



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Gapala

'gap-a-la'



SCHOOL
YEARS
4-6

SCHOOL
YEARS
7-9

Background

Playing in small dug-out canoes, bark boats or rafts was (and still is) a popular water activity.

A favourite game of the Tiwi children of Bathurst Island (northern Australia) in the wet season was pushing a tin, box or other flat-bottomed object along the water.

Children's rafts were observed in parts of Northern Australia both as a toy and a means of transporting children.

Language

The activity is named after a small bark canoe called a *bilem* or *gapala*. These were used in the Arnhem Land area of the Northern Territory.

Short description

Small inflatable rafts or canoes are used to play a variety of games.

Players

- Groups of two to four players

Playing area

- A swimming pool or suitable water area

Equipment

- Small canoes or rubber mats, tubes or rafts as the *gapala*

Game play and basic rules

- Use the boats with one or two (or more) players on each one to play a variety of games. These might include:
 - paddling races
 - water fights
 - splashing ('fights')
 - jousting on water
 - attempts to knock other boats over
 - swimmers attempt to overturn boats or take them over
 - standing up
 - diving from them
 - players on the land use a rope to pull the boat along.