

THE WINNIPEG ART GALLERY
compiled by Darlene Coward Wight, Curator, Inuit Art

INUIT GAMES

Games have many forms and names in different areas of the Arctic. This list has been compiled from the following textual sources and is incomplete. Readers are invited to submit the names and descriptions of games that have been omitted. This list will be updated on a regular basis.

This listing was compiled with the assistance of Frederica Knight, and valuable assistance was provided by John MacDonald, Igloolik, Nunavut. An attempt was made to use modern orthography whenever possible.

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INA

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Tumivut

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LIST OF INUIT GAMES

Aarsiiq (Igloodik) Also *arsiqattaq*

Players must stay quiet without speaking or laughing while being provoked.

Aataujaq (Igloodik)

An aggressive ball game that sometimes involved fighting over the ball.

(See also *aqtajaaq* below)

Aivinguujaq (Igloodik)

Pretending to be "like a walrus."

Ajagaq

Ball-and-pin game. (Arctic-wide)

The bone can be a hare's skull, caribou vertebrae, pieces of antler.

It is drilled with small holes and a stick or pointed bone is attached with a cord. The player holding the stick tosses the attached bone in the air and tries to get the stick in one of the holes. Sometimes stories were developed with each successful catch

Ajaraaq; ajaqaat (plural)

Making string figures, or cat's cradle.

There are many taboos and restrictions associated with the playing of string games. The spirit of the string figures will be offended if the games are played at the wrong time. The Copper Inuit believe that string games can only be played when the sun can be seen in the sky. If *ajaraaq* are played in the dark of winter, the string will become entangled in one's kayak or ice-hunting gear and cause the person to perish by choking or drowning.

Ajuqitaaq

"Making faces."

The making of bizarre faces in order to make others laugh is a form of entertainment that is probably universal. Franz Boas recorded its use by Inuit in his classic book, "The Central Eskimo," 1888 (p. 164). His spelling is *ajokitarpoq*.

Ajuttaq (INA)

A ball game similar to lacrosse, played with two teams. A ball is caught in nets attached to a stick and hurled, with opponents trying to catch it. No touching ball, tripping or kicking. Teams sometimes represent Summer, (Sea Pigeons (Guillemots) or Old Squaw Ducks) and Winter (ptarmigans) according to when players were born.

Akslungisarvik (Igloodik)

Rope acrobatics (outside).

A sled is frozen upright into a hole in the ice. Ropes are attached and can be used for

various acrobatics.

Alluniartaq Also *nuqartaq*

Igloo “High Bar.”

Played inside an igloo. A rope is suspended from the ice window, sometimes in a loop, sometimes two ropes with loops at the end. This allows various athletic games to be played, hanging by the legs, sitting, turning over, etc.

Amaruujaq (Rasmussen, Igloolik)

“Like a wolf.”

Participants pretend they are a wolf chasing a caribou and try to catch the quarry by touching any part of the body. The first one successful becomes the quarry. This was also a tag game called *Uviniknniaq* (“touching the skin”)

Anauligaaq (Rasmussen, Igloolik)

“Hitting”

A baseball-type game. A ball is struck with long clubs.

Angutinnguaq (Tumivut)

Tag game played to catch a man who had five wives.

Animal Game (Rasmussen)

No Inuktitut name mentioned by Rasmussen.

Children play with salmon-head bones which resemble various animals, birds and objects.

Aqraoraq (AIC)

Popular modern-day sport in which competitors try to kick a sealskin ball hung from a high pole while hopping on the opposite foot.

Aqsarniq (Turner, Igloolik)

A type of football game.

Arsaq means “ball.” *Arsartut* is the verb, “playing ball.”

Football is made of sealskin, sometimes played with whips to drive the ball (see *ajuttaq*).

Aqsaararniq (Rasmussen)

Arm test of strength or tug-of-war.

A rope with wooden handles is sometimes used.

(Other names exist for various types of tug-of-war)

Aqtajaaq Also *irqasaaq* (Rasmussen)

A ball game with any number of participants. Sets of two partners try to throw the ball to each other and the rest try to intercept the ball.

See also *aataujaq* (Igloolik).

Arsiqattaq (Rasmussen, Tumivut) Also *nillinasaaliurniq*.

“Trying not to talk”

A group of players tries to be silent. The first to speak is given a ridiculous name. Igloolik spelling is *aarsiiq*.

Aterartarniq (B-S) Also *misiktaagaq* (Rasmussen)

Skipping

Played by women and children. In the past, a sealskin thong would have been used. Two players hold the rope for a third, or one player skips alone.

Avatarmut qulauttasugu (Tumivut)

“Jump over the *avataq*.” (sealskin float)

Dog team

Pretending to travel by dog team, some players being the dogs.

Dominoes

A variation on dominoes, described by Lucien Turner.

Flagpole Climbing

A game sponsored by the trading companies at Christmas in which competitors would win one-hundred or two-hundred dollar bills placed up a flagpole.

Himiluhut Also *ipirautarniq*

“Whipping”

Hitting a target with long whips.

Hiutimigaaq

Ear-pulling contest with two people using a long loop of string.

See Avaala drawing in exhibition G-84-405.

Hunting contests (Tumivut)

Activity rewarded usually by cash prizes at modern games or festivals.

Igloo-building contest

Modern-day contest. Prizes are given for speed and quality.

Ijurnasaaliurniq (Tumivut)

Group of players trying not to laugh for a long time.

Ijuttaut (INA)

Hitting a target with short whips.

Ikusimmiq (INA, AIC)

Walk on elbows while lying prone on the ground.

A variation is walking on elbows and toes.

Illukisaaq, illukitaat (INA)

Juggling.

Print in exhibition is titled *Eelukitaaq* (G-89-1204) (Nunavik spelling)

Iluvisaaq (Rasmussen)

“Playing graves.” (*Iluvi* – grave.)

One player lies on the ground, another sets stones around him making an outline of his body.

Imiklutaq (Rasmussen), **imillutaq** (Tumivut)

Bull-roarer.

A piece of wood attached by a double cord revolved between the hands making a humming noise.

Imiqtautinguanig (Rasmussen)

Pretending to kill one another by throwing stones. The player who is hit “dies” and leaves the game.

Inugaaq, inugait (pl)

Flipper bones game.

Elaborate game played with the bones of a seal’s hind flipper. A large number of bones are needed, and they are placed in heaps between the players, who at a signal grab as many as possible, though avoiding certain ones which do not count. Each player then lays his bones out in their natural order in the flipper, and he who has the most complete set wins. Each bone has a name, e.g., *tornganguaq* (little spirit), *qamutinguaq* (little sled), *nanunguaq* (little bear) etc.

See print 2005-86 titled *Innugait* (Bone Game) by Mary Pudlat, CD

Inuujaq

“Resembles a person” Playing with dolls.

Inungualiurnig (Rasmussen)

Archery target practice.

Making figures of humans or animals and firing at them with bow and arrows.
(Name refers only to making target figures.)

Isiraqniq (Rasmussen), **immutaa** (Tumivut), **quutaaq** (Igloodik)

Hide-and-seek

Kaittaq

Dice game

Kaivisaq (Rasmussen)

Spin a top made of wood, or ice and wood, with a braided sinew attached to the wooden part.

Kiisinasurnig (INA)

Player picks up an object from a one-handed push-up.

Makittaq (Tumivut)

Knife lancing.

Mannijautijut Unaarminnik

People throwing their harpoons.”

Competition to throw harpoon the farthest or the most accurately.

Misijjaq Also *misiliurniq* (INA, Tumivut)

Long jump

Nakataq

Throwing rocks at a target for accuracy.

Nalaussarniq (B-S)

“Guessing”

Played by two people. One guesses in which hand the other holds a small object.

Nalukataaq

Blanket toss.

Activity is also called *qumuaqataijut* in a print in the exhibition by Sorosiluto Ashoona.

Contestants bounce on a walrus hide held fireman-style by assistants.

Nanunguassarniq

Pretending to be bears.

Napanguaniq

"Having fun"

Describes acrobatics, such as performing hand stands.

Nappatailiutinniq (Tumivut)

Balance beam. Walking along a narrow beam, avoiding falling off and laughing.

Nassiusaqtut (Rasmussen)

“Hunting a seal.”

An ice scoop is buried deep under the snow, and trying to hit it with a seal harpoon. He who hits it has harpooned a seal.

Nattiujaq

“Pretending to be a seal.”

Nikuvinniq (INA)

Contestant lying prone on the floor has another lie on top of him, then tries to get up without putting hands on floor.

Nipaaqurniq

“Making noise.”

Players imitate sounds made by instruments and tools.

Nisaraaq (Rasmussen), **pitisiq** (Tumivut)

Archery

Nuklugaaq (Rasmussen)

The nuklugaaq is made from a bone or piece of wood and pierced with one or more holes.

It is suspended in a snow house and players try to hit the holes with long thin sticks.

See Emerak, *Gambling*, G-84-66.

Pangakkartaq

In push-up position, move forward on hands and feet simultaneously.

Pattarniq

Handball.

This word was used for football in Nunavik.

Pillartartaq (Igloolik)

Jumping from squat to standing and back to squat quickly.

Pillartarniq (INA)

Bounce and catch joint bone.

Prisoner's Base

A universal game that may have been learned from the whalers.

Mentioned in Jenness, p. 203

See print G-90-719 titled *Olaokton (Prisoner's Base)*.

Qajaqatiik

Qajaq (kayak) partners (Igloolik)

Participant asks others: “My kayak partner, has your kayak tipped over?” Answer would be “no”; questioner falls over at some point meaning kayak has tipped. Eventually all have fallen down.

Qaklupinguaq (Rasmussen)

A player kneels on a big stone, and another on the ground tries to touch him on the soles of his feet. When one is touched he is out of the game.

Qallupilluujaq (Igloolik)

Sea troll game.

One pretending to be the wicked Sea Troll tries to capture other players and put them (figuratively) in her *amaut* (hood).

Qitirliniq (Rasmussen), **Nutsutinniq aggaminnut qitiqsimi** (Tumivut)

“Pulling middle finger.”

Test of strength. Opponents seated, hook middle fingers and pull.

Satqasarniq Also *imirarniq* (Rasmussen)

Gambling game. Played by making a round musk-ox drinking horn revolve. When it stops, the person to whom the handle points wins the stakes.

Satqataunniq (Rasmussen)

All players but one crawl up on a large rock. The one below has to try to pull the others down.

Seal-racing (INA)

Moving forward prone, using arms, dragging legs.

Shooting contests

Can take many forms. Cross Arctic.

Sitturtaq (INA, Igloolik)

Russian-style squat-kick.

Snowmobile races

Modern, cross-arctic.

Sunnila (INA)

One participant tries to straighten opponent’s bent arm.

Tattaujaq (Igloolik)

Blind Man’s Bluff

This Igloolik version involves a blindfolded player being hit on the temple by the player he touches.

Inuktitut word *oatavitaaq* means “blindfolded” in Pangnirtung. (Information from Andrew Qappik with reference to his 2007 print, *Blindfold Game*.)

See also *Uatamanna* below.

Tikisaqatarniq (Rasmussen)

Finger balancing game.

Players line up and one at a time balance a sabfut (seal breathing-hole searching tool made of horn) on the forefinger, to see which can walk farthest without it falling off.

Tiklotut (Rasmussen), **tigluutiniq** (Igloolik)

Test of strength and endurance.

Two opponents hit each other in turn, on the chest, shoulders, or face, with fist.

Timmiujaq (Boas)

A game similar to dice with about 15 figures, some birds, and people.

Tivajuurtuuk (Igloodik)

Jump Over the Block of Snow

Two players in disguise, dressed as one of each sex, jump over a block of snow placed inside the *qaggiq* (large igloo) for this purpose. The “woman” carries a stick, the “man” a whip, which can be used.

Tuktunguujaq (Rasmussen, Igloodik)

“Resembling caribou”

Players take parts of wolf and caribou, wolf pursuing the caribou, like hares and hounds.

Tulukkaujjiniq

Pretending to be a raven

Player would put his legs through the sleeves of the parka, stooping low, and hopping about resembling a raven.

Tunummijuq (INA)

Test of strength

Two contestants, seated on the floor back-to-back, each attempting to push the opponent over a line, using hands and feet.

Uatamanna (INA, Igloodik)

Identical to Blind Man’s Bluff.

In Igloodik this is referred to as “Exit Wall Game” where blindfolded player points to features of the wall near the door and names them.

Uatammataaq given as “Blind Man’s Bluff” trying to touch someone.

See also *Tattaujaq*.

Ugaqsiunguaq (Rasmussen)

Pretending to be cod-fishing.

Ugguqattautigasuariniq (Tumivut)

“Trying to trip each other”

Two players, standing back-to-back, each trying to make the other fall by tripping.

Ujorojoroluk (B-S) **qanirmigut nukittautisinniq** (Tumivut)

Mouth pull.

Two opponents, arms around opponent’s head, finger hooked in mouth.

Umimmanguasarniq (Rasmussen)

Pretending to be musk-oxen.

One person runs after the others and tries to gore them.

Unataqniq (INA) **paajarniq** (Tumivut)

Wrestling.

Ungatanguaniq (B-S)

Gambling game with caribou toe bones.

Two opponents representing Inuit and Irqilit (Chipewyans), lining up their “men” in a row and trying to knock them over. The loser is the one whose men are knocked over first.

Ungataujarniq (Rasmussen)

“Playing family.”

Ungaujaq

“Visiting game.”

A group of children playing outside run to enter the igloo. The last one to enter becomes *ungaq* and is forbidden to enter. He knocks and tries to make others come out so he can catch them. Any caught become *ungaq* in turn. When one is left he or she wins.

Ursuutaujaq (Igloodik)

“Oil container” game

Children hold hands in a circle, move to centre, bouncing bellies, and if one falls down others would try to touch their belly first, calling out “*ursuutaa!*”

Ussutaq (INA)

Crack the whip

Uviniknniaq (Igloodik)

A tag game similar to *amaruujaq*, involving touching the skin of the one pursued.