

Traditional Inuit Games

GRADE LEVEL This lesson plan is designed to be used with students aged 12-15 years.

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 of students will learn one game and demonstrate it to the class.

TIME REQUIRED 1 class period (estimated)

- MATERIALS**
- Virtual Museum of Canada (descriptions of traditional Inuit games):
http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/inuit_games.html
 - Copies of directions for playing traditional Inuit games (or students may visit site):
<http://www.athropolis.com/news-upload/master/11-frames.htm>
 - CBC archive, “Arctic Winter Games”:
<http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-41-1194/sports/arcticgames/>
 - “Arctic Winter Games” website:
<http://www.arcticwintergames.org/>

- ACTIVITY**
- 1 Ask students to name some of their favourite sports and games. List them 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 involve physical strength, agility and endurance. In addition, games help in social posturing. Some games (such as temple pounding) used to be 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 animals. Agile legs ensured that one could jump over bears, outrun wolves or catch caribou. There are many stories that have turned into legends about people capable of incredible athletic feats who kept their abilities hidden until it was 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?

Traditional Inuit Games (cont'd)

- 7 Explain that while Inuit soccer is different from the worldwide soccer/football of today, it does share the kicking of the ball and running aspects. In addition, skills and endurance are important to both games. The games of the Inuit may be culturally different, but they still share similarities with the games played by students in the south.
- 8 Introduce the Arctic Winter Games, established in 1970. Originally, only three northern territories competed, however, as of 2000, the games included Alaska, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Northern Alberta, Greenland, Magadan (Russia), Nunavik (Quebec), Nunavut and Chukotka. Locate these territories on a map.
- 9 Explain that the Arctic Winter 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.E. Share the information from the “Living Traditions” website with students. As each game is described, discuss its similarities to other games with which students are familiar. Ask the students what skills they feel were developed by playing each game and how these skills might have been 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 questions above.
- 11 Break students into pairs (or 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 each pair is going to learn how to play the game they choose and then demonstrate it for the class (or in small groups).
- 12 Students can research game independently and provide the class with directions on how to play them in: <http://www.athropolis.com/news-upload/master/11-frames.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 the students for feedback. Which game is the funnest?

REFERENCES

Isuma Publishing – a division of Igloolik Isuma Productions: <http://isuma.ca/buy>

Kessler, Deirdre, *Isuma Teacher's Resource Guide*, Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004

Robinson, Gillian, *Isuma Inuit Studies Reader*, Montreal: Isuma Publishing, 2004