



Forest Preserve District of Cook County (Illinois)



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Ask A Scientist

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Forest Preserve District of Cook County
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****:OLD SCHOOLYARD GAMES

Children are much the same everywhere: naturally, they want to have fun and play games. Many of the games enjoyed in our American schoolyards and playgrounds today were played by our great-grandparents, Some of them, with different names and rules, were brought from other countries and their origins are lost in the mists of antiquity. In ancient Greece and Rome, for instance, youngsters rolled hoops, flew kites and played games like hide-and-seeK, blindman's buff and hopscotch. Our American Indians were fun-loving people with scores of games. The Iroquois invented lacrosse and Indian children flew kites of bladders, spun teetotums (a kind of top), made "cats' cradles" with fibers, and played tag, hide-and-seeK, blindman's buff and shuttlecock.

Hide-and-seeK is a common game in Persia and most European countries where it originated from an ancient custom of seeking birds, insects and flowers as trophies heralding the approach of spring. Drop the handkerchief, which, in Scandinavian countries, was derived from a folk-tale of the Norsemen, is also a favorite in Greece, Italy, Russia and Japan. London Bridge, called "Falling Bridge" in France and "Bro, BroBreda" in Denmark, was a part of the folklore of the early Teutons. Fox and Geese is played all over the world including China, particularly where they have snow. Prisoner's Base, also called "Dare Base" and "Stealing Sticks", dates back to the original Olympic games when it was called "War is Declared".

Boys and girls still play Pom-pom-pullaway or Red Rover, Run-sheep-run or "I spy!", Statue Maker or "Cheese it!", Follow-the-leader, "Johnny, may I cross your River?" and "How many miles to Babylon?" Boys still walk on homemade stilts, originally invented for crossing rivers and marshes, and play mumblety-peg with their two-bladed jack-knives. The original name was "mumble-the-peg" because the loser had to use his teeth to pull a peg driven in the ground, Girls skip ropes, play "jacks" or "jackstones", and play hopscotch -- hopping through the spaces of a diagram "scotched" or scratched on the ground, or chalked on a sidewalk.

Among the games played by larger boys, are leap frog, duck-on-the-rock, tug of war, crack the whip, and shinny. The last two are especially

adapted for ice and shinny was the forerunner of our modern ice hockey. As early as 500 BC, in Athens, it was played with curved sticks and a puck. During the Middle Ages it was known as "bandy" in England and Wales, "hurley" in Ireland, and "shinty" in Scotland.

Baseball, our national game, is credited to Abner Doubleday who, in 1839, laid out a diamond with 90-foot sides and set up rules for two opposing teams of eleven players each. However, at least five bat-and-ball games were played by Roman children. Early in the 18th century, the English played a game called "baseball" and also "rounders" -- the bases being posts set in the ground. As "town ball", it was played by the early colonists and by Washington's soldiers at Valley Forge. Town ball, one-old-cat and two-old-cat -- still popular with boys, were variations of and the forerunners of modern baseball.

In the days of one-room schools, when the family driving horse was stabled in a small barn, one of the standard games for kids was Andy-over or Antony-over. Two teams lined up on opposite sides of the building. The leader of one side threw the ball, which had to roll or bounce over the peak of the roof, and cried "Andy over ! " If caught, the ball carrier tagged as many as he could while both groups dashed around the building. The game was over when all of one side were captured.

A game by any other name is still the same -- it's FUN.



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