

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 78: Big Brain Time. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we continued our discussion of the taonga tākaro that required some degree of physical fitness. Today we will be moving into games that required more mental fitness rather than physical, so things more involving calculations, memorisation, riddles and other such games. These sorts of games usually go by a couple of different names. Tupea actually comes from a game of the same name and in particular is used to reference games that are non-verbal. The other name is kai, which typically means food that you eat. However in this context it is more being used to mean food for the mind, as such the games kai refers to are ones that require quickly imitating your opponent or puzzles. As usual, this isn't the same for all iwi or hapū and even some of the names of the games will talk about going forward will differ depending on what region you are referring to.

There are a plethora of different games we are going to talk about so lets just pick some and see where we end up! Taumata is a memory word game that has actually gone by a few different names but is known as taumata today cause it is based on the very famous place name that we talked about a few episodes back. You know the one, TaumatawhakatangiHangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. This is actually a hill on the east coast of the North Island, south of Waipukurau, the name means 'the summit of the hill, where Tamatea, the man with big knees who is known as the land-eater, slid down, climbed up and swallowed mountains, played on his nose flute to his loved one' Or variations of that, depending on how you translate it. The name refers to a rangatira who got into a battle near the hill and as a result his brother was killed. The chief, Tamatea, then went up the hill to play his koauau everyday in lament of his brother. The way taumata worked was by dividing the players into two teams on a court that was about 10m squared in size. One team would line up on the boundary line and the other would spread out on the court. The first person on the team on the boundary would take a deep breath and recite, in a clear and audible voice, TaumatawhakatangiHangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. The idea was to do this in one breath while at the same time running around the court, trying not to be tagged by the opposing team. If they get tagged, they are out. Once the person has either run out of breath or finishes says , TaumatawhakatangiHangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu fully, they leave the court and the next person on their team runs out and does the same. This process continues until either all the players on the reciting team are tagged, at which point the tagging team wins, or if a predetermined amount of time ends, in which case the reciting team wins.

Tupea is almost the opposite to Taumata as one of the rules is that you aren't allowed to talk at all. This makes the game a bit difficult when it is all about transferring information between two players. The idea is that one player holds a rock, the tupea, which has a slit in where a rope of harakeke sits. The other player holds the other end of the rope and is blindfolded. The player holding the rock would tug, flip, waggle or otherwise manipulate the rock to make various movements or vibrations, which would travel down the rope and be felt by the other player. Each of these movements would be a sort of code that both players would know, with various movements representing words or phrases. The object of the game was to transmit the correct phrase using only the rope. Once the blindfolded person thought they knew the phrase, they would yell it out or usher over the referee to tell them in secret. Usually the game was refereed by a kaumatua, who also determined what the phrase was. In saying that, the 'phrase' could range from a single word to a sentence, phrase, proverbs, songs or even whole stories depending on the skill level of the players. Some teams could learn hundreds of different coded words and as such could transmit very complicated messages over the ropes. The game was most often played with two players but there were versions where up

to ten players were involved on a team, where there were time limits and players were swapped out. The symbolism around the game was that the rope represented the common link of whakapapa between the players and their ability to use that common link to relate to each other in lots of different ways. Tied into this was that the sorts of people that commonly played this game were those that needed to remember and recount whakapapa or other ancestral knowledge, which if you remember from earlier episodes wasn't just about passing on a hapū or iwi's history, it also had legal ramifications between groups as well.

Some games not only required a quick brain but also quick and dextrous fingers. Whai is a string game similar to what Europeans might call cat's cradle. The full name being as Te whai waewae a Māui, on account of the fact that Māui was the one who invented or discovered the game. It's all about telling stories by manipulating the string with your hands, teeth, feet or even between people to make pictures or symbols. As with most games, the stories could range in difficulty from a couple of simple symbols all the way up to really complicated designs that were rapidly chained to tell a long and complex story. Commonly told stories were ones around Māui, Tawhaki and various other gods or famous figures, with some designs representing tāniko patterns. Symbols and designs would be practiced over and over until they became second nature and it wasn't all that uncommon for someone to have a store of over 100 designs memorised. One of the cool things about whai is that people would come up with their own designs to tell the stories that they wanted to tell, resulting in a bunch of unique and interesting designs. Where this led was that whai became kinda like the Māori version of Magic the Gathering or other trading card games, as designs were traded between players with more complex designs being highly desirable and usually worth more. So one complicated design could be traded for a few simple ones. During feasts, people would have competitions sitting back to back, showing off how quickly and expertly they could tell a story through their pictures or by trying to complete the same design the fastest and most accurately. People who were really good at the game prided themselves on how quickly and fluidly they could make certain designs and chain them together with children who showed a real aptitude for learning whai and coming up with new designs often being accepted into the whare wānanga. Most often the game was played individually but you could get multiple people teaming up to make bigger productions using string that was metres in length. Given that whai didn't require you to go outdoors, it was quite popular in the winter when it was cold outside and you could instead gather inside around a fire. Interestingly, Best says that whai was primarily thought of as entertainment for women with only a few men joining in. Women were said to be better at the game, having more dexterity with their hands than men, which probably makes sense since they were the ones most often doing things like weaving.

Patokotoko or panokonoko is a similar string game that was simpler to play than whai. Each player gets given some string with a loop at the end, Best describing this as being like a Texan lasso. The string would be made from the midrib of the tī leaf to give it some rigidity. The end without the loop was wrapped around the index finger on the right hand while the loop was held open with the index finger and thumb of the left hand. The objective was to get the other players right index finger into your lasso/noose, thrusting out to try and grab them and tighten the lasso around it. All while, of course, trying to stop your opponent from doing the same to you. Tuhoe had a slightly different version of the game where women would have a special role "as a kind of objective". As you may have guessed from that quote, women didn't play an active role in the game when being the objective, with the example Best gives talking about how when a player had caught their opponents finger, he would "rapidly touch that opponent's hand with his own and then turn and touch, with the same hand, that of his ruahine (his female partner). By this act he is supposed to transfer the ha (dexterity or power) of his opponent to his own ruahine, who seems to act as a guardian or

repository of his own dexterity or cleverness at the game.” This was apparently meant to be representative of how rituals are highly tapu and women play a vital role in removing that tapu due to being noa.

Ti ringa was a game that was almost a combination of string and speaking style games. Also called matimati or matemate, the game was played with two people, one person would say a short phrase and at the same time make a shape with their hands, usually by opening and closing them in some way. The opposing player would repeat what they did as fast as possible, the idea being that they would eventually be able to predict what the person is saying and catch up to them, saying the words and doing the movements at the same time. Some versions of the game had the same words and actions always being used so it was about memory and speed rather than observation, while another version had the players touching a finger that corresponded to a number that was called out. This was possibly related to how different rounds were called out as sometimes the game was played by yelling ‘ti tahi’ on the first round, ‘ti rua’ on the second, ‘ti toru’ on the third and so on, usually up to ten rounds. Sometimes the game would be changed up so that the two players were actually trying to do different moves, not the same one, instead trying to predict what the other player would do so that they could do something different.

Moving more into games involving speech, like a lot of cultures across the world, riddles were a popular way to entertain. This was pretty much what it said on the tin, no real widespread changes or differences to the format, just a sentence or a few asking a question in a rather abstract way and it was the players’ job to figure out what the answer was. The only real difference was that obviously the riddles don’t translate well if you aren’t familiar with Māori culture. Best, thankfully, gives us one riddle that he had heard, lets see if you can get the answer. “He aha te kiri putaputa, kiri honohono, ara i te mua, arai te muri, whai pane, whai karu, ka toro te hi arero?” I’ll give you a few seconds to think about the answer... Hm? What was that? You want in English? Yea, I may have made it a bit too hard leaving it in the original Te Reo! So, in English, “What is the bark full of holes, joined together, elevated in the front and behind, possessing head and eyes, and with protruding tongue?” If you want to pause to think about the answer, you can do so now. Otherwise, here is a hint, in the English version, kiri is translated as bark, however Best notes that it could also mean something rounded in shape and hollowed out. Think you know the answer? If you guessed a waka, you were spot on! To break down the riddle, waka are obviously made of wood so their made of bark, the holes on the side are to put rope through to lash various things, the elevated front and back are the bow and stern which would often have some sort of carving on them, which is also the reference to the protruding tongue as well as the head and eyes as these carvings would often depict human figures.

Throughout HANZ we have had a number of Māori myths, legends and stories that tell tales from how Māori believe the world was created to some of their most famous figures. As we have mentioned in the past, many of these stories were designed to convey whakapapa, the proper application of law, morals, who owned what and why, the names of places, navigation and many other concepts through the generations. However, these sorts of stories, the ones that were designed to actually give some sort of information and guidance, were rather tapu so they were reserved to only be told to those in the whare wānanga or similar exclusive circles. The ones that were told to most people were called korero parukau, oven side stories, or as Best notes, what Western culture would call fireside tales. These were fun tales that any lay person could understand, they were entertaining whilst also being informative on a variety of topics, but didn’t mention anything too heavy in terms of practical or spiritual info. These stories could also just be people

talking about their own lives and exploits, travels they had been on or battles that they had been a part of.

Speaking of the whare wānanga, tuakiri was a game played pretty much exclusively in it. The game was all about practicing the reciting of whakapapa, again, something that was reserved only for those that were selected. In this case it was specifically played with kids to get their minds trained in such a way that they could continue to remember all the important info that would be required of them. The way it was played was that each child picked a leaf from a tree, or some other similar object, and each child gave the leaf an identity or personality. What do they like and dislike who are their whānau and other ideas that fleshed out who this 'person' was. Each child does this on an individual basis before they get into small groups and compare their leaves, figuring out how they could be grouped together based on shared or similar traits. Essentially what this was doing was grouping them into a whānau. A leader is then chosen from each group who gives a speech about their whānau, telling the others who their leaves are and how they are grouped together. After these speeches, each group then decides how it wants to link up with other whānau to make a hapū, trying to find more connections in the shared or similar traits, ideas, personalities etc. The important part of this is that these connections need to be justified. In the whānau step this was a bit easier, one leaf likes cheese and the other milk so it's easy to form a link but at the hapū level, it's a bit harder to justify why you might have a link with another whānau when their all about fishing. However, perhaps you can justify that over your shared interest in food and create a connection through that. Once the hapū are made, each again chooses a leader to represent them and those leaders collaborate to come up with a competition between each hapū. Again the leaders of the hapū give a speech about the connections made within each hapū, why they are there, how they justified them as well as making sure to give special acknowledgement to the leaders of each whānau. During this speech, they should also express support for the inter-hapū competition, laying down a wero to the others. The idea of this speech is meant to rev up their hapū and get them hyped to smash the other teams. When all the speeches are made, the competition commences and is judged. These competitions usually were about creating something related to their hapū such as a waiata, haka or legend about a significant ancestor.

Next time, we will get a bit more specific in our focus as we look at the development and how to play Māori board games. It will be a bit of a shorter episode but there will be a video that accompanies it as well where I show you how to play one of the more famous board games that has actually found its way into the video gaming space too!

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on historyaotearoa.com. You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!