



Let's Play

A collection of party games from other nations

by Karen Olesch-Williams

When my oldest son was nearly 4 years old, my husband and I planned a Valentine's Day party for him and his preschool friends. We deliberated about the games they might play at the party, desperately trying to remember what we had played in our youth.

My husband, who is British, suggested "Pass the Parcel" and "Lucky Dip." I stared at him blankly. I suggested "Hot Potato." He gave me a quizzical look.

In the end, we decided to play all the games we could recall from our childhoods. It was the beginning of our family tradition of seeking out and playing multicultural party games.

After the Valentine's Day party, I began to plan my son's birthday party. I visited the library and several bookstores looking for a book on party games from other countries. I only found one outdated and not particularly useful book. So I asked my husband, who works with a lot of colleagues from other countries, to ask some of his friends and coworkers if I could talk to them about the games they played when they were children.

Everyone was eager to help. I spent several months interviewing people, struggling with language barriers. Some of the people I spoke with knew little

English, others were difficult to understand, and some of the words and concepts in various games were difficult to translate into English. As a result, we found ourselves drawing diagrams and playing the games to get their ideas across.

In the end, we were successful. I had a new array of games to play at my son's party. Here are just a few of the games we have learned from friends and colleagues, organized by country of origin.

Colchester, England

Taken from interviews with Daron Olesch-Williams and Stephen and Johanna Smith

Lucky Dip

Ages 18 months to 10 years.

1. Fill a big container with packing peanuts.
2. Hide small prizes in different places among the packing peanuts.
3. Each child gets to choose a prize by reaching into the container and pulling out whatever she finds.

This is a great game because everybody gets a prize. At our Valentine's Day party, we put enough prizes in the container so that each child had three turns. We spread the turns over the course of two hours and played this game after each game in which only one child could win.



Squeak Piggy Squeak

Ages 3 to 10 years.



1. Ask the children to sit cross-legged in a circle.
2. Select one child to stand in the center and be blindfolded.
3. Spin the blindfolded child around and guide him to sit on another child's lap.
4. The sitting child squeaks like a pig.
5. The blindfolded child has to guess whose lap he is sitting on. He keeps guessing until he is correct.
6. The child in whose lap he sat gets the next turn to be blindfolded.

When playing this game, it is a good idea to direct the blindfolded children to ensure that everyone gets a chance. You'll find that when older children play, it's more difficult for the children to correctly guess whose lap they are sitting in because older children are better at disguising their squeaks.

Dead Lions

Ages 4 to 7 years.



1. All the children lie down on the ground and pretend they are dead lions.
2. Any child who moves is out of the game.
3. The last child to move is the winner.

This simple game was one of the children's favorites at our last party. We found that the older children would have lain on the ground indefinitely,

so we modified the game and tickled the remaining children in order to get them to move.

Pass the Parcel

Ages 3 to 8 years.



In this British version of Hot Potato, the children pass a gift that has been wrapped in at least six layers of paper. (The children don't know how many layers of paper are on the parcel.)

1. All the children sit in a circle.
2. When the music plays, they quickly pass the parcel around.
3. When the music stops, the child holding the gift gets to unwrap one layer of wrapping paper.
4. The child who unwraps the last layer gets to keep the gift.

Gujrat, India

Taken from an interview with Poorvi Shah

Many parties in India, including children's birthday parties, are large affairs that include family and friends. For this reason, these games are suitable for groups of 30 or more people. Prizes are uncommon; being recognized as the winner is more important.

Parrots Fly

Ages 3 to 8 years.



1. Each child sits on the floor and places the tip of her

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- index finger and the heel of her hand on the floor.
2. An adult or older child starts the game by saying, "Parrots, fly!"
 3. The children lift their index fingers into the air while keeping the heel of their hand on the floor; then return their fingers to the ground.
 4. The leader continues to call out commands to fly, such as "Robins, fly!" or "Carrots, fly!" But the children are only supposed to lift their fingers if the command is about something that actually can fly. Any child who lifts her finger on one of the other commands is out of the game, as is any child who doesn't raise her finger on a command for something that does fly.
 5. The game starts slowly and gets faster, making it harder for the children who are playing it. The last person left is the winner.

This game was a hit at our son's 4th birthday party. The younger children laughed when I called out false statements such as, "Houses, fly!" The kids thought they were very clever to know which things fly and which do not. I found it difficult to trick the children, so we had two winners.

Antakshri

Ages 7 to adult.

This singing game is one of the most common party games played in western India. The object is to avoid becoming the *Ga dhe do* (the donkey). The losers become the donkeys.

For fewer than 10 players:

1. Children and adults sit in a circle.
2. Someone starts the game by singing a song and everyone joins in.
3. When the song ends, the person to the left of the person who started the first song must start a song that begins with the last word of the previous song.
4. If the person can't think of a song within one minute, he is out.
5. The game continues until only one person is left, and that person is the winner.

For 10 or more players:

1. The players divide into two teams.
2. After the first team sings a song, the second team has to sing a song that starts with the last word of the first team's song.
3. The first time a team can't think of a song, they get the *Ga* (the first syllable of *Ga dhe do*). Play continues until one of the teams has failed to come up with a song three times, at which point they are the donkeys.

The Lemon Drop Game

Ages 5 to 10 years.

We modified this game slightly from the original, in

which the children carry the spoon in their mouths.

1. Each child gets a lemon and a spoon.
2. The children balance the lemons on the spoon and race to the finish line.
3. If a child drops her lemon, she can pick it up and continue.
4. The first child to make it to the finish line with the lemon on the spoon wins the game.

This simple game was so popular at our party that the children requested that we play it a second time, which we did.

Indian Musical Chairs

Ages 4 to 8 years.

This variation of a familiar game uses people instead of chairs. In India it is played by mothers and their children, but we play it with fathers, too.

1. The parents stand in a line. The first parent places her right hand on her hip; the second places his left hand on his hip; and so on. The number of parents should be one less than the number of children.
2. When the music starts, the children run around the parents.
3. When the music stops, each child hooks his or her arm through a parent's arm.
4. The child who has no one to hook arms with is out of the game.

Eastern Nigeria

Taken from interviews with Raphael Udeogu and Eric Ekwonwa

Nchorokutu (Ibo language)

Ages 3 to 5 years.

This game is traditionally used to foster young children's social skills and teach them to count.

There are no prizes, but older children bet on who will win the game. The wager is typically a banana, mango or cookie.

1. Two children are chosen as the players; the others watch the game.
2. Two rows of six holes are carved in the sand, one above the other. The top holes belong to player one, and the bottom holes to player two.
3. The children place four palm kernels in each hole. (Any small nut will do.)



4. Player one takes four palm kernels out of his first hole and places one kernel in holes two, three, four and five. (Play moves counter-clockwise.)
5. Player two does the same starting with the first hole on her side.
6. Player one takes as many palm kernels as he thinks he needs out of hole 5 and continues distributing one kernel in holes 6, 7, 8, 9, etc., all the way to hole 12.
7. Player two follows suit.
8. Each player tries to distribute as many palm kernels as possible to the other player's holes by choosing enough palm kernels to make it past his or her own holes and deposit them into the other player's holes.
9. The first player to have a hole with no palm kernels wins the game.

Onye E Lele Anya N'azu

Ages 4 to 8 years.

This is one of many popular Nigerian circle games that involve chanting songs and playing homemade instruments.

1. All but one of the children sit cross-legged in a circle.
2. The one child standing outside the circle places an object (stick or pebble) behind a sitting child and taps the back of that child.
3. While the object is being placed behind the child, all the children chant: "Don't look behind you. Onye

e lele anya n'azu. Masquerade is coming behind you. Mmanwe anyi na-abia n'azu."

4. When the sitting child is tapped, she gets up and chases the standing child around the circle.
5. The standing child tries to get to the sitting child's spot without being caught. If he is caught, he plays the same role again. Otherwise, the child who was tapped is now the standing child.

Kpu Kpu Nkpu Ogele

Ages 3 to 8 years.

This is a good game to help a group of children learn one another's names.

1. All the children sit in a circle with their legs outstretched.
2. One child beats on the end of a U-shaped drum and chants, "Play the Ogele. Play the Ogele. Kpu kpu mkpu ogele."
3. The other children pat the beat on their laps and respond, "Who is playing the Ogele? Ogele ogele ge."
4. The child's name is called out: "Eric is playing the Ogele. Eric na-kpu ogele, ogele, ogele, ogele ge."
5. After this is repeated up to four times, the Ogele is passed to the next player.
6. The drum goes around until each child has a turn.

Karen Olesch-Williams and her husband live in Algonquin, N.Y. with their children, Talieson, 4, and Draigh, 2.



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