

**Example Analysis:** Boat Race

**Culture:** Boat Race is native to Nigeria, Africa. The original creation date is unknown, but as far as I know it's still played to this day. It's usually played on a nice sunny day with 18 or more people divided into two teams. For beginners it's recommended to play on a flat area with lots of space, but people with more experience sometimes like to play in places that will increase the difficulty level, such as hilly or uneven areas. Boat Race is a very social game, and usually played on festive occasions. People are yelling, laughing, and communicating as the game progresses. The target audiences of the game are girls and guys of age 8 and up who enjoy social, loud events. This game has a strong positive effect on its target audience, but most people that don't like loud events will try to avoid the game because they won't want to get caught up in it.

**Definitions:** The person who's facing forward is called the cox, or steersman. The playing area between the starting line and finish line is called the river. The stick that's held between the players legs is called the boat.

**Equipment:** Multiple sticks are tied together end to end to make a length that will reach between each players legs while they are standing in a single file line. This stick creates a connection between all the players. Nigerians traditionally use bamboo, but

wooden sticks will work fine. They also use material to mark off the playing area, or “river”. Nigerians usually use rocks or sticks to mark the area, but any material will work as long as it distinctly marks the playing area.

### **Rules:**

- 1) The players are divided up into two teams, and each team chooses a steersman. It’s usually good to choose steersmen who are loud and have a strong presence because they will be the ones trying to organize and guide their teams after the game starts.
- 2) After the teams are made, the playing area needs to be agreed upon. Depending on the experience of the two teams, this area can be made an easy or complex obstacle course. One way to make the game difficult is to make the river extremely narrow with a lot of turns, and put obstacles in the middle of the river that must be avoided. Also, there can be places that the river splits and comes back together, which can be a tactical advantage. When the river splits, one way could be a shortcut to the finish line, but have more obstacles; that way it’s only a shortcut if the team is good. There are many creative ways to set up the river that will give many possible outcomes to the game.
- 3) After the river is made, the teams go to their own starting positions. The teams will normally start an equal distance away from the finish line unless one team is more experienced than the other, and they wish to give the inexperienced team an advantage. These decisions are worked out between the two teams.

- 4) Once the two teams are in position and ready, someone shouts a signal to start the game. Once the game starts, the two teams run as fast as they can to the finish line. The winner is the first team to the finish line.
- 5) As the teams navigate through the river, all team members must have the stick between their legs, and the stick may not touch the ground. If a team's stick touches the ground, that team needs to stop moving until their stick is back off the ground; if they move while their stick is on the ground they will be disqualified.
- 6) Teams must follow the boundary of the river. If any team members stray out of bounds, the team has to stop moving until all members are back in bounds. The team cannot move forward while out of bounds, and if they do the other team will automatically win.
- 7) No team members can be left behind; in the case that someone falls, the team can't move forward until they have that member back on the boat.
- 8) A team may use the boundaries of the river in order to block their opponent. If there is an obstacle in the river, a team could veer the other team into that obstacle, forcing them to stop until they clear the obstacle. Also teams can ram each other, trying to make people on the opposite team fall, which will stall the opposing team until all the members get back on the boat. These methods are cheap, but they are within the rules.
- 9) For formal play, a referee will be chosen to make sure the teams are following the rules.

**Play:** When the game is being played, a team of  $n$  players will have  $n$  players in a single file line all holding a stick between their legs with  $n-1$  players facing backward. One of the players is facing forward; this player is known as the steersman. As the team is navigating through the river, the steersman yells to his team about how to get through the obstacles on the course. While the steersman is guiding their team down the river, the steersman experiences anxiety, excitement, frustration, and sometimes anger their team is not listening to them. Since the other players are facing backwards, they experience high levels of anxiety, excitement, and hesitation that tend to make them move cautiously because they must rely on the steersman to guide them down the course. If trust is lacking between the team and the steersman this will cause hesitation in the team's movement, and will ultimately slow them down. This game is highly reliant on the steersman because the team must feel comfortable enough to run backwards without seeing where they are going. As a whole, a team that is familiar with its individual players will do better than one that is not. A tactical advantage is to pick a responsible steersman that everyone trusts so the team can run with little hesitation. This game also relies heavily on teamwork, and cooperation. Throughout the game a team should be communicating, and not just running aimlessly. Another advantage is to tell people on the team to keep one hand holding the stick between their legs, and one hand on the waist or shoulder of the person in front of them to help them move as one unit. Boat Race is meaningful because each of the team member's individual actions effect the outcome of the race. Whether their individual actions are good or bad, it effects the system as a whole. Given the fact that an action can result in a bad outcome for the team, team players will try their best to win.

**Description provided by:** University of Florida (IFAS), *Games Around The World*,  
September 1989. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/4H/4H05500.pdf>