

# Blackfoot Ways

With Mary Ellen Little Mustache

2022



The Blackfoot Confederacy makes up four indigenous nations: Kainai (Blood), and Siksika (Blackfoot), and Piikani (Northern and Southern Piegan). The land of the Blackfoot people is comprised of an area south to Northern Montana, as far west to British Columbia, north to in Alberta and east in Saskatchewan.

## Buffalo hide and Blackfoot furniture



The Blackfoot Confederacy was a buffalo hunting culture. Buffalo was a common source of meat, while the hides and tans were used for fur and clothing. The sinew, bones, and dung were used for clothing, shelter, decorations, tools, and fuel.

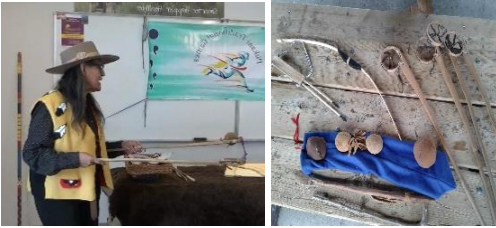
The item of wood shown in the photograph on the buffalo hide is a piece of furniture made of willows that were gathered along the river. For each stick we had to look at the tree to find straight branches. Then we had to cut them to size. It would be placed upon a tripod for people to sit on with their backs against the narrow portion and sitting on the wider portion. It also became a divider in our tipi. The space inside the tripod would be used as a closet.

Our tipis were very well organized and neat. Sometimes we would get our tipi poles in Medicine Hat and Cypress Hills because they were good straight poles. When we're putting up a tipi, we had to bore holes, take off the hair from the buffalo hide, and sew at least 15 hides together. A wealthy person would have 15 hides together. A poor person would have 8 or 9 hides. They would have fewer hides for their tipi's. It was constant work; from the time you wake up in the morning to the time you go to sleep at night.



Everybody knows their place, and everybody must have ultimate respect for each other and their responsibilities. My grandchildren think whatever I have is theirs, which is absolutely true. It gives them that sense of ownership so if I am not there it is theirs to protect.

## Lakota Lacrosse Sticks



These are Lakota Lacrosse Sticks. I traded one moose hide for four of these sticks that was made by my Lakota friend.

The girl's team in our recent tournament sleep with their sticks and carry them everywhere.

There are some tribes that play with two rackets at the same time.

## Making indigenous Games

When we make traditional games, we are very conscious about the importance of each tree before harvesting it to make game equipment. I usually give an offering of tobacco to the tree, but when I don't have tobacco, I sing. My song expresses my thankfulness in the best way I know how.



## Ring the Stick



After a series of bends and trims and bending, a ring is made and can be attached to a stick with sinew to make a ring on the stick for the game "Ring on the Stick".

## Shinney



The game "Shinney" is the grandfather of hockey. The Blackfoot people make their goals from willow branches bent over and tied together in the form of a goal.

The ball is placed in the center of the playing teams who use their sticks, or feet, to guide the ball into the opponents' goal.

There are always songs sung during sporting events and games.



## Playing with Double Ball



The double ball is made up of two oblong balls stuffed into buffalo hair or deer hair and connected by a long thong.

Players try to ring the double ball with their sticks.

Traditionally, double ball was called the “Throwing Game” by two large bands who try to throw the ball over their opponents’ pole.

## Run and Scream

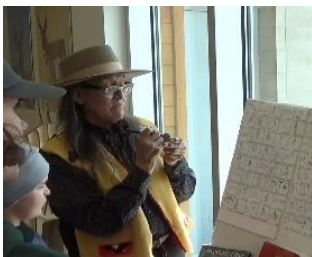
The “Run and Scream” game is a Blackfoot game devised for the purpose of enhancing and maintaining endurance.

These skills were necessary for life skills, such as hunting.

Arduous competitions gave power and healing to the people.



## Traditional Stories



Our tipis had designs on them that told stories. Each tipi would have their own story and every tribe would have different stories.

Stories were etched on rock to tell tribe member events that happened in order of its occurrence. The language consisted of symbols and images to convey the meaning of the stories.



Historically, stories were always told as the truth, so as not to deceive any members of the tribe. Storytellers today tell stories as they were passed on to them as they wish the stories to be passed onto others.



## Rock in the Fist



The game sets were precious to our people. We had to make all of the wraps from hide. Some would put decorative carvings on their sticks to identify them.

Teams decide who is going to begin hiding the rock. The rock is hidden in one of the players fists behind their back.

Once hidden, players “show” their fists for their opponent to guess which hand the rock is in. Sticks are used to keep score. The winner is the player who won all three sticks back from their opponent.

Mary Ellen is demonstrating the Blackfoot signal for guessing in “Rock in the Fist”.

Her thumb is pointed one direction which means she is guessing the rock to be in the hand of the opposite direction.



## The Give Away Blanket



The game, “Rock in the “Fist is a game of generosity and thankfulness.

Prior to the game, each player would place small object as a gift in the blanket for the end of the game.

The winner of the game chooses a gift (usually nice) for their competitor from the blanket.

Other players carry the blanket to players to give away a gift and each person gives back a generous “thank you”.

The last item in the blanket is for the winner.





Mary Ellen Little Mustache is from the Northern Piegan (Piikani) people in Brocket, as well as from the Southern Piegan Piikani people in northern Montana.

She is an elder and a member of the International Traditional Games Society who enjoys bringing Blackfoot history to everyone in our region.

More information can be found at ([Blackfoot-Confederacy-History-and-Culture-.pdf](http://Blackfoot-Confederacy-History-and-Culture-.pdf) ([aggp.ca](http://aggp.ca))), and the International Traditional Games Society.

