

# A Game “Handed” Down



You have probably played the hand game without knowing who invented it. It's a guessing game. One player holds an object hidden in each hand. One of the objects has a special mark on it. Another player guesses which hand has the marked object.

Does that game sound familiar? The Spanish name for the hand game is *peón* [pay•ohn]. Native American names include *churchúrki* [choor•choor•kee] and *tinsok* [tin•sahk].

Different versions of the hand game have been popular for generations.

## Strategy

### Clarify Understanding

by using photographs, charts, and other graphics to help me understand what I'm reading.



Write notes on your own paper to tell how you used this strategy.

The hand game was probably first played by the Plains Indians. However, 81 different Native American groups have played this game. Most of them lived in the western two thirds of North America. In fact, many of these groups still have hand game teams that play each other at tournaments. The hand game was and is a fun way for groups of players to try to outsmart each other. Groups can compete even if they speak different languages. They communicate with **gestures**.

### The Rules of the Game

Two people can play the hand game. It can also be played by two teams with the same number of players. When teams play, the players stand or sit in rows about six feet apart. Players from each side take turns hiding the marked object and guessing its location. Long ago, the objects were often small animal bones, one plain and one painted. Some pairs of bones were hollow, while some

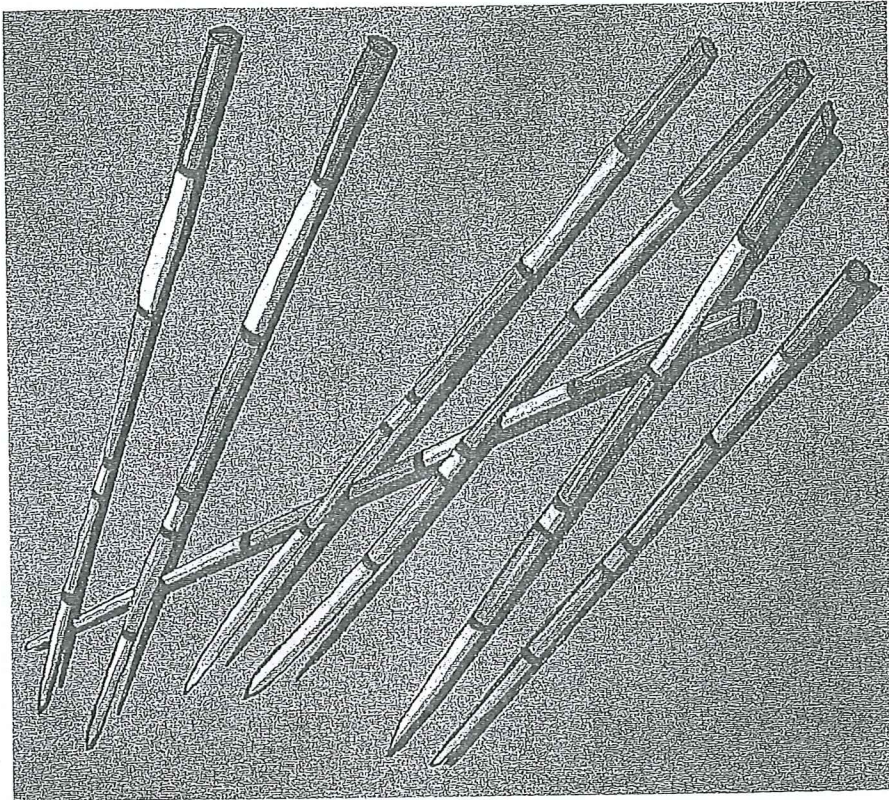


### Vo • cab • u • lar • y

**gestures** (jes•chuhrz)—hand movements that communicate meaning



Most children enjoy playing variations of the hand game.



Sometimes sets of counting sticks were handed down through families.

were solid. Sometimes one bone was marked by tying a leather strip around it. These bones were considered good luck for whoever owned them. They were passed from one **generation** to the next.

If a player correctly guesses the location of the marked object, the person or team gets a wooden counting stick. Anyone making an incorrect guess loses a stick. When one player wins all the sticks, the game ends. The winner may get a prize. Sometimes an **umpire** makes sure everyone plays fairly.

Some sets of counting sticks are elaborately carved or painted. Some of them are sharpened to a point on one end, so they can be stuck into the ground between the two teams or players. Long ago, each stick sometimes represented a horse. Players won and lost horses as they played. ●.....

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## Vo • cab • u • lar • y

### **generation**

(jen•uh•ray•shuhn)—each part of a family, such as all the brothers and sisters or all the grandparents

### **umpire (um•pyr)—**

a person who makes sure games are played fairly

## The Tricks of the Game

During the game, the player hiding the object often makes many hand movements to confuse the guesser. For example, one player might hold his hands above his head or behind his back. Another player might hide her hand movements under a blanket on her lap. The player or team usually sings while hiding the object, and someone plays a drum. The fast beat of the drum makes the game more exciting and helps confuse the guesser.

In some Native American groups long ago, only men were allowed to play the hand game. The women cheered them on and sang. In other groups, teams of women could play each other. Today women and men both play, but the drummer is usually still a man.

People watching these games often place bets on who is going to win. A game might last all day and all night. A winning team might

become not only famous but also rich.

Today, teams have colors, jackets, songs, and many supporters. Every year, tribal colleges and universities meet to hold different kinds of competitions. You can be sure they play the hand game.



Singing and drumming could be the entertainment—or they could be just the distraction needed to fool an opponent!

## Try Your Hand!

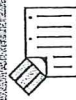
You and a friend can play the hand game. First, you must find two objects the same size, small enough to be hidden in your hand. Mark one of them. For example, you might gather two stones and use a marker to put a red spot on one of them. Make sure the objects are the same size. If one object is bigger than the other, the guesser will be able to tell which fist holds it.

## Hand Game for Two Players

The first player will pick up the two objects and put both hands behind his or her back. When this player shows his or her hands again, the guesser must point to the hand with the marked object. If the guesser is correct, he or she gets a point. Players take turns hiding the objects and guessing the location of the marked one. ●.....



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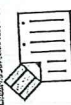
All you need to begin are two small objects—one plain and one marked.

The hand game is good for teams and for just two players.



## Strategy

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## Using Text Features

**Chart** Read the information in the chart. Demonstrate the hand signals for a partner. Play a game of tillikum.

## Hand Game for Teams

The teams sit facing each other. Both teams should have the same number of players. The teams can play the same way as described previously, with members of each team taking turns hiding and guessing.

In another version, the teams can play this way: The first player on one team will hide both objects in his or her hands. Then this player will pass one object to the next player on his or her team. The opposing team must guess whether the first player passed the marked object or kept it. If the team guesses correctly, it gets both objects and earns a point. Then the first player on the other team hides the objects and passes one on to a teammate.

## Tillikum

Native Americans in the Northwest played this hand game. *Tillikum* means "friend" in the Chinook language. Two players or two teams can play. These are the hand signals for playing tillikum:

**Earth** = right hand held out with palm facing down (as flat land)

**Water** = right hand held out with fingers and thumb hanging down (as falling water)

**Fire** = palm of right hand facing forward, with fingers and thumb pointing up (as flames of a fire)

Partners or teams stand facing each other, their right hands in fists. Someone says, "Go!" and the players raise their right fists to shoulder height three times, all together. Players can call "One, two, three" or "Til, li, kum." On "three" or "kum," players open their fists to make an Earth, Water, or Fire signal. This is how the scoring is done:

Earth drinks Water; Earth wins.  
Water puts out Fire; Water wins.  
Fire scorches Earth; Fire wins.

If teams are playing, each team leader must tell team members which hand signals to use before play begins. If players tie, the turn is played again. The first to win three rounds wins the game.