

Activity – Recess Games

One Room Schoolhouses

Objective: Students will learn about the games students played during recess in the 1800s. Students will have the opportunity to play the games and compare and contrast one room schoolhouse games to recess activities today.

Backstory:

After lunch, students played recess games. Students always looked forward to recess as it was a welcome respite from sitting in the classroom. Since early schools in the 1800s did not have playground equipment, students were very resourceful in finding many ways to amuse themselves. Many were free to wander around as long as the school bell could be heard in the distance. In the winter time, sledding, building snow forts, and snowball fights filled recess time. If the weather kept students inside they would play with toys, or play games in a group like Blind Man's Bluff, Hide the Thimble, or I Spy. Once warmer weather came, students played many versions of tag. Those students fortunate enough to have a bat and ball would start a game of baseball during recess.

Activity:

1. Choose one game to play as a group, or set up game stations for each game. Some are indoor games, others are suitable for the outdoors.
2. Name each of the games and briefly describe the game to the group. If desired, have the group choose which game they would like to play. Alternatively, assign individuals to each game station and have them play that game for a designated amount of time and then switch to another game station.
3. Discuss:
 - Which games did participants like best? Why?
 - Have participants name at least 3 of the 6 games used in the activity.
 - Are these games similar to games played today? How are they alike? How are they different?

Bear in the Pit

Players stand in a circle and hold hands to form the pit.

One person is chosen it and stands in the middle of the circle as the bear. The bear tries to break through the circle and escape. If the bear does not break out after three tries, they may choose another person to be it and become the bear in the pit.

If the bear escapes, the others recapture the bear by tagging them. No tackling allowed! Whoever tags the bear becomes the next bear in the pit.

Hide the Thimble

One player is chosen “it” and the others leave the room.

“It” hides a thimble in the room. The thimble can be anything the group agrees to if you don’t have a thimble. The thimble must be public view, not in a desk drawer or totally out of sight. It calls out “find the thimble,” and the other players return to the room. It doesn’t say anything as they search for the thimble.

As the searchers see the thimble, they don’t give away its location. They sit down silently at their desks and wait for the others to find the thimble on their own.

The first searcher to find the thimble can write its location on a piece of paper to confirm their find. If they are correct, they become it for the next round.

Statues

This game is similar to freeze tag.

One player is chosen to be “it”. They chase the other players around, tagging them. As the players are tagged, they must stay in position, or freeze.

When all players are frozen, “it” chooses the statue that has stayed in the most interesting or funny pose. The chosen statue becomes it for the next round.

Kick the Can

This game is a variation on hide-and-seek.

An empty can is set up as home base. A player chosen to be it covers their eyes and counts to 100 near home base. The other players hide.

“It” tries to find the other players. When it sees a hiding person, “it” calls out their name. If “it” has correctly identified the person hiding, the hider must run from their hiding place and try to kick the can before it can tag them.

Others hiding also run for the can and try to kick the can before “it” catches and tags them. Those who have been captured by it go free when someone successfully kicks the can. The kicker becomes the next “it”.

Marbles

Two or more players can play this game. They'll need a flat spot of ground about 3-5 feet across.

Draw a circle for a playing area. Each player puts 4 to 6 small marbles in the center of the circle.

Each player takes their turn shooting at the smaller marbles with a larger shooting marble. Each kneels down at the outside of the circle and flicks their shooter with their thumb (like flipping a coin) while knuckling down (touching one knuckle to the ground on the shooting hand).

The aim is to capture the little marbles by knocking them out of the circle with the bigger shooting marble. The winner has the most marbles at the end of the game.

Pom-Pom-Pull-Away

This game is played in a gym or outdoors with plenty of space.

Players line up on one side of the playing space. One player is chosen to be “it” and stands in the middle of the space.

“It” calls out “Pom-Pom-Pull-Away” or “Pom-Pom-Pull-Away, Come on out or I’ll Pull You Away”, which is the signal for the other players to run and dodge their way to the other side of the field without being tagged by it.

Those tagged join “it” and help tag others on the next run. The game ends when all players are tagged. The last person tagged becomes “it” for the next round.