

## Yodigo – Inuit StoryBones



Blanket toss game played with a seal skin

Inuit have played games since the earliest camp and community life. These include games of physical strength, agility, and endurance, as well as quieter indoor games. Games teach skills include co-operation, fine motor co-ordination, and attention, as well as being entertaining.



Inuit family bone carving in Greenland

Some popular games of skill include those using string or small bone pieces, such as *Niortut*, a game similar to darts. *Ajagak* involves trying to hook a bone piece with holes using a small bone spear. You can watch an online video of how to make a bone and stick game of your own at <http://icor.ottawainuitchildrens.com/node/23>.



<http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca>

These quieter indoor games helped to pass on **social knowledge, legends and stories**. *Ajagak* is sometimes played to tell a story. Two or more players flip the bone until it is speared 5 times. This represents first 5 days of the *hunt*. The 6th flip represents a *caribou kill*. They continue until 10 caribou have been killed. When the hunter gets 10, he is supposed to *bury them (cache)*, which requires 10 more flips of the game, each representing cache.



Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk describes *Inugaktuuk*, a story bones game in her novel *Sanaaq*:



<http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca>

"I'm collecting my little bones!" said Qumaq. "We're each going to do that, ai! Akutsiaq! We'll play a game of pulling bones out of a mitten, by using a sinew with a noose at the end!"

After eating her rear flipper, Qumaq saved the following little bones: a *qimminguat*, *arnanguat*, an *iglitikallak*, a *paannguaq*, a *natsinguaq*, a *qajuuttalutuq*, a *sirpalutuq*, an *illiti*, an *utsuluttuq*, and an *angutinnguaq*...They would now play the bone game.

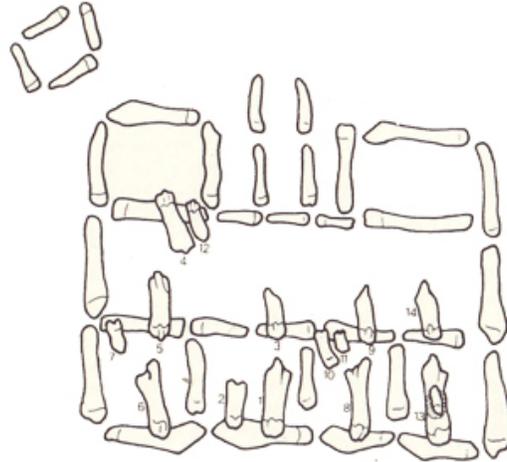
"Akutsiaq!" said Qumaq. "Use the sinew noose to pull some little bones out of the mitten ai!"



Mayoreak Ashoona *Inugaktuuk*

...They each took turns...With their little bones, they each made the outline of a snow house and a meat cache. Qumaq tried to break into

Akutsiaq's meat cache while Akutsiaq's pawn was asleep...the two pawns were now going to fight each other. They were tossed into the air and the one that fell convex side down was the loser...That was the bone game.



In inland parts of Nunavut caribou bones can be used. In another version of the game, each bone shape represents a certain member of the family, such as mother, child, grandfather, dog, etc. The object of the game is to get a complete family unit before your competitor. This was also an opportunity to tell stories, and to address conflict in the form of a story.



William Noah *Skeleton Caribou*



This **collective** way of **telling stories, addressing conflict, and managing distress** speaks to one of the traditional sources of **individual and community resilience**. Storytelling was more than just entertainment. It involved the passing on of knowledge and **a way of being** among the family group, and **between generations**; and these benefits would be **internalized** to become a source of **strength** for individuals.



Kenojuak Ashevak *Storytelling of Ravens*, 2005