Ohlone Stave Game

The Ohlone people played many different types of games. They played field games, guessing games, and games of luck and chance, just as are played today. Ohlone descendants alive today still play some of these games as a way of connecting with others. The game you are going to learn today is called the Stave Game or the Stick Game. Stave means something that is “2 sided”. Today you will have the chance to learn the game and create your own set of sticks to play with.

(Two carved staves)

This game is an Ohlone game of chance. It is played with six sticks, sometimes made from Elderberry or Willow. The sticks are small sections of branches cut in half with one side decorated with a burned-in design or color and one side left plain. Sometimes both sides are left plain, and sides are determined based on if it the rounded or flat side of the stick is up. A set consists of 6 staves and 10 counter sticks (to keep score). The object of the game is to win all of the 10 counter sticks.

Instructions on how to play:

Rules of the game (one version):

1. Place all 10 counter sticks in the middle
2. One player takes all six staves in their hands and tosses onto the playing field.
3. If staves land all up or all down, the player or team gets two points (takes two counter sticks from the middle) and another turn.
4. If the staves land three up and three down, the player or team gets one point (take one counter stick from the middle) and another turn.
5. If they land any other way, the player or team gets no points and the staves go to the next player.
6. Counting sticks are used for keeping score, one stick for each point. The player or team who wins all the sticks wins the game.
How to make your own set:

Today we invite you to make your own sticks to play the game.

We recommend using popsicle sticks for this project because they are fun to decorate using markers or any sort of pen to draw designs. This way you can create your own personalized set! As mentioned above, Stave means “2 sided” so if you are unable to find sticks or popsicle sticks to decorate you can play with any item that has two distinct sides such as a coin.

To play the game you will need 6 staves and 10 counter sticks (these do not need to be 2-sided).

Remember: Only draw on one side of the stick and have fun!