



History @ Home!

Cherokee Games & the Cherokee Butterbean Game

Adapted from instructions provided by the Museum of the Cherokee Indian

<https://www.cherokeemuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/INFORMATION-PACKET-pdf.pdf?x90513>

Designed for Grades K-2

Activity Snapshot: Students will learn about Cherokee sports and games, then learn to play the Cherokee butterbean game.

Duration: 30 minutes for introduction and tray making. One round of the butterbean game can take 10 to 15 minutes.

Materials needed for the game:

- A tray for tossing butterbeans (instructions included)
- Dried butterbeans, colored black on one side with a marker.
- Corn kernels or other counting objects to keep score
- Surface or extra trays for corn kernels when keeping score.

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Gain an appreciation for Cherokee culture by learning about Cherokee games, including sports games and the butterbean game.
2. Understand how one modern day sport is adapted from a traditional Native game, and compare and contrast the two sports as they are played today.
3. Practice teamwork by creating basket trays, taking turns playing the butterbean game, and counting corn kernels.
4. Exercise their counting skills, appropriate to grade level.
5. Exercise following directions by learning the rules of the butterbean game.

North Carolina Standards Correlations and Key Terminology

Kindergarten

Mathematics

NC.K.CC Count to tell the number of objects

.5 Count to answer “How many?” in the following situations:

- Given a number from 1–20, count out that many objects.
- Given up to 20 objects, name the next successive number when an object is added, recognizing the quantity is one more/greater.
- Given 20 objects arranged in a line, a rectangular array, and a circle, identify how many.
- Given 10 objects in a scattered arrangement, identify how many.

.6 Identify whether the number of objects, within 10, in one group is greater than, less than, or equal to the number of objects in another group, by using matching and counting strategies

Social Studies

NC.K.C.1 Understand how individuals are similar and different.

.1 Explain similarity in self and others.

.2 Explain the elements of culture (how people speak, how people dress, foods they eat, etc.).

1st Grade

Mathematics

NC.1.OA Represent and Solve Problems

.1 Represent and solve addition and subtraction word problems, within 20, with unknowns, by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem, when solving:

- Add to/Take from-Change Unknown
- Put together/Take Apart-Addend Unknown
- Compare-Difference Unknown

NC.1.OA Add and subtract within 20

.6 Add and subtract, within 20, using strategies such as:

- Counting on
- Making ten
- Decomposing a number leading to a ten

.9 Demonstrate fluency with addition and subtraction within 10

Social Studies

NC.1.C.1 Understand the diversity of people in the local community.

.1 Compare the languages, traditions, and holidays of various cultures.

2nd Grade

Mathematics

NC.2.OA Work with equal groups

.3 Determine whether a group of objects, within 20, has an odd or even number of members by:

- Pairing objects, then counting them by 2s.
- Determining whether objects can be placed into two equal groups.

.4 Use addition to find the total number of objects arranged in rectangular arrays with up to 5 rows and up to 5 columns; write an equation to express the total as a sum of equal addends.

Social Studies

NC.2.C.1 Understand how various cultures influence communities.

.1 Explain how artistic expressions of diverse cultures contribute to the community (stories, art, music, food, etc.).

Key Terminology

- **Adapt** - to change or tailor something to fit, humans change their environment or their way of doing something to fit their current needs or goals.
- **Community** - a group of people living together.
- **Cultural groups** - A group of people who share one or more unique characteristics such as race, national origin, ethnicity, or religion.
- **Cultural values** - the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.

- **Diversity:** Having or being composed of a variety of different elements i.e. cultural and ethnic background, race, gender values and beliefs, and socioeconomic status.

Explaining about the game:

1. Explain that today, the students are going to learn about a game that Cherokee people have been playing for a very long time. This game will help the students practice their counting skills and learn about Cherokee culture.
2. Connecting Question: Ask the students what kinds of games they like to play. The students might name board games, video games, sports games, or games they play on phone apps. Reflect that the students play many different kinds of games- Some are games where they use their bodies to run and catch balls, others are games that ask the students to exercise their minds.
3. Say that, just like the students, Cherokee people have played many different kinds of games for a long time. One example is chunky.
 - a. Explain that chunky was a competitive game played by men. A player would roll a disc-shaped stone across the ground, and other players would throw spears in an attempt to land the spear as close to the stopped stone as possible. A little bit like the game of horseshoes, but with a moving target!
 - b. Show or pass around the painting of the Mandan men playing chunky (by artist George Catlin, c1832-33). Point out the spears that the men are using, and the disc-ball that is rolling away in the right side of the image. Explain that many different Native American communities enjoyed playing chunky, not just the Cherokee, and this picture shows a people called the Mandan (a Great Plains tribe) playing the game.
 - c. [If you wish you can share this 10 second YouTube clip of Cherokee men playing Chunky.](#)
4. Explain that another game the Cherokee and many Native people have enjoyed playing is stickball. Stickball, like football or soccer, involves two teams trying to get a ball to a goal to score points. Today, usually the goal is a pole in the middle of a field, and the players try to hit the pole with the ball. Stickball is a contact sport and involves a lot of tackling, similar to football.
 - a. Pass around a picture of members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee playing a game of stickball.
 - b. [If you wish, you can share this video showing Oklahoma Band Cherokee youth playing stickball.](#) A good demonstrative clip runs from 01:10 - 01:48. You can explain that historically, only men have been allowed to play stickball. But today, in some places, women are allowed to play as well (like in the video).
5. Connection with lacrosse: Explain that people developed the modern-day game of lacrosse from stickball. Explain that there are many similarities and differences between the games as they are played today.
 - a. One similarity between the two games is that players use sticks with nets to carry and throw the ball.
 - b. One difference is that in stickball, players often (but not always) use two sticks-one in each hand- but in lacrosse, each player carries just one stick.

- c. Another difference is that lacrosse players try to get the ball into a netted goal, whereas in modern-day stickball, the players try to hit a pole in the center of the field.
- d. Pass around the picture of Maryland and Ohio State University students playing lacrosse (courtesy Jared Bernhardt/Washington Post). Compare the pictures of the Cherokee youth playing stickball with the picture of the lacrosse players. Ask the students if they can find any other differences or similarities based on the pictures. Some answers might be that the sticks are shaped differently or that the lacrosse players use padding and helmets while the stickball players do not.

Cherokee Butterbean Game

1. Connecting Question: Has anyone played games that involve counting things? Maybe Monopoly? What about games in which keeping score is important? Sports like football and soccer are good examples.
2. Explain that the students are going to learn to play a Cherokee game called the Butterbean Game that will help them exercise their minds and use their counting skills.
3. Explain that, although many Cherokee games like chunky and stickball are competitive, the Butterbean Game is more of a fun, social game. Cherokee men, women, and children have played the game for recreation for hundreds of years.
4. Explain that the game can be played one-on-one or in teams. Six split butterbeans are placed in a flat basket and then tossed into the air. How they landed in the basket determines the score, which is tallied with corn kernels.

TO PLAY:

Grouping students in a classroom:

The game can be played by two individuals playing against each other, with the other two in the group keeping score, or it can be played by having two teams of two compete against each other.

Task 1: Making basket trays for tossing the butter beans (more if needed for keeping score with corn kernels).

Only one tray is needed per group of players.

1. Print the guide from this packet on an 8.5 x 11 piece of paper.
2. Fold and crease the paper along all of the lines- dotted and undotted.
3. Cut the dotted lines with scissors.
4. Use tape or glue to lap the new “tags” over the edges, making a tray.

Task 2: Preparing the corn for counters

1. Shell out at least fifty corn kernels for each group of players.
2. Divide into two groups of twenty-five kernels for keeping score.

Task 3: Preparing the beans for play

1. Take six dried butterbeans per group and place them in the basket.

Game Rules:

Each person (or team) takes a turn flipping the basket.

Each person or team gets one toss during each turn.

(Teachers may want to write the scoring rules on a board)

- All light sides = six points
- All dark sides = four points
- Five on one color + one of another color = two points
- Other combinations: no points
- The first person or team to get 24 points, wins. *Teachers can adapt the number of points needed to win, based on grade level and counting skills of students.

Counting: Depending on the age of students, look at the mathematics curriculum standards above and have students use counting strategies appropriate to their grade level.

Cherokee Butterbean Game—Related Facts

Cherokee values:

1. In Cherokee culture women farmed while men hunted, fished, and made war. Both men's and women's activities were valued, and both men and women were equally respected.
2. Children learned by experience. They imitated what adults did and also helped with chores until they became adults themselves.
3. Children also learned by hearing stories from their elders—stories about plants and animals, about history, and about magical beings. Often, these stories had a moral that taught the right way to act: don't brag about yourself; be slow to get angry; be concerned about other people.
4. Cherokee culture was democratic. Each village had a townhouse (also called a council house) that was big enough to hold everyone from the village: men, women, children, and old people. Everyone participated in discussions of important decisions, and everyone had to agree before a decision was made. This is called democracy by consensus.

Cherokee food:

1. People in the southern Appalachians began semi-cultivating plants nearly ten thousand years ago. The earliest cultivated plants were: sunflowers, squash, gourds, may grass, and chenopodium (Today we call this edible wild plant, chenopodium, a weed and know it as goosefoot or lamb's quarters.)
2. Cherokee people began growing a form of corn two thousand years ago. By about a thousand years ago, or 1000 AD, they were growing corn and beans, as we know them today.

3. Corn, beans, and squash was always grown together and was known as the “Three Sisters.” Beans restore nitrogen to the soil while corn depletes nitrogen. The vines of the beans and squash twined up the cornstalks. When corn and beans are eaten together, they provide complete proteins and amino acids for our diet.

4. Gourd birdhouses were hung on poles around fields and gardens so that purple martins would nest there and eat insects that would otherwise attack the crops. Old women also sat on platforms and watched the fields to keep away raccoons, bears, and other animals.

5. Each Cherokee family had its own fields, but also helped cultivate a village plot. Each family had their own storehouse for food for the winter. But each family also contributed to the village storehouse, which was used for people who were old or sick, for visitors, and for emergencies.

6. Corn was so important to the Cherokee that they had important celebrations and ceremonies called “Green Corn Festivals.” The first of these was held in August, before the sweet corn was ready to eat. The last was held in October or November, when the field corn was ready to be picked. At these ceremonies, people purified themselves physically and spiritually before feasting together. At this time, people got married and divorced. All old scores were settled and everyone started a new year together.

7. The Cherokee women used a form of science called “empirical science” to observe plants and their growing habits. They created several varieties each of corn, beans, and squash, and Cherokee people still grow these heirloom varieties today.







