



Lahal Game

Introduction

This lesson uses Lahal, a traditional Indigenous gambling game featuring sticks, bones and songs, to explore attitudes and ideas related to gambling. Gambling was a prominent feature of nearly all games played by many different First Peoples across the Pacific Northwest. Gambling games became common ways to engage with others in the community and with peoples across territorial boundaries in the exchange of goods, information and even lands and people. Lahal has a complex history and was played by many different groups in the area. In the Coast Salish tradition the Creator gave the stick game to humanity at the beginning of time as a way to settle disputes, as an alternative to war.

Lahal games were usually accompanied by drumming and singing used to boost the morale of one's team and to distract the opposing players' attention. The Lahal songs can be seen as entreaties for spiritual assistance in the game. The games were played with serious attention to winning but were also joyous affairs associated with celebration.

During the early encounter with colonial authorities and the suppression of Indigenous cultural practices, many of the traditional games were lost. Lahal almost disappeared. During the same period, European attitudes toward gambling were in flux. Social gambling, in which players bet against each other, had been around for centuries. But commercial gambling emerged as a new economic activity, and towns competed to attract gamblers and their money. The social disruptions caused at the gambling tables, among other considerations, led to the suppression of gambling in various jurisdictions. All of this had some influence on how gambling was being viewed in North America.

But today, Lahal has returned, although the rules and practices have somewhat changed over the years. It is played in the Chilcotin region and other places at funerals and celebrations, helping younger generations of Indigenous people remain connected to some of their culture and language through the songs.

Instructional strategies

1. Encourage students to reflect on their assumptions about gambling sparked by questions such as those below. You might ask them to record their answers on paper or facilitate a class discussion.
 - a. Most of us have played games (such as board games, card games, etc.) and maybe even engaged in gambling. What is the difference between playing games and gambling? Discuss.
 - b. When you think of gambling, what comes to mind? Finish the following sentence: Gambling is ...
 - c. Why are certain games framed as gambling? How does the label 'gambling' impact how you think of that game?
 - d. What assumptions do you have about people who gamble? Where do these assumptions come from?
 - e. What is the appeal of gambling? Why do some people have a strong urge to gamble?
2. Watch the video [Lahal: A Close Look at the Bone Game](#) with the class and facilitate a class discussion (or have

Note to teachers:

You might suggest students do further research on Lahal, gambling laws and attitudes in European, Indigenous and Canadian societies and the history of gambling as further preparation for the discussions in #2.

If so, remind them to treat all sources critically. That is, to regard statements as the views of the authors/speakers and to ask about what each author/speaker is basing those views on.

students discuss in groups) on one or both of the following themes related to gambling and the video using questions such as those provided.

Culture and gambling

- a. What role did gambling games like Lahal play in the traditional cultures of First Nations in the Pacific Northwest? What role does it play in their cultures today? In what ways are the roles similar or different?
- b. Specifically, what benefits did these gambling games provide in the past? What benefits does Lahal bring today? Are there any risks involved in gambling games like Lahal? If so, what?
- c. If something is “cultural,” does that mean it is good? Consider examples of cultural practices within different groups of people as you reflect on and explain your ideas.

The ethics of gambling

- a. In the video, former Chief Roger Williams says that during the residential school period, the government said that “Lahal is a bad game, it’s gambling. When you gamble, it’s evil.” Why might the government at that time have suggested gambling was “evil”?
- b. Why, do you think, gambling has been made illegal at certain times and places and regulated and taxed at other times and places?
- c. If something is illegal, is it bad? If something is legal, is it good? Explain.
- d. Is it possible for gambling to be both good and bad? If so, suggest conditions under which it might be good and those under which it might be bad.
- e. What, in your opinion, is the responsibility of leaders and governments with respect to gambling? Explain.
- f. What, in your opinion, is the responsibility of an ethical person with respect to gambling? Explain.

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- Every human society appears to have accepted gambling, legal or otherwise, in some form or another
- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling
- Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples’ principles of learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions

- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story

Social Studies 10

Big ideas

- Global and regional conflicts have been a powerful force in shaping our contemporary world and identities
- Worldviews lead to different perspectives and ideas about developments in Canadian society
- Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups during this period (continuity and change)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)
- Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond (ethical judgment)

Social Studies – BC First Peoples 11

Big ideas

- The identities, worldviews, and language of BC First Peoples are renewed, sustained, and transformed through their connection to the land
- The impact of contact and colonialism continues to affect the political, social, and economic lives of BC First Peoples
- Cultural expressions convey the richness, diversity, and resiliency of BC First Peoples
- Through self-governance, leadership, and self-determination, BC First Peoples challenge and resist Canada's ongoing colonialism

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; listen to the oral traditions of Elders and other local knowledge holders; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Use holistic, experiential, reflective, and relational experiences to better understand connectedness and the reciprocal relationship of First Peoples and the sense of place
- Recognize the consequences of our actions (cause and consequence)
- Assess and compare the significance of the interconnections between people, events, and developments at a particular time and place, and determine what they reveal about issues in the past and present (significance)
- Ask questions and corroborate inferences of Elders and other local knowledge keepers through oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, memory, history, and story (evidence)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups in different time periods and places (continuity and change)

- Determine and assess the long- and-short term causes and consequences, and the intended and unintended consequences, of an event, decision, or development (cause and consequence)
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, and events, and distinguish between worldviews of today and the past (perspective)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical claims in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
- Make reasoned ethical claims about actions in the past and present after considering the context and values of the times (ethical judgment)

Social Studies – Comparative Cultures 11

Big ideas

- Understanding the diversity and complexity of cultural expressions in one culture enhances our understanding of other cultures
- Value systems and belief systems shape the structures of power and authority within a culture.

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess and compare the significance of cultural expressions at particular times and places (historical significance)
- Analyze continuities and changes in diverse cultures at different times and places (continuity and change)
- Assess the development and impact of the thought, artistic expressions, power and authority, and technological adaptations of diverse cultures (cause and consequence)
- Explain different perspectives on past and present cultures (perspective)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)