kamai (string games)

rlangga (billabong) Ngalakgan language from Warndarrang Country, Northern Territory

Many Aboriginal groups traditionally made patterns or designs on the hands with a loop of string. ‘kamai’ was among the names applied to string figures in north Queensland, ‘meeroo-meeroo’ in one area of Western Australia and ‘wame’ is the word used for string figures in the Torres Strait.

The basics:

Palm String
Left hand
Pinky
Thumb
Extended String
Pointer, or Index Finger
Right hand
Left hand
Pinky

Let’s play!

Step 1:
Hook thumbs into string loop - extend

Step 2:
Hook pinky fingers into string loop

Step 3:
Extend

Step 4:
Slide your right pointer finger under left palm string

Step 5:
Extend

Step 6:
Hook right thumb under near pointer finger string
Step 7: Result of step 6

Step 8: Hook left thumb under near left pinky string

Step 9: Result of step 8

Step 10: Bend your left pointer finger and slide it under your left inner thumb string

Step 11: Result of step 10

Step 12: Use your mouth to grab the thumb string closest to you

Step 13: Then lift string over your thumbs

Step 14: Strings are now over your thumbs

Step 15: Release the pinkies

Step 16: Extend string

Step 17: Turn both hands so that the back of your right hand faces the ceiling and back of the left hand faces the floor

Step 18: Twist your hand so your right fingers are facing to the left and your left fingers are facing to the right.

Congratulations! You have a billabong or waterhole!