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The following was created by Vance Mead, a teacher participating in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

The Atlatl System

The concept of controlling and testing variables is one we try to teach the fifth graders at my school. To aid in that endeavor and to help students better understand our prehistoric past, I have chosen the study of the atlatl system. To create an effective atlatl system one must carefully consider the elements that go into the construction of the atlatl, the dart, and the projectile point.

The web sites listed below will not only aid in the understanding of each element listed above, but will also provide information on the proper throwing techniques, on available literature of atlatl systems, and on the popularity of atlatl use today.

Some of the variable we will explore in my class will include the length and material used in the atlatl and dart, the fletching of the dart, the mass or weight of the projectile point at the end of the dart, and the weight or banner stones used on the atlatl.

Due to time constraints in the curriculum, only one or two of the above variables will be tested in class. It is my hope that not only will students gain a better understanding of the use of variables in a controlled experiment, but that they will gain a greater appreciation for the prehistoric people who had to discover, test, and assimilate these variable into their daily lives.

Web Sites with Annotations

The following website gives excellent information about the mechanics behind the atlatl and dart system, the function and classification of atlatl weights, and the effect of the projectile points on the atlatl system.

<http://www.onagocag.com/atlatl.html>

This site has many useful atlatl resources. One entitled "Throwers," provides an e-mail link to atlatl users in each state. Another link entitled "Literature" provides an extensive list of print materials available on the atlatl.

<http://www.flight-toys.com/atlatl.html>

This site provides a short article describing the methods used to make an atlatl from local tree materials.

http://www.primitiveways.com/atlatl_branch.html

This site stresses the importance of safety along with the history and mechanics behind the atlatl and dart. Of great benefit is the image it includes of rock art from southwestern Minnesota depicting the atlatl along with the hunted animals.

<http://www.tcinternet.net/users/cbailey/atlatl.html>

This site provides a link to a variety of YouTube videos that deal with the atlatl system. In one, atlatl Bob discusses the mechanics behind the system. Other clips include making an atlatl, adding fletching to the dart, and throwing the atlatl.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej3it7Ct76w>

This site discusses the mechanics behind the atlatl system. One benefit to this site is that it includes helpful pictures that allow one to conceptualize the concepts. This site also discusses the ideal relationship between the lengths of the atlatl to the dart and some of the best natural materials used in making both. In addition, this site provides varying view point on how the atlatl system works.

<http://donsmaps.com/atlatl.html>

This site is specifically dedicated to demonstrating the proper form and posture for throwing the atlatl.

<http://web.grinnell.edu/anthropology/Atlatl%20Stuff%20for%20John/CoachingtheAtlatl.htm>