



Lesson: Throwing Stick Techniques

Category: Survival

Overview

From the earliest moments of childhood, one of the first things a youth will do in nature without instruction, is to pick up a stick. Our ancestors have been doing this since humans arrived on the planet. In a survival situation, having a stick, called a “throwing stick” is one of the first things to focus your awareness on. These sticks can be used to get food (ex. Knocking fruit out of a tree), for making shelter (as a mallet for pounding stakes), for fire (tending stick or splitting wood with a knife), digging edible or medicinal roots, and also for self defense (see the Escrima stick lesson plans). In this lesson we will teach some introductory techniques for throwing a stick accurately at a target. For making a nice, long-lasting, personal throwing stick, see the lesson plan for making a throwing stick.

Materials

- Several sturdy hardwood sticks (ex oak or maple), 1-3 per person. Length = palm to armpit. Diameter = approximately 1-1.5”.
- Targets = sticks, cones, pie pans, cardboard boxes, milk jug (bonus with water) etc.
- Rope/string = for hanging some targets (optional)
- Saw/hatchet/knife (adult only) for cutting sticks to length and removing knobs/branches on sticks prior to activity

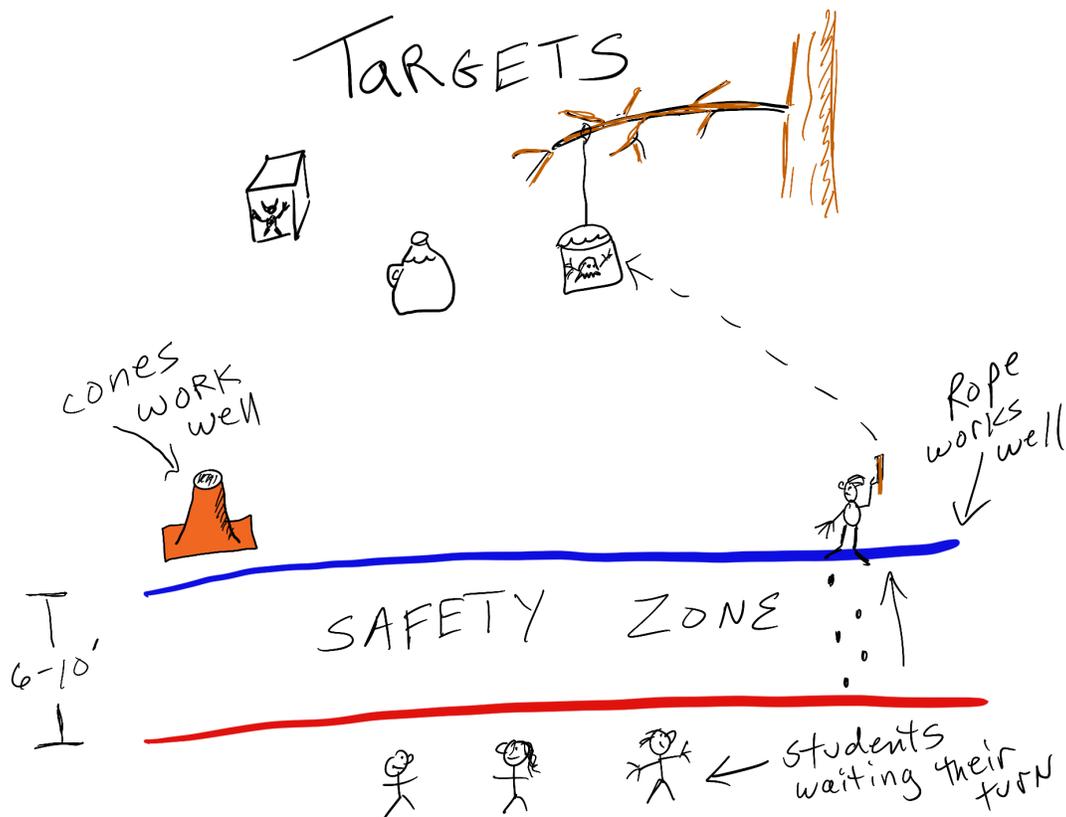
Setting

Make sure you have a safe area to use as a target range with no people, animals, or personal property behind the targets or in the throwing zone. The area behind the targets should be free of hazards (ex. poisonous plants, wasp nests etc.), and should also be an easy place to find thrown sticks (no thick vegetation), otherwise you spend a lot of time looking for lost sticks.



Preparation

Prepare throwing sticks beforehand (unless your students have made their own). Cut sticks to length, and remove sharp edges, side branches, or splinters. In setting up your throwing/target range, arrange your targets in different locations such as: on the ground, atop stumps or rocks, or swinging/dangling from ropes. Make a safety zone and throwing line (in red below) indicating where awaiting students line up (behind the safety line) as they wait their turn. Mark a throwing line (in blue below) another line 6-10' closer toward the target where they throw from.



Start at a close range. We recommend starting with the throwing line (in blue above) 5-10 m from the target. Gradually move your throwing line back as students gain proficiency.



Safety

Make sure waiting students will not be hit by the student throwing their stick. Wait until all sticks have been collected and students are behind the safety zone before initiating the “all clear to throw” or “range is hot” call indicating that students are throwing at the target. Everyone else should be behind the safety zone. After the last stick is thrown, call “range is cold” which means that no throwing is to occur and everyone should go collect sticks and reset targets. Emphasize they should only do this skill at home with permission and supervision.

Lesson:

1. **Ask-** How could a stick save your life in the wilderness? **Answer-** defending yourself, digging, fire tending, throwing at food (fruit, nuts, small game), carrying things with two people. Boomerangs, and “rabbit sticks” are examples of how people long ago hunted with types of throwing sticks.
2. **Say-** Today we are going to learn some ways to safely throw a stick at a target. There are two types of throws we will learn first: the overhand, and the sidearm.
3. **Demonstrate the two throwing techniques:** 1) the sidearm throw, and 2) the overhand throw. Watch the video by Sensei Roemke below to learn more about these techniques. Holding the stick behind you is a sneaky ninja way to hide the stick from view.



Side-arm Throw



Overhead Throw



4. **Discuss the safety rules:** 1) wait your turn behind the safety line until the instructor says to throw, 2) awareness of the safety zone- the thrower needs to be aware there is no one behind them, and those waiting must be



far enough back to not get hit with a back swing. One person throwing at a time, or if you have room, the instructor can supervise multiple throwers if they spread out. 3) Go over the calls “the range is hot” = people are throwing and no one goes in front of the throwing line, and “the range is cold”, meaning no one throws and to go retrieve your sticks. 4) Don’t get your stick until everyone has thrown and the leader calls “range is cold.” 5) When we are done training, we “bow out” meaning we are done with throwing sticks and don’t do it elsewhere outside of intentional training times.

5. Remind them to pay attention to where their stick goes if they miss.

6. Get help resetting targets or moving them to new places.

Variations

- **Food prize-** You can offer a food treat of your choosing if a certain target is hit, or a certain number of targets are hit.
- **Non-dominant hand throw-** have them imagine they just injured their dominant throwing arm. Throw with the other non-dominant arm.
- **Kaiten-** you can do ninja rolls, aka “kaiten” (forward or backward) while holding the stick, and then throw at the target. See kaiten lesson plans.
- **Decorating the targets-** enlist students to draw mythical creatures or bullseyes onto targets or add/tape stick arms, feathers, etc.
- **Teams-** keep points per team by hits of targets. Offer different points for easier/harder to hit targets.
- **Stalking-** add silent ninja walking/fox walking before the throw. See fox walking lesson plans for additional skills with this technique.
- **All-throw-** if space allows for safety, it’s fun to line everyone up, on the throwing line and do an **overhand throw** at the same time. A good way to finish the session.
- **Student range master-** choose a responsible student to be the one who calls “range is hot” or “range is cold” with your background supervision. Good for students who don’t feel like participating in the throwing.
- **Halloween pumpkin-** a great target post Halloween!



Debrief

Which technique worked the best for them? What was the most challenging throw? Which sticks worked best for throwing (heavier, lighter, longer, shorter? What did you learn from this technique?

Mind of the Mentor

This is one of our most popular activities with kids and adults. There is something so satisfying about throwing a stick and hitting a target. While some nature programs forbid kids to pick up sticks during program, we choose a different approach. Much like working with fire and matches, we emphasize that we “train” with sticks, and treat them and each other with respect, focus, and control. In other words, we don’t just indiscriminately pick up sticks and beat things or throw them. Instead we focus our attention with sticks on training exercises such as this. Like in the dojo, we “bow in and bow out” of our training, meaning, we save this urge for the throwing stick range and not at other random times. It is important to discuss that we do skills such as this as training, and that throwing a stick for self defense or hunting would only be a last resort, life or death situation. This activity is a great opportunity to discuss the meaning of respect (for each other, for the instructor, for the range master, and for nature). Using sticks as a self defense tool is an important skill that ninjas have used for a long time and are lessons that we teach further with our escrima lessons.

Video Link: [Throwing Stick Methods](#)

Join our private [NiN Mentors Facebook Group](#) to ask questions and share experiences from our curriculum.

Related mentor lessons:

- Fox walking
- Escrima drills
- Ninja Rolls
- Making a throwing stick

