

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES OF EARLY SETTLEMENT CHILDREN

There were several games played by pioneer children that are still played today in homes, schools, and on the playground. Hide-and-Seek, baseball, jump rope, tag, and string games are just a few. Word games were played both at home and at school, because these games helped the children to learn language skills. Games involving guessing were also popular, because these games were good brain exercises and helped students develop their thinking skills.

OUTDOOR GAMES

Recess was a time where several group games were played. Boys and girls sometimes played games together at recess.

- The game of **Fox and Geese** was played in the snow where the students cleared paths in the snow in the shape of a spoked wheel. They then chose one person to be the fox. The fox tried to tag the rest of the players, who were the geese. All the players had to stay within the paths of the wheel. Whoever was tagged by the fox then became the fox and had to chase the geese. An alternative to playing in the snow is to mark four squares on the playground 10 feet across each square. Every player stands on one of the lines forming the square. A signal is given and the person who is “it” has 10 seconds to touch as many players as he/she can. Players who are tagged sit down in the marked area. All players must stay on the line while being chased.
- **Shadow Tag** was a game played on bright, sunny days. Someone was chosen to be “it” at the beginning of recess. That person tried to step on somebody’s shadow. If the others tried to hide under a tree or in the shade, they could only do so to the count of ten before they had to come out into the sun to be part of the game. Whenever “it” stepped on another student’s shadow, that person became the new “it.”
- Two people were chosen to be “it” in **Chain Tag**. Those chosen clasped each other’s hand and began chasing others. When they tagged someone else, that person needed to link hands with one of them to make a chain of three. The chain grew longer as more people were tagged.
- **Blind Man’s Bluff** was a game where one person is blindfolded and the other people are in a circle around him/her. Someone turns the blindfolded

person around several times and lets him/her go to try and tag someone in the circle. Whoever gets tagged becomes the next blindfolded person.

- In **Drop the Handkerchief** (called **Duck, Duck, Goose** today), players form a circle and hold hands while “it” takes a handkerchief or a cloth and runs around the circle dropping the handkerchief behind someone in the circle. That person then picks up the handkerchief and runs the opposite direction of the one who dropped the handkerchief to try and beat him/her back to the place where “it” began. Whoever did not get back to fill in the empty space is “it.”
- **Last Couple Out** was a game where a leader was chosen. The other people involved in the game needed to each choose a partner. Each couple who partnered up lined up behind the leader. When the leader yelled, “Last couple out”, the last couple in the line behind the leader separated and each ran up the side they were on to try to get to the front of the line before the leader tagged one of them. Whoever got tagged became the new leader, and the game continued.
- **Dare Base** was a game where there were two teams. Each team chose an area that was their home base. Sometimes it was around the flagpole or some other place chosen on the playground. Players who would dare would try to run around the home base of the other team. If they were caught, the team that caught them could choose a player from the other team to be on their team. The team who had all the players on their team at the end of the game was the winner, and the game began again.
- **Marbles** was a game where a smooth playing field was required. Either a small hole was made in the middle of the playing area or an inside circle was made where each player would put a marble or more if it was agreed upon by all the players. Each player would take turns flicking a larger marble (called a shooter) at one of the smaller marbles. If a smaller marble went into the hole or was hit outside the circle (depending on the rules used), the person who shot it in the hole or out of the circle would get to keep the marble and get to shoot again. The person with the most marbles at the end of the game was the winner. Note: Shooting a marble is like flipping a coin. Hold the shooter in your curled index finger, and tuck your thumb behind the marble. Flick the marble as hard as possible. Players kneel on the ground with at least one knuckle of your shooting hand touching the ground until you have shot the marble.

INSIDE GAMES

- In the game **Ducks Fly**, players face the leader who tells the others what to do. They are to copy the leader. For example, the leader may say "Ducks fly" and flap his/her arms. The players also flap their arms. The leader continues with other actions like "birds chirp", etc. But the leader also tries to trick others by saying "sheep oink". The players are required to remain quiet until the leader says it correctly, or they will become the leader.
- **Simon Says** is similar to **Ducks Fly** in that the players do what the leader tells them to do. For example, if the leader says "Simon says, *Thumbs up*" and puts up his thumbs, then the players must do the same thing. But if the leader does not say the words "Simon says" and just says "*jump up and down*," the players should do nothing. Anyone who is tricked by the leader has to become the next leader.
- "It" leaves the room in the game **Hot and Cold** while the others hide a button (or some other object). When "it" returns, he/she has to try and find the button while the others give hints by saying "warm, warmer, hot, or cold, colder, etc."
- **Jack Straws** is a game similar to "pick up sticks". Sticks of straw or very thin sticks were used. The straws were placed in a pile shaped like a haystack or tent (coming to a point at the top and spread out at the bottom). Each player took a turn pulling a straw out of the pile trying not to move any other straws. If a player was able to get a straw without jiggling any other straws, he/she scored a point. Then it was the next player's turn. The game ended when the stack fell. The winner was the player with the most straws. To make the game more interesting, there were "special" straws which were worth more points.
- In the game **Who Has the Button?**, the players form a circle and the person who is "it" leaves (or closes his/her eyes) while the others pass a "button" or another object around the circle. One person hides the object behind his/her back. All the other players put their hands behind their backs, too. Then "it" is allowed three guesses as to who is hiding the object. If "it" guesses correctly, they exchange places and a new person is "it".
- **Checkers**, as found at <http://www2.powercom.net/%7Edchs/Checkers.htm>, was a game played with two players. Each player's goal is to reach the other side only by moving his/her checkers diagonally. When the opponent's side is reached, another checker is placed upon the checker that reached it. This checker now can move diagonally both backwards and forward to catch his/her opponents. The person who has taken all the checkers of his/her opponent is the winner.

- **Mental Arithmetic** was a great way for students to learn their math. All the problems given by the teacher to the students had to be figured out in their heads without the use of pens, slates, or the board. For example, the teacher might ask $6 \times 2 + 12 - 3 = ?$ The student would answer 21 after figuring it out in his/her head.
- **Math Buzz** was a number game that strengthened students' multiplication skills. Students sat in a circle while "It" chose a buzz number. Each student then began to count in turn. Whenever a student reached a multiple of the "buzz number", the student said "buzz" rather than the number. For example, if "4" was the buzz number, the buzz count would be 1, 2, 3, buzz, 5, 6, 7, buzz, etc.
- **Twenty Questions** was a game where one person thinks of a person, place, or thing, and the other players try to guess who or what it is by asking only "yes" and "no" questions to the person who is "it." The game ends when the answer is guessed or until the twenty questions have been asked.
- **I Have A Basket** was a game where players form a circle and the first player announces to the others, "I have a basket." The person sitting next to him/her asks, "What's inside?" The first person has to name something beginning with "A", the second person beginning with "B", and so on. The game ends when a player cannot think of something that begins with the letter that falls on his/her turn.
- **Cupid's Coming** was played by people deciding upon a letter of the alphabet with which to begin all guessed words. For example, the letter T would be chosen, so the first player to begin would say, "Cupid's coming." The second person or next in line would respond, "How is he coming?" The first person would reply with a word that began with "T" and ended with the ending "ing" or whatever was agreed upon (e.g., tumbling). The game would continue from player to player until someone could not think of a word beginning with the chosen beginning letter and ending. That person would need to leave the game, and the game would continue with the other players.
- **Taboo** was similar to "Cupid's Coming" except the letter chosen to begin every word in "Cupid's Coming" now had to be avoided at all costs. For example, a player would be "It", and the other players would ask "it" questions trying to get him/her to use a word beginning with the forbidden letter. If "it" used the forbidden letter, he/she was out of the game, and the game continued.

LINKS

Several web sites give directions for games played by pioneer children, along with the types of toys that were played with for entertainment.

<http://www.saskschools.ca/~gregory/fun.html#roll>. This site lists several games pioneer children played. They include indoor, outdoor, active, inactive, and group games.

<http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/toys1.htm>. This site shows photos on how to play several pioneer toys.

<http://www.ottawaelem.lasall.k12.il.us/OES%20folder/OES/OES%20Webquest%202002/Lincoln/Lind3rd/3rdgames2.html>. This site lists several types of games played by pioneers. There are live links with directions on how to play some of the games covered. It also shows third graders playing several pioneer games.

<http://www.awhc.org/docs/Education/PioneerLife/TeacherResourceInfo/Pioneer%20Games.pdf>. This site lists several pioneer games. It is in a PDF format.

http://www.ldssplash.com/traditions/pioneer_day/pioneer_day_traditions.htm. This site has live links which gives instructions on how to play several pioneer games (e.g., Jack Straws, Blindman's Bluff, etc.)