

# Montana Traditional Games



By:  
The Wanji Oyate Education Cohort at MSU

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# About the Authors

The Wanji Oyate Education Cohort, meaning 'One Tribe', is a program designed to support Native undergraduate students who want to become educators. The program is the first of its kind established at Montana State University which provides students with academic, financial, professional, and personal support services. The Wanji Oyate group has presented at various professional conferences including the National Indian Education Association Convention of 2015, Montana Indian Education Association Conference of 2015, and the Indian Education for All: Best Practices Conference of 2016.

# Personal Statement

What I have learned from any of our cultural traditions is that, everything has a lesson to it. We just do not do this for fun or for the heck of it. We do all that we do because it has meaning. While learning how to play the Native games, there were so many do's and don'ts. For example, while playing Shinny you get these sticks that look like hockey sticks and when you hit the ball you are not supposed to bring your stick above the waist or you can do the unthinkable and hit someone. I did this many times and one time hit a girl in the forehead while playing and felt very bad. But the good part to these games is the little guy gets to be the most aggressive due to the fact that he or she is smaller but if one is a tall adult man, he is at a disadvantage because he cannot play aggressively and push a woman or a child down. If you do, there are many penalties and you will get seated out of the game. There is an order for all ages and sexes. Another thing that I have learned is when playing Rock in Fist you find a small rock and hide it in your hand while your partner looks at you and has to guess what hand it is in. This is how children or teens learn how to read people and to see if they are bluffing or not. Lastly, my least favorite game has to be Doubleball. I do not like it because I am short and yet I get more advantages because I am smaller; I can be more aggressive. From the stories that I have heard about Doubleball, this is a divorce game played by women. When a woman wants to divorce a man, she tells him to tell everyone in the camp. The couple takes all their things including the teepee. Then the rest of the women in the camp play for all the belongings, like in a tournament. When the game is over the wife goes back to her mother's teepee to live.

-Alisha Fisher (Wanji Oyate

Member)

# Personal Statement

The International Traditional Games are more than simple games to me, they became a way to heal from trauma. I lost my mother at a young age and my grandparents made the difficult decision to move the family from East Glacier Village to Havre in order to keep my siblings and me together since we all have different fathers. This ultimately separated me from my father's side of my family for years. Throughout my childhood, I felt I had imagined my father's family to help me cope with the loss of my mother. When the family did go back to visit East Glacier Village for our annual summer camping trip, we would drive through Browning and I would remember specific houses and people. I would ask who they were and why I remembered them because I was slowly realizing that they were not a figment of my imagination. My grandparents could not bring themselves to talk about why only I felt this connection to Browning and those people and those houses. When I turned eleven, I finally started getting more of my questions answered. My father and the rest of the family wanted to meet me and try to mend the broken bond. This broken bond was mainly from not being taught the Blackfeet traditions my father and his family used to partake in. They have experienced their own generational trauma and, sadly, have not turned to traditional ceremonies for healing. When I first attended the games I thought it would become something I could simply integrate into my gym classes when I became a licensed teacher. The games became more than that. They became a way that I discovered I was still broken. They kept saying "You all should know certain ceremonies to have more knowledge of why these games are important." I know why they are important on my mother's side since I was taught traditions and ceremonies of my White Clay and Southern Cheyenne heritage. I realized that I was as empty as a baby for being Blackfeet and being on ancestral lands. At the end of the clinic, I voiced all of this to the group. A leader was so moved and touched by my confession that he adopted me as his daughter so that I can fill the void that I have been wanting to do for so long. With moving higher in my certification of the Traditional Games and learning more Blackfeet knowledge, I hope that one day my parental side of the family will see how important traditional ceremonies are and that we need to heal as a family. That healing can only be achieved through traditions and ceremonies they once took part in.

-Donnelle Williams (Wanji Oyate Member)

# Doubleball

Doubleball was once a women's game but has now become a co-ed game.

## Rules:

-The goals are usually placed 1 mile apart. The goal posts are 16' tall tripods with a pole across the top (10'-12' off the ground) stretched between the top of the ties on each tripod.

-The doubleballs are oblong, as shown below, and weighted with sand, and cut from one continuous piece of hide.

-Players are given various stations in the field and a carry stick. The sticks vary in weight and thickness. Each team lines up in front of a pile of sticks. Each person picks a stick for his/her opponent. If a player's stick is broken during play, he/she would go to his/her opponent who chose his/her stick and trade.



-To start the game, players gather in a circle and the doubleball is thrown up from the stick of one of the leaders. Once the scrimmage starts, it is kept up until one side passes the doubleball through their opponents goal. The players "pick" up or fling the doubleball up off the ground. The doubleball can only be carried on the stick and thrown to as many players as needed.

-The scoring varies from 1 point for having the doubleball be thrown and hang on the posts of the tripod; 2 points are awarded if the doubleball is thrown through the goal; 3 points are given when the doubleball is thrown and wraps around the top post that lays across the tripod posts.

-Scoring varies from the amount of designated points when reached or however many points each team has at the end of a set time of game play.

# Shinny

Shinny can be played in teams made of women vs women, men vs men, or co-ed.

Rules:

-Two stakes are set up at each end of the field (no field dimensions are required). Each goal is a "game" and the team with the most "games" wins. The length of the play can be specified or you can play until it gets dark. The goals consist of two posts at each end of the playing area. Some Shinny goals have a single post goal, blanket goals, or "hole in the ground" goals.

-The object of each team is to drive the ball through the goal of the other team. The ball may not be touched with the hand, but can be batted by the stick and kicked by the foot.

-The sticks are made from hardwood saplings and are usually curved at the end, having some greater length in the foot of the stick, resembling a hockey stick.

-The ball can be made of wood (chiefly Pacific Coast and Southwest tribes) and buckskin (generally Eastern and Plains tribes).



# Rock in Fist

This is considered a hiding game or an Indian youth game that leads up to the hand or stick games played by adults.

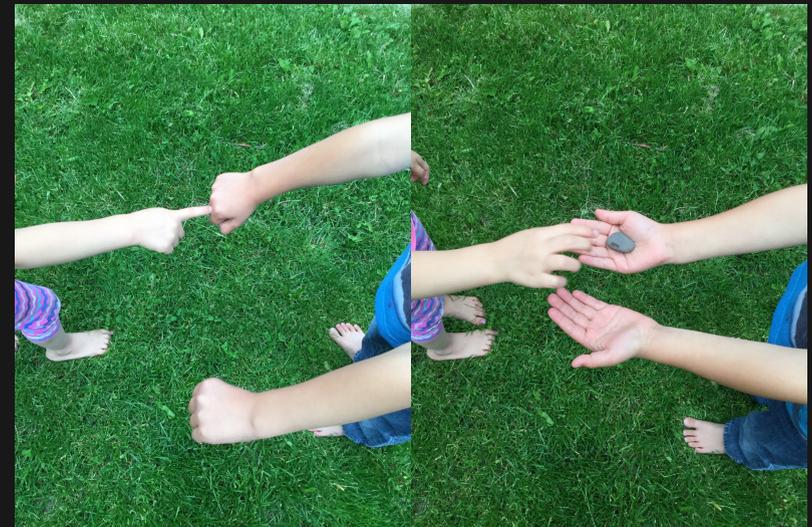
## Rules:

-In pairs, players sit across from each other. On the floor between them is one small rock and three sticks on a piece of tanned hide or trade cloth. The rock should be small enough to fit in a hand without "showing" the rock. The sticks can be 6-12 inches long.

-The person hiding the rock exchanges the rock from hand to hand behind his/her body. When ready to "show", both hands must be put forward to the other player with fists closed and ready for the other player to guess.

-The player who is guessing may take as much time as needed to make the decision by observing and sensing, then making a decision by pointing to the hand he/she thinks the rock is in (it is considered very rude and bad manners to touch the hand). If the player guesses the wrong hand, the hider gains a stick, which is placed in front of his/her. If it is guessed correctly, no stick is awarded, but the guesser now gets the rock and becomes the hider.

-When all three sticks are gone from the middle, the game is not over until one player has won all three sticks back from the other player. They will keep playing until one person has gained all three sticks.



# Additional Resources

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) offers free online lessons and curriculum that focuses on Indian Education for All (IEFA).

"The goal of the Indian Education Division is to assist in the successful implementation of the Indian Education for All Act (MCA 20-1-501) and to work to close the achievement gap for American Indian students in Montana.

Implementation of Indian Education for All is achieved through professional development, grants to local schools, funding to regional education providers and other partners, and through the development and publication of material and resources for K-12 public schools.

The Indian Education Division works with schools on Indian Student Achievement through state funding and federal ESEA Title III funding. This is accomplished through grants, professional development, pilot projects and technical assistance to individual schools."

Within this free library, OPI has generated an extensive unit on Traditional Games. Please follow the link for the Traditional Games Unit and more resources: [MT OPI IEFA Resources](#).

# Special Thanks

Wanji Oyate members attended the East Glacier Traditional Games Workshops during the Summer 2015 and Summer 2016 sessions. Follow the link to learn about the opportunities offered: [International Traditional Games Society](#).

With support from Western Washington University's K-12 STUDY CANADA program, students attending these sessions created this brochure on Traditional Games.

Thank you Tina Storer, K-12 STUDY CANADA Education and Curriculum Specialist at Western Washington University.