

# Traditional Aboriginal Games: Integrating into Curriculum and a Means to Build Positive Relationships with Students



## **Introduction**

Games are an important part of Aboriginal society, passed down from generation to generation. Games taught cooperation, team work and social skills while other games taught essential skills such as target practice, hand/eye coordination, agility, and dexterity. They were important for the emotional, physical, and mental development of the community members. Games also provide a good form of exercise and leisure activity for the young and the old. Many games were played during the winter months.

Games were shared or traded with other tribes resulting in common games amongst Aboriginal people. Men and women usually played separately and children usually played scaled down versions of the grown-up games. Many of the games played today are derived from the traditional games of Aboriginal people.

First Nations life, two hundred years ago, was rich in relationships, teamwork, art, music, dance and gaming. It was through games that much education occurred.

The social values of the traditional games were and still are highly important:

- Honouring the person who gave you the most challenge
- Respecting the rules of the competition
- Respecting your competitors
- Honouring the wager you made before the event
- Having courage, intuition and skill
- Being humble even when winning

Years ago, all tribes admired persons of superior skills, in strength, stamina, or dexterity because the games helped keep all people healthy and strong. The games were a way of passing on techniques of the hunt, tribal customs, spiritual ways, and social skill.

Today the games are played because they are fun. Children can easily make their own equipment and pieces. The game of double ball can be compared to the physical aspect of hockey. Learn the games and pass them on!

## **Curriculum Integration- Alberta Education Program of Studies**

### 1. Social Studies

1.2.1 Appreciate how stories and events of the past connect their families and communities to the present

1.2.2 Analyze how their families and communities in the present are influenced by events or people of the past by exploring and reflecting upon the following: In what ways have Aboriginal, Francophone and diverse cultural groups contributed to the origins and evolution of their communities over time? What are some examples of traditions, celebrations and stories that started in the past and continue today in their families and communities?

2.2.7 Examine how the community being studied has changed, by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions for inquiry: How is the presence of Aboriginal and/or Francophone origins reflected in the community today?

3.1.2 Examine the social, cultural and linguistic characteristics that affect quality of life in communities in other parts of the world by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions for inquiry: How is identity reflected in traditions, celebrations, stories and customs in the communities?

4.2.1 Appreciate how an understanding of Alberta's history, peoples and stories contributes to their own sense of belonging and identity:

4.2.2 Assess, critically, how the cultural and linguistic heritage and diversity of Alberta has evolved over time by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues:

5.2.2 Examine, critically, the ways of life of Aboriginal peoples in Canada by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues: What do the stories of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples tell us about their beliefs regarding the relationship between people and the land? • How are the Aboriginal cultures and ways of life unique in each of the western, northern, central and eastern regions of Canada?

## **Mathematics**

Grade 2 – Number: Estimate quantities to 100, using referents.

Grade 3: Patterns & Relations: Sort objects or numbers, using one or more than one attribute

Grade 4: Statistics & Probability: Collect, display and analyze data to solve problems.

Grade 5: Number: Use estimation strategies, such as: • front-end rounding • compensation • compatible numbers in problem-solving contexts.

Grade 5&6: Statistics & Probability: Use experimental or theoretical probabilities to represent and solve problems involving uncertainty.

## **Physical Education**

**GENERAL OUTCOME A** Students will acquire skills through a variety of developmentally appropriate movement activities; dance, games, types of gymnastics, individual activities and activities in an alternative environment; e.g., aquatics and outdoor pursuits.

A2–1 select and perform locomotor skills involved in a variety of activities

A3–5 demonstrate ways to receive, retain and send an object, using a variety of body parts and implements; and, perform manipulative skills individually and with others while using a variety of pathways

A6–1 select, perform and refine challenging locomotor sequences

**GENERAL OUTCOME C** Students will interact positively with others.

C5-1 identify and demonstrate respectful communication skills appropriate to cooperative participation in physical activity

C5–3 demonstrate etiquette and fair play

C8–6 identify and demonstrate positive behaviours that show respect for self and others

C20–1 communicate thoughts and feelings in an appropriate respectful manner as they relate to participation in physical activity

## **Building Relationships**

We all want to feel cared for and valued by the significant people in our world. **Students are no different.** This knowledge is a powerful tool in the arsenal available to you as you form your classroom discipline plan. As a classroom teacher, you wield a great deal of power over your students simply due to the fact that you control their destiny for up to six and a half hours each day, five days a week. When students feel that you value and care for them as individuals, they are more willing to comply with your wishes.

Improving students' relationships with teachers/support staff has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students' academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers/support staff will not produce gains in achievement. However, those students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships.

Picture a student who feels a strong personal connection to her teacher/support staff, talks with her teacher frequently, and receives more constructive guidance and praise rather than just criticism from her teacher/support staff. The student is likely to trust her teacher/support staff more, show more engagement in learning, behave better in class and achieve at higher levels academically. Positive teacher-student or support staff-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn (assuming that the content material of the class is engaging, age-appropriate and well matched to the student's skills).

One way to enhance those positive relationships with students is to level the playing field, have some fun and play some games.

Traditional Aboriginal Games is a great way to do this.

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## 1. Run and Scream

- This traditional is played for all ages from the time children can run. It's a game of dexterity, stamina, speed, and skill development.
- Each game requires a hand carved pegs decorated with, coloured tape, ribbons, feathers and beads.
- Players, one at a time, take turns running the farthest while sucking in one big breath and screaming while running. No additional breaths can be taken. When the scream is finished and a breath is needed, the player must stop and mark the spot with their own stick. Players try to pass the other markers. The one who runs the farthest while screaming is the winner.



How to make:

Materials:

1 foot long dowel/willow

Ribbon, paint, coloured tape, beads, feathers, etc.

Scissors, carving knife, xacto utility knife for peeling willow and creating a sharpened point

Instructions:

Peel and sharpen willow, a dowel will not need this.

Decorate with items to create your own unique stick that you can identify. Place initials or name on stick.

## 2. Make the Stick Jump

- It was a game of throwing accuracy designed to improve the boys' ability to kill small game birds or rabbits. A stick of 6 to 8 inches was carved and decorated with feathers by young boys of the Tribe. The boys would place their sticks at different distances from a line. Numbers or points were awarded to each stick with the closest stick having the smallest score and the farthest stick given the highest score. The boys would stand behind a line then throw a set number of rocks at the sticks. If a rock hit a stick directly, it would make the stick jump and the points for that stick were awarded. The sticks could be laced on the ground or stuck into the ground so one end would stand up. Both methods were used.
- To play, have each student stand behind a line you create in the gym or outdoors. Have them place their stick one meter away either in the ground or the dowels on sticky tack. Have them throw toward their stick and to try is knock it down, if they knock it down, they then move it another meter away. This continues as they successfully knock their stick down each time they throw from behind the initial line.



How to make:

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Instructions:

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Throwing Object: Bean Bags/ Hacky Sacks/ Small pebbles/ Tennis balls. Etc.

### 3. Gathering Stones (Jacks )

- A game of dexterity and skill. Small stones are used much like the game Jacks. One larger rock would be used as the tossing rock. The tossing rock would be tossed into the air, and then the same hand would gather an agreed number of smaller stones into the same hand before catching the tossed rock. A miss would occur if the tossed rock hit the ground before being caught. The object of the game would be to gather as many small rocks as possible before catching the tossed rock.
- To set up the game, the rocks are scattered loosely into the play area by throwing them from your hand. The players in turn toss the rock into the air, pick up a rock, and then catch the rock before it lands on the play area.
- The number of rocks to be picked up is pre-ordained and sequential; at first you must pick up one ("onesies"), next two ("twosies"), and so on, depending on the total number of rocks included. The number may not divide evenly, and there may be rocks left over.



How to make:

Materials:

8 pebbles

Plastic/cotton bag

Or Hockey tape to roll into small balls to resemble pebbles – using tape makes it quieter to play in class.

#### 4. Sticks on the Fists

- This is a game of pure intuition and chance. It is played with sticks that fit in the fist. This game of probability encourages the player to "sense" the stick which is marked and to draw as many unmarked sticks as possible before drawing the marked stick. Playing with the set of sticks more than once, gives the player a greater chance of using "observation" instead of "sensing" to win the game.
- The object of the game is to accumulate as many sticks before picking out the marked stick.
- In pairs, the first player will take the sticks and mix them up behind their back and then cover the bottoms with their fist. The player then shows the sticks to the other player. Player two will take out a stick from the fist one at a time until they pick the marked stick. Player then counts how many sticks they pulled out. Players then switch. The player with the most sticks is the winner.
- Play as many times or best of three.



How to make:

Materials:

9 Willow branches or wooden sticks

Marker or utility knife to mark notch or

Instructions:

Cut the branches or sticks to 8 – 10 cm in length.

Mark one of the branches end with the marker or peel the bark off.

## 5. Guessing the Sticks

- "How many sticks" was a guessing game to test perception, intuition, and observation? It was played quietly by the children as the adults played their hand games.
- Any number of small straight sticks were gathered (at least 20) and put into a bundle to be held by one person. The bundle was divided and held in each hand then quickly shown to two other players who looked at the bundles before they were hidden or guessed. The object of the game was to estimate how many sticks were in each bundle. The one whose guess was exactly right was the winner.
- The winner of the guess is given one of the counting pegs. The winner of the game is when one person accumulates all three counting pegs.



How to make:

Materials:

20 Willow branches or  
wooden sticks

3 counting pegs/sticks

Instructions:

Cut the branches or sticks to  
20 cm in length.

## 6. Kickballs

- All tribes in North America had some type of kickballs used for racing, hacky sack (footbag) types of games. Modern Native youth adopted the Zuni and Tewa style of kickbag because, when racing over the prairie, the ball often would go down a ground squirrel hole. The tail on the ball assures a safer way of getting it back out of the hole.
- The object of the game is for players to be able to run while kicking the kickball in front of them with control and in constant contact.
- Mark the race area with pylons. The distance is according to age, typically the length of a school gym. The players can race to one wall or to the wall and back.
- Players line up on the starting line with the kickball in front of them. On the signal, they begin to run while kicking the ball. Long kicks are not allowed, just short controlled kicks.



How to make:

Materials:

Hacky sacks

Yard, thread, leather strap, beads, or other material to make the tail

Needle/thread

Instructions:

Create a tail about 10 cm long by braiding the chosen material. This material can be decorated with beads. Sew one end of the tail to the hacky sack.

## 7. Hand Pull

- This game emphasizes control and balance.
- You need: Two small pieces of antler about 10 cm long with small holes drilled in the middle. A leather strip is threaded through the holes and measures about 8 cm.
- In pairs, competitors face each other sitting on the floor, one leg bent and other is straight.
- Using both right or both left hands, grab the hand pull antlers.
- On signal, competitors pull slowly until their opponent's arm is fully extended or gives up or pulled off balance. Best out of three.



How to make:

Materials:

Wooden dowel or antlers

8 cm Leather or hide piece

sinew

leather punch

Instructions:

Drill a hole in the dowel and antler. Create two holes on each end leather strap with the leather punch. Thread the leather strap through the drilled hole. Tie and loop the leather strap piece together with the sinew several times to secure it to the dowel or antler.

## 8. Match Stick Pull

- This game involves two players and a small stick about the size of a match stick. Competitors stand facing each other within arm's reach. Each player clasps his hands together with index fingers out. Players hold the same match stick between their index fingers.
- Each player pulls on the match stick without bending fingers. Best out of three wins.



How to make:

Materials:

Craft sticks "match sticks"



## 9. Stick Pull

- Game needs one broom stick or stick per pair of players
- In pairs, competitors sit on the floor facing each other with legs straight out in a straddle position. Feet match up. Grab the same broom or stick. One player has the outside grip and player two has inside grip or alternating grips.
- Use arm and leg strength; try to tip the opponent over either on the left/right side until they lose balance. Knuckles must always be facing up. Move the stick sideways and push with feet at the same time.
- Best of three.



How to make:

Materials:

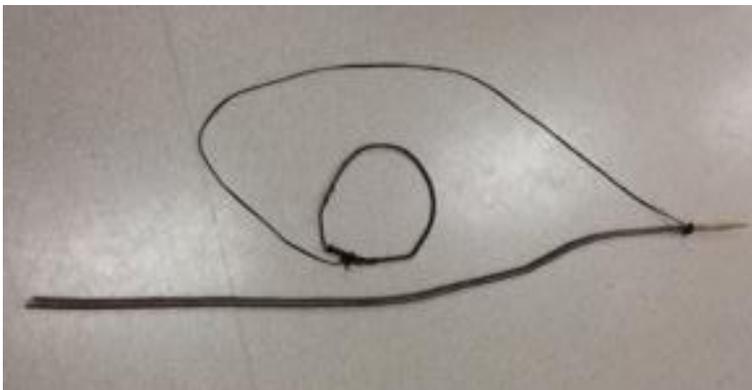
Broom stick or wooden  
dowel cut to 2 feet

Colour tape to decorate



## 10. Ring the Stick

- This game was mainly a social game played for fun but was also used to develop coordination and motor skills. A hoop of any size is tied to a length of rawhide or sinew and attached to a stick. The hoop is swung upward and as it comes down, the player tries to put the end of the stick through the hoop.
- The ring starts from a flat position on the ground before being thrown into the air. Players take turns and the player getting the most rings out of an agreed number of turns is the winner. Hoop sizes differ according to the age of player. Smaller for adults and larger for younger players. The length of stick varies as well. Shorter for younger players. Generally, the length of the stick should be the same as the height from your feet to your armpit.



How to make:

Materials:

Willow branches

Sinew or string.

paint/coloured tape, leather, feather, beads

Instructions:

Cut the willow branch: one for ring and one for throw stick

Loop the smaller and thinner branch into a circle and tie with sinew.

Cut out lengths of sinew in several long strips, just enough to begin to braid/plait together. Or use string.

Tie the braided sinew or string to the looped willow and then tie the other end to the top of the longer willow stick. Tie to about 2

## 11. Basket Pattern Game

- This game is for patterning.
- Need a basket and buttons/antlers. Need a score sheet with patterns/values. Each player has 7 point sticks
- Can be played in groups of 2, 3, or 4.
- Each player takes turns tossing the basket and matching to pattern on point card.
- If you match a pattern, each opposing player gives you the points associated with the pattern. Players rotate their turns after each toss.
- Pattern pieces have to go over the rim of the basket. They can either say in the basket or onto a play area. Players play until all their point sticks are gone



How to make:

Materials:

Basket

6 wooden circles or antlers or plastic chips (poke chips work)

7 counting pegs/sticks

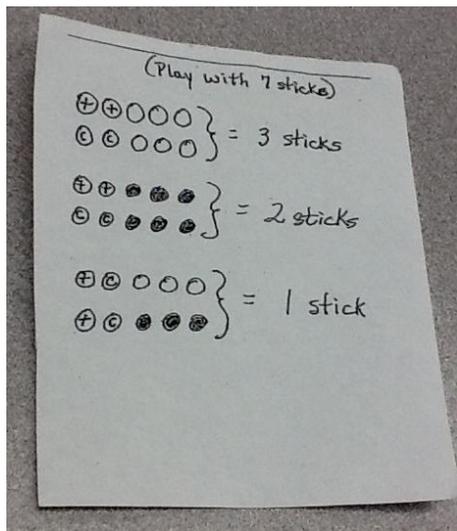
Game points card – see appendix

Instructions:

Mark the wooden circles as follows:

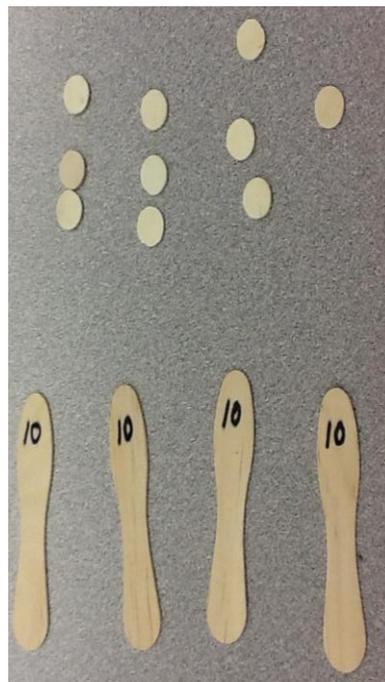
2 chips will have the letter “C” on one side and the letter “X” on the other

3 chips will have a black circle/dot on one side and blank on the other.



## 12. Indian Dice Game – Chikakwanak

- This is a game of chance. This game, as recalled by Louie Coyote, was originally played by our fore fathers as a gambling game with bets ranging from hides, clothes, moccasins, to horses or anything of value to the participants.
- Groups of 2-10 players can play. Each player is given 50 points, 4-10 point sticks (long sticks) , 10-1 point sticks (circles). Players take turns tossing the Chikakwanak and collecting the value of the points based on the toss and the point's card. Players collect the points they toss from the other players. Players take turns. As each player loses all their points, they are out of the game.
- The value of the “Chikakwanak” range from 4 to 10 depending on whatever combination the sticks fall on the throw.



How to make:

Materials:

4 foot long sticks

Counting sticks & circles

Point card – see appendix

Instructions:

Chikakwanak can be made in shop class

Make 4 long sticks with the number “10”



= 4 pts.



= 6 pts.



= 8 pts.



= 10 pts.

### 13. Mini Hand Games

- This is a smaller version of the Hand Games:
- You need 1 rock and 3 sticks per pair of competitors. You toss a coin to see who starts the guessing first.
- The object is to guess which hand the rock is hidden.
- The first person hides the rock in one hand with a fist behind their back and then hold their hands straight out for the guesser to choose. If the guesser fails to guess the rock location, the rock hider gets a stick. This continues until the guesser guesses correctly. The guesser then gets the rock and begins to hide them and no stick is taken.
- The game continues until one per wins all the sticks.



How to make:

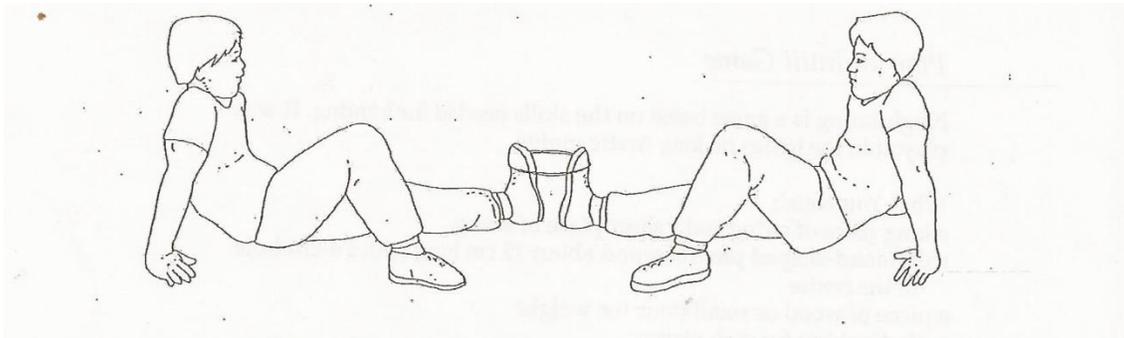
Materials:

3 willow stick cut to about 3 inches

1 small pebble/rock

#### 14. Foot Pull

- In pairs and sitting on the floor, play with a loop a leather strap or belt around their foot.
- Competitors sit on the floor with line between them equally.
- They sit with one leg straight out and one bent at the knee. Either leg can be used.
- A belt/strap is placed around the upturned foot about 2-3 feet apart.
- On signal, opponents pull back with foot using full body strength and arms. Players can scoot back with their body. The object of the game is to pull the opponent over the center line toward you.
- Opponents who pulls competitor over the line or cause the strap to come off foot wins. Best out of three.



## 15. Double Ball

- In most regions, Double Ball was played exclusively by women but over time has become a game played by both genders. Double Ball is sometimes referred to as “The Woman's Ball Game”. It is a physically active game that requires skill and endurance.
- The playing surface used was the open prairie fields with the goals placed up to one kilometer apart. The object of the game was to be the first team to throw the ball over your opponent's goal line and between the markers.
- The implements used for this game include two balls attached with a thong and 3 meter long curved sticks. The balls and sticks used vary from location to location depending on the environment of the tribe. Many tribes played similar games with their own unique adaptations. This was most often dependent upon environmental conditions and what materials were readily available. For example, the Plains Cree used a stick approximately three feet long and a double ball made from two sacks of deerskin stuffed with buffalo hair, joined by a leather thong.
- Originally, a branch of tree was the goal cross piece. Today two loge pole pine tripods hold a ten-foot cross bar of pine pole.
- Double ball sticks are made from lightweight will that has been peeled. Sticks are approximately 2 feet long and same diameter as an index finger. The ball can only be propelled by the stick.
- Two teams play against each other on a field with no boundaries and cross bar goals at each end of the field.
- Play is monitored for safety and fairness. Stick use must be safe. Players using the sticks without strict caution are expelled from the game. The judge sets time for play.
- Points:
  - 1 point - A ball crossing under the pole is
  - 2 points - A ball crossing over the pole is.
  - 3 or more points - A ball wrapping or hanging on the pole is.

How to make:

Materials:

Double ball pattern – see appendix

Hide or canvas

Sinew and glover needle

Balloons

Sand – to fill balloons to create ball and weight

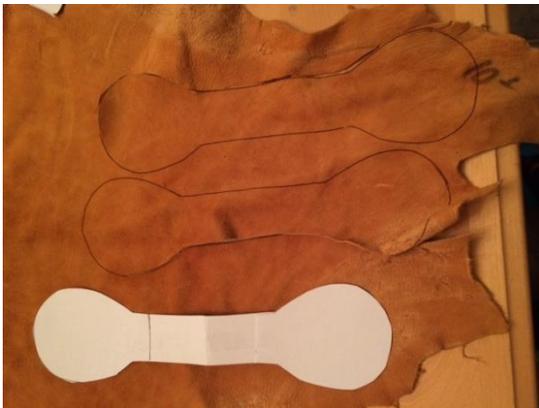
Funnel – to pour sand into balloons

How to make:

Instructions

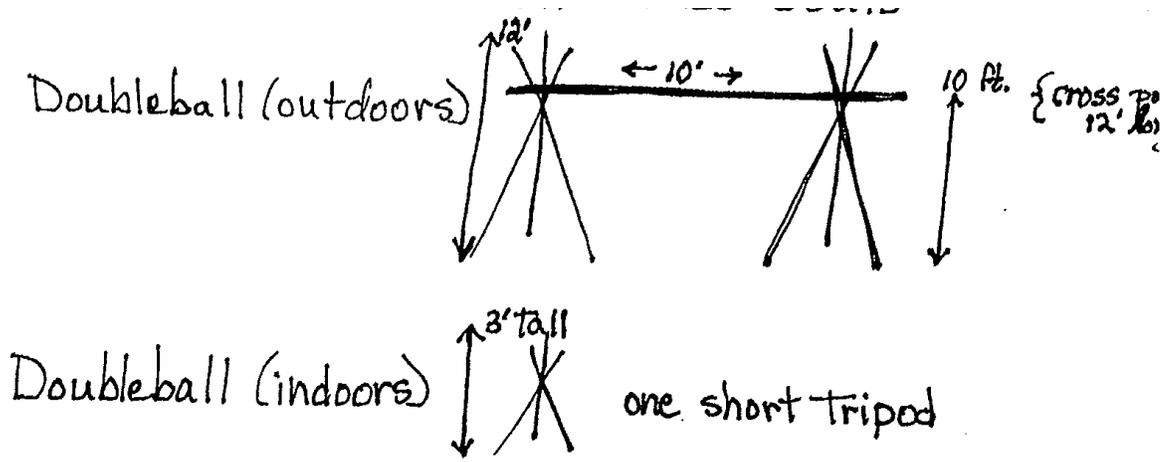
Trace and cut two pattern pieces on hide or canvas. Fill the balloons with sand by using the funnel. Start sewing the two pattern pieces together with a simple stitch. Be sure to place the balloons in the rounded ends as you sew.

See pictures below





Double Ball Game Goal Posts Outdoor and Indoor



How to make:

Materials:

Outdoor:

6 lodge pole pines or willow sticks - 6 feet tall

1 lodge pole pine or willow stick – 10 feet tall

Rope or sinew to hold sticks together for a tripod.

Instructions:

Tie 3 of the poles together to create a tripod. Place together to create a post. See pictures. – need 2 of these

Indoor:

3 dowels 4 feet long and string/sinew to tie together to create tripod – need 2 of these

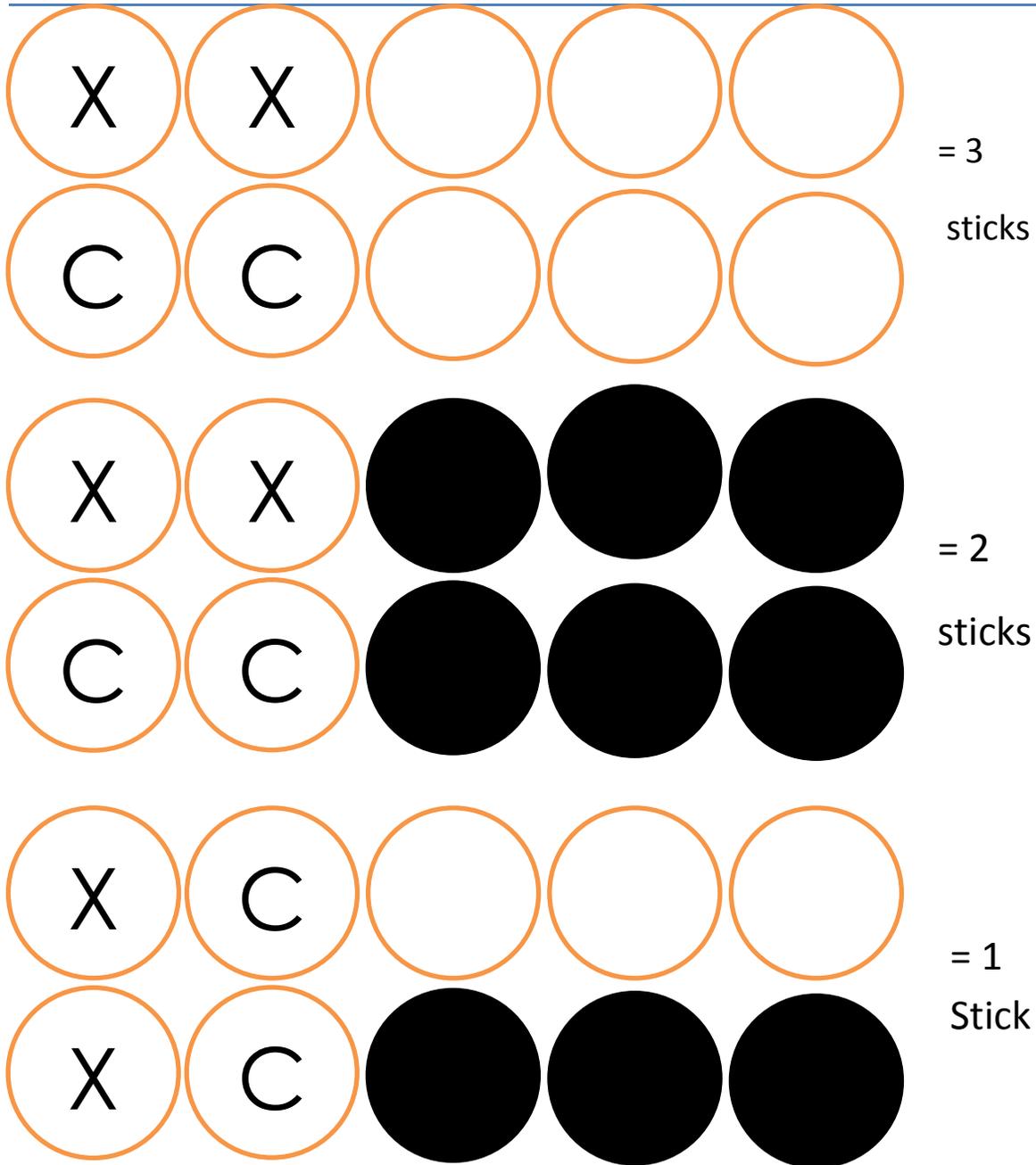


Outdoor



Indoor

# Basket Game – Points System – Play with 7 sticks per player





= 4 pts.



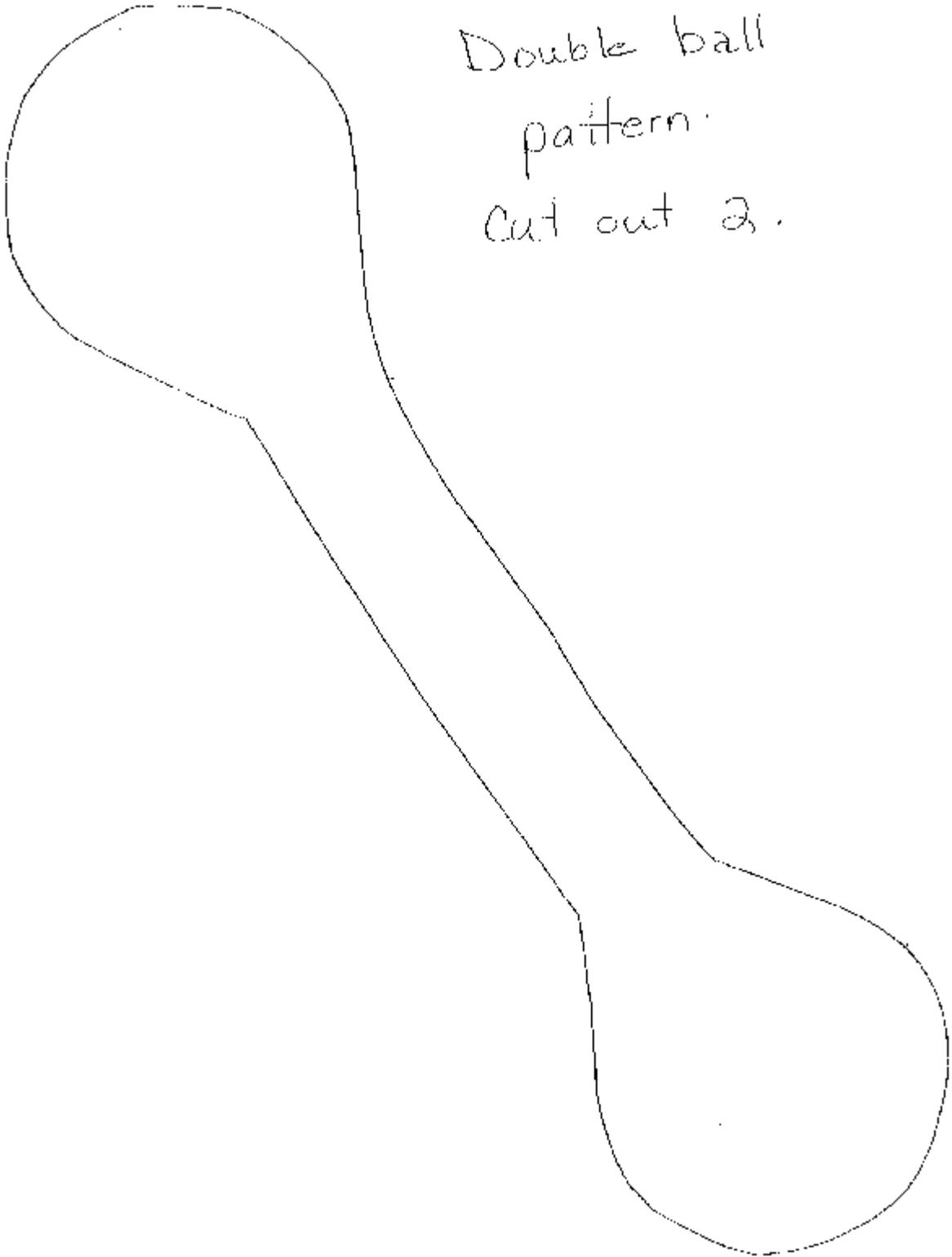
= 6 pts.



= 8 pts.



= 10 pts.



Double ball  
pattern.  
Cut out 2.