



Inuit Games

**Eugene Contreras, Lord Aylmer School (WQSB)
Aalla, Innuqatigiit (Center for Inuit Children, Youth & Families)**

The human need to play is universal; all peoples have developed physical activities, sport and games appropriate for their particular geographic and cultural context. In the harsh northern environment of the Arctic, traditional Inuit games focus on the attributes most necessary for survival there – agility, strength, and above all, endurance. Apart from the important need for social interaction and amusement with very few materials at hand, the games provide opportunities to maintain fitness and practice skills needed to procure the basics of food, shelter and clothing. Many of the games test individual and collective perseverance in uncomfortable and even painful circumstances, which are essential to survival in the context of cold, hunger and fatigue that were part of everyday life. These games were also traditionally played at gatherings of different nomadic groups at certain times of year, and used to show off competence, talent and skills that might be attractive to find a partner from another community.

Although these links to survival may now be less immediate for most Inuit, let alone to those in more southern regions, the games provide important cultural connections for people in the North, and for students in the South they offer an accessible window into a world that can otherwise seem distant and different.

I've used the games in this resource in different ways over the years; as part of broader units on the Inuit and Indigenous peoples as a classroom teacher, and now as a specific phys. ed. unit as a PHE teacher. They can also be easily integrated along with other physical education activities such as wrestling, gymnastics, outdoor ed. track & field, fitness circuits, etc.

Many of these games are played one-on-one. I have students get in groups of 3 for these, taking turns being the “judge” that ensures the two competitors are set up properly, counts them in to start the game, and determines who the winner is in case of disagreement. Win or lose, students show appreciation for their opponent with a hand shake, high-5, or fist-pump after playing.

Once students know several of the games, I finish the unit with a class Arctic Winter Games competition. Students collectively choose 4-5 games, and then each of my established gym class teams is a “community” and must nominate athletes to compete in each of the games, focusing on the strengths of each member of their community. To maximize participation and engagement, my rules are: each member of the team must compete in at least one event, and may compete in a maximum of two; each team must have at least one athlete competing in each event, and may have a maximum of two competitors in any given event. I give them time to practice amongst themselves to determine which students will compete in which events, and then the games begin!

I also teach the students a few Inuktitut words for gameplay, which I model and then encourage the judges to use as they play:

1 – attausiq 2 – marruuk 3 – pingasut

stop (enough!) – taima

Enjoy!

Siturtaq

Equipment: None

Stance and Start: Start in a squatting position in a circle or scattered around.

Movement: Extend one leg straight out, touching the heel to the ground in front, and keep the other leg tucked under, then alternate from one leg to the other. Continue for as long as possible.

Competition: The last person still dancing wins.



One Foot High Kick

Equipment: High Kick Stand (basketball net could be used or broom attached to a stepladder) with string and target (bone, beanbag, etc.). For practice, one student can hold a hat, mitt, beanbag, etc. at arm's length for a partner to kick.

Stance and Start: Start standing on two feet in front of target. Older or more advanced players may have a running start.

Movement: Jump and kick target with one foot, then land on that same foot, hopping three times to show balance.

Competition: The starting height is established by the players and the teacher so that pretty much everyone can succeed at the first level. The target must be clearly hit with the jumping foot and the landing must be balanced on the same foot. Each player gets two tries at each height. The target is raised a little bit at a time once everyone has taken their two jumps, eliminating the players that missed the target.



Two Foot High Kick

Equipment: High Kick Stand (basketball net could be used or broom attached to a stepladder) with string and target (bone, beanbag, etc.). For practice, one student can hold a hat, mitt, beanbag, etc. at arm's length for a partner to kick.

Stance and Start: Start from a standing position in front of the target with two feet together. Older or more advanced players may have a running start.

Movement: Jump from both feet and keeping feet together, kick target. Land on two feet and maintain balance (hop if necessary).

Competition: The starting height is established by the players and the teacher so that pretty much everyone can succeed at the first level. The target must be clearly hit with two feet together, the landing must be made with two feet together and balanced. Each player gets two tries at each height. The target is raised a little bit at a time once everyone has taken their two jumps, eliminating the players that missed the target.



Alaskan High Kick

Equipment: High Kick Stand (basketball net could be used or broom attached to a stepladder) with string and target (bone, beanbag, etc.).

Stance and Start: Sit on the ground with one hand placed on the floor behind the bum, and one knee up. Grab the opposite foot (right hand-left foot or vice-versa) with free hand, and lift bum up off the floor, supporting the body with one hand and one foot.

Movement: Player lifts the body off the floor and kicks the target with the foot they're not holding, holding their weight on one hand. The kicking foot must return to the floor before the bum hits the ground.

Competition: The starting height is established by the players and the teacher so that pretty much everyone can succeed at the first level (although that's a tougher call with this one). The target must be clearly hit with the foot, and the landing must be made on the kicking foot. Each player gets two tries at each height. The target is raised a little bit at a time once everyone has taken their two jumps, eliminating the players that missed the target.



Musk-Ox Push

Equipment: none

Stance and Start: Competitors get on all fours and in the middle of a set circle (or in the middle between 2 lines). The middle circle in the gym works well, or mark one out of similar size in the snow. Place heads down under the shoulder (and armpit) of opponent so that the opponents press shoulder to shoulder with head tucked under close to the ground.

Movement: Using body weight and strength, opponents try to push each other out of the circle (or across a line), or until the other person gives up. They must move forward in a straight line, not turn and twist. Hands and knees must touch the ground, only lifting one at a time in order to move forward. Players may not push with their feet while their knee is in the air. Players must also keep their heads down so as to not lift their opponent's arm up.

Competition: The player that pushes their opponent outside the circle (or past the line) wins. If a player raises their head, hands, or knees incorrectly, or turn their body to the side, they are eliminated. Players challenge each other tournament-style.



Back Push

Equipment: none

Stance and Start: Both opponents sit on the floor with backs together. Place right hand on floor between legs and the left hand on the outside of left leg. Knees are bent with feet flat on the floor. Opponents may be in a circle or between two lines at either end.

Movement: Using leg, arm, and body strength, try to push opponent out of circle or over the line. As soon as one player's foot crosses the line or goes out of the circle, the other player wins.

Competition: Start off one against one, winners continue to challenge each other tournament-style. Best 2 out of 3 event. Round 1 – Right hand, Round 2 – left hand, tie breaker – both hands on outside.



Kneel Jump

Equipment: none

Stance and Start: Kneel on floor with feet on the floor and toes outstretched (no tippy toes), players sitting on their feet. The bum is not allowed to leave the feet until the actual jump. Knees should be even with a clearly marked line.

Movement: Using upper body momentum and agility, thrust body forward to land on your feet and as far ahead as possible.

Competition: Best out of three attempts. Measurement is taken from the heel landing closest to the line, or any part of your body that falls backwards, like a regular long jump.

Figure 1



Kneel on floor with toes flat against the floor.

Figure 2



Swing arms back

Figure 3



Launch body up and forward

Figure 4



Land on both feet

Neck Pull

Equipment: Strap or belt

Stance and Start: In pairs, players face each other lying in a cobra position - stomach on the ground, legs outstretched behind, head up and arms straight with palms on the ground. A line can be marked between players.

Movement: On signal, opponents pull back with their neck and use their hands and upper body to push themselves back. The object is to try to pull their opponent over the line or pull the strap over opponent's head.

Competition: Start off one against one, winners continue to challenge each other tournament-style.



Arm Pull

Equipment: None

Stance and Start: In pairs, players face each other sitting on the floor. One leg is bent and the other is straight. Competitors lock legs and hook right arms at the elbow. The other hand is holding the ankle of the opponent's bent leg.

Movement: On signal opponents pull slowly and steadily at the elbow. The object is to try to pull the opponent over or until opponent's hand touches the chest of the winner.

Competition: Start off one against one, winners continue to challenge each other tournament-style.



Leg Wrestling

Equipment: none

Stance and Start: Two students lie on their back side by side with heads in opposite directions. The pair link inside arms at the elbow and put their hand on their chest (not down beside their body). Lifting their inside legs, the pair lock knees. You can also start with legs down and have players count as they lift and drop the leg, locking legs on the count of 3 (“pingasut”). The free leg is bent at the knee with the foot on the floor.

Movement: Pushing with the inside leg, players attempt to flip their opponent over backwards.

Competition: Best out of three. Start off one against one, winners continue to challenge each other tournament-style.



Knuckle Hop

Equipment: None

Stance and Start: From a push-up position place knuckles on floor, elbows tight at the side, not flared out.

Movement: The player lies face down on the floor in push up position with hands making fists, putting all the weight on the knuckles. Keeping legs and back straight and lifting the legs off the floor the player bounces forward on their fists. The player who goes the furthest distance wins.

With students, this works with mitts on in the snow; for a less painful variation indoors, you can do this with palms on the ground and just make it a palm hop.



Airplane

Equipment: none

Stance and Start: Form teams of 4. One Player lies on stomach with arms straight out at sides and feet firmly together. The other three place themselves around, one at each arm and one at the feet.

Movement: Player is lifted by three people, one holding the feet, and the other two on each arm. The player must remain rigid so that the body is raised 2-3 feet above the floor. As a good measure of height, the stomach should not touch the floor when the body sags. Competitor should keep the body as stiff as possible while being carried in this position for as far as possible.

Competition: Body must not sag. Shoulders should not drop below arms or bend at the elbow. The team that travels furthest in proper position wins.

For elementary students, a variation is to have the player being carried bend their arms and be carried either by their arms on the inside of the elbows or at the biceps.



Stick Jump

Equipment: Broom handle or hockey stick with no blade, preferably with marks every 5cm.

Stance and Start: With feet together, grab broom handle in overhand grip about the distance of shoulders apart.

Competition: Each jump is measured by the distance of grip on broom handle. If the jump is completed, move hands in together 5cm. This makes the jump harder. Hands keep moving together until hands join up and jump must go through the loop in arms. Two tries per grip.



Back Bend

Equipment: Broom handle or hockey stick with no blade.

Stance and Start: Standing, spread feet as far apart as you can. Feet must be in a straight line. Measure the distance from the armpit to the tip of the middle finger on the broom handle. Grip the broom handle on this spot with both hands on top of each other.

Movement: Bend backwards and touch the handle to the floor behind you. Return to starting position. Feet should remain on the floor in the same position. If successful, measure in decreasing distance from the thumb to the nose, wrist to the nose, elbow to top of head, then decrease every 5cm.

Competition: The player who can do the back bend with the shortest length of broom handle wins. If player reaches the floor with no more length of broom handle left, then player places a quarter on the ground behind them and has to bend back and pick it up as an extra challenge.



Internet sites for more games and videos:

Aqsarniit School Inuit Games Page

<http://www.athropolis.com/news-upload/11-data/index.htm>

Games of the North (Documentary)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tA-1r-cdao>

One World Classrooms virtual tour of an Arctic village

<http://www.oneworldclassrooms.org/travel/arctic/classroompackage/index.html>

Arctic Winter Games Official Website

<http://www.arcticwintergames.org/>

One Foot High Kick Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQufIbG8L2M>

Two Foot High Kick Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Kb9-1FZmQU>

Leg Wrestling Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igUfFemrem8&NR=1>

Alaskan High Kick Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmPuWmV_Rwk

Knucklehop Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-EgxF_5pYM

Ear Pull Video (not recommended for children - ouch!)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfvpKIKgFGk>

Throat Singing Podcast

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgb6BlCr-g>