

# NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

6-8

Subject

Social Studies

Lesson Title

Native American Traditional Games of Chance

**Activity Description:** Native American tribes traditionally played games for chance or skill. Many times these games demonstrated either physical ability or mental strategy, and sometimes both. This activity features the ancient artifacts and rules for a bowl game typically called the plum stone game. This game differs across tribes. This activity will share some of those differences and then provide the directions to play the Cree version of the plum stone game. Create your own game pieces and play along.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- WiFi (recommended)
- 20 or more short wooden sticks (craft sticks, twigs, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, etc)
- 5 "plum stones" (game pieces such as small wooden circles/buttons that can be decorated on both sides)
- A large bowl with a flat bottom (best if it is a flatter bowl with a wide bottom)
- ["Games" online list from the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center](#)
- Print or digital version of [Dice or Plum Stone \(Cree\) from Honoring Tribal Legacies](#)

## STEPS

Traditionally, games were an important part of Native American culture whether they were played for fun, competition, or chance. Games of chance were very popular and typically include items such as dice, sticks, stones, or a bowl made from natural objects. In this activity you will learn the Cree version of a bowl game usually called the plum stone game played using a wooden bowl for tossing and five plum pits that are dried out and decorated.

### Learn About the Game:

First, look at this [list of traditional games played indoors and outdoors](#) from the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center. How does this list show that different tribes across the nation were connected?

Next, view these [game artifacts and a painting from the 1800s](#) of women playing the plum stone game.

For the rules of the game, read this [guide Dice or Plum Stone \(Cree\)](#) from Honoring Tribal Legacies or follow below:

### How to Play the Plum Stone Game:

1. Choose how many scoring sticks to use. A higher number means the game can last longer. Three of the game pieces should have white on one side and black on the other side. The remaining two pieces should have a cross on one side and a crescent moon shape on the other.
2. Two players or two teams can play. Start with all the scoring sticks in the middle. The first player lightly tosses the bowl with the game pieces in it. Any stones that fall out cannot be counted. After each toss, the player adds points based on this:
  - 3 white sides + 2 moons or 2 crosses = 3 points/sticks
  - 3 black sides + 2 moons or 2 crosses = 2 points/sticks
  - 3 white sides + 1 moon or 1 cross = 3 points/sticks
  - 3 white sides + 1 moons or 1 cross = 3 points/sticks
3. The player takes the sticks to represent the points earned.\*\* If no points are earned, the opposite player/team takes a turn until he or she does not earn any points.
4. The winner is the player or team that gains the most sticks.

\*\*Some versions of the game divide the sticks between players and take sticks from the opposite team when they earn points. The winner is the first team/player to end up with all the sticks.

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## HELPFUL TIPS

**Parents and caregivers:** Playing games as a family is a way to build a stronger family relationship as well as teach multiple skills. Of course, it can also provide hours of fun as well. To learn more about traditional games and gather a few more ideas for playing games at home, watch this YouTube video together on "[Native American Traditional Games](#)" from the *Montana Office of Public Instruction*.

Another important lesson to teach during game play is sportsmanship. Traditional games were not only fun, but were methods of teaching cultural values and behaviors to young children. While some people see this as a value to teach in field sports, it begins with playing games at home or in the classroom. For tips on how to teach sportsmanship, read this short article "[Teaching Children Good Sportsmanship](#)" by *Stanford Children's Health*.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

**Families and educators:** These short printable handouts are useful for home-based or classroom activities. They are user-friendly and provide instructions for several games including the plum-stone or bowl game.

- For printable instructions to several games, view this [document "Native American Games"](#) from *Michiana PBS*.
- This [document "Plum Stone Dice Game"](#) from the *Illinois State Museum* provides a downloadable lesson plan for the plum-stone game with an easy-to-read game scoring guide.

### Game Activity Adapted from:

- Game rules adapted from: "Dice or Plum Stone (Cree)" from *Honoring Tribal Legacies* <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/honoringtriballeagacies/other-resources/other-educational/native-games/intuitive-games/dice-cree/>
- "Games" by *Mississippi Valley Archeology Center* <https://mvac.uwlax.edu/past-cultures/native-knowledge/games/>
- History of Survivance: Plum Stone exhibition from *Digital Public Library of America* <https://dp.la/exhibitions/history-of-survivance/survivance/plum-stones?item=569>

### Additional Resources:

- "Native American Traditional Games" by the *Montana Office of Public Instruction* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iglWnspmTs>
- "Teaching Children Good Sportsmanship" by *Stanford Children's Health* <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=teaching-children-good-sportsmanship-1-4524>
- "Native American Games" by *Michiana PBS* [https://www.wnit.org/outdoorelements/pdf/408nativeamerican\\_ga.pdf](https://www.wnit.org/outdoorelements/pdf/408nativeamerican_ga.pdf)
- "Plum Stone Dice Game" lesson Plan from the *Illinois State Museum* <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/36943851/plum-stone-dice-game-illinois-state-museum>