



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

kamai

'kam-ai'



All school-age groups (K–12)

Post-school age

Background

Using a length of twine, adult women and young children of both genders often amused themselves for hours at a time with cat's cradle (string-figure games). These were played almost everywhere throughout Australia and also in the Torres Strait. In some areas older boys and adult men also played these games.

Elaborate figures resembling such things as animals and natural objects were made by skillful manipulation. Similar string figures from different locations often had different interpretations.

Language

Meeroo-meeroo (string games) was played in one area of Western Australia. Imitations of animals' and birds' feet and many other most ingenious designs were reproduced with fur or fibre string.

Among the local names applied to string figures in north Queensland included the following: *kápan*, *morkuru*, *ane-inga*, *man-jing*, *yirma*, *mianman*, *andia-ibi*, *kumai* and *kamai*. *Wame* is the word used for string figures in the Torres Strait.

Comment

String figures are made with a length of string up to 2 metres long, with the ends spliced or knotted together. The loop is then placed on the fingers of the hand and manipulated in a series of movements.

The diagrams available often only record the finished article. Some of the string figures are extremely complicated. During their creation, the figures often require not only the hands, but even the mouth, knees, and so on, to make the different loops, twists and turns. Occasionally two endless strings are used and one or even two assistants are involved.

Suggestion

Use a 20–30 metre length of skipping rope and have small groups of four to six players copy (from a book) or 'invent' string figures.

