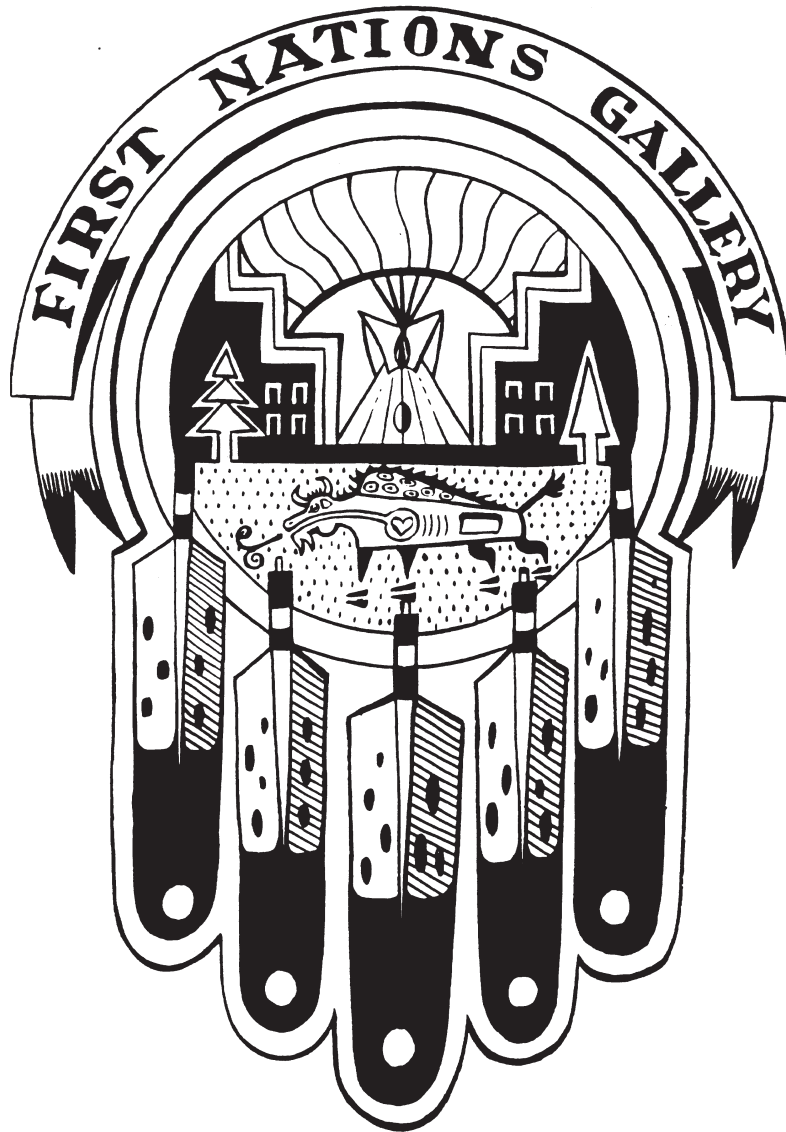


# Royal Saskatchewan Museum



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## **TIME WELL SPENT**

### **Program Objectives**

The Time Well Spent program is designed for Grade 2 and 3 classes.

The program is meant to show another aspect of pre-contact and historic Plains Indian lifestyles to young students. By playing some of the games that First Nations children enjoyed, the people and the culture become much more real and tangible to children living in a technological culture. People do not necessarily need TV and computers to have fun.

The second objective is to show students the difference between leisure and work and to create an awareness that different individuals may enjoy different kinds of leisure activities.

### **Program Outline**

Students play some of the games for 30 minutes and visit the First Nations Gallery for 30 minutes. The Gallery visit will concentrate on leisure activities shown in the displays.

### **Chaperones**

Chaperones will be asked to assist the children in playing the First Nations games. Please bring at least one adult for every 15 students.

### **Games**

Many of the games that First Nations children played took place outdoors. These sorts of games included tag, various sorts of ball games, shooting games, and some that resembled hide and seek or blind man's bluff. There were very few that could be played inside. As well, girls and boys tended to play different sorts of games, and did not often play together.

For the Activity Room, the following games can be played:

Cup and Pin

Men's dice game

Women's dice game

Buzzers

Sliding game (marbles)

The Activity Room session is wrapped up with a discussion of the games and whether they were difficult, easy, or fun.

## **Background Information**

All human activities can be organized into six different categories:

- Making a home
- Earning a Living
- Rearing and training the young
- Using leisure time
- Engaging in community activities
- Practicing religion

The Time Well Spent program concentrates on using leisure time. Engaging in leisure activities may not seem as significant as making a home or earning a living, but all human beings engage in play and other leisure activities at some time.

For children, play is especially important. Through play, children practice the skills that they will later need as adults. The games, toys, and play that amuse children reflect the life they will have and the kind of society they will live in as adults.

The activities of people living in pre-contact North America are reflected in their games and toys.

Girls and boys tended to play separately. Many of their activities have a direct link to adult activities. Girls, for example, played with dolls and toy tipis. They engaged in string games such as cat's cradle. Boys tended to play with scaled down replicas of adult tools and weapons.

Some games were played by boys and girls together. Guessing games and games of chance were popular for mixed play.

Adults engaged in leisure activity as well as children. Gambling was always a favorite pastime. Losers in games of chance were expected to relinquish personal belongings cheerfully, even when it meant real hardship. Gambling within a relatively small community ensured that wealth circulated freely between individuals.

Adults also played team games. Lacrosse is the most well-known team game, but it was not played in western Canada. Some of the better known team games are discussed later in the Guide.

### **Dancing**

Dancing was another activity in which everyone participated. Some dances were sacred in nature, but others were community events in which everyone participated. Round dances are examples of this type. They were (and are) held to honour an individual or celebrate an event.

Today, powwow dances are an important activity for many First Nations. The dances are competitive in nature, with rules for performing the dance and for the outfits worn. Powwow dances evolved from ancient sacred dances. Today dances that originated in distant areas have spread across North America through powwow competitions.

## Stories

Like dancing, listening to stories was a leisure activity that had greater meaning and significance than simply being an enjoyable pastime.

Legends and stories were usually told by elders. They might have spiritual meaning, such as the story of Wisakecak and the creation of Turtle Island shown in the First Nations Gallery. Such stories kept the wisdom of the elders circulating down to younger generations, so that they in turn could pass it on to their own children. Stories were also told to teach children. There was no formal system of education as we know it. Children learned by imitation, trial and error, and through the stories told by their elders.

Stories, especially those that involved spiritual connotations, were told only in the winter. Stories intended simply to amuse could be told at any time, but more often they too were part of winter activities, when people had longer hours to sit and listen.

## Some Plains Cree Games

Cup and Pin games were popular. Eight or nine phalangeal bones were strung along a leather thong. A buckskin flap with a number of holes pierced in it was tied to one end and a wooden or bone pin to the other. The object was to flip the thong and catch either the phalangeal bones or the buckskin with the pin.

A number of gliding stick games were always popular with boys. These usually involved throwing a stick over the snow to see whose would glide the furthest. The gliders were made in a number of ways, including long carved sticks (4 ft or 1.3 m long), or shorter 2 ft (.6 m) sticks. Another glider consisted of a bison rib bone with feathers attached to one end. An example of this type of glider can be seen in the First Nations Gallery in the winter encampment display.

Boys also played with tops made with bone, stone, or horn. They beat them with whips to make them spin.

“Playing With a Ball” was a team game that resembled shinny. Men and women both played, but not together. Players batted a small stuffed leather ball with curved sticks resembling modern hockey sticks. Goals were set up at either end of a large field about 100 to 150 yd (90-140 m) apart. The object of the game was to score a goal. The game was over and the winner determined when the first goal was scored.

“Tossing the Ball” was played by two or more players. A ball was batted back and forth between two players, or around a circle of players. When a player missed or dropped out, another could step in to take his place.

“Stick Dropping Game” was played with four flat sticks of equal width and length. Each stick had a design on one side only. Two sticks had one design, the other two, a different design (e.g. two frogs and two snakes). The sticks were held by their ends and dropped. Scoring was based on the designs that turned up.

All marked sides up, count 4

All blank sides up, count 3

Two snakes up, count 2

Two frogs up, count 2

The recorder of this game did not indicate the score for 3 blanks and one design or for 3 designs and one blank. This configuration may not have been counted. If played in the classroom, it could count for 3.

“Stick Striking Game” was played by two or more players using 21 willow twigs each about 18 in (.5 m) long. One player rolled the twigs between the palms of his hands, then divided them into two bundles, one in each hand. The bundles were crossed and presented to the opposing player. That player was to guess and choose the bundle with an even number of sticks. If he guessed correctly, the actions were repeated. A player won when he guessed correctly three times in a row. If a player guessed incorrectly, he took the sticks and the other player guessed.

Throwing games were played by all people using arrows, throwing sticks, hoops, and digging sticks, depending on the game played. Men and boys played games that involved shooting arrows or throwing a stick through a rolling hoop. Girls played similar games using digging sticks to throw at a designated target.

“Sliding Game” was played in winter. A length of snow was cleared off and formed into a sloped sliding surface. At the bottom of the slope, 12 holes were dug, each of which had a different scoring value. Marbles made of horn or wood were rolled down the slope. Points were scored when they landed in one of the holes.

#### Cat’s Cradle/String Games

Women and girls used string to make figures. The original figures and methods have been lost.

“Shaking Game” was a dice game that used different markers to cast and count. Mandelbaum’s account lists prune pits sawn in half and painted on one side, lynx claws painted red on the underside, slugs cut from old kettles, and an eagle claw. The objects were placed in a wooden bowl and then cast. The configuration of the objects when they landed determined the score.

Besides games, First Nations people also enjoyed races. These were usually run over long distances. After the acquisition of the horse, horse racing became popular. Bets were often laid on the outcome of the races.

Tests of strength were also popular. Various forms of wrestling competitions gave people a chance to place wagers on the outcome.

### **Suggested Classroom Activities**

#### 1. Games Book

Children can put together a list of games with rules of play that do not need modern equipment (e.g. Tag, Fox and Goose, Red Rover).

If there are children from other places in the class, do they play the same games? Adults who grew up in places other than Saskatchewan can be questioned about what games they played as children; these new games may be added to the Games Book.

#### 2. Marbles (Sliding Game)

In winter, children can make their own sliding game out of a mound of snow. Snow is heaped up and a run from the top of the mound to the bottom is patted smooth. At the bottom, holes are made in the snow. A number is assigned to each hole. Children roll marbles down the snow to see who gets the highest score.

### 3. Outdoor Games

Many traditional games are played outside. One of these is called “carry the pail.” The children form a circle holding hands. One child is “it” and goes into the centre of the circle. The player who is “it” must break through the circle and run away. When this happens, all the other children chase this player. The one who tags the runner now becomes “it” and the game starts again.

### 4. Modern Equivalents

Some of today’s favorite pastimes come from First Nations culture. Have the students find as many as they can. Include tobogganing, snowshoeing, lacrosse, and canoeing. Did all of these activities start out as fun things to do? Why do people enjoy these activities today?

### **Suggested Reading and Resources**

1. David Mandelbaum, The Plains Cree  
University of Regina, 1979.
2. Pat Atimoyoo, Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na: Games of the Plains Cree  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, Saskatoon, 1980.
3. Debra McQuiston and Don McQuiston, Dolls and Toys of Native America  
Chronicle Books, San Francisco: Raincoast Books, Vancouver, 1995.
4. Pat Deiter-McArthur, Dances of the Northern Plains  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1987.
5. Wil Nighthtraveller and Gerald Desnomie, Assiniboine Legends  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, Saskatoon, 1973.
6. Margaret Reynolds, Dene Stories  
Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1979.
7. The following websites have good information on a variety of First Nations topics and issues:  
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/sifc>  
<http://www.turtleisland.org>