institutions in furthering both continuity and change.

Section 7: Science, technology and society: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society, so the learner can:

Middle grades:

- b. Show through specific examples how science and technology have changed people's perceptions of the social and natural world, such as their relationship to the land, animal life, family life, and economic needs, wants and security.
- c. Describe examples in which values, beliefs; attitudes have been influenced by new scientific and technological knowledge, such as the invention of the printing press, conceptions of the universe, applications of atomic energy and genetic discoveries.

E. Student Learning Objectives

After these lessons, students will be able to:

- Manufacture and play the Nez Perce stick game to facilitate appreciation of one aspect of Nez Perce culture.
- Critically analyze objects from the Nez Perce National Historical Park Museum collection.
- Use the analysis to develop an understanding of the function of tools and attire used by Ancestral Nez Perce people and the natural resources used to make them.
- Communicate their analysis in writing and orally to hypothesize how natural elements could be transformed into tools, games and attire.

F. Background and Historical Context

The Nez Perce enjoyed a number of games and amusements during their leisure time. Adults enjoyed archery, hoop-and-pole, hand game, horse-racing and sham battles that provided much excitement.

The hand game (lopmix) was the most popular gambling game. The players were seated in two rows, facing each other, with a fire between them when the game was played at night. A log was placed before each row, and each player had a stick with which he kept time to a song by striking the log. There were usually two sets of pieces, each set consisting of two cylindrical sections deer legbone, one being plain and the other having a black ring of deerskin around the center. Each side was provided with ten counting sticks. As a prelude, the leader on one side manipulated the bone pieces- hiding them beneath his blanket and passing them from one hand to



the other, while the other men on beat the log and sang a mocking song. The leader then passed out the two sets of bones to two of his fellow players. These players further manipulated the pieces and then held out their closed hands for the leader on the other side to guess which hands held the plain bones. The side that was guessing silently watched the dealers. When both sets of bones had been properly guessed the deal changed sides. Losses were paid out of the ten original counters until these were exhausted.

Another game consisted of rolling a hoop along a prepared piece of ground and throwing a shaft so that they would stop where the ring did. There were variations and sometimes the shaft was thrown through the hoop.

A game of ball with bats having curved ends like hockey sticks was very popular. It was played on a large piece of level ground. Goals were formed with two heaps of stones about fifteen feet apart. The ball was stuffed with deer hair. Men played on one side and women on the other.

Horse racing was very popular. Sport on horseback often took the form of sham battles. Sometimes a famous battle with another tribe would be reenacted with a great deal of realism.

Children had many games. Tops were spun by the children either with the hands or with a string. The common form of top was a disk of bark through the middle of which was inserted a peg pointed at the lower end and extending about four inches above the disk. Cat's cradle and other string games were also common. These were made by the old people to amuse the children and with each figure went a story.

“The hand game was played in much the same manner by all tribes of the Northwest. It was the most popular gambling game. Players were seated in two rows, facing each other, with a fire in between when the game was played at night. A log was placed before each row and each player had a stick with which he kept time to a song by striking the log.....”

Herbert Joseph Spinden, *The Nez Perce Indians*

G. Materials Used in this Lesson Plan

- PVC pipe – ¾ inch, length enough so each student has two, two inch pieces
- Wooden dowels – ¼ inch, length enough so each student has Five, twelve inch pieces
- Black permanent marker or black acrylic paint
- Writing materials: journal, pencils
- Ruler
- Saw to cut pvc pipe and dowels
- Other colors of paint or permanent marker
- Tea to stain pipe
- Chalk or dry erase marker
- Blackboard or whiteboard
- Video clip of stick game being played, go to <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/nepe/>; click on Video Clips, and then Clip 7 Treaty vs non-Treaty



❑ *Similar items [objects].*

Teacher made set of 2 pieces of pipe stained, one with a black band. Five dowels of same length.

❑ *Other materials:*

- *Forms and Charts:* How to Read an Object Chart at [<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/tmc/index.htm>]
- *Writing materials:* Pencils and journal
- *Art-making materials:* Permanent markers and acrylic paint various colors
- *Science and math materials:* Ruler

H. Vocabulary

1. Culture: traits learned and transmitted by members of society
2. Taunting: trying to distract others from game
4. Dowels: a round rod or stick

I. Teacher Tips

- ❑ Download and laminate color prints of bone game pieces photograph of museum objects; NEPE 81,82,83,84 (all in one picture) and picture of a stick game.
- ❑ Collect an item and photograph it and write a “historical” document about it.
- ❑ Make copies of the “Reading a Museum Object” chart
- ❑ Check the Nez Perce National Historical Park website (www.nps.gov/nepe) for more park information and/or a brochure.

J. Lesson Implementation Procedures

Activity 1: Reading a created object

- ❑ Collect an item that is small but able to be photographed and write a document about the item. For example collect an object such as an item of clothing, a unique kitchen utensil, something that has personal connections. Photograph it, enlarge, print, and write a document that describes the object without specifically identifying it.
- ❑ Divide the class into three groups give each group one or two of the items described above. Also, give the students “how to read an object” template, one per group, and have them choose a recorder and a reporter and begin working through the template.
- ❑ Let students work for 30 minutes while you work your way around the classroom answering questions without giving too much away. Reconvene as a large group and have each reporter describe their findings. Leave enough time for students to reflect in their journals. If you already use journals in class you can have them use a specific part in the journal. If you do not use journals, they need to maintain a small journal for seven class periods. They can either write or illustrate what they have learned each day. The goal is reflective writing.

Activity 2: Reading a museum object



- ❑ Use downloaded laminated pictures of the gaming pieces (Catalog numbers 81,82,83,84 - all pictured together) and the Pictures of Playing Stick Game .
- ❑ Break class into two groups and hand out one copy of the “How to read an object” template to each group. As before students work together in groups and work through the template to surmise use and make up of items. Let students work in small groups for ten minutes then convene the whole class and have each group report their findings.

Activity 3: Learning the Stick game

You will need two complete sets of bones and sticks (PVC and Dowels). Write out the stick game rules on board.

Stick Game Rules

- ❑ Select two teams, each team has the two bones, and one is marked with a black band. One member of the team switches the bones around in their hands (behind their back, under a scarf or piece of material either front or back), while the rest of the team tries to distract the opposing team by taunting, making noise with sticks, or singing.
- ❑ The object of the game is for the opposing team to guess which hand has the bone with the black band. For each correct guess the team wins a stick and the deal changes sides. The first team with three sticks is the winner.
- ❑ Explain that good natured taunting and good natured sound making is allowed. Inappropriate taunts and rude sound making *will not tolerated*. Students will then start playing the game with the similar items that you have made. Join in the game with the students. Remember to leave enough time to write in their journal.

Activity 4: Making the Stick Game

- ❑ Give each student two, two inch pieces of PVC pipe and five, twelve inch lengths of dowel.
- ❑ Set up stations for staining the pipe, banding the pipe, and decorating the dowels. For staining pipe students need access to boiling tea water to soak pipe in to make it look old. Another adult would be required to supervise this process.
- ❑ Mark off the banding area to be painted with masking tape. Black marker or black acrylic paint can be used to put banding on one piece of PVC pipe. Other colors of paint or permanent marker can be used to decorate the 5 lengths of dowel. Primary colors are best. Leave time for the students to write or draw pictures in their journal about the experiences of the day.

Activity 5: Teaching Peers the Stick Game

- ❑ Prior to the fifth activity, the teacher needs to arrange to have the students teach stick game to students in other classes. Divide the students between the rest of the school’s classrooms interested in learning the game. They will teach how to play the game and why games were important to the Nez Perce. Students need to be prepared to explain how the game is played, what taunting is, why this activity might help people work as a group and why that might be important.
- ❑ After finishing the game the students return to their own classroom with enough time to write in their journals. Include information about: teaching peers games; incorporate



details concerning; the ease or difficulty of teaching the game; whether the other students seemed to have fun and enjoy the activity; what you would do different the next time; and would you like to arrange a school wide stick game event?

Activity 6: Using what you have learned to create something new

Have the students bring a piece from their favorite game at home for a show and tell activity. At the beginning of class present your (the teacher) favorite game piece to the class. Include how you think the parts were made, if the game inspires team work or individual work, and other aspects that you like about the game. Include what the pieces represent and recite the rules. Then have students break into small groups and do the same thing with their favorite game and have students create a game using both the stick game and their favorite game pieces to make a different game. Students need to make clear and concise written rules. Home work will consist of doing journaling for the day.

□ **Wrap Up Activity and Discussion**

As a class talk about games from the past and those played now. What is the focus of the stick game? What is the focus of modern games? Have students list several changes in society (leisure time, technology, etc.) between games in the past and now. Do you think that societal changes and changes in the way we provide for our needs have changed the way we play games? Do games help you with your daily life? Do we have modern games that are similar? What is it like to play with a “sore loser” or someone that cheats? Is the board game Monopoly similar? Jacks? Marbles?

After a discussion of 30 minutes or so have students write a personal opinion, three paragraphs, on how games affect daily life or how society has changed games. When finished they can choose to play either Stick Game or a similar modern game.

K. Evaluation/Assessment for Measurable Results

A. Teaching the game to peers (Lesson 5)

1. Knows the game well enough to explain to others with out help and can fill in gaps left by other students. 3 points
2. Knows how to explain the game to others but needs peer help to get it correct& include all of the details. 2 points
3. Can not teach the game does not know how to play the game even when asked by the teacher one on one. 1 point

B. Journaling (daily)

1. Wrote in journal after every activity. Gave thoughtful responses or artistic drawings about activities. 3 points
2. Wrote in journal daily but did not give thoughtful responses or make a reasonable attempt at drawing. 2 points
3. Did not journal at all. 0 points

C. Writing a response to wrap up activity.

1. Wrote an opinion about how games have changed or how society has changed games. Obvious thought put in and supports contention with information learned in activities. 4 points



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2. Wrote an opinion but not on either of the two themes given in the wrap up activity. Obvious thought and supports contentions with information learned in lessons. 3 points
3. Wrote an opinion but it is not supported by information or obvious thought was not put in to writing. 2 points
4. Wrote an opinion but not on the themes from the wrap up activities and it is not supported with material learned from the activities. 1 point
5. No opinion paper written. 0 points

Name of assignment	Points possible	
Teach game	3	
Journal	3	
Writing wrap up	4	
Total	10	

10-7 Mastery 6-4 basic knowledge 3-0 below basic knowledge

L. Extension and Enrichment Activities

Have students conduct internet and library research for sources of other Native American games and have them teach others about those games. Students would have to reproduce game pieces, make a rules sheet and teach the game to both the teacher and to peers.

Have students research a Euro/American games to find out where and why it evolved.

Go to a retirement home with students and have them teach and play the Stick Game with the elders. Most retirement homes have an activities coordinator who can schedule a time for you to bring your students. Call a week or more in advance. Bring along written instructions. There may be elder Native Americans at the home that know one of the versions of the game. If so you might ask that person to teach their version to your students. Make sure your students are polite and courteous while working with elders. You might be able to extend this into a community service project where your students play various games with elders.

Find out if Native Americans in your area play Stick Game and invite them to teach their version and play with your class.

Teach other classes to play and have a school tournament at end of semester/quarter/ school year. Have ribbons for all places and fun prizes for the school champions.

Watch video *“The Hand Game- the Native North American Game of Power and Chance”* (A film by Lawrence Johnson) with class and note the different way various tribes play the game. Discuss the coyote legend in the video, why was it used, what is the importance of coyote in Nez Perce legends.



M. Resources

❑ ***Bibliography***

The Hand Game - The Native North American Game of Power and Chance (A film by Lawrence Johnson)

Spinden, Herbert. *The Nez Perce Indians*. Lancaster PA: The New Era Printing Co., 1964.

❑ ***Annotated related web sites with url addresses***

Nez Perce National Historical Park: www.nps.gov/nepe

Nez Perce Tribe: www.nezperce.org

Nez Perce National Historic Trail: <http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht/index.shtml>

Nez Perce National Historic Trail: <http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht/education/kidsteacher.shtml>

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation: <http://www.umatilla.nsn.us/>

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation: <http://www.colvilletribes.com/>

N. Site Visit

❑ ***Pre-visit:*** Before visit go to website with students and do overview with students. Also speak to the students about how to act in a museum and about leaving artifacts where they lay.

Have students brainstorm what questions they would like answered by visit. Make a hand out for students fill in while at museum.

❑ ***Site visit:*** Have students analyze an item at the museum. Make sure to provide a how to read an object template. Sketching item is optional.

❑ ***Post-visit:*** See extension activity list

❑ ***Virtual visit:*** Have students do site visit activity with on line museum resources.



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Stick Game at Nez Perce National Historical Park Cultural Days Celebration (Nez Perce National Historical Park collection)