A close-up photograph of a child's hands holding a piece of dark, textured earth. The child's fingers are visible, and the earth is held between them. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color. The title 'Heartbeat of the Earth' is overlaid on the left side of the image in a large, orange, serif font.

Heartbeat of the Earth

*A Handbook on
Connecting Children
to Nature Through
Indigenous Teachings*

LAUNA PURCELL

Indigenous Games

Introduction

Indigenous people have used games throughout history. These games develop skills, promote connection, build physical health and strengthen balance, patience, hand-eye coordination and accuracy. Children learned the games from a young age and many games continued lifelong with Elders participating. Worldview was taught through games with inclusiveness, teamwork and trusting the outcome to the Creator. There were no gloating winners or angry losers, as the game's outcome was as it should be, as the Creator decided. With this viewpoint, games were used to resolve conflicts over bigger issues.

Most of our Indigenous games fell into three categories: skill, chance and physical (strength and endurance). Minimal equipment was required for the games, with the people using natural resources on hand. Games were played in all seasons and in the natural habitat.

Many games can work with only you and your child participating. Prepare your child for the games by reminding them that the intention is to connect with nature, gain skills and improve yourselves. The game's outcome is not as important as the process. Our culture values being a good person and respecting earth, family, community and ancestors much more than simply winning. Enjoy the games with a light heart and much joy.

Blindfold Detective

Supplies:

- » Tote bag
- » Blindfold (scarf, bandana or leg of tights)
- » Natural debris

Activity:

- » Gather various items throughout your nature walk and place them in the tote bag. Collect only items already on the ground. You might look for bark, stones, pinecones, leaves and seeds.
- » Find a comfortable spot to sit and blindfold your child. Let them know they are safe and will only be touching safe items.
- » Have your child explore each item through touch and smell. They may also want to scratch, shake or crinkle the items to explore sounds.
- » Ask leading questions: Does it smell familiar? Does it feel like something else? Can you describe the sound?
- » Your child may wish to gather a nature bag for you to explore too.
- » Remind your child how much of life we experience through our senses.

Stalk the Drum

Supplies:

- » Blindfold for each child (scarf, bandana or leg of tights)
- » Hand drum and drumstick

Indigenous people had to fine-tune their senses for safety and survival in nature. A hunter needed to quietly stalk his prey while being aware of threats to his safety. Being able to walk gently and listen carefully were important skills. This game works on both skills.

Explain that there are no winners or losers. We play to sharpen our senses.

Activity:

- » Blindfold the children.
- » Tell them to walk towards the sound of the drum, moving carefully so they do not get injured, and freeze when the drum stops.
- » The drummer changes position often to confuse the listeners.
- » When a child is tagged by the drummer, they take off their blindfold and move to the side.



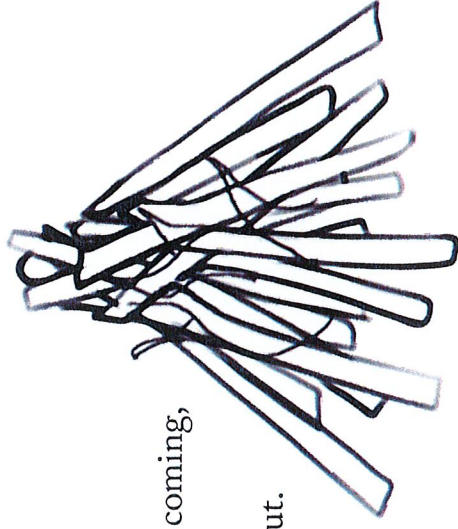
Fire Keeper

Supplies:

- » Blindfold (scarf, bandana or leg of tights)
- » Firewood or sticks

Activity:

- » One Leader is the Fire Keeper. The Fire Keeper is blindfolded then guards the firewood.
- » The children stand in a circle around the Fire Keeper.
- » Another Leader chooses a child by pointing at them.
- » The child tries to silently steal some firewood.
- » The Fire Keeper must listen carefully and when they hear someone coming, they point to them and that player is out.
- » The game ends when all firewood is stolen or when all players are out.



Deer Cliff Arrow

This game is similar to Rock Paper Scissors. The two players use different actions to represent each element: Deer, Cliff and Arrow. Play begins with both players saying, "Deer, cliff, arrow, shoot."

The rules are:

- » Arrow beats Deer.
- » Cliff beats Arrow.
- » Deer beats Cliff.

Actions:

- » Deer = antler hands
- » Cliff = both hands up in the stop position
- » Arrow = shooting a bow



Deer

Hunter

Supplies:

- » Three different sized hoops:
- » Large to represent moose (large game)
- » Medium for rabbit (medium game)
- » Small for duck (small game)
- » Arrows (sticks with feathers)

Safety:

- » Make sure all children are lined up before starting the game.
- » Explain that players must listen to the Leader for when to collect their arrows.
- » Explain that players must return safely back to the line before the next roll.

Activity:

- » The Leader stands on the side, yells, “Ready, set, aim,” and on “aim” they roll the largest hoop in a line in front of the children.
- » Children aim their arrows trying to throw them through the hoop.
- » On the Leader’s command, the children collect their arrows.
- » Repeat using the other sized hoops.



Run and Scream

What child wouldn't want to play a game called Run and Scream? While this game looks like children simply having noisy fun, it actually teaches endurance and builds lung capacity. In the past, children needed to build their endurance for long hunting and paddling journeys.

Activity:

- » Mark a line on the ground to begin.
- » Take a deep breath.
- » Children run in a straight line as fast as possible while screaming until they run out of breath, then stop.
- » Mark the spot reached when breath ran out.
- » Children repeat the Run and Scream, trying to beat their personal best.

Métis Map-Making

The Métis Map-Making game encouraged exploring the environment while working on navigational skills.

Activity:

- » Divide the children into two teams.
- » Each team chooses a team captain.
- » One team hides together and the team captain draws a map for the opposing team.
- » The opposing team uses the map to find the team that is hiding.
- » With each turn, pick a new team captain so that each child has the opportunity to make a map.
- » Remind children to walk gently in the natural environment and not crush any plants.

Note: This game can be adapted for a parent and child to play by hiding an object rather than having an entire team hide.