



HEALTH

Games of Physical Skill and Endurance

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Lifeways

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will play double ball and understand how games and physical activities varied from tribe to tribe based on the natural resources available to them.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do games help people to be part of a team?

LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?
Classroom
- How are the students organized?
 - ☒ Whole class ☒ Teams: 2 – 4
 - ☐ Pairs ☐ Individually

TIME REQUIRED

2 – 3 hours of classtime

Overview

Tribal nations and Indigenous communities throughout North America have always enjoyed games and athletic activities that provide entertainment, teach skills of physical and mental endurance, promote tribal values such as teamwork and fairness, and allow individuals and teams to challenge themselves in competition. These games and activities range from the simple stick game that dates back thousands of years to the modern-day Indian Relay Races that often draw large crowds. Even in the pre-contact era there were some similarities in the games played by tribes in a given region or even in completely different parts of the country, but there were also many variations in the rules, materials, and methods of play.

In this lesson, students will have the opportunity to learn about one such game, which is often called double ball in English. Double ball is a team sport that is similar to the contemporary game of lacrosse, in that it involves multiple players using long sticks and a ball, with the purpose—in most versions—of getting the ball across a goal line or through some sort of target. Many tribes, including several in Oregon, played a version of double ball and continue to do so today.



While focused on physical education, this lesson reinforces two important concepts that are woven throughout this curriculum. First, students will learn that while there are many similarities across tribal nations and Indigenous communities—including some of the games they play—Native American people are far from homogeneous and in fact represent a rich diversity of unique cultures. Second, students will be encouraged to think about how the specific natural environment in which a given tribe lived—its ancestral territory—shaped its identity and culture in both large and small ways. Understanding this strong connection to place is essential to understanding and respecting Native American cultures in Oregon and across North America, past and present.

Background for teachers

The following resources provide more context about traditional Native American games, in general:

- The Traditional Native Games Society: <https://www.buildingbrains.ca/cultural-games-indigenous>
- The two-volume *Games of the North American Indians*, by Stewart Culin, is a standard reference work that provides details about the many games—and their variations—played by Indigenous people both before and after contact with non-Native people. If a teacher has access to the publication, it may be useful to review the entry for double ball.
- Sjima at the University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jy9DaMywPj0>

STANDARDS

Oregon physical education standards

PE.1.4.28 – Strikes an object with a long-handled implement (e.g., hockey stick, golf club, bat, tennis racket, badminton racket), while using mature pattern for the implement (grip, stance, body orientation, swing plane and follow-through).

PE.2.4.6 – Applies the concepts of direction and force when striking an object with a short and/or long-handled implement, sending it toward a designated target.

PE.4.4.2 – Reflects on personal social behavior in physical activity.

MATERIALS

What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?

- Several long, curved sticks (similar to hockey sticks or curved branches)
- Several double balls or something similar (connected hacky sacks, balloons filled with sand in a sock)
- Two small wooden cylinders about three- to four-inches long tied together with string
- Goal posts, cones, or some form of target
- An open field of 50 to 100 yards
- Sticky notes and pencils/pens



- Native American Traditional Games, from the Montana Office of Public Instruction: <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Health%20Enhancement/Traditional%20Games%20-%20all.pdf>
- Sjima Game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwLk7dkT918>
- Double Ball, from the National Parks Service: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/traditional-game-double-ball.htm>
- Social roles and the importance of double ball play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qh333-ogqK8>

VOCABULARY

Double ball – Common name for a traditional game played by many Native American tribes across North America that involves using a stick to toss a set of tethered balls toward a goal.

Team work – Decisions made by or actions taken by individuals as part of a larger group; coordinated effort.

Sjima – The Klamath Tribes' term for double ball.

Billets – A small, thick cylindrical piece of wood.

Saplings – Young tree branches.

Key ideas to be aware of:

- There are many versions of double ball. Differences can include who participates, how teams are organized, the types of sticks and balls used, the length of the playing field, and the duration of the game.
- While there are many cross-tribal similarities in how double ball is played, this does not mean there is a central idea of where the game began or how it spread to other tribal nations over time.
- Double ball was played long before European settlers came to North America.
- In Indigenous cultures, games are played not only to provide entertainment and support physical health and well-being, but also to instill tribal values, such as the importance of teamwork and cooperation.



What teachers should do or review prior to delivering the lesson:

- Review the websites above to see how double ball is played by tribes in and around Oregon.
- Review a brief handout, created by Saskatoon Public Schools in Canada, that provides instructions for one version of double ball: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/27363357/double-ball-we-pitisowewepahikan-saskatoon-public-schools>
- Address adaptive physical educational needs with students prior to playing to ensure that all students have the ability to learn, practice, and meet the grade-level standards and expectations with appropriate accommodations. Since double ball is an adaptive game with many variations, students can help provide guidance on ways to include all students.

Considerations for teachers**Assessment**

- The teacher will observe how students participate as part of a team and how they use the equipment.
- Students will fill out an exit ticket at the end of the lesson that will allow the teacher to assess their understanding of underlying concepts, such as variation across tribal cultures and the importance of teamwork.

Practices

There should be adequate equipment for three to five students in each group and adequate physical space to play the game safely. Emphasize that the rules of the game are to only touch the ball with the stick. Students should not touch the ball with their hands, feet, or head at any time. Once a student has gained accuracy and speed with the stick and ball, allow them to coach other students.



Learning targets

- I can follow the rules in order to play the game of double ball.
- I can explain why the game of double ball varied slightly from tribe to tribe.

Options/extensions

- To practice passes and throws, you can give students a target on a wall. Once they have hit the target accurately three times, have them take a step backward to increase the distance of the toss.
- Have students practice with their dominant and non-dominant hands and feet and compare the results.
- Have students bring in materials such as leather, denim, sticks, cords, cotton, or yarn to construct double balls. Point out how the available materials and design preferences vary between students, as they did for different tribes.

Reflection/closure

Sum up the lesson by giving students an exit ticket with the following questions:

1. Why might the rules or materials of double ball change over time?
2. How do individuals help or hinder teamwork in a game?

Activity 1

Introduce students to double ball and its variations

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Say:

Today, we're going to learn about a traditional game that was played and continues to be played by many Native American tribes in Oregon and across North America. Native people have been playing some variation of this game for years. In English, it's called double ball because it's often played with a set of small balls that are attached together in some way, but as we will see, there were many, many variations in how this game was played. In some versions of double ball, the ball wasn't even double!

These differences in how the game was played—and even what equipment was used to play it—were based on many things, including different tribal traditions, but the most important factor was where a tribe lived and what natural materials were available. In some versions of double ball, for example, there really were two balls and they were very round—kind of like two baseballs connected by a piece of rope. But in other versions the ball was flat at the ends and in the center and was made of a single piece of buckskin. Some double balls had fringe and some didn't; some were painted and some weren't. Many of the tribal nations in Oregon used a single long, buckskin-covered version that narrowed in the middle, while the Klamath Tribes used billets, which weren't really balls at all but rather small cylindrical sticks tied together. [Show examples of different kinds of double ball.]

The other main piece of equipment was a stick or pole, and this also varied from tribe to tribe. Most versions had some kind of curve at the end that was used to pick up the ball, run with it, and throw it. A good comparison might be a hockey stick.

The sticks could range from two- to six-feet tall. Sometimes they were made of saplings (young tree branches) because these were easy to bend into the shapes that were most beneficial to the players. Most often, the sticks were round and thick at the handle and then tapered down to a thin curve, but there were as many vari-

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

ations in the kind of stick used as there were in the type of ball used. For example, some Paiute people used a stick with a small split or fork at the end.

The type of playing field also varied. It could range from 300 or 400 yards long (three or four football fields) to more than a mile long. Imagine watching a soccer or football game in which the nets or goal posts are a mile apart!

In some versions of the game, a team scored points by tossing the ball past the other team's baseline or what we might call a goal line, while in other versions the point was for each team to get the ball over its own goal line. Some versions used a fixed goal, such as two sticks or poles, and players tried to put the ball between the sticks, while in other versions, the object was to hit a single tall stick with the ball.

One interesting fact is that double ball was often played by women, who were celebrated not only for their speed, endurance, and skill but also for their well-coordinated teamwork and ability to score the most points. In double ball, working together as a coordinated team is very important. It's not an individual sport; it's a team sport.

Since this was a game played by many Native American tribes across North America, there were also many variations in the rules about who got to play. This might depend on tribal traditions about how and why to play games in the first place or on many other factors, such as the different gender roles within a given tribe, or even intertribal relations. Sometimes men played only against other men and sometimes women and men played on the same team. Sometimes double ball was played by teams within a single tribe, and in some cases teams from different tribes played each other.

Today, more and more people are discovering the fun of playing double ball. Both Native American and non-Native people are playing in parks, gyms, ball fields, plank houses, and longhouses, which are tribal buildings used for social gatherings and ceremonies. [The teacher may choose to show video clips of people playing double ball in the various settings and team configurations.]

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

Ask:

What are some ways we could go about playing double ball today? How would we create the ball? How about the stick? Where would our field of play be located? In thinking about this, how do you think a tribe's physical location might have affected the way its people played the game? Would a tribe whose ancestral territory was located along a river or ocean play differently than a tribe that lived mostly in the mountains or inland plains? How do you think ice or snow might affect the game?



PHOTO CREDIT: HISTORICMUSEUM.CA

Activity 2

Practice tossing the double ball with students

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Students will practice using the sticks to scoop the ball and toss it in two ways: overhead and underhand.

Say:

OK, today we're going to try playing double ball. We're going to try a few different ways. First, we're going to practice how it feels to toss the balls forward. Just like in different tribal nations, we have some different objects to use for the balls, sticks, and goals. We're going to play as two teams together in this area. Everyone will get a turn to try out both types of balls (round style with a connecting strap and a Klamath billet-style version).

To play, you're going to use the stick to scoop up the ball in the center and then toss it forward toward the goal. (Divide into smaller groups based on the amount of sticks and balls available.) Each team will have one stick and one ball to practice with, so you're going to need to take turns. One person at a time will use the stick to toss underhand, then switch to another team member to continue toward the goal. Just practice tossing the ball straight forward. Your toss may be short or it may be long, but right now what we're focused on is moving forward in as straight a line as possible.

To toss underhand, you want to face in the same direction you're throwing. Both hands are on the stick with your dominant hand, usually the hand that you write with, above the other hand. Your non-dominant leg will be in front, while you put your weight on your back foot. So if you're right-handed, the right hand is over the left hand on the stick, your left foot is forward, your right foot is grounded behind you, and your hips are turned slightly toward that back leg. Then, you will shift your weight forward into the front foot, straighten your hips, and flick your right wrist, all while keeping your eyes on the target. Your hands will naturally want to move forward also, launching the ball forward. So, to make it easy, you [model] step, turn, and throw.

Activity 2 (Continued)

If you're left-hand dominant, of course you will do this same movement in reverse—left hand on top, right foot forward, weight on your back foot. Before we get the sticks and balls, let's practice the movement so our muscles have an idea of what to do once we have the equipment in our hands. Step, turn, throw. Step, turn, throw. [repeat as needed]

Ensure students have enough room between groups to toss the ball safely.

After students have practiced throwing underhand, divide groups into smaller teams in order to have more space.

Say:

Now, we're going to split up into smaller groups and practice scooping and tossing overhead. Before, the object was to throw the ball with accuracy. With the overhead technique, we still want to be accurate, but we're also trying to throw the ball as far as possible. This one is a bit tougher because everyone wants it to go far, but the shape of the ball makes it complicated, and you're also playing around other people—you have to be careful not to whack anyone with a stick or bop them on the head with the ball. This move is rarely used, but it's still fun to learn.

First, you want to make sure your eyes are focused on the target. Second, this time you want your non-dominant side to be facing toward the target, so if you're right-handed that means putting your left foot forward, right foot back, and turning slightly so your left shoulder is pointing toward the target. Third, you want both hands on the stick, right hand on top. Your right arm is back, with your right hand behind your head. Your left elbow is up at about chin height and pointing in the direction you want the ball to go. If your front elbow is pointed way to the left of the target, for example, then your ball will most likely go that way, too. Very important!

OK, you want to have your left foot in front, right foot back, hips and weight shifted toward your back foot. Then you're going to rotate your hips and weight forward, which will naturally bring your arms along as well. This movement of your hips as you shift your weight from back to front is where most of the power comes from,



Activity 2 (Continued)

not your arms. Finally, you want to make sure you don't just stop the stick once you think the ball has been tossed. Instead, you want to follow through with your arms in a natural arc.

Let's review. For the overhead toss the steps are: Look toward the target, turn to one side, lift your arms, shift your weight back, then step forward, rotate your hips, and follow through with your arms [model] Look, turn, lift, shift, step, rotate, follow through. (Repeat as needed to practice the movement without the equipment.)

Once students have practiced without equipment, allow them to use the equipment and practice how the body, stick, and different types of ball react to the movements. Teachers can use this as a chance to have two teams and to award points on farthest toss, straightest toss, or both.

Ask students what they notice about the different techniques and the actions of the ball based on how their body was positioned. Ask students which style of ball they preferred and why.

Teacher note: This type of play should be modified for students who need adaptations for physical education. For these students, you may want to discuss the variations—or modifications—tribes made to the ball, stick, playing field, and so on. Just as the game was played differently between tribes based on resources, students can modify how they play to best fit their needs. Teachers can support an adaptive physical education by addressing instruction, rules, equipment, and/or environment. For example, the length and grip of the stick should be appropriate to the student's needs, and double balls can be modified by size, color, or length between the two balls. The physical throwing motion can also be modified to isolate areas of strength, flexibility, and mobility, and a student can get by without the full range of motion described in the steps for the general classroom. It is best to ask the student or students ahead of time how they might want to adapt the activity so that all can play and enjoy the game.



Activity 3

Play double ball with students

Time: 30 – 60 minutes

Students will combine the skills of tossing underhand and overhead to score points by tossing the ball toward the goal in a forward-only motion.

Say:

Now, we're going to put these skills in action. Traditionally, teams could range from 10 to 100 players and a match could go on for several days, but I'm not going to ask you to do that! Instead, we're going to form teams of five (or a quarter of the class on each team) and play in eight-minute rounds, with one team cycling out and one new team cycling in for each round. When your team is not playing, I want you to be actively watching, and I want you to make note of which players are showing really good teamwork and which players are tossing the ball the straightest and the farthest.