

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 81: Games for the Kids
This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Kelsi. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we talked about mental games, word games and board games. Games that Māori played that didn't really require the need to leave the house to play. Today we will talk about games that were pretty much exclusively played by tamariki, so no complicated board games but rather games we would expect to see children playing either in the fields or just outside the whare. Like a lot of the games we have talked about, these were meant to teach skills as well as entertain but they were obviously played in such a way that was appealing to a much younger demographic. Most of this information comes from Elsdon Best, so do with that what you will, but he also describes actually quite a lot of children's games in his book *Games and Pastimes of the Maori*, so I'm only going to go through some of the ones that caught my eye and that I found quite interesting. In the latter half of the episode we will also talk a little about Māori interactions with European games.

A lot of games involved the use of small objects, one being spinning tops. These were made of stone and sometimes inlaid with paua shell to give them that extra pizzazz. Māori spinning tops were slightly different in that they were long and cone shaped compared to the more short and wide European style ones. The game that was played with these was essentially Beyblades, where an arena was dug in the ground with bumps, ridges and other obstacles put in. The tops were then spun in the arena and whichever one stopped spinning first, lost. Some tops would have a harakeke rope on them, changing them into whipping tops. The rope helped to spin the top more easily and get it going. There were also the humming tops which, unlike what their name might imply, made a high pitched sound that Best equates when Māori would mourn the dead, though I do wonder whether that was an exaggeration. However, he does say that sometimes humming tops would be substituted for actual singing for the dead if no one of sufficient skill was available. What he doesn't mention, of course, is how these tops were made and how they produced such a sound.

Karetao were another small object that may not have been used to play games as such, but was certainly a device for entertainment for children. Essentially they were toys, kinda like puppets, small occasionally intricately carved wooden figures of humans that had some sort of long handle underneath that allowed someone to hold them. The whole thing would be made of a single piece of wood, except for the arms which were made separately and attached via a loose cord to the shoulder and then tied behind the figure. This allowed for a degree of manipulation of the arms by tightening or loosening of the cord. So one hand would hold the handle and shake the karetao a little, while the other hand tugged on the cord to make the arms move, all of which would give the effect of the figure performing a haka. Songs or chants were also sung when playing with these toys too, adding to the effect.

Kura-winiwini is a bit of an interesting game involving hiding a string. A number of players would seat themselves in two rows facing each other with one person at the front who would be trying to guess where the string ends. The first person in the row would put one end of the string in their mouth to indicate where the string started before the rest was passed down the middle of the two lines with each person taking it in their hand with their palms facing down and using their thumbs to move it along, so the guesser couldn't entirely see what was going on. The string didn't have to make it all the way to the end though, the game was to guess where it had ended so it was common for it to end up part way along the row of people and everyone just be imitating the movements to look like they were gripping the string. It's also possible that the string may have been almost entirely collected by someone up the front or even have it get to the end and loop back up the row if the string was long enough. Apparently the game was pretty hard as players were often very good at

concealing the string and disguising their movements. As with other games, songs were sung as the string was moved, possibly with some sort of rhythm that was followed.

What about games that didn't involve any equipment? There were plenty of those too! For example, Māori seem to have had their own version of cat and mouse called *wi*. I'm not sure if this was a Kiwi thing or whether other places in the world also played this game but it was basically where kids stand in a circle and hold hands with one player being the mouse and another the cat. The cat was trying to catch the mouse, who would run into the circle as allowed by the other kids moving their arms up, whereas they would deny the cat. It was a pretty simple game and didn't really have any sort of end point. The Māori version on the other hand had one kid play the *kiore*, the rat, and the other plays the *papaki*, which possibly meant the slapper or the swatter. The rest of the kids would line up in two parallel lines or a similar shape and the *kiore* player would run around and try not to get caught by the *papaki* player, the catch was that the *papaki* had to follow the same route as the *kiore* otherwise they were out. Unfortunately I couldn't find any info on how the rest of the kids were involved in their two lines so my assumption is that they would move through them in some way. There also seems to have been a variation of this game that is a combo of duck, duck, goose and go home, stay home.

A game that actually involved a mild amount of slapping was *toekoekoea*. This was a game where each child would close their hand and outstretch downwards their index finger as if they were pointing down at something. They would then stack their hands on top of each other, their index finger touching the back of the hand of someone else, each child stacking up. Then a small little song would be sung, only a couple of lines, and when it was done everyone would snatch their hands behind their backs or try to tag someone else's hand. The idea was to not to get touched otherwise you were out.

The use of hands was popular in children's games as their good implements for doing all sorts of simple procedures. *Hapi tawa* was a two player game which one child open their hands and put them together in front of them. The other player would then run their hands along them as if stroking them, saying a chant/singing a song. At the end of this, the player asks "*Me aha koia?*", "what shall be done?" The player with their hands together then either replies "*Me whakaroa*, spare him or *Me patu*, strike him". If the player chooses to be spared, they get a "light box on the ear". If they choose to be struck, nothing happens to them, which Best notes is a "curious reversal of the decision." The second player, the one who would be doing the striking, would then force the first players thumbs up and away from the fingers as the hands were still together, saying "*He hapi kumara*" *Hapi* meaning oven. They would then move onto the index fingers, forcing them up and away from the middle fingers saying, "*He hapi taro*." And continuing on down the hand referencing each oven of *kereru*, *koko* and *kaka*. All of these *hapi* are related to the initial chant or song as they are referenced in there as well. The player with their hands together then cups his hands while the other player quickly moves into them with a finger and thumb and retracts them as fast as they can. The idea being that the first player tries to snap their hands shut to catch the thumb and finger. If they are caught, the game ends. Other variations of this game saw different chants being used or the finger catching phase being in slightly different positions.

As mentioned at the start, this is really only the surface of the games that Māori children played, there were so many more pastimes such as rope swinging, throwing hoops, skipping stones, racing toy *waka*, chewing gum which they would pass around with each other, hide and seek or even just building stuff like rafts and seeing if they float. Anything you can imagine kids doing outside messing around, they were doing it.

So that was some children's games that I found kinda fun and interesting! I think it's really cool to learn about these rather more 'mundane' aspects of life as it really paints a much clearer picture of what people were doing just in their everyday lives or what you might expect to be doing if you grew up in this time and place. Now I want to talk a bit about Europeans and some their games and how they interacted with Māori culture.

Best himself notes that many early European explorers and missionaries that came to Aotearoa didn't really take all that much interest in Māori games or things that they did for entertainment in general, the haka was really the only exception, so they didn't record very much about those aspects of Māori life. One missionary only noted, "There are numerous other pastimes. Men and women walk on stilts, boys stand on their heads in rows, moving their leaves in the air; kites, fashioned of reeds, in the shape of birds, are flown in windy weather. When bathing, there is a game which consists in seeing who can keep longest under water. Men wrestle, and jump from high poles into deep water: the leapers before jumping sing 'This is the precipice over which I cast myself, even to Toreakura and am thus separated from the beloved one spring'. Swinging over chasms by ropes attached to poles is another amusement. Spears are discharged at objects from slings, people and canoes race, trees are climbed and mimicry and ventriloquism are practised as pastimes." That was pretty much it. Best also notes that the well known explorer Polack, who had been living in the Bay of Islands for many years was pretty shit at recording what games Māori played and could have written a much more comprehensive list.

As for what Māori liked of European games, you can probably take a guess based on what we have seen with other areas such as music, where Māori tended to gravitate towards things that were similar to what they already knew. So games like cards, draughts, possibly hopscotch, boxing and football, which were all introduced from Europe, they were quite big fans of. Probably the only mildly surprising exception to this, according to Best was chess, though he doesn't elaborate as to why. Boxing was actually a bit of an interesting one as Best explains that Māori essentially had two modes. One was like our own boxing, punching with a clenched fist with the intention of striking with the knuckles, whereas the other was striking again with a fist but trying to hit with the outer side of the fist, the side with the little finger. This was supposedly done when fighting with a close relative so presumably the idea was that by striking with the more fleshy part of your palm on the side, it would do less permanent damage. In general it seems that boxing wasn't done much for sport but mostly for disagreement with a relative and there is not much evidence to suggest that competitions were held, wrestling seems to have been the more popular option.

You will have also heard mentioned in that quote just before that Māori used slings. This is a fairly interesting comment since, unlike other Polynesian cultures, rock throwing slings weren't really a thing in pre-European Aotearoa, with only a possibility that they were used in warfare. There is some oral stories that allude to slings being used but these haven't been further confirmed as far as I can tell but Best does talk about how they were a popular item to play games with. The slings themselves were pretty similar to what was used throughout the world, a cord with a little woven square or oval part where the stone would sit which could then be whirled around to flick the stone in the intended direction. Another way would be to have a long, bendy stick stuck in the ground with a cord attached. One person would hold the cord taut and bend back the stick, while the other held the rock against the stick facing towards the target. The person with the cord would then await the signal to release the cord, flinging the stick forward and hurling the rock. This implement was possibly used in sieges, potentially with the rock being heated in a fire first before it was flung over the walls of a pā. Spears could also be thrown in a similar way by taking a stick, tying a cord to it which was then tied loosely to a short spear. The stick was then held and flung forward, the spear

coming away from the cord and flying forward. This technique was also apparently used in battle as well. This makes it rather interesting that Māori did seem to have ranged weaponry to a degree but for some reason never made the jump to some form of bow and arrow type technology, whether that be just cause the resources at hand weren't good for it or whether it just wasn't needed.

Next time, it will be the first of three parts covering argueably the most famous aspect of Māori culture. We have mentioned it briefly through HANZ so far but we will be diving deeper into its social importance, how it is performed and an entire episode detailing the history of the one that everyone knows cause of the All Blacks. That's right, we're gonna be talking about haka.

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!