

Section 13

Physical Education

Traditional games

These games may be helpful in planning activities in physical education classes: Children at Whitman Mission were expected to be active so most of their games were outdoors and very active. Such games included shinny, throwing pole through rolling hoop, tug of war, blind man's bluff, ball juggling, hopscotch, foot races, wrestling, swimming, etc.. Children made tops and dice out of wood and bone. They teetered on stilts, used bean shooters and flew kites.

Indians of all parts of the United States were also active game and sports participants and great athletes. Depending on one's tribe, a child may grow up playing handball, kickball, lacrosse, shuffleboard and quoits. They raced on foot and horse. Some games they played for fun; others were sacred and helped avert disaster or heal the sick. Shinny, ring-and-pin, and hoop-and-pole were favorite Indian games.

1. Shinny

The game is similar to field hockey, using a leather-covered ball of the same size as that used for cricket and sticks, like golf stick, but not so heavy at the turn. There are two sets of players, each of which have their own base. One on each side is selected as a mounter. He places the ball at his base, and mounts it by driving it as far as he can with a blow of his shinny stick toward the opposite base. Points are scored by driving it all the way to the opposite base.

2. Ring-and-pin

For this game, you need seven dew claws (hooves) from the feet of deer, strung on a thirty inch thong with a bone needle tied to one end and a piece of buckskin, perforated with one large and several small holes, at the other end. Swinging the seven hooves forward and up, the player tries to catch them on the needle. Or he tries to put the needle through a hole in the buckskin. Game is forty points. Threading the first hoof gave the player five points, the second hoof ten points, etc... The small holes in the buckskin counted four points; the large holes, nine. Deer hooves may be obtained through Moscow Hide and Fur and Crazy Crow Trading Post.

3. Hoop-and-pole

You need level ground for this game. The Indians made hoops by soaking, then bending and tying a twig or sapling into a circle twelve inches in diameter. The hoops were wrapped in buckskin. One pole or lance is needed for each player. Two at a time compete. One rolls the hoop past his opponent who throws his spear or pole. Getting the spear through the hoop counted one point. Seven points was game.

Indians also made darts from corncobs, feathers and sharpened sticks by placing the feather through one end of the corncob and the stick through the other.

4. Snow Snake

This was a favorite game played in snowy areas. The Indians would take long, smooth branches and carve snakes from them. Then a heavy log was dragged across a snow bank to make a long path. One player at a time would try to throw the snake as far as they could down the path. Sometimes players would dip their "snake" branch into water. The water would quickly freeze which would make their snake go faster and farther down the path. It was said that some Indians were capable of throwing their snake over one mile in distance.

5. Guessing Game

This game was played by the Modoc and Klamath Indians. It was played with four sticks with the two largest sticks being painted or specially carved. One of the players would lay the sticks up and down in a row. They were then covered up with a mat or blanket for the other players to guess at the correct sequence of size. Were the larger ones on the outside or were they mixed, etc.

6. Bull-Roarers

Bull-roarers were simply thin, flat pieces of wood which could be up to two feet in length. A long rope or twine would be tied to one end of the wood and it was then swung above and around in a circle. This swinging would create a loud buzzing noise. In some Native American cultures bull-roarers were thought of as having magical powers that could control the wind. Because of the magical powers that the pieces of wood possessed, in those cultures, Indian children were not allowed to play with the bull-roarers.