

Dakota & Lakota

Traditional Games Resource

Jeremy Red Eagle | Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota

Mike Marshall | Sicangu Lakota

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Author Biographies

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota

Mike Marshall, a Lakota artist, was born on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. Drawing on his culture, Mike works in traditional and modern interpretations through metal, batik, stone, jewelry, paints and natural materials. Mike also does presentations on traditional Lakota games.



Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota

Jeremy Red Eagle is a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, on the Lake Traverse Reservation. He descends from the Wahpe kute (Shooters among the Trees) and Wahpetuwan (dwellers among the leaves) people of the Toka nuwan (Enemy Swim) community.

He is currently employed at the Sisseton Wahpeton College as an apprentice learning the Dakota Language where he received his Dakota language teaching certificate. He has been actively learning the Dakota language for the past four years. Jeremy has worked with Native American youth from all over Montana, South & North Dakota and Minnesota for the past decade. One of the many effective methods he uses to reach youth is through the teaching of traditional native games and other cultural activities, by incorporating traditional values and history of the games. Jeremy began his work with the International Traditional Games Society based out of Browning Mt. He is currently working on integrating the Dakota language and knowledge of traditional games into one.



Recovery & Restoration of Dakota and Lakota Traditional Games

International Traditional Games Society (ITGS) (www.traditionalnativegames.org) has been an important partner in recovering and restoring Dakota and Lakota Traditional Games.

ITGS was formed in Montana in 1997 with the mission to recover and restore Native American games of many cultures. ITGS offers clinic trainings and certification in Native American games throughout the United States and Canada. Three clinic trainings were held in South Dakota in 2016 and 2017, resulting in over 150 South Dakotans becoming certified to teach traditional games. This momentum has helped to spark the recovery process for Lakota and Dakota games.

Easily used, these flip cards are intended for families who are camping, teachers in classrooms, tribal programs, parks employees, or museum presenters. Play is the highest form of joy. The games bring values from the old tribal cultures:

- Honoring the person who gave the most challenge
- Respecting your competitors
- Having courage, persistence and skill
- Being humble even when winning



Types of Native Games in the Americas

The First Peoples of the Americas had thousands of games for both individual and team competitions. These included physical games or games of intuition and chance. Team games were not found in most European countries until explorers saw the exciting competitions in the new world.

This rich culture of games and sports was introduced to the first contact visitors in early 1500's. Europeans took and formalized the native games of stickball, shinney, and footbag, with rules that became baseball and cricket, hockey, and soccer. Later, a bladder bag game was formalized into basketball.

Slaves and prisoners from European and Asian countries were the first to take those games back home to England and India where those countries claim them as their national sports.

The indigenous people of the Americas depended on older tribal members to teach survival skills to their youth. When indigenous people were removed from their homes and sent to mission or boarding schools, they returned to their tribes lacking the cultural knowledge or the natural skills for successfully protecting and providing for their families.

Today, neuroscience has shown the importance of "games of intuition" as giving humans those observational and sensing skills needed for understanding and getting along with others. The development of physical endurance, coordination, dexterity, quickness, and strength is as important to health as it was in the past.

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International Traditional Games: Montana. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.traditionalnativegames.org/>.



Photo courtesy of Richie Richards of Native Sun News Today.



Dakota Traditional Games

Kaṇsu kutepi They shoot the plum seed (dice)

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



Equipment: Six plum seed dice, 25-100 scoring sticks, small basket or cup.

How to play: Game can be played by individuals or teams. Start by rolling all dice with the objective of rolling pairs of any suit. Played until one individual or team wins all sticks/points. It is determined by the game maker what symbols to use example: (two) turtles equal = 6pts, (two) eagles = 4pts, (two) elk=2pts. On the underside of the seed, without the animal, an X is drawn or can be left blank. A seventh single seed can be added in.

How to craft: Gather six clean plum seeds and either wood burn or use a fine tip marker to draw the three pairs of symbols.

Notes: This was predominately played by women although men and youth were known for playing. The players agree on how many scoring sticks will be used and any other rules that may need clarification. For example, game maker could implement different color sticks to signify a 'ten count stick' if a large game is underway with numerous players.

Language: Kaṇta – wild plum. Su – seed. Kaṇsu – wild plum seed. Kute – shoot. Caṇwiyawa – scoring stick.

Tasiha unpi (Foot bone game)

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



How to play: The player swings the string of bones in an upward arcing motion while trying to pierce one or multiple bones. There are usually five bones but can have as few as four and as many as eight. At the one end is multiple strands of beads and the other end of the buckskin strip is an awl. The bone closest to the strands of beads is worth one point, the second is worth two and so on. Each strand of beads caught is worth one point.

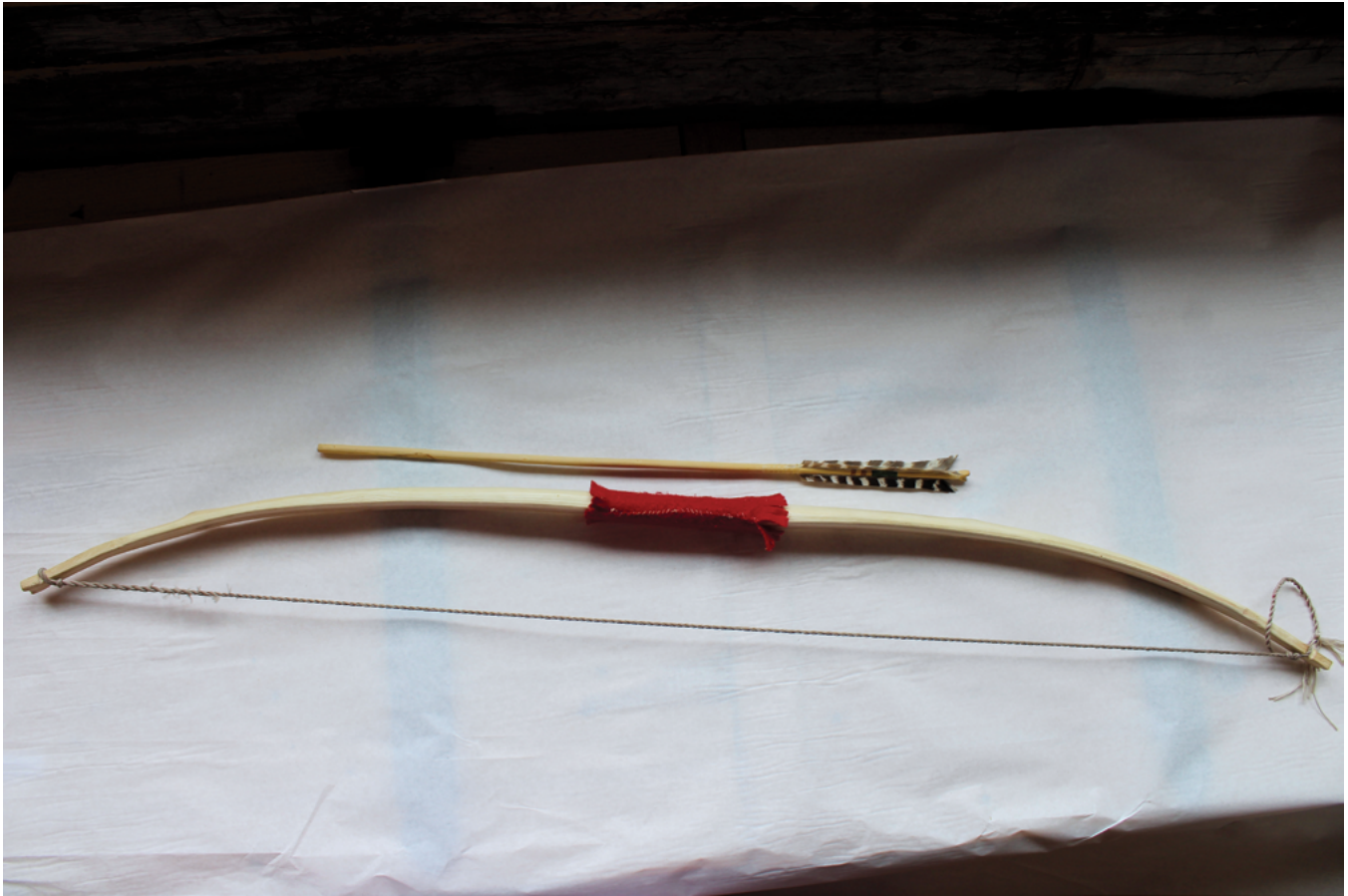
How to craft: The toe bones from within the deer hoof are used. They usually are hollowed out and one end is filed to make the bone into a cup shape. Long ago an awl made of bone was used, but after European contact Dakota people started to use wire in place of the awl. Ensure the length of the string has enough 'swing' so to not have too 'tight' of an arc.

Notes: This game helped with hand eye coordination. It would also help to pass the time on long winter nights.

Language: Taḥca – deer. Siha – foot. Tasiha – deer foot. Unpi – They use. Tahinšpa – awl.

Hoksina itazipe Young boy's archery

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



How to play: Boys would play various different games utilizing their bow and arrows. They would use different items as targets, one of the boys may shoot an arrow into the air and the other boys would try to hit the arrow with one of their arrows. Boys would often wager their arrows on these shooting contest. They would also use a moccasin placed on a stick or a cactus attached to a stick that one young boy would wave around while the other boys would try to shoot it hit it. The ability to be a skilled hunter was a continued effort.

Equipment: Bow and arrows, quiver, moccasin or cactus (optional)

How to craft: Bows can be made from a variety of hard woods. The most common among Dakota people are ash, choke cherry and elm. Arrows were usually made from choke cherry shafts. Optimally harvested during the time when the sap is 'down'. Arrows for these types of games would usually have a blunted or rounded end. Small bows for very young boys could be made out of willow.

Notes: Along with these games, boys would also hunt small game.

Language: Hoksina – boy. Itazipe – bow. Wahinkpe – arrow. Wan'yeya – to shoot an arrow.

Tahuka canhdeška Hoop and arrow

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



Equipment: Four to eight webbed hoops that are between eight and fourteen inches in diameter. Each player should have two spears around four to five feet in length.

How to play: Two teams consist of two to eight players per team. One team rolls the hoop back and forth to each other while the other team tries to spear the hoop. The backward spinning motion employed to spin the hoop is one that takes practice. The hoop can also be tossed through the air. Multiple sized hoops are used. The center of the hoop is called the cante (heart). If this is speared this is worth the most points. Anything speared on the outside of the center is one point.

How to craft: Willow is one of the easiest woods to use to make the hoops. Chokecherry and ash can also be used. Binding the ends of the hoops together with sinew or moistened rawhide strips is used. Then take sinew or wet rawhide to weave a dreamcatcher style webbing. Other types of webbing were also used, such as the spider web and webbing similar to a snowshoe.

Notes: This game was usually played by older men.

Language: Taha – rawhide. Canhdeška – hoop. Wahukeza – spear. Canțe – heart.

Cankawacipina Spinning tops and whip

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



How to play: An area with a smooth flat surface will be needed. Long ago this was done on the ice. Wrap the leather from the whip around the top 'ridge' of the top and spin it to get the propulsion necessary or use both hands wrapped around top and spin it on a flat surface. The whip is then used to keep the top spinning.

How to craft: Cedar block approximately 3 x 4 in. is a good soft wood to use, but a sapling of any other hard wood can be used. Carve the wood into an acorn shape.

Notes: Young men or boys game. Competitions were usual mode of play. Obstacle courses were developed to make a more challenging game. Two boys might also battle each other to see who could knock the other ones top off of balance.

Language: Can – wood. Wacipi – they dance. Kapsinte – to whip. Icapsinte – a whip.

Takapsicapi Lacrosse

Jeremy Red Eagle, Wahpe kute/Wahpetuwan Dakota



Equipment: two goals, buckskin ball, traditional lacrosse sticks

How to play: Two teams, any number of players. A goal, usually a tall tree or a designated pole placed into the ground. A field or gym, of any size. Objective is to score points through passing, of buckskin ball or the like. A traditional lacrosse stick is utilized by each player. Few rules, only to play honorably. Be mindful of other players particularly women and children and never touch the ball with the hand while the ball is in play.

How to craft: Ash or other hard wood is implemented to produce the stick by carving then heating and bending the end into a hoop and a buckskin thong is strung into the hoop to cradle the ball. The ball is made of buckskin, stuffed firmly with deer or buffalo hair. Ball may also be made of wood.

Notes: Long ago this game would be played on fields a minimum of 300 yards and as much as a mile in distance from goal to goal. This game was used for conflict resolution, wagering, healing and also just for entertainment.

Language: Takapsica – they cause the ball to bounce. Tapa – ball. Psica – jump. Taicabsice – Lacrosse stick.

Lakota Traditional Games

Icaslohe econpi Game of bowls

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



Equipment: A round marble of stone, wooden pins, and items for a scoring system. The round marble of stone should be the size of a shooter marble or a bit larger. Wooden pins vary in size but average @ 2 ½ to 3 inches tall. In lieu of “bets” (as an example, a hank of beads) counting sticks may be used for scoring.

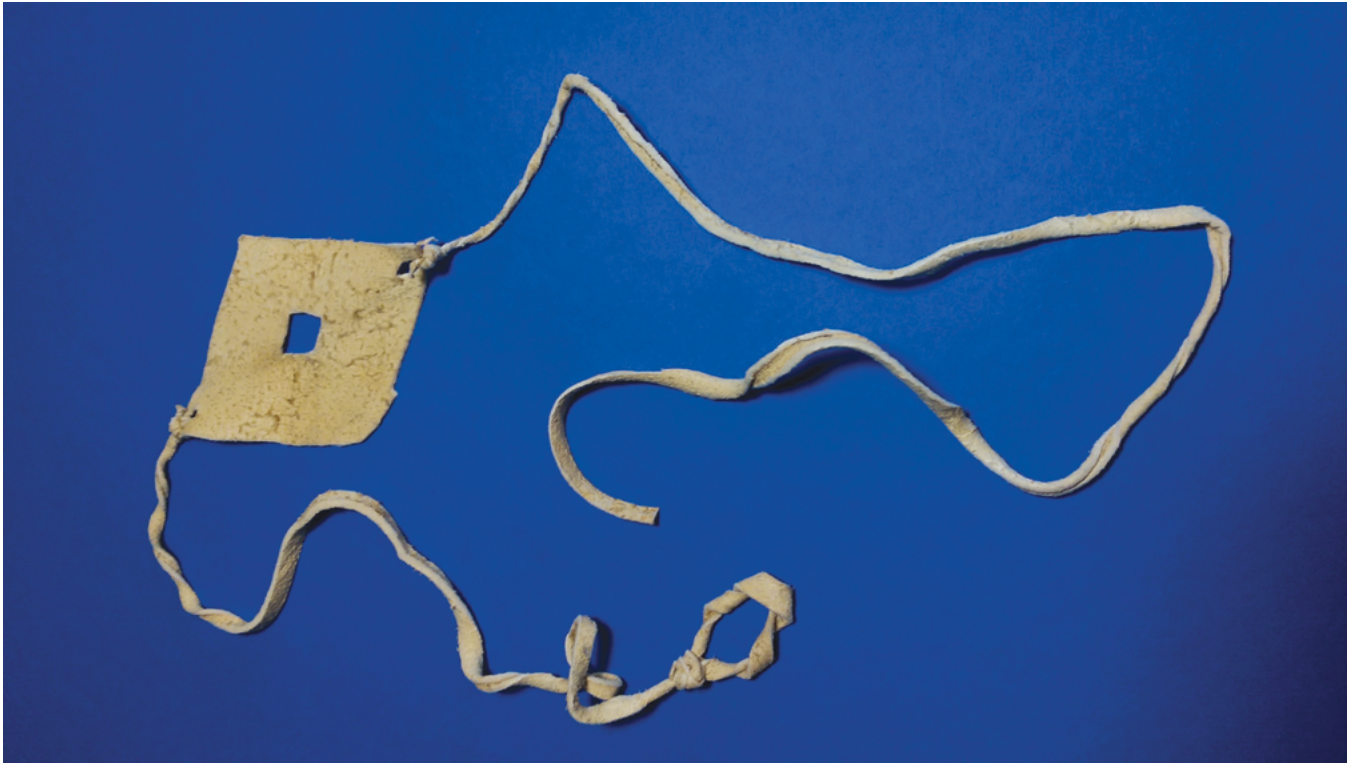
How to play: This game is similar to ten pins. It was traditionally a woman’s game played on a smooth surface, such as ice or packed snow. The players, facing each other, a distance apart, would take turns rolling the “marble” back and forth trying to knock over each other’s wooden pins. Usually, a bet is involved. When a pin is knocked over and a bet or point must be given, the “point” can be tossed over and if it hits the successful player’s pin, the loser gets his bet/point back and can keep the marble. Another variation is to provide an extra pin and two players on each side/team.

How to craft: The ball can either be found (river stones) or can be manufactured by carving/ sanding. Certain stones such as pipestone or alabaster are readily carved. The pins and counting sticks can be made from easily manipulated woods such as cottonwood (pins) and willow (counting sticks).

Notes: This is a very easy game to recreate and materials can be found or purchased. Wooden marbles make good rolling stones and can be purchased from hobby stores. Dowels will work for pins and counting sticks.

Inyan onyeyapi A rock sling

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



Equipment: sling and rocks; the sling consists of two thongs that are tied to the center “cup”

How to play: This was traditionally a toy for boys. They would place a rock in the sling, twirl it about, and see how far they could send the rock. Sometimes boys would try to hit small birds using the sling.

How to craft: The length of the thong varies in length to suit the user. The cup is either rounded or diamond shaped with a slot cut in the middle which helps to hold the rock. Slits are cut into the cup and the thongs are tied to it. Stout leather is best as it holds up to hard use.

Notes: Safer “rocks” can be substituted, such as plastic or foam balls.

Ipahotonpi Popgun

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



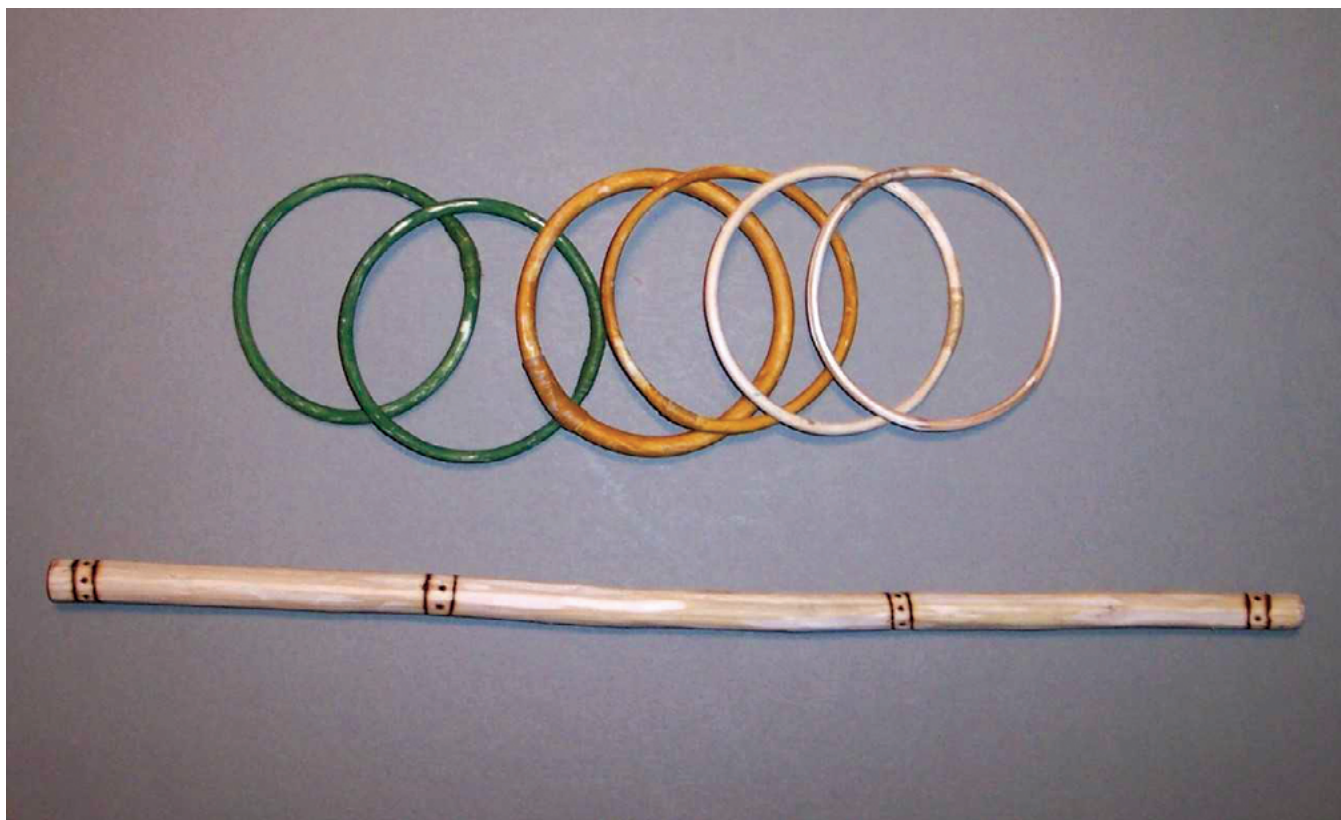
Equipment: popgun consist of 3 parts: 1) tancan/the body, 2) iyopazan/the ramrod and 3) iyopuhl/the bark wadding

How to play: Boys would play hunting or have battles with the popgun. Wadding from the inner bark of an elm is chewed and inserted into both ends of the body. The ramrod is inserted and forcefully hit, thus compressing air which causes the wadding to fly out and make a popping noise. The ramrod and wadding are tied to the body (barrel) with leather string.

How to craft: The body is made from ash about 9 to 12 inches in length. The soft middle core is burned out the entire length. A ramrod is procured the same diameter as the body core. It is said that the inner bark of the elm tree makes a good wadding but cottonwood will work as well.

Napsiyohli Small Finger Ring (Ring Toss)

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



How to play: Six hoops are placed on the hoop wand. The player gently tosses the hoops off the wand and in midair sees how many he/she can catch for points. It is a points-based game, so a point goal is set. If all hoops are caught, the player automatically wins the round. If the player fails, it is passed on to the next player.

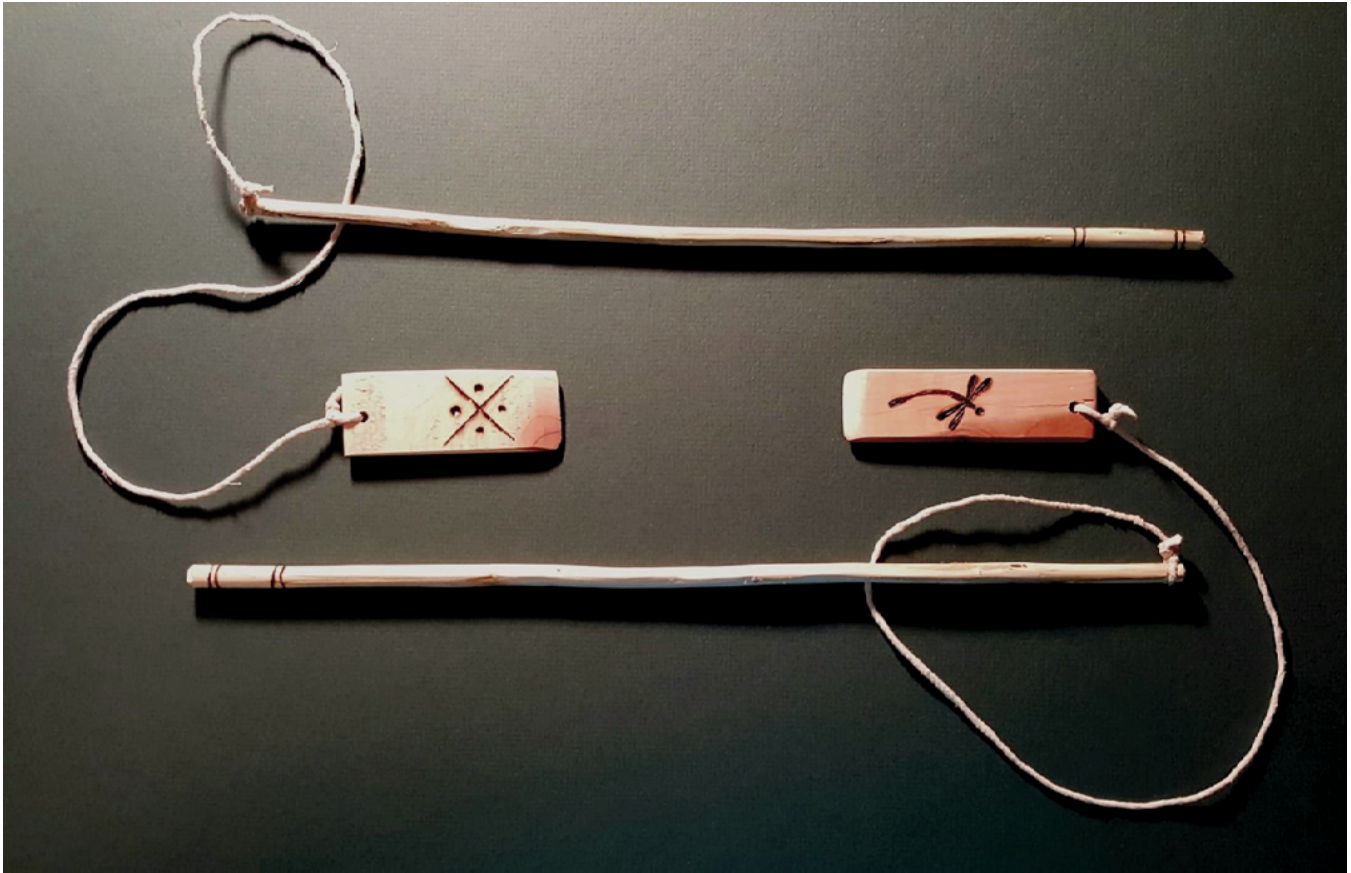
How to craft: Willow is the best material to use as it is easily peeled and pliable and readily found along the water's edge. To form the hoop, wrap the willow around a circular mold, such as a log of 3 inch diameter. Leave it to dry, which happens quickly. The spirals are then cut into individual rings that are joined with glue and sinew (artificial sinew can be used) wrapped at the join. The wand is also best formed from willow and can be 12-14 inches long.

Notes: Before the game starts, rules must be agreed upon:

- Establish a winning number of points (for example: 10).
- Determine how many tries a player is allowed before needing to rotate to the next player (example: two tries or another version would be to let a player that makes a point keep having turns until they do not make any points).

Tateka yumunpi Wind Buzzer (Bull Roarer)

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



Equipment: The wind buzzer consists of a wooden plank joined by a leather thong to a wooden handle.

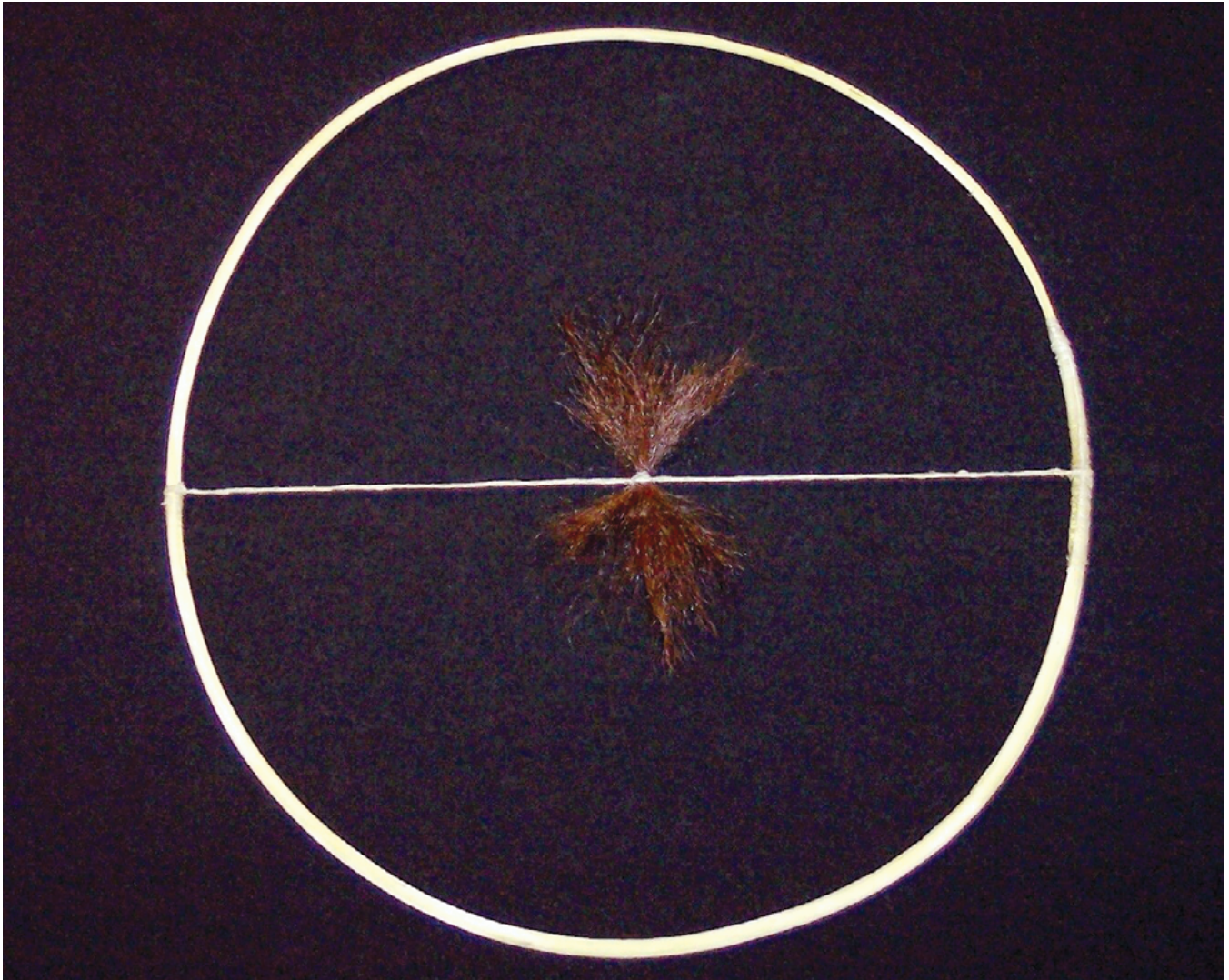
How to play: This game was traditionally played by boys. They held it by the handle and spun it around vigorously, thus creating a buzzing noise. Participants can compete to see who can keep it buzzing for the longest duration.

How to craft: It is said that when you want to make a toy that will produce a sound, cedar is the best wood to use. The wooden plank of the wind buzzer is carved to be rectangular in shape. A hole is drilled through the plank to accept a leather thong which is also attached to a wooden “wand.” The plank can be beveled at the tip to help cut the wind, thus creating a louder sound. The wand can be notched to keep the leather thong in place, or a forked stick can be used to keep the thong securely attached. Usually the buzzer is plain, but some burn in designs, usually on the plank.

Notes: It takes effort to make the plank buzz and as an after effect, the arm muscles will strain and tighten, making for good completion.

Tate kahwogyapi Wind Chaser – They are chasing the wind

Mike Marshall, Sicangu Lakota



Equipment: wind chaser hoop

How to play: When the wind blows hard, the boys roll it on the ground and the hoop would be carried away. Each boy tries to catch it first. After that, the play starts over.

How to craft: A willow shoot about finger width is collected and easily peeled. While green, it is molded around a round object and in short order is formed into a circle. The hoop ends are joined with sinew which is strung across the circumference and at the same time, a tuft of buffalo hair is attached in the center.

Notes: Since the materials are extremely light, it is taken by the wind with little effort. Size can vary, but 1 foot in diameter is common. It is said that the hoop represents a buffalo calf and the boys would say, “Ptehincala unkiyepi - we are young ones (calves).”

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