

12 Traditional games

Generations of children all over the world have played these surprisingly universal games. Every region has special variations and this chapter serves to remind us of some of the games we might have played, and which we should make the effort to pass on to the current generation of children.

Arm wrestling

Arm wrestling is a sport with two participants. Each participant places one arm, either the right or left, on a surface, with their elbows bent and touching the surface, and they grip each other's hand. The goal is to pin the other player's arm onto the surface, with the winner's arm over the loser's arm.

Did you know that there are arm wrestling associations with competitions happening at international level?

Have you tried to thumb wrestle?



Marbles

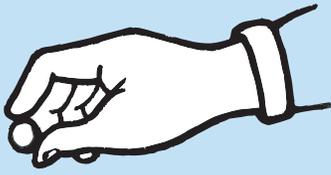
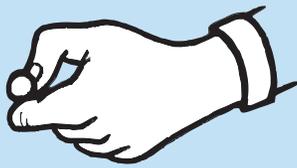
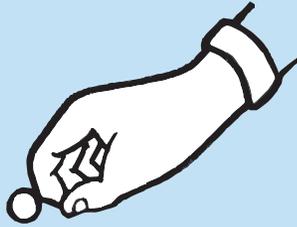
(izimabuli, malies, amaeli, taws)

Marbles can be used in many different ways, and children can create their own games with marbles.

- **Marble golf**

Write the numbers 1-9 on objects such as an empty matchbox, a draughts piece, a bottle lid, a yoghurt cup, and so on. Place them randomly in the playing area. Each player has one marble and shoots in turn from a starting line at target number 1. The player who takes the least number of shots to hit the target wins that “hole”. Players then shoot at target number 2 and so on. The player who completes the whole marble golf course having won the most “holes” is the overall winner. Alternatively, the player who uses the least number of shots over the whole course could be the winner.

HOW TO "SHOOT" A MARBLE

		
<p>1. SQUEEZING: Hold the marble between thumb and index finger and squeeze it.</p>	<p>2. KNUCKLING: Rest knuckles on the ground. Bend in thumb and place the marble in the crook of the first or second finger. Shoot the marble by flicking the thumb forward.</p>	<p>3. FLICKING: A quick flick with the index finger. Useful when trying to hit a close object.</p>

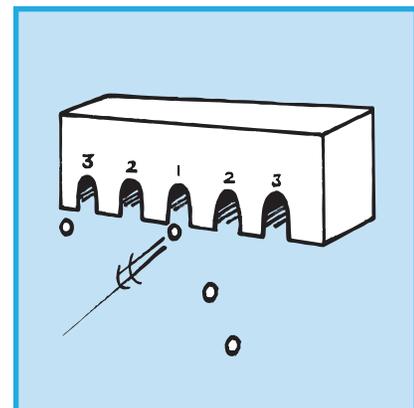
- **Ring Taw**

Draw two circles – a smaller one (about 25 centimetres across) in the centre of a larger one (about 1.5 metres across). Each player places one or two marbles as agreed in the small circle. The first player stands outside the large circle (or “bar”) and shoots their “taw” trying to knock as many marbles out of the inner circle as possible. All marbles knocked out by a player become that player’s property. The successful player continues to shoot from wherever the taw rests until they fail to knock out anymore marbles from the inner circle.

At this point the taw is left where it has rolled, and the turn goes to the next player, who in addition to trying to knock marbles out of the inner ring, may try to hit the first player’s taw. If their taw is hit, the first player must give one marble to the hitter. Each player may only aim for another player’s taw once per turn. The game continues until all marbles are knocked out of the ring.

- **Bounce Eye**

Draw a circle 30 centimetres in diameter. Each player places one marble in the circle. The first player drops a marble from waist height and tries to hit one of the marbles in the circle. Any marble driven out of the circle becomes their property. If no marbles are knocked out, the player adds another marble to the circle and the turn passes to the next player.



MARBLE SHOOTING GALLERY:
Cut holes in a shoe box. Number the holes and allocate scores (smaller holes should have higher scores).

Try and shoot your marble into the highest scoring hole. Each player uses 10 marbles. Highest scorer wins one or two marbles from the other players.

Elastic jumping

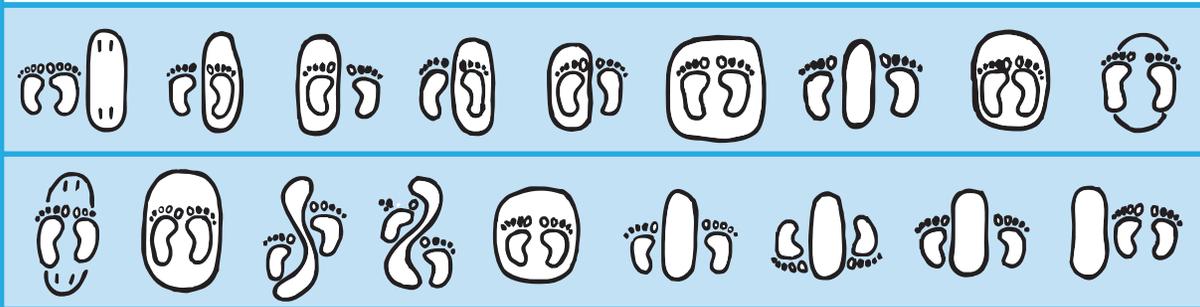
(umagalopha, umghusha)

Players jump sequences on an elastic band held on the legs of two other players. Lengths of elastic can be used. If this is not available, players have often used old pantyhose pieces tied together or even woven grass strands. Play starts with the elastic “band” held on the ankles of support players and, at intervals, this is lifted to right up under the arm pits. Players take turns jumping the sequences and perfecting their skills.

Every region has their own traditional jump sequences, and rules vary. Two popular elastic jump sequences are illustrated below.



TWO POPULAR ELASTIC JUMP SEQUENCES



Skipping

(inqathu, kgati, ugqaphu, ntimo)

This game is played with a thick rope and it can be played outside or indoors in an open space. Two players must hold the two ends of the rope with one hand and swing it in the same direction. The other players will be waiting in queues to take turns jumping over the rope. While players jump they might sing local rhymes or songs; as the song gets faster and faster, so too does the rhythm of the swinging rope.

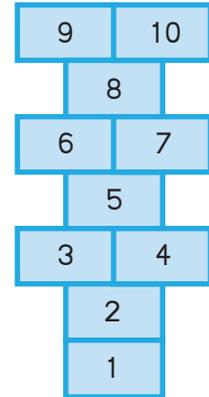
Jumpers can jump as many times as they want as long as they don't stop or touch the rope. If that happens they must stop jumping and become the rope holder. Any jumper who touches and stops the rope is said to be “uqhustile” (faulted).

Hopscotch

If playing on cement or concrete, draw a hopscotch plan with chalk; if using the ground, draw the plan with a stick. Number the squares or spaces.

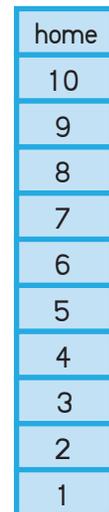
- **Traditional hopscotch**

- First, throw a stone into square 1.
- Hop over square 1 into square 2.
- Jump into square 3 and 4, landing with one foot in each square.
- Hop into square 5, jump into squares 6 and 7, hop into square 8 and jump into squares 9 and 10.
- Jump completely around and land back in squares 9 and 10, facing the way you have come.
- Jump and hop back again in the same way, stopping on square 2.
- Standing on one leg, pick up the stone from square 1 and hop over it.
- Start again, this time throwing the stone into square 2, then square 3, and so on.
- You miss a turn if your stone does not land in the right square; you accidentally step into the same square as the stone; you stand on the line; or you put two feet on the ground while hopping.
- The winner is the first person to pick up the stone from square 10 and get back to the start.



- **Ladder Hopscotch**

The player throws the stone into square 1, hops over that square into square 2, then 3, 4, and so on up to 10 and then lands on “home” with both feet. The player “jumps” around to again land on both feet in the “home” square and then hops back into each square until 2. After picking up the stone from square 1, the player hops over that square and back to baseline.



Continue to play as above (traditional hopscotch).



Hopscotch patterns and other games painted on school grounds.

Hide and Seek

Choose a player to be a “seeker” and station them at a central place designated “home”. The seeker covers his or her eyes and counts up to 20 or so while everyone else goes and hides. When the seeker reaches the end of their count, they shout a warning, “Coming, ready or not”, and they start to look for the hiders. The hiders have to try and reach “home” before being caught, and if they do this they are “safe”. The first player to be caught is the next seeker.

Try playing this in the dark. Give the seeker a torch.

Adapt game for children of different ages. Younger children might need adults to help them find spaces to hide. If the game is in your house, make sure that players know the “out of bounds” areas!

- **Sardines**

In this version of the game, one player goes off to hide while the others shut their eyes. Once hidden, all the other players split up to search for the hider. When a seeker finds the hider, they carefully slip into the hiding place with them (the hiding place should accommodate a few players). As further players find the hiding place, they too silently squeeze into the space, which becomes tighter and increasingly squashed up.

Other players become aware that fellow searchers are disappearing and rush to the places last seen. When the last person arrives, they are sometimes chased back to the starting point, but more often than not there are sighs of relief as the “sardines” come forth from their cramped positions.

- **Hunt the Lantern** (a traditional scout game)

This game usually takes place on a dark night in a bushy camping area. There should be trees, boulders, shadows, and so on to hide in. Players line up at one end of the playing area, while one player, holding a flashlight, stands at the other end. The object of the game is to move from one end of the playing area to the other, past the person holding the flashlight. The player with the flashlight stands with their back to the other players. Every five seconds or so they turn around and scan the playing area for three seconds. If a moving player gets caught by the flashlight beam, they must return to the starting end. Stationary players remain where they are.

The first player to successfully move past the “flasher” becomes the light or “lantern” for the next round.

Variation: The player with the flashlight keeps the flashlight on, and continuously scans the playing area. Stalking players dress in dark clothes and need to be more skilful in getting past the light.

Tag or catching games

(aan-aan; touchers; cops and robbers)

- **Chain tag**

One player is the catcher. When they catch another player they join hands and together try to catch other players. The last player to be caught is the winner. The chain can split once four players are holding hands.

- **Stuck in the mud**

Once a player is caught by the catcher, they must stand frozen and “stuck in the mud”. The only way to rejoin the game is to have a friend crawl through their legs to free them. The first player to be stuck three times is the catcher in the next game.

- **Catch my tail**

Each player tucks a tail (cloth, piece of rope) into the back of their waistband. The object of the game is for each player to grab another’s tail. Once your tail is taken you cannot take anyone else’s tail. Last player with a tail wins.

- **Shipwreck**

The catcher tries to catch other players who are “safe” when they are on an “island” (which could be anything off the ground such as logs, pillows, chairs, rugs, crates, tyres). Players may only stay on an “island” for a couple of seconds at a time. When a player is caught they become the catcher.

- **What’s the time Mr Wolf?**

One player is “Mr Wolf” and stands with their back to the rest of the group. The group calls out, “Wolfie, Wolfie, what’s the time?” Mr Wolf does not turn around but replies in a gruff voice, “eight o’clock” (or any other time). The players walk the number of steps the wolf calls out (in this case eight). The children continue to pester Mr Wolf with their question. Suddenly Mr Wolf cries, “Dinner time!” and turns round and chases the other players. The children run back to the starting point (usually screaming). If Mr Wolf catches one of them before they reach home, that person is the next Mr Wolf.

