LESSON PLAN — JUST FOR FUN —GAMBLING

CHORIS - GAMBLING IN CALIFORNIA

Tribes enjoyed games of many kinds. Some were based on skills and others just on luck. The stick game was a common favorite, where a stick or bone is passed from hand to hand on a team (*alewsa* in Chumash). The other team has to guess which hand it is in, kind of like the game played with a 3 cups and a pea. These could be played for fun or serious gambling. Many tribes in California had similar gambling games and probably had a good time contesting fortune when they met. Men and women might gamble away valued possessions in the heat of competition.

This 1816 painting by Louis Choris may show Ohlone people playing the staves game - where split elderberry branches are thrown — kind of like dice. The gambling probably irritated the padres who tried to ban it. Ohlone women were reputed to be particularly skilled at gambling. A wide variety of two sided dice games were also played around the state.

Many other types of games were also played and enjoyed. The hoop game was very common and involved trying to throw a spear through a rolling hoop. No doubt archery and spear throwing were also turned into competitions to the delight of participants and spectators. Gambling might add spice to the game. Young boys played a game similar to field hockey called shinny. Others had ball and stick games. The Miwok women played with a soft ball and their seed beaters.

Try to recreate and play some native games. Anthropologist A.L. Kroeber prepared a very good paper on native California games and you can read it on-line.
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