

## COLONIAL FUN AND GAMES

### **Background info on children in colonial times.....**

Boys and girls were taught that work was good for them. They worked hard doing their chores. Girls that were old enough would help with the cooking and baking. Girls would dye and weave wool, sew linen for clothing, churn butter, harvest herbs and vegetables and of course help with the cleaning. Boys helped their dads plow, plan, hoe and harvest crops, chop firewood, use hand tools to make things out of wood, and if old enough learn to use a musket to hunt small game. Young children would also do chores such as feeding chickens, fetching fresh laid eggs and dipping candles, even children as young as five would help harvest vegetables. The children enjoyed their work and took satisfaction in doing it well. But even though the children were busy they always found some time to play.

### ***They used natural materials for fun too.***

**Apples** – they would dry them and poke features in them to make a doll's head

**Corn Cob** – cobs were cut into pieces and used as building blocks

**Shells** – were used as dishes for dolls or used in hopscotch

**Dandelions/Wild Flowers** – used to make necklaces and bracelets

**Walnuts** – were halved and gilded and hung on Christmas trees

**Fruit pits** – were used as counters in games

**Gourds** – hollow them out and blow through them to make noise

**Pressed flowers** – used for designs or pictures

Knives – all boys owned a pocketknife. It was used to make toys and work around the house. The name 'jack knife' came about by saying Jack's knife.

### **Talk/Discuss**

Start by asking how they spend their free time and solicit info from the children so it is a back-and-forth dialogue. Discuss the games and toys, show them what we have –jacks, tops, Jacob's ladder and ball in cup.

### **Craft Project**

Next tell them they will make a "buzz-saw." Explain how to make it, pass out materials (30-inch string and one button per child) and have them make it – help out where necessary. Give a piece of masking tape to put child's initials on the button. Please make use of the chaperones if lots of children need help.

### **The classic "Button Buzzer" or "Buzz Saw"**

It's simply a button or disk suspended between your two hands on a loop of string. When the string gets twisted and you pull your hands apart, the button whirls, first in one direction and then the other.

**Cool Facts:** More than 300 United States patents have been awarded for button-spinning toys. The technical name for a button-on-a-string toy is "string torsion device." Pioneer children played with disk-spinning toys more than 150 years ago.

### **Play some games**

If it is nice outside take them out to play Blindman's Buff. Explain the rules, choose a person and play the game.

If time permits show them how to play hopscotch (it will be made in the driveway out front).

At the 5-minutes-left time, wrap up the game and bring the children back in to get their "buzz saw."

If it is raining, let them play with Jacob's ladder, jacks, tops, cat's cradle and both the real and their newly made "buzz-saw." To do this you should break the children into groups so they can rotate through these indoor activities.

## SAMPLE — CLASS OUTLINE

We are here to talk about what colonial children did for fun and games.

Do you think the children back then had a lot of free time? (No) What do you think their usual day was like? (lots of chores/helping mom and dad, some went to school part of the year – but not during farming season) But they did have some free time!

### Let's start off by asking you – how do you spend your free time?

- Watching TV
- Playing sports
- Computer or video games
- Dancing/gymnastics/drama
- How do you get to after school activities (driven in a car)

If you lived during colonial times (about 200 years ago) you would have lived on a family farm or in a small town like Holliston. How close do you think your neighbors were? (very spread out)

Do any of you play soccer or baseball or softball? How many kids do you have on a team? If your nearest neighbor was a mile away, do you think you could get 12-20 kids together to play a game? (No). So who do you think you would play with most of the time? (brothers and sisters)

### What kinds of games do you think they played?

- Toy games – Marbles, tops, cat's cradle, dolls, Jacob's ladder, ball-in-cup, jacks, buzz-saw
- Jumping games – Jump rope, hopscotch
- Running games – Tag, snap the whip, kick the can, capture the flag, rolling hoops
- Tossing games – Bean bags, quoits (similar to present day horseshoes), lawn bowling
- Board games – Chess, checkers, Parcheesi
- Team Sports – Baseball, softball (not soccer, basketball, football or hockey)
- Winter – Skating (only men and boys), sledding, snowball forts
- Wealthy people – Tennis, Yachting
- Other – Yo-yo, kite flying, swinging, Jack straws

In the colonial period, these games helped children learn skills that they would need later in life as farmers and parents. Games taught children how to aim and throw, how to solve problems and do things with their hands, and how to follow directions and rules. They also learned to be fair, to wait their turn, and to use their imaginations.

### Where do you think they got their toys?

Colonial children had to make do with what they had. There were no factories for making toys – no toy stores. Toys had to be found in nature or they had to make them. They made dolls from cornhusks and rags. Leftover wood and string could be used to make spinning tops. Hoops from barrels could be used in races and other games. Many times the children made up their games and needed no equipment at all - they improvised with what was around the farm they lived on.

### Bees

When colonial families faced a hard task, they made the work lighter and more enjoyable by working together. They held flaxing bees, quilting bees and corn husking bees. One family would host the "bee" and everyone would work together and tell stories or sing songs. In the evening, after the work was done, the host family would serve a big meal and the children would play.

## GAMES TO PLAY

### BLINDMAN'S BUFF

Called “blindman’s buff,” this game was popular with adults as well as children in the 1700s. In earlier times, the players not only spun the blindfolded person around, but shoved or buffeted him or her, which is how the name “buff” started. The colonists played the game according to the rules used here. Any number can play; the more the better.

#### Materials

Handful of sticks or straws of different lengths

Scarf or similar cloth for the blindfold

5 or more players

1. **To start:** players draw sticks or straws to see who will be the first blindfolded player. The player who draws the shortest one wears the blindfold.
2. **To play:**
  - a. One player ties a blindfold securely around the person who is “it.” The other players form a circle around him/her.
  - b. One or two players step forward. They spin the blindfolded player around two or three times, then rejoin the circle.
  - c. The players join hands and walk in a circle around the blindfolded player. The player who is “it” claps three times and the circle stops moving.
  - d. “It” points at one player who must step into the circle. The blindfolded player has one chance to guess who the person is. If the guess is right, that person takes the blindfold. If the guess is wrong (and it usually is), the blindfolded player tries to catch the player by touching him on the head, clothing or feet.
  - e. The blindfolded player then has one more chance to guess who the player is. If the guess is right, they change places and the player become “it.” If the guess is wrong, the player rejoins the circle, the blindfolded player is spun around again, and the game continues.

#### Notes

Colonists who came to America from other countries often played the same games, but with different names and often with different rules. Swedish colonists who settled in New Jersey and Delaware played blindman’s buff but they called it *Blindbock*, which means “blind buck.” German settlers in Pennsylvania called the game *Blindekuh*, meaning “blind cow.” And to French settlers in the Hudson River Valley of New York colony, the game was known as *colin maillard*, which came from a legend about a heroic knight who was temporarily blinded in battle but continued to swing his sword at the charging enemy. Over the years, many people forgot the meaning of the word “buff” and began calling the game “blindman’s bluff.”

## **PLAYING JACKS**

The game the colonists called jackstones is known today as jacks. You can buy a set, which includes six 6-pointed metal jacks. Or you can be like colonial children and use six small stones, pumpkin seeds or any other small objects that are all the same size. A set will include a small, bouncy ball, but any small ball with a good bounce will do. Or, like colonial children, use a round, smooth stone. (If you use a stone, toss it the air rather than try to bounce it.) Here are three of the most popular games.

### **Materials**

Ball or round, smooth stone  
6 jacks or other small objects of the same size  
2 or more players

### **GENERAL RULES for Jacks**

*There are more than 100 different jacks games, but most follow these basic rules.*

1. Two or more people can play, indoors or out.
2. To start: a player tosses the ball in the air, scatters the jacks, and catches the ball on one bounce. The player wants the jacks to land pretty close together, but not so close that they're hard to pick up one at a time. Even if he doesn't like the way they landed, he must play the jacks as they lie.
3. During play, the player must pick up the jacks and catch the ball on one bounce with the same hand.
4. When picking up jacks, the player can touch only the ones he is picking up. If he moves or touches others, his turn is over.
5. On any play, each player has only one try. If he makes a mistake, it's the next player's turn.
6. If a player makes a mistake and loses his turn, on the next turn he goes back to the beginning of the play in which he made the mistake.

### **GAME 1: Ones-Through Sixes (also called Onesies, Twosies)**

*Note: Remember that to start, the first player tosses the ball, scatters the jacks, and catches the ball on one bounce. The ball can bounce only once; if a stone is used, the stone is tossed in the air and must be caught before it lands.*

1. To play:
  - a. For ones (onesies): Player 1 tosses the ball again, picks up one jack, then catches the ball on one bounce with the same hand. Player 1 then puts the jack in the other hand and repeats the play, again picking up one jack. Player 1 continues until all six jacks have been picked up, one at a time.
  - b. For twos (twosies): Player 1 bounces the ball, picks up two jacks, catches the ball on one bounce in the same hand, then puts the jacks in the other hand. Player 1 continues until he/she has picked up all six jacks, two at a time.
  - c. For threes (threesies): Player 1 bounces the ball, picks up three jacks, catches the ball on one bounce in the same hand. He/she then puts the jacks in the other hand and repeats the play to pick up the remaining three jacks.
  - d. For fours (foursies): Player 1 picks up four jacks on one toss, then two on the next toss.
  - e. For fives (fivesies): Player 1 picks up five jacks at once, then one jack on the next toss.
  - f. For sixes (sixies): Player 1 picks up all six jacks at once and catches the ball on one bounce with the same hand.
2. To win: A player who goes from ones through sixes without an error is a winner, but this player can be tied if another player also has a perfect round. Remember, when a player loses a turn, he/she starts the next turn at the beginning of the mistake. If the error was made on threes, for example, the player starts over at the beginning of threesies.

**GAME 2: Crack the Egg**

1. To play: Same as Ones-Through-Sizes, but after picking up each jack or jacks, the player must tap them on the playing surface before catching the ball.
2. To win: Same as Ones-Through Sixes.

**GAME 3: Sheep Over the Fence**

1. To play:
  - a. The player stretches one arm on the playing surface, with the arm flat on the surface from the elbow to the hand. This is the fence. Right-handed players use their left arms for the fence; left-handed players use their right arms.
  - b. During play, the player uses the free hand to play and cannot move the fence. The player must pick up each jack or jacks, place (not toss) them over the fence, then catch the ball. After catching the ball, the player transfers the jacks to the hand on the “fence” arm. Play proceeds as in Ones-Through-Sixes.
2. To win: Same as Ones-through-Sixes.

**HOPSCOTCH**

Hopscotch is a wonderful hopping game that can be played on a bare patch of ground or on a floor indoors. There are hundreds of variations of the diagram that can be drawn. Use your favorite version to have children play.

Use chalk to draw a hopscotch pattern on the ground or use masking tape on a floor. Create a diagram with 8–10 sections and number them. Each player has a marker such as a stone, beanbag, bottlecap, shell, button, etc.

The first player stands behind the starting line to toss her or his marker in square 1. Hop over square 1 to square 2 and then continue hopping to square 8 (or 10), turn around, and hop back again. Pause in square 2 to pick up the marker, hop in square 1, and out. Then continue by tossing the stone in square 2. All hopping is done on one foot unless the hopscotch design is such that two squares are side-by-side. Then two feet can be placed down with one in each square. A player must always hop over any square where a marker has been placed.

A player is out if the marker fails to land in the proper square, the hopper steps on a line, the hopper loses balance when bending over to pick up the marker and puts a second hand or foot down, the hopper goes into a square where a marker is, or if a player puts two feet down in a single box. The player puts the marker in the square where he or she will resume playing on the next turn, and the next player begins.

Sometimes a dome-shaped “rest area” is added on one end of the hopscotch pattern where the player can rest for a second or two before hopping back through.