With the advent of computers, video games, and other modern technological marvels, some of the simpler pursuits of thirty, forty, fifty, or more years ago appear to have been lost or forgotten. However, many of these games developed balance, strength and coordination, fine motor skills, and locomotor and non-locomotor movements. These games can be as interesting and engaging today as they were in the past—students just need to be reintroduced to them. This article describes several of these activities, and also incorporates interdisciplinary concepts into the playing of traditional games. The activities described in this article include descriptions of these classic games followed by a version with an interdisciplinary twist. All can be played indoors or outside, in a gym or a classroom. A description of an interdisciplinary version of the game is included after the description of each “regular” game. Subject areas include math, history, social studies, geography, and world language arts. Each description includes detailed rules and sources from which rules for the activities and related information can be obtained. This article describes four games: Marbles, Jacks, Four-Square, and Hopscotch.

Marbles

Although most of us think of marbles as an old-fashioned pastime, the game is still fun for children of all ages and is played around the globe. Benefits to students include eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills. These are the rules for a version of “ring taw” marbles, an older, more common variant. There are many variations; this is just one.

Equipment: marbles, string or chalk. A large hoop can be set around the smaller chalk/string circle to prevent marbles escaping on a hard or wood floor.

Procedure

- Organize the students into groups of three or four.
- Ask them to draw a circle 2 to 3 feet wide using chalk on asphalt or concrete, a stick in dirt, or a string on the floor.
- Each student selects a shooter marble (shooter marbles are the larger marbles used to knock the smaller marbles out of the ring) and places the...
remaining smaller marbles inside the circle as targets.
• Use “lagging” to decide playing order. The players line up opposite a line 10 feet away (the “lag line”) and shoot their shooter marbles at it. The player whose marble ends up closest to the line goes first, the next closest goes second, and so on.
• Each student takes a turn flicking the shooter marble from outside the ring at any of the marbles inside the ring and gathers any marbles he or she knocked out of the ring. Another turn is awarded if any marbles were knocked out of the ring.
• The next player begins if no marbles were knocked out and/or the shooter marble remains in the ring.
• Players continue shooting, taking turns, until the ring is empty.
• The winner is the player with the most marbles at the end of the game.
• Marbles are returned to their original owners unless playing for “keepsies.” In that case, each player keeps the marbles he or she won during the game.

Mathematical Marbles
This game works to strengthen addition and subtraction skills.
**Equipment:** A shooter marble for each player and smaller marbles of 3 or 4 different colors.

**Procedure**
• Played in a similar fashion to traditional marbles using the shooter marble, smaller marbles, and the circle.
• Ask students to assign each color of the smaller marbles a point value, for example, 1 point for blue, 2 points for green, 5 points for yellow.
• Ask students to select a total point value to win, such as 21. The object of mathematical marbles is to get the total point value by knocking out selected marbles.
• The winner is the first person to collect 21 points. It must be exact.
• If shooters goes over 21, they now have to subtract the point value of the marbles they knock out.
• If they miss 21 by subtracting, they begin to add again. The point value of the marbles must add up to 21.

**Variation:** Change the equipment and use tennis balls or whiffle balls instead of marbles (see photo). Mark an “S” on the shooter tennis balls and the numbers 1, 2, and 5 on the other balls. When using whiffle balls, use a white ball for the shooter and colored balls that are assigned a point value. Use a hoop for the ring.

Jacks
True classics never die, and this childhood game doesn’t require much to keep it thriving: a little bouncy ball, at least 10 jacks, and a hard, level playing surface. Jacks works to benefit students’ eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills.

**Equipment:** One set of metal jacks or larger plastic jack set, found at toy stores, for each set of partners.

**Procedure**
• The student sits on the ground (blacktop, sidewalk, or floor) unless they are playing on a table, in which case standing is usually better than sitting on a chair. The 10 jacks are tossed gently out onto the playing surface.
• The student tosses the ball in the air using his or her throwing hand and while the ball is in the air, the student picks up one jack with the throwing hand and catches the ball in the throwing hand before the ball hits the ground.
• The toss, pickup, and catch are repeated until all 10 jacks have been picked up.
• If a student misses the pickup or the catch, the second partner takes a turn. When the second partner misses, the first partner continues where he or she left off before the miss.
• The game can be repeated a second time by picking up two jacks between the toss and catch.
• The game can become more challenging by increasing the number of jacks picked up when the ball is in the air until all ten jacks are picked up at one time.
• Students can choose how a winner is designated. Each round of toss, pickup, and catch with a specified number of jacks can be considered a game or one partner can succeeds at “onesies” through “tensies” (1 jack through 10 jacks) for a longer game. Large jacks, like those in the photo, allow students to collect one at a time, holding on to the jack and catching the ball.

**Variations:** Another way to play is to bounce the ball on the playing surface rather than throw it in the air, and
try to pick up as many jacks as you can before the ball bounces again. A two bounce variation can be added to decrease the difficulty.

To make the game more challenging, a player cannot touch any jacks other than those being picked up or a player must place the jacks picked up in the non-throwing hand before catching the ball.

**Geographical Jacks**

Played the same way as Jacks, but with a geography question asked after each set or if the jacks player makes a miss. This game provides a review of geographical facts.

**Equipment:** One set of metal jacks or larger plastic jack set for each set of partners or group of three, Geography fact/flash cards purchased or created by the students relevant to the content they are learning in the classroom.

**Procedures**

- Use the same playing rules as regular Jacks, with the additional rules described below.
- When getting to the end of each set (“onesies,” “twosies,” etc.), the player has to answer a geography question or fact on the card picked by their partner from the top of the pile.
- If the player gets the geography fact correct, they can continue to the next set. If they get it wrong, they lose their turn. Each time the card should be returned to the bottom of the pile.
- If players make a miss in the middle of a set, they can try to answer a geography fact. This gives them another turn in the set, if they answer correctly. If not, they lose their turn as normal. This can only be done once in any given set.
- Repeat the game until all 10 jacks are picked up.
- Winners can be declared, if desired, based on number of jacks sets completed, or on number of Geography facts answered correctly, or a combination of the two.

**Four Square**

Players take turns bouncing a ball into each other’s squares, which is a bit like tennis. This game benefits players’ eye hand coordination and striking skills.

**Equipment:** A large square (for each group of four students) with four foot sides, divided into four equal six foot squares, numbered one through four. A circle is marked around the lines that meet in the center. Use chalk to draw squares on the pavement or masking tape on carpet or floor. Use one playground ball for each square.

**Procedure**

- Organize the students into groups of four, give the group one ball, and assign them to a square.
- Place one player in or just behind each square.
- Place the starter in square four.
- Line up any additional players behind square one.
- Serve the ball from square four by bouncing it in that square and then hitting it into another square. Players are fine if the ball lands in another square or if someone hits it before it bounces into a square.
- Players should return the ball any time it bounces in their square. Hit it and bounce it into another square.
- Players leave their square and go to the end of the line behind square one if the ball they hit goes outside the boundaries without bouncing or being touched.
- Players go to the end of the line if a ball bounces in their square and they can’t hit it.
- Players go to the end of the line if a ball they hit lands in the circle in the center.
- Move up as other players miss and have to go to the end of the line.
- Develop strategies by learning to bounce the ball at the edge of the square so that it bounces and then goes out of the square.
- Try putting a spin on the ball so that it bounces and then rebounds in the opposite direction.
- Win the game by making it to the fourth square and staying there longer than anyone else.

**World Language Four Square**

Use the same rules as regular Four Square with the addition of incorporating world language counting or study words. This game reinforces recall and practice speaking world language terms and phrases.

**Equipment:** same as Four Square

**Procedures**

- Play the same way as regular four square, but allow a 3-second catch (or an appropriate time depending on language skills of pupils).
- On each catch and throw or catch and hit, have the students count in French or Spanish or another selected language. If the students can only count to 10, have them start again at one after they reach 10. Upon catching the ball, the player would say one in the selected language then throw or hit the ball to another square where the player would catch and say two, etc.
- Rules for going to the end of the line are the same as regular four square, with the addition that hesitating too long in saying the number or saying the wrong number would also send you back to square one.
- This sequence can also be followed by using a selected study word list. The students would repeat the words in the predetermined order.
Variation: Add a tricky “think on your feet” element and have them say “buzz” for every set number, for example every third number (in English, this would be: “One, two, BUZZ, four, five, BUZZ,” etc.). This is really quite tricky, and it may be OK just to have them try it in English! However, if there are English language learners (ELL) in the class, teach the class to count to 10 in the ELL student’s native language, and watch the ELL student shine when it is time to play the “Buzz word” version of the game!

Hopscotch

Hopscotch is a great hopping and jumping game that can be played on a bare patch of ground or on a floor indoors. There are hundreds of diagram variations that can be chalk drawn or taped to the floor. Hopscotch works on locomotor skills, balance, strength, and eye-foot coordination.

Equipment: Chalk, floor, sidewalk or driveway, rock/shell/button/bottle cap/bean bag.

Procedure

- Draw the layout with the chalk—2 single squares, 1 double square, 1 single square, 1 double square, and 1 single square. The squares can be numbered. Many different numbers of squares and patterns can be used. Each player has a marker such as a stone, beanbag, bottle cap, shell, or button. Assign two or three players to a hopscotch diagram.
- 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, turn around, and hop back again. Pause in square 2 to pick up the marker, hop in square 1, and out.
- Continue by tossing the marker in square 2. All hopping occurs on one foot unless the hopscotch design is such that two squares are side-by-side. Then the player can jump with one foot in each square.
- A player’s turn is over 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.
- A winner can be declared when they have completed all the squares.

Variations: A dome-shaped “rest area” can be added on the far end of the hopscotch pattern where the player can briefly rest before hopping back. Another variation is after using a traditional hopscotch pattern, ask students to create their own patterns.

Historical Hopscotch

This variation provides a review of social studies facts.

Equipment: Chalk, tape, floor, sidewalk or driveway, rock/shell/button/bottle cap/bean bag. Also needed are historical fact cards created by the teacher or students with a question on the front and answer on the back, based on the topic of study in social studies.

Procedures

- Play the same way as regular hop scotch with these additional rules.
- Modify the rules so that players’ turns are over UNLESS they get a “pass,” which is gained after they make an error and their partner asks them a history question. If they answer correctly, they get a “pass” and continue their turn. If the answer is not correct, their partner begins a turn.
- The player puts the marker in the square where he or she will resume playing on the next turn, and the next player begins.
- At the end of each successful out and back, players again need to answer a historical question correctly. If not, they lose their turn and their partner goes.
- A winner can be declared in the same manner as regular hopscotch.

Sources

Marbles: From eHow web site games page: www.ehow.com/list_1044.html
Jacks: From the eHow web site games page: www.ehow.com/list_1044.html
Four Square: From eHow web site games page: www.ehow.com/list_1044.html
Hopscotch: Adapted from Games Kids Play website: www.gameskidsplay.net/games/other_games/

Note: Photos are from Holly Glen Elementary, Monroe Township, NJ. PE Teachers: Donna Grabbe (pictured) and Matt O’Toole (not pictured).

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