

## How we socialize in Azerbaijan: ancient folk games and dances

In Azerbaijan, people remember and play games that are from ancient times and traditions. These games are interesting from the point of view of historians and folklorists. Just like many other folklore **masterpieces** around the world, Azerbaijani “chovkan” sport-game and “yalli” dance are among those cultural norms that continue to be passed from generation to generation and these has always been a favourite activities and part of the national identity of Azerbaijani people.



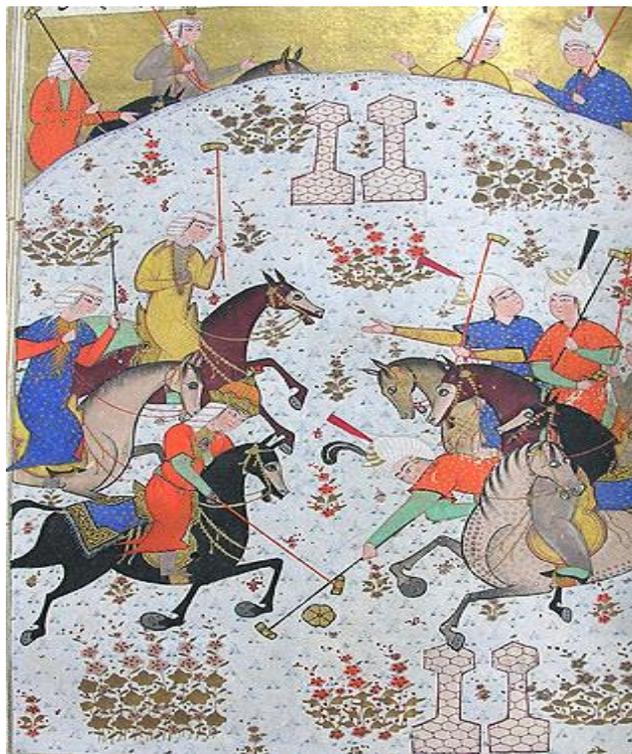
### **CHOVKAN** - sport

A well-known national sport games in Azerbaijan is “chovkan”. In 2013 the game was included in the list of UNESCO’s **intangible heritage**. “Chovkan” is a form polo in which a team of three or five tries to hammer a ball into a goal; the game is always accompanied by the national music “jhangi”. There are two *referees* officiating the game. One of the referees has a handkerchief in his hand, which he raises high to signal instructions, while the other has bugles to make sounds. Players are divided into 3 teams, and each rider sits on a horse that they ride around in the arena. There are 3 or 5 riders in each team. The first team ride on white horses, the second team on grey horses and the third team on black horses. On the other side of the arena there are doors with towers. On the first tower there is a blue flag, on the other towers a red flag. The main purpose of the game is score through a mark by directing the ball towards the **doorpost** either with or without the help of teammates.

The ball for Chovkan is usually made of wool. The wool is formed into a **rounded figure** with the hand until it becomes hard. Next it is then put into hot water and left there for half an hour. The wool is **compressed** in the water and then coated with leather.

In ancient Azerbaijan the game of Chovkan was highly valued by Azerbaijani people for its developmental impact, such as **physical agility** and strength, and for providing a platform for **social interactions** among children and young adults, also building positive characters like cooperation and team work.

According to researchers, women and girls also played chovkan. Azerbaijani poet of 13th century Nizami tells about women playing chovkan in his famous “Khamisa”. We can see women playing Chovkan together with men in the miniature paintings of XVI century.



There are many facts proving that Chovkan was popular in many regions of Azerbaijan. The pictures of people playing chovkan on the plate which was found during archaeological **excavations** in Oregala is an evidence that this game was popular in Beylagan in IX century.

Azerbaijanis take pride in this game and there is still an interest and **admiration** to the game. Azerbaijan government and the private sector as well as try to preserve chovkan as its national heritage. Recently there was a Presidential Cup on chovkan organized by the enthusiastic people aiming to support the national sport games.

You can watch Chovkan game by visiting this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsQoPTimts8>

## Vocabulary

**Keywords to remember:** masterpiece, intangible, heritage, doorpost, rounded figure, compress, agility, interactions, excavation, admiration, engage, unique, repetitive

**Class activities:** Find the meaning and make sentences with these phrases –intangible heritage, rounded figure, physical agility, social interactions, the crown of Nakhchivan

## The Joy of Yallı

Many ancient traditions and customs of Azerbaijani people have been preserved in the regions and villages of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which is one of the most beautiful regions of Azerbaijan. Nakhchivani folk dances have passed on from ancient times and the people were able to preserve the expression, magic and energy.

“Yalli” is one of the ancient and most famous folk dances of Nakhchivan. There are more than 100 types of yalli dances in Sharur region of Nakhchivan. In the year 1937, the great Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibayov said that Sharur was the motherland of yallı, it emerged here and started its movement around Caucasus and later around the world”. Nakhchivan is known as the homeland of yalli dance in the Caucasus, in the Middle and Near East and around Europe. In 1970s our national leader Heydar Aliyev recommended the preservation of yalli dance of Nakhchivan and called yalli “*the crown of Nakhchivan*”.



Yalli *engages unique repetitive* actions, combining head movement with arms and legs movements as well. It requires participants in the dance to stand in a circle. The participant in the dance who stands first is called *yallibashi (head of yalli row)*. He or she carries a handkerchief or a stick in his/her hand. The last participant in the row is called *ayaqchi (final man in the row, “foot of the yalli”)*.

Yallı begins with a fast temp and gets even faster; the melody is rhythmic, bouncy and cheerful. Two zourna and drum players accompany the dance. When you watch people dancing yalli you can definitely feel the happiness and energy that dancers transmit with their

movements. Yalli calls for unity, courage, shows joy and happiness that people feel when they are together. It is very popular dance during the Novruz celebrations in Azerbaijan. During Novruz people dance yalli around the fire, which from ancient times is considered the symbol of light, energy, collectiveness and unity of all people.

Where does the name “yalli” come from? In some sources yalli is compared with «yal» (crest – a top of mountains or hills). The comparison comes from the art of yalli dancers standing side-by-side in one or two rows, like chain. “Yal” also means “row”, “chain” – a chain of hillcrests. If you saw the rock paintings of Gobustan, you may have noticed that the figures of dancing people resembles the chain and this can also imply that people of Azerbaijan in very ancient times knew yalli and loved dancing it.

Watch yalli folk dance performed by Azerbaijani State Dance ensemble here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMwtPhI5ytM>

### **Class activities:** Essay writing

1. Write about any sports that is your favourite?
2. What is the most famous sports in your country and why do people like it?

**Tips:** Why do you like this sport? Is it a team sport or an individual sport? How is the sport played or performed? When do you play or engage in this sport?

### **Questions**

1. Name two national Azerbaijani pass-time activities you know?
2. When was chovkan introduced into the UNESCO heritage?
3. How many persons in a team in the game of chovkan?
4. Which national song accompanies the game?
5. Where did yalli dance originate?
6. Who said “yalli, the crown of Nakhichan”?
7. Where does the name “yalli” come from?

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Class:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Lesson:</b>	<b>Time:</b>	<b>No. of pupils:</b> <b>(boys/girls)</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
Social Students	Grade 4 / 5 / 6			1 hour		
<b>Topic/Context</b>				<b>Prior learning/experience</b>		
How we socialize in Azerbaijan: ancient folk games and dances				Basic knowledge of English Language in the classroom		
<b>Resources</b>				<b>Focus of observation (if appropriate)</b>		
Materials prepared for the purpose of teaching English through social studies				<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning English language through social studies</li> <li>2. Connecting our societies with the rest of the world</li> </ol>		
<b>Learning Objectives/Intentions:</b> <b>By the end of the lesson students will be able to:</b>				<b>Success Criteria /How Progress will be demonstrated:</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The history of the Azerbaijani folk dance and songs</li> <li>2. Perform the famous “Yalli” dance of Azerbaijan</li> </ol>				<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student ability to make connection between history and society over different centuries</li> <li>2. Appreciation of cities in Azerbaijan and it’s peculiar features</li> </ol>		

<b>Clock Time</b>	<b>Learning Activity (TS3)</b>	<b>Key Questions (TS4)</b>	<b>Differentiation (TS5)</b>	<b>Assessment Opportunities (TS6)</b>
	<b>Starter/Bell Work (Where appropriate):</b>  LA1: Welcome student to the lesson; attendance and messages LA2: Review of previous lessons	How has our knowledge of previous lessons helped our understanding?	Some students might be new to the class, revising past classwork help them to connect with the lesson	Retentiveness of past lessons; producing text of previous homework
	<b>Main Activities:</b>  LA3: Introducing the game of chovkan and Yalli.  LA4: Class activities: get students to create the various forms of Yalli dance	What is the history of these famous Azerbaijani? Is it performed in any other part of the world? What are the similar activities you can compare?	The lesson should be centred on famous national games and origins as well as national dances that students know.	Class participation and engagement
	<b>Plenary/Review:</b>  LA5: Keywords –meaning and essay writing  Based on discussion on sports in general	What do students know about sports in general? How are sports followed in your sports? Can students relate with their national teams?	Students will form their opinions based on very limited knowledge or based on what their parents has suggested. This is fine and acceptable.	Critical thinking
	<b>Homework /Independent Learning</b>  LA6: Post-reading questions	Can students find the answers to questions from reading the passage?	How can students show understanding and connect to learning objectives	Research ability