

TRADITIONAL INUIT GAMES

Grade Level

This lesson plan is designed to be used with students ages 12-15.

Objective

Students will learn about traditional Inuit games and the role these games play in life in the Arctic. Pairs of students, or small groups, will learn one game and demonstrate to the class.

Estimated Time Needed

1 class period.

Materials

Virtual Museum of Canada (descriptions of traditional Inuit games):

http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/inuit_games.html

Copies of directions on playing traditional Inuit games (or students may visit site):

<http://www.athropolis.com/news-upload/11-data/index.htm>

CBC Archive, "Arctic Winter Games":

<http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-41-1194/sports/arcticgames/>

Arctic Winter Games Website:

<http://www.awg.ca/>

Activity

1. Ask students to name some of their favorite sports and games. List on the board.
2. Ask if anyone surfs? Skis? What factors influence why some people become proficient in certain sports and games and others don't? (climate, environment, money, accessibility to materials, etc).
3. Ask students to think about what they've learned so far about life in the Arctic and Inuit culture. What sports/games would they expect are not popular in Nunavut? Why?
4. Remind students that life in the Arctic is very challenging. There are three months of winter darkness accompanied by freezing temperatures averaging -30° Celsius (-22° F). Games play a very important role in adapting to the severe environment. Many games concern physical strength, agility and endurance. In addition, games help in social posturing. Some games, like temple pounding, were seriously competitive, and helped in gaining a standing in the community and the respect of others.
5. Explain that most traditional games were relevant to survival tactics. Strong arms and hands were required to harpoon walruses, whales and polar bears and then hold on to the struggling animal. Agile legs ensured one could jump over bears, outrun wolves or catch caribou. There are many stories that have turned into legends about someone capable of incredible athletic feats, kept hidden until it became necessary to use them, as in *Atanarjuat The Fast Runner*.

6. While many traditional games require no equipment, some do, including ropes (toggle hand pull), sled races, Inuit baseball, and Inuit soccer. Ask students if they are surprised that soccer and baseball are popular games? Why?
7. Explain that while Inuit soccer is different from the worldwide soccer/football of today, it does share the kick the ball and running aspects. In addition, the skills and endurance are important to the game. The games are culturally different; however they show a common thread with the games played by southern students.
8. Introduce The Arctic Games, established in 1970. Originally, only three northern territories competed, however in 2000 the games included Alaska, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Northern Alberta, Greenland, Magadan (Russia), Nunavik (Quebec), Nunavut and Chukotka. Locate territories on a map.
9. Explain that the Arctic Games feature many of the same games as in the Winter Olympics such as cross-country skiing, hockey, speed skating and curling, as well as northern sports like dog mushing and snowshoeing. Also included are unique games exhibiting traditional Inuit competitions such as One Foot High Kick, Two Foot High Kick, Kneel Jump, Sledge Jump, Airplane, Knuckle Hop and Snow Snake.
10. Some traditional Inuit games may have been learned in Asia before the Inuit migrated across the Bering Strait around 2000 B.C Share the information from the [Living Traditions](#) website with students. As each game is described, discuss similarities to games with which students are familiar. Ask students which skills they feel were further developed by participation in each game and how those skills were useful to Inuit survival in their environment. (Optional: Assign the above selection for homework. Ask students to create a table or chart describing each game and answering the above stated questions.)
11. Break students into pairs/small groups (for The Airplane) and have them choose one of the following Inuit games: The Kneel Jump, The Back Push, The Airplane (need 5 students to play), The Sitting Knuckle Pull, The Legwrestle, The Knucklehop, The Mouth Pull, The Musk Ox Push. Explain that pairs are going to learn how to play the game they chose and will demonstrate it for the class (or in small groups).
12. Students can research game independently or provide directions for how to play to students (<http://www.athropolis.com/news-upload/11-data/index.htm>). Allow students time to learn and practice playing assigned game.

Evaluation

Once students feel confident, pull desks out of the way and arrange chairs in a circle. Have students write name of game on board and demonstrate how to play in the middle of the circle. If there is time, allow students to try each game. After all games have been demonstrated, ask students for feedback. Which game is most fun? Most challenging?

References

Robinson, Gillian, [Isuma Inuit Studies Reader](#). Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004.

Kessler, Deirdre, [Isuma Teacher's Resource Guide](#), Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004.

Isuma Publishing - A Division of Igloodik Isuma Productions: <https://store.isuma.ca/>