

# SNOW SNAKES



## PIKSIKSIINAA (BIK-SEEK-SINAA)

*“Snow snake dates back more than 500 years and was originally a form of communication between villages. Over the years and long winters, throwing ‘snow snakes’ developed into a competitive sport between different communities after the men returned from the annual hunt” (Saucier, 2020).*



*The Dene community made their snakes from birch or willow sticks into the form of a spear or arrow with a length of up to 1.2m. (Saucier, 2020).*

*Among the numerous tribes that played this game, the snow snakes would vary in shape and length, but were always in the shape of a dart or javelin.*

*Snow snakes were often a long polished rod made to glide on the snow or ice. Another type was a bone slider, using a piece of bone or horn and made to slide along the ground. Javelins were also used having a feather or horn at the tip and made to slide along the ground or fly through the air to strike the ground. Some of the rods would be made up to 10 feet in length. Snow snakes were distinctly a man’s game, although women also played (Culin, 1975).*

*As a game, snow snakes was traditionally played in the winter. The surface of the snow would have to be prepared in the form of an alley or a high wall with a carved out trough to throw the spears down (Onieda Indian Nation, 2021). Alternatively, the Dene would make an alley about 100 m. in the snow with walls along the side. Players run and hop from the run-up line to the throwing line with the javelin in a proper grasp before throwing (Dene Games). Rules varied among tribes, but the winner was the one with the longest throw.*

### References

*Saucier, J. (2020). Indigenous ames for Children. From Indigenous Communities Across Canada. Retrieved online from [www.HIGHFIVE.org](http://www.HIGHFIVE.org).*

*Culinn, S. (1975). Games of the North American Indians. (pg 395). Dover Publications: New York.*

*Oneida Indian Nation. Retrieved online 2021 from: [Snow Snake: Traditional Winter Game of the Haudenosaunee – Oneida Indian Nation](#).*

*Dene Games. Retrieved online 2021 from [www.denegames.ca](http://www.denegames.ca).*

**Endurance, good dexterity and motor coordination  
are fundamental movements that enhance the  
development of executive functions.**

- ◆ *The action of an overarm throw with hopping and balancing a javelin to throw has been considered part of fundamental movement skills that are prerequisites to learning various skills necessary to play other sports and activities. These fundamental skills enhances overall development when begun in childhood in addition to enhancing their academic achievement (de Waal, 2019).*
- ◆ *Activities and games of jumping, balancing and throwing that require the use of whole body coordination of movements are believed to enhance the development of behavioral inhibition and impulse-reflective cognition beginning in children (Rosey, Keller & Golomer, 2010).*
- ◆ *Learning and practicing fundamental movement skills into adolescence have been found to increase fitness levels and endurance with a positive impact on development of intense physical activity necessary for adult training (Jaakkola, Yli-Piipari, Houtari, Watt & Liukkonen, 2016).*

Snow Snakes made from the pine  
tree by Blackfoot Elder Mary  
Ellen Little Mustache



#### References

de Waal, E. (2019). *Fundamental movement skills and academic performance of 5- to 6- year old pre schoolers. Early Childhood Education Journal, 47 (4): 455-464.*

Rosey, F., Keller, J., & Golomer, E. (2010). *Impulsive-reflective attitude, behavioral inhibition and motor skills: Are they linked? International Journal of Behavioral Development, 34 (6): 511- 520.*

Jaakkola, T., Yli-Piipari, S., Houtari, P., Watt, A., & Liukkonen, J. (2016). *Fundamental movement skills and physical fitness as predictors of physical activity: A 6-year follow-up study. Scaninavian Journal of Medicine Science & Sports, 26: 74-81.*