

Name: _____ Class: _____

Fun and Games

By Kelsie Ingham
2005

Throughout America's history, children have enjoyed playing games. In this informational text, Kelsie Ingham discusses the different games that Native American children played. As you read, take notes on what children learned from the games they played.

- [1] Just as they are for today's children, games and sports were an important part of the lives of children growing up before 1492. Native American kids — and adults, too — enjoyed a variety of games and sports. But they weren't just pastimes:¹ they also taught life lessons and skills. Games and sports were for everyone: men, women, children, and the elderly. Some games were played by one person, and others were team sports that could include an entire village.



"Ojibwe Lacrosse League 05" by upwiththemooses is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Through play, children learned valuable skills. Many children's games mimicked² adult behavior, such as hunting and stalking.³ Practicing silent footsteps and quiet breathing while sneaking up on someone was fun, and it trained children to be good hunters. (Haven't you had fun sneaking up on a friend or parent?) Wrestling also taught important lessons and built strength and stamina.⁴ Good wrestlers have to think, plan, and stay one move ahead of their opponents.

Running games and races were popular. Running was useful for hunting and gathering food and for delivering messages in a hurry. Races were run over short and long distances — up to 25 miles — and often involved obstacles such as trees or rivers. For some races, children had to spin around, then run while dizzy! These runners improved their balance as well as their speed and endurance.⁵

Groups of children played many different sports. Team sports included everyone, regardless of their skill level. Teams played to win, but fair play and sportsmanship⁶ were just as important as winning. Many games had judges, but individual players were expected to play fairly. Poor sports and cheaters were punished.

1. an activity that someone does for enjoyment; a hobby
2. **Mimic (verb):** to copy someone
3. to follow someone or something without being seen
4. mental or physical strength that allows you to continue doing something for a long time
5. the ability to do something difficult for a long time
6. fair and respectful behavior while playing a sport

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Play, Play Again

Play puzzles scientists. Why do animals spend time and energy doing silly things that seem to have no purpose?

By Ellen Braaf
2010

Just like humans, animals commonly play with each other, especially when they are young. In this informational text, Ellen Braaf discusses why animals play and the benefits that come with playing.

- [1] The struggle for survival in nature is deadly serious. What place is there for play, an activity that doesn't help animals eat, grow, or reproduce?

And play is risky. Animals can break bones, pull muscles, or get bitten or scratched. Why is play worth the risk? Many scientists believe it's essential for survival — as important as food or sleep. According to animal play expert Marc Beckoff at the University of Colorado, "play is serious business."



"Playing cubs" by Tambako The Jaguar is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0

Getting Ready for the Adult World

Playing lets young animals try out different ways of doing things again and again in a safe environment, where a mistake won't be fatal.¹ Most scientists believe that when animals play, they are practicing skills they'll need later in life. This is why different kinds of animals play in different ways. Young predators, such as wolves, lions, and bears, play by stalking, pouncing, biting, and shaking their heads from side to side. They're honing their skills for when they will run down, catch, and kill prey. When a wolf pup chases its own tail, bites it, and yanks it back and forth, the pup is rehearsing skills it will need one day as a hunter.

Prey animals, such as elk, deer, or antelope, play differently. They dash about like crazy, leaping wildly in the air — twisting, turning, twirling. According to biologist John Byers of the University of Idaho, they act like they have "flies in their brains." But these animals are rehearsing skills they'll need one day to escape predators and avoid becoming dinner.

- [5] During play, animals constantly monitor their behavior to keep play going. If one animal plays too roughly, the play ends. To keep things fun, they often reverse roles. A stronger or dominant animal will lie on its back, assuming a submissive² position, while a weaker animal gets to play "boss."

1. **Fatal (adjective):** causing death
2. ready to yield to an authority figure