

*Narrative Geometry: Warli Art  
and Traditional Games -  
“What Games Do You Play?”*



# Activity, Time and Materials

## ACTIVITY:

Some of our most enduring childhood memories center around play. Play is generally associated with excitement, happy times, and good friends. In this activity, residents in an elder care facility engage with young elementary students (grades 1-4) to exchange stories and reminisce about play and favorite traditional children's games; not computer games. The plan is multi-dimensional, including passive, active, and creative segments to break the ice, generate excitement, and foster sharing while providing participants with a unique piece of art.

The first session involves intergenerational conversations, readings, and comparisons regarding favorite traditional childhood games. This initial exchange is facilitated through participation in an actual game. The games discussed and shared will provide the subject matter to be depicted in the artwork to be created in the second session. The second session should occur soon after the first while memories are still fresh.

The artistic style utilized in this follow-up activity will be patterned after the *Warli* paintings of Vaishali Mohite. Her lively artworks depict village life in India, including that of children and adults at play, and will form the basis of an art project called *What Games Do You Play?* After a brief description of *Warli* folk art and technique, participants will create paintings of their favorite childhood games in the *Warli* style. Ideally this second session would include

the same intergenerational group as those in the first session. (It is not necessary that the children be of the same age. A homeschool group of mixed grades, for instance, would be fine.) If those same children cannot return, invite the elders' family members, especially their grandchildren, to participate with their loved one. If it is not possible for the same group of children to return to the care facility for the second session, the elders and children could complete their *Warli* art projects separately.

This plan is ideal for about 20 participants (10 elders paired with 10 children). If an entire school classroom is involved, try to match as many elders with as many students participating. If need be, attribute more than one child to one elder or vice versa.

A third optional session titled *All Things Warli—A Celebration* would involve the exhibiting of the participants' artworks.

Note: The people involved in this plan may be teachers, parents, activity directors at elder care facilities, volunteers, or artists. It is strongly encouraged, however, to work with artists. Volunteers will be needed to assist the children and adults. The number of volunteers is dependent upon the number of people. Consider at least one volunteer for every four people.



### **TIME:**

Three hours total over three sessions, with one session being optional.

### **MATERIALS:**

- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains* (for readings and photocopies of text for readings described within the plan)
- Soft, light foam ball or beanbag that is easily grasped, minimum 6” diameter (have one ball available for each group of ten people)
- Red craft paper cut into 20” squares
- Plain white scratch paper
- Index cards
- White tempera paint or white paint markers
- Foam Stamps in the shape of triangles, squares and circles
- Paperclips
- Pencils
- Rags or paper towels
- Plastic table cloths for easy clean up
- Small paper cups or jars for water to clean brushes
- Paint brushes (fine or medium points, large enough for the elders to clearly see; adaptive brushes for those with mobility issues can be obtained online)
- CD Player or audio system
- Large open work space with tables
- Name tags and markers
- Computer, digital projector (optional), and internet access
- Digital camera
- 2-3 Jump-ropes

Optional: Utilizing *Narrative Geometry: The Art of Warli* by Vaishali Mohite is encouraged. This exhibit consists of twenty-five pieces of art depicting snapshots of village life, animals, and traditions in India. Multiple activity plans with an eye towards elders in care facilities and interaction with children are available based on the folk art featured in this exhibit. Instead of using reproductions to learn the style of *Warli* art, participants could consult the actual paintings. For booking information, contact the North Dakota Council on the Arts at #701-328-7590.

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### **“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):**

Some of the most popular programs occurring at elder care centers include intergenerational activities that pair elders with children. The children’s presence does much to alleviate loneliness. Many elders might have grandchildren they may not often see. This interaction helps fill that void. The children bring energy. Their fearlessness to express and share their stories helps encourage elders to do the same, which combats a sense of helplessness. Elders nostalgically share what they remember of their youth, telling the children what it was like to play before computers, electronics, and fancy equipment. They share how simple items could be transformed into great toys. In this way, the elders are educating the youngsters and providing valuable and worthwhile insight into past times. This validates to the elders that they have valuable wisdom to share. That they aren’t helpless but relevant.

The game activity is low impact but high energy, giving elders an opportunity for light physical movement from the seated position. Physical activity, even though minimal, requiring mostly hand-eye coordination, helps brain health. The social dialogue, among peers and with the children, alleviates boredom as does exposure to new things like the exotic *Warli* culture of India. The *Warli* art project gives residents something they can share with their friends and families.

If the optional Session 3, an exhibition of the artwork created in this plan, is completed, the benefits will be many and far-reaching,

giving participants much to look forward to and to be proud of. Bringing people together in celebration of their achievements helps to address the issues of loneliness and helplessness. Each segment of the plan provides opportunities to combat the “plagues” in a meaningful way.

### **ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:**

There are a variety of studies citing board games, puzzles, card games, and even bingo as healthy and beneficial to seniors. These games can help hone fine motor skills, lower blood pressure, exercise the brain to improve cognitive function, and reduce stress. But what of traditional games?

One study explores the premise that “some traditional games, as a form of physical activity, can serve its role in engaging elderly adults. They do not require high level of specialization and technical perfection and may also be useful as a form of physiotherapy, particularly with elderly individuals who suffer age- and health-related problems. Play as a form of physical, playful activity is essential for healthy development of any individual as it seems to facilitate the linkages of language, emotion, movement, socialization, and cognition. As a movement activity, it is a rather free-spirit activity that makes a positive difference in brain development and human functioning. Although rooted in biological aspects of life, play needs to be associated with cultural aspects of human development. Especially with the elderly population, this social and also [sic] cognitive stimulation is sometimes more important than physical.”

[Abstract]

The authors studied traditional games like bocce, croquet, *bierki* (pick-up sticks), lawn bowling, horseshoes, barrel rolling, ringo (thought to originate from the game “Fox and Geese”), curling, *pierścieniówka* (a Polish game involving a ball and a net), and darts; noting the beneficial improvements that might be achieved. They state that, “Recreational games help to develop strength, postural control, eye–hand coordination, agility and reflexes, and can contribute to general fitness at any age. Due to their relatively low entry barrier, it can also serve as ice-breaker for social interactions. In fact, research has shown that many of the benefits of leisure activities are the result of its capability of fostering companionships and friendships.” (26).

The researchers conclude their study, stating, “Therefore our recommendation of including traditional games and even simple movement plays originating in folk habitual activities in organized programmes [sic] for the elderly populations may be a vital concept that would add some new and much-needed vitality into the health-care system of this sector of the population” (29).

*--Bronikowska, Malgorzata, Michal Bronikowski, and Nadja Schott. “You Think You Are Too Old to Play? Playing Games and Aging.” Human Movement, 12, no. 1 (2011): 24-30.*

# Activity Plan

## SESSION 1 (60 MINUTES): HOT POTATO

1. Well in advance, the person or persons directing this activity plan should contact a school or children's group (home school, Girl or Boy Scouts, 4-H, the elders' grandchildren, etc.) to discuss the project and to schedule the intergenerational visits.
2. Hold the activity in a room that will accommodate one or more large circle of seated persons. Have volunteers on hand to pull chairs aside to accommodate those seated in wheelchairs. If a large group is participating, organize several circles of ten people each (five elders and five children).
3. As participants arrive have them gather in circles, alternating elder with child. It is helpful if volunteers are aware ahead of time of the elder/child alternating seating plan to save time and avoid the necessity of chaotic reorganizing which might be frustrating for elders.
4. The facilitator should introduce him or herself and tell the group they will be doing an activity that explores favorite children's games. Explain that some playground games have endured over time and may be familiar to both the children and the elders. Elaborate how those games may have slightly different names and rules depending on when and where the game was played. Further mention that there may be new games to share and historic games to pass on that might

be known by one generation and not the other.

5. Have the participants take a few minutes to get acquainted. Provide each child with two name tags. Ask each child to make a name tag with their name and one for their new "elder" friend. (This will help both the elder and the child remember each other's name and break the ice.)
6. To begin the discussion about games and focus everyone's attention, read excerpts from the "Children's Games" section of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*, pages 258-259 and "Drop the Handkerchief" on page 260. These stories will help spark dialog, recollection among the elders, and generate ideas. The facilitator should be part of the conversation and should ask questions to elicit responses;
  - "Do you recognize these playground games? (After reading the entries for "Fox and Geese" and "Fox and Rabbit" or for "Anti-i-over" and "Antee-i-over", the person directing the activity plan should point out that sometimes a game may have slightly different names and be played slightly differently, depending on when and where it was played.)
  - Ask if anyone has played the games referenced in the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Or if anyone played other games like the ones mentioned. Or if anyone played games that

are completely different than the examples given, like “Red Rover.” If someone has responded affirmatively, question that person as to how the game was played and what it was called. Inquire if anyone can name some games that have funny or descriptive names. Ask the group where they learned to play their favorite games and who taught them.

- The person directing the activity may explain that often a rhyme is used to decide who is or is not “it” to start a traditional game such as “tag” or “Fox and Geese.” Distribute photocopies (with proper book citation) of the three counting-out rhymes on page 264 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*. The person directing the plan should have the entire group read two or three of the rhymes out loud. Then inquire whether anyone knows of a different counting-out rhyme and if they can recite it for the group.
- Spend 15-20 minutes in conversation.

7. Now inform the group they are going to play a game. Ask them if they have heard of or played the “hot potato” game. If someone has, ask them to explain the premise and rules to the group. Inquire if anyone can guess the origin of the game and why it has such a funny name. This will be entirely speculative, since nobody knows when or how the game began, but it’s likely origin is in the late 1800s.

- **The Original Hot Potato Game:** The game is simple. One person oversees the music while three or more players stand in a circle and toss a soft ball or bean bag from person to

person while music plays in the background. The object being passed is the “hot potato.” The goal is to pass it as quickly as possible so you don’t get caught holding the “potato” when the music stops. In the traditional game, whoever has the hot potato when the song ends are “out” and may not participate further in the following rounds of passing the potato. The play continues with new rounds until one player is left -- and that person is the winner.

8. Tell the group that they are going to play the “Hot Potato” game with a little twist. With the group still seated, begin by giving one person the hot potato (a lightweight and easily gripped ball or beanbag) that will be passed around the circle while the music is playing. Let the group know they should pass the potato to the person on their left as soon as the music starts. Start the music. Any fun music is fine. Allow the passing to go around the circle a couple of times then stop the music. The last person holding the potato when the music stops must tell the group their favorite childhood game and briefly explain it, if they remember. That person is now out of the game **but** can keep their seat and continue passing. Again, the music and the passing of the potato starts. When the music stops, as before, the last person holding the hot potato recalls their favorite game. This goes on until everyone has a turn to identify their favorite game.

Note: Remind the children to not throw the potato if the music stops on a person who has already identified their favorite game. If the potato lands with a person who has already identified their game, that person gets to pick the next person who will name their game.

This prevents the activity from going on too long for everyone to be left holding the hot potato.

9. Hand out an index card to all participants. Ask everyone to write down their name, their favorite game or games, and the name of their child or elder partner. Explain that this will help everyone remember their game(s) since it will be used in a second session as the subject of the art project, *What Games Do You Play?* The person directing the activity should collect and save these cards to be used in Session 2.

10. Optional: If there is still time, return to the *Sundogs and Sunflowers* book and read the humorous “My Boyfriend Tony (Clapping Game)” on page 260. Tell the group you will read the verse and they should clap and try to keep time. Do this a few times. Or read it as a group and clap along to it after distributing photocopies (with proper book citation).

## SESSION 2 (60 MINUTES): *WHAT GAMES DO YOU PLAY?*

1. Hold the activity in a large room with big tables so participants can spread out the materials needed for their projects. Prepare the tables with necessary supplies; red craft paper squares, white tempera paint, paint pens, pencils, stamps, rinse water cups, and samples of *Warli* art.

2. The same children from Session 1 return. Instruct them to sit with their elder friend. As participants arrive, the person directing the activity (or their helpers) should distribute the index cards with

notes that each person prepared in Session 1. These notes will help everyone remember their partner and their favorite game(s), which will be the subject of the paintings in this session. Include at each table, two children, two elders, and a helper/facilitator.

3. Inform the group that in this session they will learn about an ancient folk painting style called *Warli*. Hand out or display the photocopies of the *Warli* painting on page 9. Give a brief description of the artform. Explain that the artist who created this painting, Vaishali Mohite, is from India and this style of painting is called *Warli*, a folk art from the Maharashtra region of India. Inform the group that traditionally the people used this style of painting to adorn the inside of their mud huts. Show the map on page 10 to the participants so they know the geographic origin of the art.





Warli painting by Vaishali Mohite showing children and adults at play.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/pGWYg6OLZnH8y8RW2> This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores. After selecting the link and closing out of the image, you will be returned to the beginning of the activity plan. Not where you last left off. We apologize for the inconvenience.)



Google Maps. (2017). Maharashtra, India. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Maharashtra,+India/@24.9726725,79.6961976,5.25z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x3bcfc41e9c9cd6f9:0x1b2f22924be04fb6!8m2!3d19.7514798!4d75.7138884>

4. Show the details of the painting on page 9 to the participants. Ask them what kind of childhood games they can identify in the artwork. The person directing the activity plan should point to different scenes and say, “What do you think they are playing here? What are they doing here?” And so on. When someone states “jumping rope,” follow up with a conversation.

- Ask the elders if they jumped rope as children. Ask the children if they jump rope. Inquire of the participants if they recited rhymes to keep time? If so, ask whether anybody can remember a jump-rope rhyme and will share it.
- Hand out copies (with book citation) of the jump-rope rhymes on page 265 of the *Sundogs and Sunflowers* book. Read them out loud together. In an open space in the room, have a jump rope available. Select three children to jump rope; two to twirl the rope and one to jump. The seated group reads the rhyme while the children jump rope. Then another set of three children jump rope as the group reads another rhyme and so on. Or if the children know a jump-rope rhyme not featured in the *Sundogs and Sunflowers* book, have them jump as they recite it.
- After 10-15 minutes instruct the children to return to their seats.

5. Now notify the participants that they will create a painting of their favorite childhood game or games in the *Warli* style. It’s likely you will hear a lot of grumbling and talk like, “I can’t paint!” or “That’s too hard!” With the previously mentioned painting by Vaishali Mohite

showing children and adults at play around the tree, explain that *Warli* images are easier to make since they consist of simple lines, circles, triangles, and repeated patterns to depict people, animals, landscapes, and activities. In that painting, draw their attention to the figures jumping rope - two triangles meeting at a point, a circle, and a couple of lines! In addition, explain and point out in the picture that boys and girls are differentiated with a ponytail for the female.

6. At the tables, provide and display a few more examples of Vaishali Mohite’s *Warli* paintings. Have the facilitators explain how the artist captured complex activities with simple geometric shapes and patterns combined and arranged in flowing patterns.



*(To create larger examples, select the link below the image and download the file to your computer. These files can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores. All of the images provided within this activity plan are copyrighted by the NDCA. They may be utilized only in the execution of this plan. Their use is prohibited for any other reason and may not be reproduced or distributed in any way or format outside of this plan.)*



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/h3S8kPFQtCqOcyel3>



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/4WlZW76vDTelapE3>



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Q3j8rGodjPoCmdp02>





*Warli painting by Vaishali Mohite showing children and adults at work.*

*(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/FSOCSdMp8GXJrPQH3>. This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores.)*





Warli painting by Vaishali Mohite showing a wedding procession.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/XbeaDDCp3FF10TK73>. This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores.)

## SESSION 2 (45 MINUTES):

7. At this point, instruct the group to recall the “Hot Potato” game and the favorite childhood games discussed in the first session. The person directing the plan should cite out loud examples from Session 1 to prompt that recollection for those who might need their memories jogged; for example, “Red Rover,” “Anti-i-over,” “Fox and Geese.” Also, refer the participants to the notes on their index cards distributed at the start of this session.

8. Give everyone a sheet of plain white practice paper and a sheet of red craft paper. Instruct the participants to take a few minutes to practice making people by combining simple geometric patterns; two triangles linked at a point for the body, a circle for the head, and lines for the neck, legs, arms, and ponytail. Even the body of animals can be created by drawing two linked triangles. Explain that the artist Vaishali Mohite often sketches her designs in pencil before painting, and they can do that if they wish.

If *Narrative Geometry: The Art of Warli by Vaishali Mohite* exhibition is accompanying this plan, the facilitator can show the group one of the original artworks so they can see the artist’s pencil marks. They might ask, “Why did she leave those marks visible?” You can explain that it wasn’t important to the artist, and that’s lucky for us as it shows her artistic process.

Some elders may have mobility issues and my need to use geometric stamps to create their images. The person directing this activity should notify the participants that such adaptive tools are

available. A demonstration of how to use the tools, like triangle stamps, to create the body of a person is recommended at this point.

9. After practicing in pencil on the white scratch paper, direct the participants to use their red craft paper for their artwork. Encourage them to close their eyes and imagine their favorite game or games. Ask, “What do you see? How are the playing children arranged for the game? In a circle? A straight line?” Then encourage them to sketch the design onto the red craft paper and begin painting their favorite childhood game or games.

- Entice the participants to be creative and artistic with the arrangement of the people depicted. If, for example, a child is painting a depiction of the game “Red Rover,” the two opposing sides do not have to be two continuous, straight parallel lines. They could be two wavy parallel lines with one of the lines “broken” as a child is depicted running through the clasped hands of the children in the other line. The children could be alternating between boys and girls holding hands. Remember girls are identified by ponytails.
- “Anti-i-over” could be illustrated with groups of children on other side of a house with some running around a corner with a ball. The facilitators (hopefully artists) should provide gentle and helpful suggestions to make the paintings more artistic and stylized within the *Warli* form.
- “Fox and Geese” could be depicted with a large circle divided like that of a pie. Children could be shown running along the outer circle of the design while other children are running

along the lines that divide the circle. And so on.

- After the primary images of people at play have been created, encourage the participants to add additional elements to their paintings; trees, birds, animals, buildings, and landscapes in the undulating and flowing style of *Warli* as depicted in Vaishali Mohite's paintings.

The facilitator and the table helpers should be sensitive to the elders' abilities. Some elders will be perfectly fine with brushes and paint. For others the paint marker might be preferable. Yet for others the stamping might be easier. Tell the participants they can "mix it up" and try all the varying methods for applying the paint and making the shapes. Demonstrate the use of the stamps, if necessary.

**IO.** Tell the participants to sign and date their painting. Hand out an index card. Instruct the participants to write on the index card their name and a title for their work along with the game or games they illustrated. With a paperclip, attach the index card to the back of the red craft paper.

**II.** The creation of the painting might take longer than this session allows. If so, the facilitator should suggest an additional meeting time to complete the artwork. Set a date, time, and location. Collect and store the paintings until the next session, but encourage the participants to work on their paintings on their own. Make appropriate arrangements, if the participants wish to work on their art before the next session.

**I2.** Take pictures of all the paintings. If possible, make plans to share the finished paintings with the community through exhibitions or in publications like newsletters. If an exhibition is developed and an exhibit opening is held, use the name, title, and game information written on the index cards to create artwork labels.

### **SESSION 3 (OPTIONAL; 60 MINUTES): ALL THINGS WARLI—A CELEBRATION**

**I.** In this plan all the artwork created in the Warli suite of activity plans is assembled for an exhibition titled *All Things Warli—A Celebration*.

**2.** The *Sundogs and Sunflowers: An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging, Health, and Wellness Toolkit* includes additional online activity plans associated with *Warli* art.

- *Narrative Geometry: Warli Art and Animals*
- *Narrative Geometry: Warli Art and TimeSlips Stories - "Lions, Tigers, and Bears ... Oh My!"*

Each of these plans results in projects based on *Warli* art; paintings of animals, *TimeSlips* stories, and paintings of favorite childhood games. If elders enjoyed this plan, it is suggested that the other two plans in the suite of *Warli* activity plans be completed and the artwork created be set aside. Since children are involved, ask their teachers and/or parents to keep their art for a special exhibition.



3. The person directing this plan should review another online toolkit plan, *Springtime Wanderings: Exhibiting Creative Projects*, for guidance in presenting artwork. If time allows and the group wishes to proceed, this exhibit activity plan can be followed to feature the *Warli* art generated from each of the individual *Warli* plans or to feature the work of all the plans together.
  
4. With, preferably, or without the elders' assistance, prepare the artwork for exhibition. Schedule an exhibit reception. Invite the entire community, residents, staff, students who participated and their parents, and the families of the participating elders. Make it a celebration! Send out invitations. Provide snacks and beverages.
  
5. Let the broader community know about your projects. Send press releases, invite the local media, and get recognition for your facility and everyone who participated.
  
6. Optional: Host the exhibition, *Narrative Geometry: The Art of Warli* by Vaishali Mohite. The inspiration for each of the online *Warli* activity plans is from the original artwork in this exhibit. Having it available to complement and enhance the activity plans is a unique experience that will make for a memorable and comprehensive event for the community, care center, gallery, school, or town.
  
7. Optional: Photograph all the *Warli* paintings created by the elder and children participants. Utilize those images to create puzzles and to conduct *TimeSlip* stories. To do so, refer to the additional *Warli* activity plans in the online *Sundogs and Sunflowers: An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging, Health, and Wellness Toolkit*.

#### **AUTHOR • VAISHALI N. MOHITE:**

Vaishali holds a Master's degree in Social Work with a Medical and Psychiatric Specialization from Shivaji University in Kolhapur, India. She worked with health sciences at Symbiosis International University in Pune, Maharashtra, India, and as a medical social worker for the Lions Club Eye Hospital in India. Vaishali is also a folk and contemporary visual artist. She creates intricate, colorful, and beautiful traditional sand paintings, *rangoli*, that are used in everyday life, ceremony, and festivals to bless the home, people, and Hindu deities. As a child and young adult, Vaishali learned various folk painting styles from her mother – *Warli*, *Gond*, and *Madhubani*. *Warli* is a traditional art wherein stylized pictographic images are painted on a red background on walls of homes. She has participated in numerous exhibits in India and the United States as well as demonstrated at festivals in the Fargo, ND, and Moorhead, MN, area. Vaishali conducted art workshops for people of all ages with the Indian American Association of the Great Plains (IAAGP) and worked as a trainer conducting art classes for the children's television channel POGO.

#### **AUTHOR • SALLY JEPSON:**

Sally is the gallery manager at the Jamestown Fine Arts Association (JFAA). In addition to her curatorial activities, she coordinates JFAA's Art for Life Program. Jamestown was one of the pilot sites in the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) *Art for Life Program*, which places artists in eldercare facilities. Sally worked with the NDCA to create a touring exhibition based on the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*. The exhibit, which she coordinates, travels to libraries, cultural centers, and art galleries. Sally also developed *Art for Life Program* activity plans. One plan utilizes illustrations from the *Sundogs and Sunflowers* book and exhibit in the creative storytelling method called *TimeSlips*. Another guides staff and seniors in developing exhibits showcasing the creative results generated from *Art for Life Program* activities.

Sally holds a BA in Art History and Anthropology and a MA in Art History from the University of California at Davis. She worked for the Plains Art Museum, in Fargo, North Dakota, for eleven years, ultimately becoming curator. In 2000, she relocated to Gackle, North Dakota, and began her current work in Jamestown. Sally has served on various boards, numerous grant panels, and has juried a variety of regional art exhibitions and projects. She and her husband, artist Deane Fay, operate an exhibition design and art consulting business, Starview Enterprises, Inc. Together, they create exhibits for museums, cultural centers, city and state institutions, and private businesses. Sally is a Certified TimeSlips Facilitator.