

# STICK DICE



## Materials:

- Stick dice sets (6 sticks per child)
- Markers (you provide)
- Rubber bands (you provide - optional)
- Edible prizes OR face paint (optional)
- Toothpicks for counter sticks (optional)

Dice is a gambling game which was a favorite of many Native American tribes. Several California tribes made their dice from sticks. In this activity, a sample round is played with the "master" set of stick dice; and then each participant can make their own set of stick dice for gambling. If time permits, you can have the group play a game as individuals or in teams.

## Procedure: To Make Stick Dice

1. Explain that when decorating sticks, only ONE SIDE of each stick is colored and the other side must remain blank.
2. Give each child 6 tongue depressors.
3. The children color their stick dice, using Native American designs or designs they can make up themselves.
4. Have the children put their initials on each stick so that they don't get mixed up during play (these can be on the back sides).
5. If available, provide a rubber band to keep each child's set together.

## Procedure: To Play

1. Explain that these stick dice have only two sides whereas modern cube dice have 6. On these, one side is painted (decorated), and the other is not.
2. "Throwing" the sticks is simply dropping them from some height either onto the ground or a table. Once the sticks land, count the sticks that are face up and face down. There are 3 ways to get a winning throw: 1) All 6 sticks landing face up. 2) All landing face down. 3) 3 up and 3 down. All other combinations are not winners.
3. Next, throw the dice yourself, with the chant: "**Hey, chin-a-mah, Ho chin-a-mah, Hoya, Hoya, Hey!**"
4. Teach the group how to say the chant by letting them repeat it after you.
5. Have each child throw their own dice while everyone 'chants' together.
6. A winning throw can get a prize: a pine nut, a feather, a stripe of paint on the winner's face or hand or anything else "Native American."

**Option:** A fun variation of this initial round of play is to

## ADDITIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN GAMES ACTIVITIES

1. **Play a guessing game.** Have two different colored game pieces that you can hold in the palm of your hand (checkers work well). Put one in each hand and hold your hands behind your back. See if your partner can guess which hand holds which color.
2. **Make some kickballs the Native American way.** Sew up a ball-shaped covering using a chamois cloth (car-polishing cloth). Fill the ball with dried moss, which can be purchased at a plant store. Use the ball for relay races (the native version included rigorous cross-country routes).
3. **Figure out the odds on the stick-dice game.** Have the children keep track of how many times the sticks come up in various configurations. Then have them determine the

change the chant slightly. Explain to the group that the Native Americans were chanting to their gods, asking them to influence the outcome of the throw. The Native Americans didn't believe in luck; they felt that their destiny was determined by supernatural forces. Each child will determine how to best influence his chances at a winning throw. Say or sing the chant loudly or softly; in a high, squeaky voice or a low deep voice; or make up something silly, like a telephone operator or an underwater diver. As children take turns, let them decide what type of voice they want to use. Everybody chants together, as this will bring more "luck" to the player and the group as a whole (and helps everyone learn the chant).

## Group Game Option:

1. Have all of the children sit in a circle.
2. Each child throws his set of dice at the same time.
3. Every winning throw receives a toothpick ("counter stick").
4. At the end of several throws, the one with the most counter sticks is the grand winner. Prizes are optional.

## Team Game Option:

1. Divide the children into two teams.
2. Have the teams sit in lines facing each other.
3. Have each team alternately throw their dice, keeping a count of the winning throws on each team.
4. Each team watches the other team's throws (this eliminates cheating).
5. Count at the end to see which team had the most wins.

**Additional Information:** The Native Americans played this game in pairs. They would start with ten counter sticks. Three sticks up and three down would win one counter stick; all up or down would win two. Once the counters were all won, the players would win them from each other. The two would keep playing until one of them had won all of the counter sticks.

(4, 16)



percentage of time each type of throw is seen (i.e., 6-0, 5-1, 4-2, and 3-3). A good math exercise for older kids.

4. **Investigate Native American art forms.** Make sand paintings, petroglyphs and pictographs using signs and symbols from the Native Americans.
5. **Music from long ago.** Listen to some Native American music and learn some ceremonial dances of some of the tribes. You can also make costumes and instruments to complete the fun. (5, 6)
6. **Native American Crafts.** Learn about other Native American crafts, such as pottery, basketry, toy-making, jewelry making, weaponry, etc. Explore different techniques and materials for each of these crafts. (5, 6)