



Games of the Shuswap

SHUSWAP CULTURAL SERIES • BOOK 6
SECWEPENC CULTURAL EDUCATION SOCIETY



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Games of the Shuswap People

Introduction

The Shuswap enjoyed many kinds of recreation. They had several games that could be played quietly at the end of the day or during the winter months. They also enjoyed active games, of a competitive nature, where they tested themselves against one another in a number of skills. Many games and competitions took place at the annual gathering at Green Lake, in the Northern Shuswap area.



Lehal Game

The “lehal” game, played by the adults, included an element of gambling. This game, still played by the Shuswap, was played in teams. Two teams sat facing each other. Variations of lehal were played including the use of gambling sticks and guessing. Lehal was accompanied by music and song. The beat was kept on a drum or by the players tapping their gambling sticks on a pole in front of them. The object of the various stick games was to win all the sticks by guessing. Often there was a prize to be won.

Dice Game

The women played a game with four beaver tooth dice, all marked differently. They were thrown, and when they landed points were awarded, depending on the combination of designs and “blanks”. The winner was the woman with the greatest number of points.

Card Game

A card game was played, perhaps only in the last century, using birch bark cards. The cards contained two of each kind in the deck. One game was played like Fish where similar cards were paired. Card matching was the object of another game but it was played by matching with cards already laid face up. Points were awarded for winning pairs. The pictures on the cards were taken from the card maker's dream.

Ring and Spear Game

Many active games were popular. In the Ring and Spear game, the players threw the spear at the rolling ring. The object was to cause the ring to fall on the spear. Points were gained according to how the ring sat on the spear. The knobs inside the ring had different values when the spear lined up with them. The person who gained the most points, by making the ring land on the spear with the highest-value knobs being aligned, won the game. A similar game was played with this equipment with the teams of players sitting facing each other.

Ring and Dart Game

Another ring game was played inside or outside, by adults or children. In this game the teams sat facing each other. The ring, about ten centimeters in diameter, and made of reeds, bark or grass wrapped around a bent stick, was rolled from player to player. As it rolled other players threw darts at it, trying to knock the ring over. The dart was about ten centimeters long and made of wood. Points were awarded for hitting the ring. In another dart game the players tried to hit the middle of a ring one or two centimeters in diameter from a distance of about three meters.

This game was also played by children. When children played dart games they played to win the darts. If the thrower lost the match, he or she lost his or her darts.

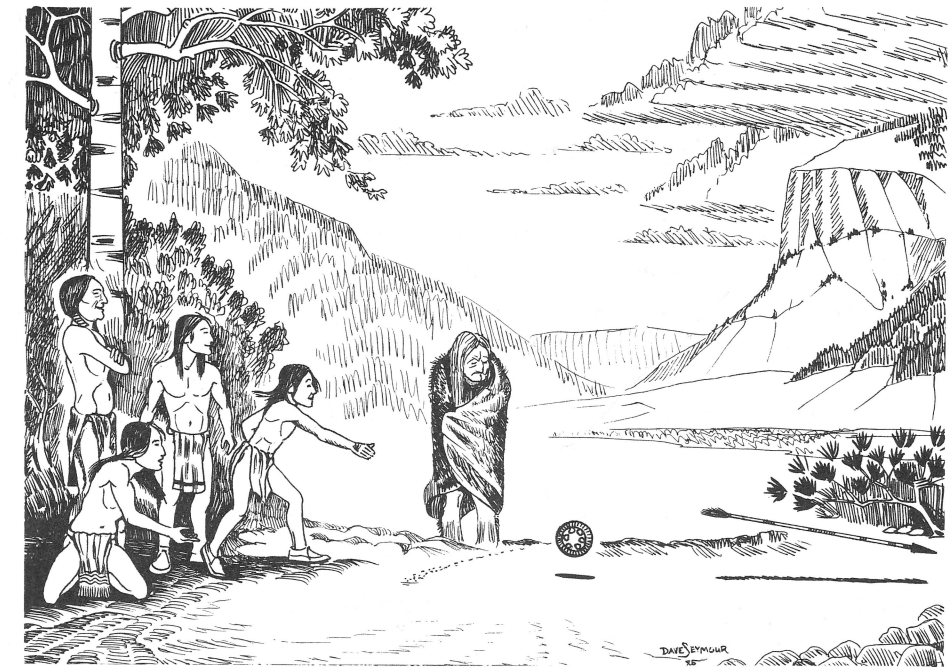
Ball Games

Various kinds of ball games were played. Balls were made of tree knots rounded off or of buckskin stuffed with grass. One game played with a stick similar to a bat was similar to softball. In this game the player hit the ball and ran to a base. If he got home again he continued to bat. If he was hit by a player with the ball his turn at bat ended.

Children played ball games in which a ball was thrown up and the catcher ran with it until he was caught, then that person ran until he was caught and so on. Boys played a ball and string game. In this game a long grass ball was held to the hand by a string. A wooden pin was held in the same hand. The player swung his arm, swinging the ball away and as it swung back toward the hand, the boy tried to spear it onto the end of the stick.

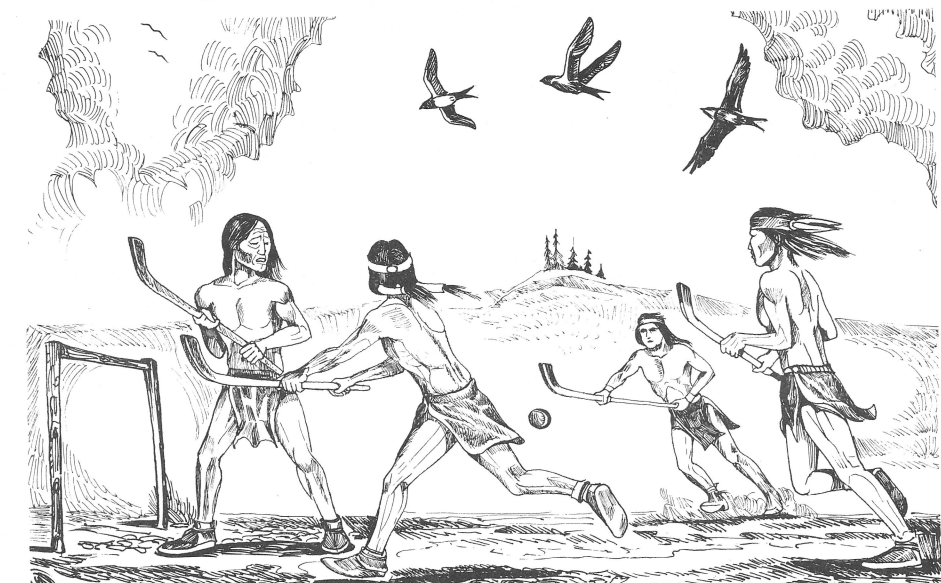
Boys threw stones wrapped with buckskin down hillsides while others tried to catch the bouncing ball in a net hoop with a twine netting. In another game the nets were used to catch the toggle attached to a ball.

Various tests of skill were included as games. Shooting arrows for accuracy was a common game. An arrow was shot into a target thirty to eighty meters away. The archers tried to split the shaft of the target arrows with their own arrows. Contests for shooting an arrow great distances were also held. In some target contests the winner won the arrows shot by the losing players. Moving rings were also used as targets for shooting.



Lacrosse

A very popular game was that of lacrosse. Goals about a meter or more in height were placed at either end of the field. A ball, like those described was used. Sticks were curved at the ends to catch the ball. In the winter the game was played with netted sticks so that the ball could be carried. The ball could not be touched with the hands, it could only be directed toward the opposing goal with the sticks or feet. Sometimes the teams used different coloured face and body paint to identify members of the same team, i.e. red for one team and yellow for the other. The object of the game was to score the greatest number of goals.



Tug of War

Tug of wars using ropes were played by men and boys. High jumping and long jumping contests were also held. Stone throwing, like shot putting, was also practised. In another game stones were thrown at pegs for accuracy.

Wrestling and Foot Races

Wrestling and foot racing were other contests the Shuswap engaged in. Races could be of long or short distances. The long distance races were up to 15 kilometers. The Shuswap sometimes competed with the Thompson and Okanagan in races and large bets were made on the best runners. Wrestling was often done by challenge, with bets being placed, and the winner taking the highest stakes.



Swimming

Almost all Shuswap could swim. They sometimes held swimming contests for distance or speed. Canoe races of various distances were also held on the lakes in the region.

Sling Shots

Boys made slings from Indian hemp bark and a buckskin thong which they used to throw stones great distances. Tops and whirligigs were made from bark with a sharpened wooden pin through it for the spindle.

Tobogganing

Children enjoyed tobogganing on flat stones or thick pieces of bark turned up in front. Men sometimes descended the mountains by tobogganing down on large fir branches on the frozen snow. Children made snowmen and rolled snowballs for winter entertainment.

Cat's Cradle

Small children played the game of cat's cradle with strings. They used a variety of hand movements to make the strings look like the teepee, the eagle, the sturgeon, the mountain sheep or the ruffed grouse. They also played games of hide and seek.

References:

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SHUSWAP DECLARATION

TO WORK IN UNITY ON SHUSWAP LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND CULTURE

Traditionally, Shuswap territory covered an area of 56,000 square miles and included the Thompson River drainage basin, extended eastward to the Columbia River Valley and reached north into the Fraser District. European settlement and colonialism eroded Indian title to traditional lands and lead to the eventual breakdown of the Shuswap Nation. Where thirty communities existed at the turn of the century, seventeen remain occupying only one-third of the traditional territory.

British imperialism and the colonizing of the Indian nations resulted in the disintegration of the society and a gradual decline of Shuswap culture and language.

For years the Shuswap bands have struggled to recover their heritage and restore it to its true role as the foundation of their nation.

Perseverance and hard work resulted in the signing of the Shuswap Declaration, August 20, 1982. The seventeen Shuswap bands had agreed to work together to preserve, record, perpetuate and enhance the Shuswap language, history and culture. The Shuswap Declaration marked the renewal of a strong and harmonious relationship that existed among the bands prior to European contact.

The Secwepemc Cultural Education Society is one of two sub-groups of the larger Shuswap Cultural Working Committee involved in cultural education programming and carrying out the Shuswap Declaration Agreement.

*THE SECWEPENC CULTURAL EDUCATION SOCIETY
would like to thank everyone who assisted
in the research and production of the Shuswap Cultural Series.*