

Games of Years Past

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Games

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Children live in a world of play and make-believe. Games are an important part of our heritage, but through the years many games, rules and diagrams have been lost. These are some of the games I played during recess at the country school. My favorites are “Hilly, Hilly Over,” “Capture the Flag,” and “Kick the Can.” Do you remember “Follow the Leader” or any of these?

Duck, Duck, Goose: Everyone sits in a circle. One kid, “It” walks around the outside of the circle tapping each kid on the head lightly, saying “Duck”, until he taps a player and says “Goose”. The Goose then jumps up and chases the player around the outside of the circle trying to tag him before he reaches the just emptied space. If he reaches it first, the Goose becomes “It”. If Goose catches him, the same kid is “It”.

Freeze Tag: “It” runs around trying to tag the other players. Anyone who is tagged must “freeze” (hold still). However, any player may “melt” a frozen player by touching him. A “melted” player can resume running around again to avoid being refroze. Whoever is tagged three times is the next “it”.



Winslow Homer, *Snap the Whip*, oil, 1872.
Image courtesy of www.WinslowHomer.org and is in the public domain.

Giant Step (May I?): Establish a start and finish line. The leader stands behind the finish line and the other players spread out across the start line and the other players spread out across the start line. The leader gives the first command, such as, “Jack, you may take three baby steps.” Jack must ask, “May I?” If he doesn’t ask, his turn is over. If he does, the leader says, “Yes, you may.” In which case Jack takes three baby steps toward the finish line. Or the leader could say, “No, you may not. You may take one giant step.” Again Jack must ask “May I?” If the leader says “Yes” then Jack takes one giant step toward the finish line. The game proceeds down the line of players until the first player crosses the finish line and becomes the next leader. Use such commands as baby steps, hop, step backward, leap, giant step, jump, etc.

Blind Man’s Bluff: Blindfold “It” and spin him around several times, then stop. The other players move around, making funny sounds as “It” tries to tag them. The first person tagged becomes “It”.

Red Rover: Divide the players into two teams. The teams link arms and stand opposite each other about fifty feet apart. Then one player calls a player (Let’s say Jack) on the other team: “Red Rover, Red Rover, Let Jack come over.” Jack then runs across the play area and tries to break through the arms of the opposing team. If he breaks through, he goes back to his own team. If he doesn’t, he links arms with the team he could not break through. Play continues until only one player is left on one team or until you feel like playing something else.



Louis-Leopold Boilly (1761-1845), *Painting of a family game of checkers* (“Jeu des dames”), oil on canvas, circa 1803. This is in the public domain.

Red Light, Green Light: Establish a start and finish line. “It” stands at the finish line. The other players spread out across the start line. “It” yells, “Green Light” and turns away from the players and counts out loud from one to ten, during which time the players run toward the finish line. When “It” reaches ten, he turns back to the players and yells “Red Light”. At the sound of the words “Red Light”, the players stop running and freeze. “It” sends anyone still moving back to the start line. “It” yells, “Green Light” and the game continues. Eventually a player reaches the finish line and becomes the next “It”.

Drop the Handkerchief: This old game is always fun. Players form a circle. One player walks around the outside of the circle with a handkerchief or rag. He drops it behind one of the players and keeps on going around the circle. This player picks up the handkerchief and chases the player who is trying to get back to the space vacated by the player he dropped the handkerchief behind. If he makes it, the other player becomes a “dead fish” and must stand in the center of the circle. The “dead fish” picks up the handkerchief and runs in pursuit. Variations: The players sing....

‘Tiskit a ‘Taskit:

“I sent a letter to my love, I thought I put it in my glove,,
But on the way I dropped it, I dropped it, I dropped it,
But on the way I dropped it.
And one of you have picked it up and put it in your pocket.

‘Tiskit a ‘taskit, a green and yellow basket,
I took a letter to my love and on my way I lost it,
I lost it, I lost it.”

Hide the Thimble: All the players leave the room except one. He hides the thimble. The other players are recalled into the room and begin to look for the hidden thimble. When a player is near the hidden thimble, the player who hid it says, “You’re warm.” If a player is right on top of the hidden thimble, he calls, “Your hot”. If no one is near the thimble, he says, “You’re cold.” The player who finds the thimble then gets to hide it. This is a great game and I remember playing it with my family.

Detectives (we called this game, “I am thinking of...”): One or two players stay in the room and select an object they want the other players (detectives) to locate. This object may be a button on a coat or dress, a vase on a table, a books, a pencil, etc. The detectives are called back into the room and begins quizzing the player(s) who selected the object. The detectives are allowed only three questions each. The detective who guesses the object wins and gets to select an object for the rest to guess. Variation: “I am thinking of...It begins with the letter....”

London Bridge: Two players join hands, holding them as high as they can, thus forming an arch. This is the London Bridge. Each of these two players have previously and secretly chosen some object he is supposed to represent. Example: rose, bear, horse, crown, show, etc. The two players agree between them what they are to represent, but do not let the other players know.

The other players march around in a circle going under the arch, London Bridge, as they sig the following verses. On “my fair lady” the bridge comes down holding one of the players. The two players forming the bridge whisper to the captive, “which would you rather be, a rose or a horse?” (This is what each player represents.) The captive then stands behind the player he has chosen. The game continues until each player has chosen. The game ends with a tug of war between the two teams. The two forming the bridge hold hands and pull as their teammates grasp one another about the waist and help.

London Bridge Song: The players sing...

London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down.
London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady.

Build it up with iron bars, iron bars, iron bars.
Build it up with iron bars, my fair lady.

Iron bars will rust away (repeat as above)
Build it out with pins and needles (repeat as above)
Pins and needles rust and bend (repeat as above)
Build it up with penny loaves (repeat as above)
Penny loaves will tumble down (repeat as above)
Build it up with bricks and mortar (repeat as above)
Build it up with gold and silver (repeat as above)
Gold and silver will be stolen away (repeat as above)

When the bridge lowers on a player, they sing:
Off to prison you must go, you must go, you must go.
Off to prison you must go, my fair lady.



Girls playing “London Bridge is Falling Down”, Alexander B. McBride, Grand Marais, Michigan, United States, 1898. Photograph. This image is from the United States Library of Congress Prints and Photograph division and is in the public domain in the United States because the first publication prior to January 1, 1923.

Lame Wolf: One player is chosen to be the “Lame Wolf.” All of the other players are the “children.” A space is marked off as the wolf’s den. At the other end of the playing area a place is marked off as the house of the children. The wolf goes to his den. The children run out of their house and begin to tease and taunt the wolf, singing “Who’s afraid of the big bad wolf?” And making jeer remarks such as “Lame Wolf can’t catch anybody.” When the wolf thinks he can catch someone he rushes out of his den. However, he can run only three steps and then he must start hopping on one foot. Anyone caught becomes a lame wolf and must help catch the other players. The children rush home and the wolf and whoever he catches goes back to the den. Then the children venture out again to tease and taunt the wolf. The game continues until only one child remains. That player becomes the lame wolf for the next game.

Fox and Geese: We played this game a lot in the snow, before snowmobiles and computers. Gets children out in the fresh air. Make this illustration in the snow. The center where the paths cross, is the goal or safe area.

The player who is the fox chases the other players who are the geese, trying to tag (touch) someone. If he succeeds, that player becomes the fox. The players must stay in the paths. The geese can jump across from one path to another, but the fox can not. Neither can the fox tag a goose across the paths. Any goose who is in the center (safe area) is safe and can not be tagged. However, only one goose can be in the safe area at a time. The last one in the center is safe and the other must leave.

Cat and Rat: Players stand in a circle, holding hands. One player stands inside the circle, he is the rat. Another player is outside the circle, he is the cat. The cat tries to catch the rat, but the other players help the rat and hinder the cat by raising and lowering their arms and by not allowing that cat to break through when chasing the rat.

Hilly, Hilly Over: This is a simple game and we used to throw the ball over the country schoolhouse. After choosing up teams, each team stands on opposite side of a building (we used our family one car garage). It was hard shooting the ball all the way over the roof of the schoolhouse. After shooting the ball over the roof to the other team, someone catches it and puts it behind his back. All players of that team put one arm behind their backs pretending to have the ball. They then run to the other side of the building and the one with the ball tries to touch someone. But with all of them having their arms behind them, the other team doesn’t know who has the ball, who to avoid and not be captured (touched). If the player with the ball touches someone on the other team, that player now has to stay and play on that team. The team with the ball stays on that side of the building and the other team runs to the other side. And so it continues...

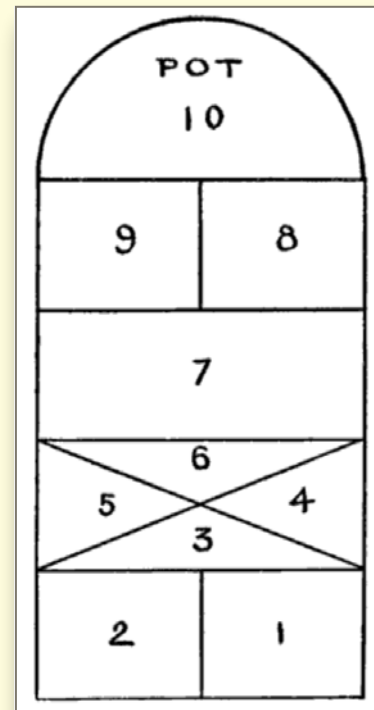
Witch's Cage: One of the players is the witch. Each of the other players chooses a tree, post, large rock, (etc.) as their home. The witch marks off on the ground her home and cages for the captured players. The players run out from their homes and the witch pursues them. When she catches a player, she puts him in a cage. The only way a captured player may be freed is to be touched by one of the other players. After being freed he goes back to his home, but the player who freed him is in danger of being caught by the witch. When all of the players are caught, a new witch is selected.

Chicken Market: A game from Italy. All the players pretend to be chickens, except two who are the buyer and the market woman. The market woman says to the players: "Stand in a row, little chickens. Stoop down and clasp your hands under your knees. Don't unclasp your hands and don't laugh or even smile, no matter what happens."

The buyer then comes up and asks, "Have you any chickens?" "Yes, I have very nice chickens," answers the market woman. "Would you like to try them?" "Yes", says the buyer. Then the buyer goes to the rows of chickens and places his hands on the first little chicken's head and says, "This is too old." He puts his hand on the second chicken and says, "This is too skinny." On the third chicken, he says, "This is too tough." If a little chicken laughs, he is out of the game. The buyer continues down the row until at last he says, "This is just right." The buyer takes the little chicken by the arm and swings it. "One, two, three," they count as they swing. You are a good little chicken. You kept your hands clasped and you did not laugh."

Hop Scotch: Mark the diagram on the cement or walk. Begin:

A player stands two or three feet from the base of the diagram and tosses a flat stone trying to get it in number 1. If he succeeds, he hops on one leg into number 1 box. Picks up stone, and hops out. In doing this he must not touch any lines with his foot. He next throws the stone in number 2 box, hops on one foot on number 1, then to number 2. This continues until he fails to get the stone completely in the correct space, he touches a line with his foot, fails to pick up the stone, or when touches the other foot to the ground. Number 8 is the "resting bed." When the player reaches number 8 he can rest, putting both feet down. Before proceeding he must resume the hopping position before reaching the top or "cat's face." The player then turns around and hops back. Each player in turn tries his luck.



If the stone is pitched into the wrong number of falls on a line, the player loses his turn. If he puts both feet down, except in the "resting bed", sets his foot on a line, he also loses his turn.

Hopscotch court, p. 357, fig. 294, A Typical American Court with Ten Subdivision; D. C. Beard, *The Outdoor Handy Book: For the Playground, Field, and Forest*, New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907. This image is in the public domain because the first publication occurred before January 1, 1923.

Kick the Can: We used to play this every night when the weather was warm and we had our homework done. All the neighborhood kids would come to the store to play. Those were wonderful days. Our jail was the gas pumps. We would use an oil can to kick. One player was “it” and he would kick the can. The other players would run and hide. “It” would count to 100 and yell, “Here I come, ready or not.” If he finds a player he runs back to the can (which he had retrieved and set up close to the jail) and yells, “I see Jack behind the tree.” If Jack beats “It” back to the can, he kicks it and “It” must get the can again and replace it before he can look for the hidden players again. If “It” beats Jack back to the can, Jack goes to jail.

At any point in the game while “It” is out hunting for players, a player can run to the jail and free all the prisoners with the cry, “All-ee-all—ee-in free!” Let me say that again, “All-ee-all-ee-in-free.” The rescuer then kicks the can as far as he can and “It” must come back, retrieve the can and start all over again. This game could go on all night.

Remember musical chairs, pin the tail on the donkey, or drop the clothespin in the bottle? Life was simpler. We played games more. We were kids longer. When was the last time your kids played one of these games? Don’t let these games be just a memory or forgotten. Play them today. Give your kids a happy childhood filled with good memories.

Capture the Flag: Wow! This really brings back happy memories. Another favorite game we played during the country schoolhouse recess.

Players are evenly divided into two side. Zones are marked off by drawing lines 30 to 60 feet apart with a center line. In back is a box 5x10 with the “flag”, a stick sticking into the ground.

All players are standing next to the center line on their teams side. One player crosses the line and tries to “capture the flag.” But if the enemy touches him, he becomes a prisoner and must stand next to the opposite teams flag. The prisoner can be freed if a teammate runs across the line without being tagged by the enemy and captures the flag and runs back across the line (with the flag). A prisoner must keep one foot in the prison. If there are several prisoners, only one must keep one foot in the prison with the other prisoners linking hands and stretching towards a