

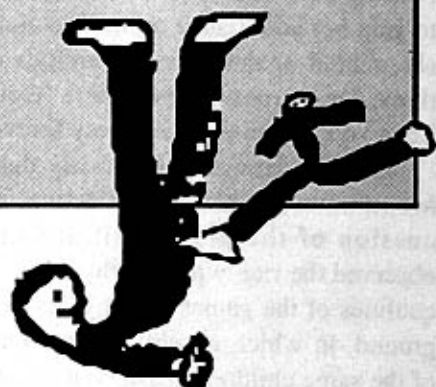
# AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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## NEWS AND NOTES

Changes are afoot at the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*! Hence the delay in publication, for which we apologise, and the double issue for 1996, which is only the second 'double issue' in our fifteen years of publication. (The next issue will appear in 1997.) ACFN will now be published from the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University in Melbourne. The Centre is one of the few tertiary institutions in Australia teaching folklife studies, and in 1995 received funding from the Department of Employment, Education and Training to develop a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Australian Folklife Studies). It is preparing to teach the course in 1997, and a flyer calling for expressions of interest is enclosed. The 'Grad. Dip. Folklife' will offer Australia's first tertiary qualification in folklife studies and should interest a wide range of applicants, including those in the growing field of cultural planning.

This issue of ACFN is devoted to a great friend of Australian childhood. The late Dorothy Howard was one of the world's most remarkable children's folklorists, and we include here not only tributes to Dorothy, but one of her ground-breaking articles on Australian children's traditional play. Several years ago the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, now housed in Melbourne University Archives, was indeed fortunate to receive from Dorothy Howard all her Australian research and published material, with her permission to republish.

In this issue we say goodbye to Donald Oliver, artist, teacher and new father, who has handled graphics and production of ACFN almost since its beginning. Heartfelt thanks and warmest good wishes, Donald!

The *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter* welcomes contributions. Please send manuscripts typed in double spacing, if possible accompanied by a disk in any common program.

## TWO OBITUARIES FOR DOROTHY HOWARD 1902-1996

June Factor

### Dorothy Howard

*Teacher and folklorist. Born: Texas, USA, 8 July 1902.  
Died: Massachusetts, USA, 23 March 1996, aged 93.*

The USA and Australia are indebted to Dorothy Howard for her pioneering work as a children's folklorist on two continents.

Born Dorothy Gray Mills into an old American family in rural East Texas, she spent a childhood steeped in nature, relatives and oral lore in Sabine Bottom, a speck on the south-western frontier. Her memories of visiting preachers, tornados, eloping couples, the seasonal work – and workers – on the farm, domestic chores, and especially the games and songs of childhood are recollected evocatively in her book, *Dorothy's World*, published in 1977.

Graduating from teachers' college in Denton, Texas, in 1923, she taught in public schools until 1944, when she became a professor of English at Frostburg State Teacher's College in Maryland. In 1967 she became a professor at the University of Nebraska, from which she retired to what she called her 'mock adobe' house in Roswell, New Mexico in 1969. Her last years were spent with her daughter in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Dorothy Howard may well have been the first person in the English-speaking world to gain a doctorate (1938) for a study of contemporary children's 'folk

jingles' – in her case, the rhymes, chants and songs of American children in the 1930s. The academic authorities at New York University were certain that children's play was far too unimportant a subject for a Ph.D. thesis, but the then professor of English at N.Y.U., Dr Walter Barnes, used his scholarly prestige to gain her admittance to the doctoral program. When she chafed against the university's narrow perspectives, Dr Barnes advised her: 'Get that doctorate. Then you can go your own way forever.'

Dorothy Howard did exactly that. She continued her lifetime's work: the collection, analysis and discussion of the play traditions of children. She observed the richly poetic, rhythmic and collaborative qualities of the games and rhymes of the school playground, in which all children participated. Yet many of the same children, masters of an array of oral lore – rhymes, chants, insults, songs – would cringe when the teacher said, 'Now we'll study a poem', and were motivated by ordinary classroom practice to compete rather than cooperate.

With no precedents to guide her, Dr Howard encouraged her pupils (and later, as an academic, her student teachers) to bring lore into the classroom. Discussions of metre and rhyme arose from the children's own oral verse, children wrote their own poetry, put together anthologies of their work long before it was fashionable, and began to read 'serious' poets as fellow writers. Activities such as dramatic choral reading and group composing built on the strengths of the collaborative traditions of the playground.

As well as collecting and teaching, Dorothy Howard wrote extensively about the significance of children's inherited and adapted play traditions, an informal educational arena operating 'three feet below adult eye level and invisible to myopic adults'. Her interest in the universality, and the local specificity, of play brought her to Australia in 1954. Curious at the 'silence from Down Under', she spent ten busy months here as a post-doctoral Fulbright Scholar, travelling around the country, collecting children's games and verbal lore in every State, and receiving correspondence from hundreds of Australians eager to pass on their particular play ways.

The Dorothy Howard Collection, now part of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, housed at the University of Melbourne, is a record of the most extensive research yet undertaken into the play lore of Australian children. Her work was recognised by Ian Turner when he collated the first edition of *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* in 1978, and remains an exemplary study of the folklore traditions of childhood.

Like an explorer of neglected territory, Dorothy Howard mapped the play world of childhood, knowing

and respecting the diversity of children's culture and wishing to inform adults of its power and significance.

Dorothy Howard is survived by her daughter Anne, son Jim, and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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Frances Butler

It was her own love of language and literature that pushed Dorothy Howard out of the classroom and into the playground. There she discovered amongst primary school children a rich exchange of language, balanced in rhythm and rhyme.

In tune to the many and varied games that youngsters in the school-yard continually create and regenerate in the New York State School yards of the 1930s, Dorothy Howard discovered that children are a mine of poetic language.

As a teacher, she wanted to bring this appreciation of language into the classroom. Until her discoveries within the playground, she found that a dislike of poetry was a common response amongst young students, particularly boys. Her casual observations of children at play, unsupervised, stimulated her to radically change her teaching methods. She brought into the classroom the rhythmic language that accompanied the body movements of skipping rope, balls bouncing, marbles rolling, selecting 'he' or 'it' for tiggly. The games change and are adapted over time, but the oral tradition amongst children never dies.

It bit  
Dog shit  
One two three  
It bit  
Dog shit  
You're not 'He'.

Dorothy Howard subtly put into practice a significant change in the power relationship between children and teachers. Instead of children being told what they should learn and how they should learn it, her method of teaching allowed children to bring into the classroom their own experiences of and experimentation with the language that grew within their play culture. She had school children making their own books of verse and poetry, allowing them to appreciate and absorb the magic of language from their own perspectives, creating this magic for themselves with their own words, rather than forcing them to learn by rote the poetic works and perspectives of adults.



Trees are green  
The sun is bright;  
Teachers are mean  
And the pupils write.

*George Shaw – 13 years  
(written between 1935–40)*

The girls love Robert Taylor  
I'd rather be a sailor  
Then they might come to see me too  
When I'm boss of a sailor's crew.

*James Cummins – 13 years  
(written between 1935–40)*

Dorothy Howard was a small woman, very petite in frame and physical features. She always dressed in an unassuming fashion. No doubt all this enabled her to witness, in a non-threatening manner, the intricate games and rhymes of children at play, both in the schoolyard and in the streets. In her presence, the children never felt obliged to censor themselves. Her primary source of information was the children themselves. Her interest was in the voice of children and how this informed her about the here and now of the child's mind. As a teacher it was important to her to be able to nurture the growth of those minds.

In 1933, her sister met by chance at a cocktail party Dr. Walter Barnes, a Professor of English at New York University. She spoke with Dr. Barnes about Dorothy's innovative work as a teacher. He was interested and insisted upon meeting her. On doing so, he suggested to Dorothy Howard that she turn her work into a Ph. D. dissertation. She had not realised her work, which she regarded as children's playlore, was actually folklore, nor that it would ever be considered in a doctorate. What had been done in the area of children's folklore took place in the 19th century; the writers then wrote, as though gleaning the remnants of a disappearing tradition. In the U.S.A., Dorothy Howard's work changed such a notion.

Dorothy Howard was influenced by the ideas of the Progressive Education movement prevalent in the early part of this century. The movement was motivated in part by the goal of developing democracy. Its adherents believed the quality of education a country can provide for its people helps to determine the quality of the society the country creates for itself. This was a view Howard shared all her life.

The powers that be within the University had enormous difficulty in considering her subject

area – children's folklore – a proper subject. Eventually, with the influence and assistance of Dr. Barnes, Dorothy Howard was awarded a Doctorate, but had to skip through many a hoop, then, and for the rest of her academic career, in order to appease academic authorities.

On receipt of a Fulbright Scholarship, Howard came to Australia for ten months in 1954–5, to research the schoolyards and document the children's folklore taking place here. Her research is currently housed in the University of Melbourne archives, part of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. She wrote extensively for various journals on her Australian experiences, but few of her articles have been published in Australia.

In her 70s, she completed a personal memoir of her life as a pre-school child – *Dorothy's World – Childhood in Sabine Bottom – 1902–1910*. This book also serves as a social document, detailing and exploring from her childhood perspective the influences that shaped and contributed to her cognitive development. It is written with the voice of the child dominating the flow, expanding and reordering her interior world on a daily basis. The reflective voice of the elderly woman interleaves the child's, providing the reader with a sum of environmental, historical, and family relationships.



In her 80s, she published *PEDRO OF TONALA*, a detailed study of the home, school, work and play life of a Mexican boy. Based on research Howard began in 1962, it represents a rare example of a folklorist cum educator putting into practice her conviction that children's lives can only be understood when examined holistically.

Howard's laboratory was the playground, her teachers were the children. Throughout her life as a teacher in primary schools and then later as an academic and researcher in children's folklore, she remained

stimulated by and convinced of the learning children had to offer adults. Dorothy Howard was a radical and independent thinker, well ahead of her time. She had an indomitable spirit when it came to this pioneering work of hers. The value she places in the voice of the child and what these voices have to offer in the education of adults, is yet to be recognised by the institutional authorities who govern the world of the child.

*Frances Butler is a student of journalism at RMIT*



# The Game of 'Knucklebones' in Australia

Dorothy Howard

*First published in Western Folklore Vol. XVII, No. 1, January 1958*

This Ancient Game played under many names ('Knucklebones', 'Jacks', 'Jackstones', 'Dibs', and others),<sup>1</sup> with various materials (sheep's knucklebones, stones, marbles, bits of iron, sea shells, double-metal-tripods and any handy, adaptable material);<sup>2</sup> accompanied by colorful terminology ('tally', 'buck', 'cradle', 'jumping the ditch', 'horses in the stable', and similar indigenous or inherited metaphors and actions)<sup>3</sup> has circumnavigated the globe.<sup>4</sup> The how and when and whence of these global peregrinations are matters of delight to scholars.

But Australian children of 1955, undisturbed by the learned activities of their elders, continue to play the old game with some semblance of its pristine purity.<sup>5</sup> 'Knucklebones' is the name used the length and breadth of Australia; 'Jacks' was the only other name heard, and that only occasionally and rightly so, for real sheep's knucklebones are the preferred playing implements of all Australian children with whom I talked.

Alas for the game's pristine purity, however, real sheep's knucklebones are harder and harder to come by these days; and manufactured imitation plastic bones are offered for sale in little shops that sell marbles, tops, kites and comic books. That real bones are still as prevalent as they are is evidence of the tenacity with which Australian children hold on to cherished old ways; for the peculiar geography, economy and population distribution of the country make it more and more difficult for Aussie lads and lassies to buy or beg real sheep's knucklebones.

The population of nine million people in a country approximately the size of the United States is largely urban; it is centred in five capital cities (the sixth state, Tasmania, is an island, more rural in culture pattern than the five mainland states). Though the Australians 'live off the sheep's back' as they say, and sheep have been the basis of their economy for almost all of the country's history, the sheep live in the great Australian 'Outback', the children live in the cities; and the city butcher who, twenty-five years ago, sold sheep's knucklebones in sets of five, no longer caters to juvenile trade. He finds it time-saving to whack the knucklebones in two, the children say.

In the old days a child bought his bones for 'tuppenny,' took them home to mother who boiled them clean, then dyed with ink or with the juice of berries. A child today needs great patience and ingenuity to collect a set of real bones— he needs an amiable

neighbourhood butcher or a cooperative uncle who owns sheep; and one by one he hoards the bones until he has a set of five. Meanwhile, or if no friendly butcher or helpful uncle is available, he must go to the neighbourhood shop and buy for two shillings nine pence a set of plastic bones colored pink, white, green, red and yellow. Children say the plastic bones 'don't feel right'; 'they don't stay on your hand — they are too slick'; and 'they are not heavy enough'. Consequently, the child who owns genuine bones takes good care of them.

The children who have no two shillings nine pence (and no real bones) revert to stones — stones carefully chosen for size, shape, size and weight. This takes time and patience, as well as careful judgement. Therefore, when a child has collected a good set of stones, he looks after them with care.

Most Tasmanian children, according to reports, are still able to collect real knucklebones, for Tasmanians, because of their island position and their small rural population, have held fast to traditional ways more than have their fellow Australians on the mainland.

The game of 'Jacks' as American children know it, played with a set of metal double-tripods of different colors (sometimes seven and sometimes ten in number) and a rubber ball, is apparently unknown among Australian children. Of all the children and adults questioned and observed in play, one woman in Brisbane, Queensland, had seen a set of metal jacks about sixty years ago.

Sixty years ago or prior to 1900, the game of knucklebones was a lengthier, more complicated game than it is today and was played by children over a longer span of years. In earlier days children played the game well into their teen years, so many older people told me, and could therefore develop greater finger dexterity to perform the more intricate maneuvers.

In suburban Melbourne, Victoria, lives a woman (anonymous by request) over eighty years old who, in her youth, was the champion 'Knucklebones' player in her community — the same community in which she lives today. The neighbourhood was then open country with 'paddocks' or pastures surrounding the home. As she remembers, she was about fourteen years old — around 1880 — when she became the champion. Still able to play the game through several times without a miss, she demonstrated her undiminished skill by sitting on the floor and going through the game three times while her friend, Mrs. Fairlie



Taylor, wrote down a description of her play. This is Mrs. Taylor's description:

**Ones.** Place four jacks, one at each corner of a six inch square, in the floor. The fifth jack is the taw. Throw up taw; pick up one jack, put it in the center of the square, then catch the falling taw. Next throw up taw; pick up two, put them in the center of the square, then catch falling taw. Next throw up taw; pick up all four (three in center plus odd one), put all four in center, catch the falling taw. Place taw in center with the four. That ends *Ones*.

**Scatters.** Hold all five in hand. Scatter quickly over floor. Don't move any. Pick up one for taw (this choice involves judgment; the player will consider the position of each jack with reference to the play to be made in scatters). Repeat the plays of *Ones*.

**Juggles.** Place jacks in a small four inch square, one at each corner, as in *Ones*. Throw up taw; pick up two, put down one, then catch the falling taw. Now the player has two jacks in hand. Next throw up two; pick up two, put down one, catch falling two. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up three; pick up two, put down one, then catch falling three. Now the player has four jacks in hand. Next throw up four; pick up one, then catch the falling jacks. Now the five in hand are placed in a pile on the floor. That ends *Juggles*.

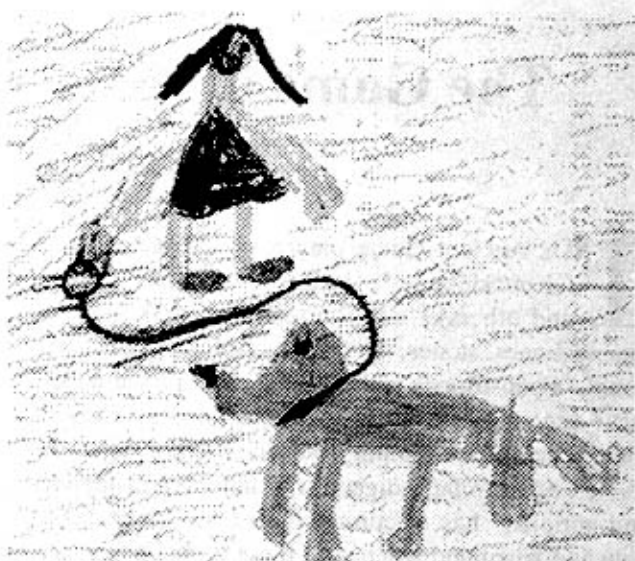
**No juggles.** Place jacks in a small four-inch square, one at each corner as in *Ones*. Throw up the taw; pick up one, catch falling taw. Now the player has two in hand. Throw up one of the two (holding one in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling taw. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up one (holding two in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling taw. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up one (holding three in hand); pick up one, then catch the falling taw. Now the player has five in hand. The five in hand are placed in a pile on the floor. That ends *No Juggles*.

**Horses and stables.** The jacks are placed in a bunch on the floor. Pick up a taw. Spread fingers of left hand, curve them like a claw. Place claw with finger tips resting on floor about six or eight inches from the four jacks. The claw hand is the stable; the opening between fingers are the stalls. Throw up taw; push one jack (horse) into a stall, then catch the falling taw. Next throw up taw; push another jack into another stall, then catch the falling taw. Continue until four jacks are pushed into the four stalls of the stable. That ends *Horse and Stables*.

**Mice in Hole.** Throw up five jacks; catch as many as possible on back of hand. All that miss are the mice. Then throw up the jacks on back of hand, catch in palm. Choose one mouse for taw (this involves careful judgment considering the next play to be made). Next the mouse hole is made by the left hand - thumb and forefinger (with finger tips on floor) make an arch (the other three fingers are clenched so that they will not be an obstruction). Next throw up the taw; push all the mice into the hole, then catch the falling taw. That ends *Mice in Hole*.

**Skim the milk.** Scatter jacks gently. Choose a taw. Throw up taw; catch on back of hand, then moving hand and taw back and forth above the other jacks say:

Skim the milk, skim the milk



Turn the dishes over.

Next throw up the taw from the back of the hand, pick up one jack ('dish'), then catch the falling taw. Next throw up the two in hand; catch on back of hand, and moving hand with two jacks above the other jacks on floor, say:

Skim the milk, skim the milk  
Turn the dishes over.

Next throw up the taw from the back of hand, pick up one jack ('dish') then the player has three in hand. Next throw up three; catch three on back of hand; move hand over jacks on floor, saying 'Skim the milk', etc, then throw up three from back of hand, pick up one, then catch the falling three in palm. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up four; catch four on back of hand, repeat 'skim milk', etc, throw up four from back of hand, pick up one, catch the falling four in palm of hand. Next throw up all five, catch on back of hand, throw up from back of hand, catch in palm. That ends *Skim the milk*.

**Clicks.** Scatter jacks gently. Choose a taw. Throw up taw; pick up one jack, click it against another, then catch the falling taw. Next throw up the two (in hand); pick up one, click it against another, then catch the falling two. Now the player has three in hand. Next throw up the three; pick up one, click it against another, then catch the falling three. Now the player has four in hand. Next throw up four; pick up one, then catch the falling four. Now the player has five in hand. That ends *Clicks*.

**No Clicks.** Scatter jacks gently. Choose a taw. Throw up taw; pick up one, catch taw (the two jacks must not click). Repeat the plays of *Clicks* but this time without any clicking. Any click heard means the player has missed and must wait for her turn again. When *No Clicks* has been successfully completed, the jacks are placed in a bunch on the floor. The game is over.

The longest, most complicated 'Knucklebones' game current today in Australia is played by children in Western Australia, according to all information collected to date. In April, 1955, Miss Milligen, a schoolmistress in the Mt Lawley Government Primary

School in Perth, wrote the following description of the game as it is played by girls and boys on the school playground there:

### PLAIN.

*Ones:* Hold five bones in palm of hand. Throw them up, catch as many as possible on back of hand. Use one as taw; throw up taw, pick up one, catch taw; continue this way with others on the floor (any others caught on back of hand are set aside).

*Twos:* Repeat as in *Ones*, except that bones which fall to floor are picked up by twos.

*Threes:* Repeat as in *Ones*, except that bones which fall to floor are picked up by threes.

*Fours:* One bone is taw. Taw is thrown up while player picks up the other four at one time, then catches taw. (In *Twos*, *Threes* and *Fours*, you are allowed to place bones in position while you throw up taw. This is called 'Dumps').

### SCATTERS.

*Ones:* Hold five bones in hand. Scatter them on floor. Choose one for taw. Throw up taw, pick up one bone without tipping or touching another bone on the floor. Continue, throwing up taw and picking up bones one at a time. *Twos*, *Threes* and *Fours* are played like *Ones* (with no touching).

(In *Scatters-Fours*-if the player calls 'Dumps' she is allowed to place the bones in a clump, then take one for taw and pick up the four. If another player call first 'No Dumps,' the player must proceed as in *Ones*, *Twos* and *Threes*.)

### FRIENDS.

Similar to *Scatters*, except one of the playmates acts as a friend and picks a taw for you, picking advantageously.

### ENEMIES.

Similar to *Scatters* and *Friends*, except that a playmate picks a taw which makes it difficult for the player to proceed without tipping or touching.

### PUSSY CAT (or PUPPY DOG or LITTLE WHITE MICE).

Four bones are placed in a square thus:

1 2  
3 4

The fifth bone is taw. With taw on back of hand, place hand above bone One and say: 'My little pussy cat likes fresh milk.' On *Cat*, taw is thrown up, first bone is picked up and placed in center of the square; then taw is caught on *milk*. Repeat this with second, third and fourth bones. (If your hand is over a space when the line is finished, you are out. Then throw up the taw and pick up all four bones together.)

Variants:

My little puppy dog likes fresh meat.  
My little puppy dog likes fresh bones.  
My little white mouse likes fresh cheese.

### SWEEP THE FLOOR.

Place the bones in a square thus:

1 2  
3 4

Say: Sweep the floor, pick up the chair

Sweep beneath, place it there.

Begin by holding taw on back of hand.

'Sweep the floor' (throw up taw, make sweeping-floor motion with the hand, then catch the taw).

'Pick up the chair' (pick up the first bone while throwing the taw into the air).

'Sweep beneath' (sweep the floor with the fingers holding the bone while taw is thrown up).

'Place it there' (place bone in the center of the square while the taw is thrown up).

Repeat this performance with each of the other three bones. When all four are in a clump in the center, throw up the taw and pick up all four together.

### GRANNY'S FALSE TEETH.

Place four bones between fingers of the left hand. Throw up taw, remove one bone from fingers, catch taw, throw up taw, place bone on floor, catch taw. Repeat until all four bones are in a clump on the floor, then throw up taw and pick up the four together.

### HORSES IN THE STABLE.

Place left hand on the floor with fingers spread and palm raised. Place a bone before the opening made by two spread fingers until all four bones lie before the open stables. Throw up taw, push one bone through open fingers (one horse into a stable), then catch taw. Repeat until all horses are in the stables. Then remove left hand and, throwing up taw, pick up all four together and catch taw.

### UPS AND DOWNS.

Place four bones in a square thus:

1 2  
3 4

Throw up taw, pick up first bone, catch taw. Then throw up taw, place first bone back in same place on the square, catch taw. (The player may sweep the bone back into position, throwing up taw while sweeping.)

### SNAKES IN THE GRASS.

Place four bones in a line four to six inches long thus:

1 2 3 4

Throw up taw and sweep fourth bone back and in and out, zig-zag between third and second bone and first bone and place in line before first bone, throwing up taw with each sweep. Repeat with the third bone, then the second, then the first. Throw up taw and pick up all four. (No tipping allowed.)

### WINE GLASS.

Place four bones in the shape of a wine glass thus:

x        x        3        4  
          x        2  
          x        1

Throw up taw, pick up first bone from bottom, catch taw. Throw up taw, place first bone beside second bone, catch taw. Throw up taw, pick up second bone, catch taw. Throw up taw, place second bone beside third bone, catch taw. Throw up taw, pick up third bone, catch taw. Throw up taw, place third bone beside fourth bone, catch taw. Throw



up taw, place fourth bone underneath second bone to form the original wine glass formation. Throw up taw and pick up all four together, catch taw. (Dumps is allowed.)

### COMING THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN.

Place left hand on the floor using thumb and forefinger spread to form an arch. Place four bones in a row before the arch thus:

1 2 3 4

Throw up taw, sweep first bone through arch, catch taw. Repeat with second, third and fourth bones. Remove left hand. Throw up taw, pick up all four bones together, catch taw. Repeat this whole performance, sweeping in two at a time, then three at a time, then all four at once.

### CLICKS.

This figure is the same as **PLAIN**, except that taw must click with the bone, each time a bone is picked up.

### NO CLICKS.

This figure is the same as **PLAIN**, except that taw must not click the other bone, each time a bone is picked up.

### CUT THE CABBAGE.

Place four bones in square thus:

1 4  
2 3

Say: 'Cut the cabbage, cut the cabbage, one, two, three.' Meanwhile use taw to go diagonally between the first and third bones and the second and fourth. On *three*, pick up three. Throw up taw, place third bone down again in its exact position, catch taw. Repeat this performance with each of the other three bones. If the square is not exact, you are out.

On another Perth playground at the Carlisle Government Primary School, the game of 'Knucklebones' (reported by Mrs. Jennings, schoolmistress) included the following figures:

Ups and Downs	Jack Be Nimble
Scatts	My Little Pussy Cat
Enemies	Sweep the Floor
Friends	Horses-Stables
Onions	Granny's Teeth
Onions-Scatts	Left Handed

(All figures are repeated with the left hand.)

Observation and collected data indicate that the game current in the other five Australian states is a much briefer game limited to four or five of the simplest routines, usually called 'Ones', 'Twos', 'Threes', 'Fours' and 'Fives'. From Tasmania, figures called 'In and Out' and 'Over and Under' have been reported in use in recent years; and from Northern Queensland a figure called 'Ironing' was current about 1940.

Terminology varies some but little in different parts of Australia. 'Taw' is the word used for the bone

throw up – spelled 'T-O-R' by children when they write it (this is logical spelling to Australian children who spell 'shore' s-h-o-r-e and pronounce it 'shaw'). In Swansea, an isolated village on the Eastern shore of Tasmania, the children call the taw 'the boss'. 'Dumps' or 'No Dumps' shouted by Western Australian children means the player may place the bones to his advantage or he cannot. In Melbourne 'Dubs' and 'No Dubs' reportedly perform the same functions. 'Mice in the Hole' and 'Horses in the Stable' are two names for the same play. Both terms have long been known in different parts of the British Isles and may have migrated to different parts of Australia from different localities in the homeland.

Individual creativeness which is a part of, rather than opposed to, the folklore process, explains some variation in games and game terminology from region to region and variation even in the same community or on the same playground. One child prefers 'Pussy Cat', another, 'Puppy Dog' and still another, 'Little White Mice'.

One of the two most important historical changes in the game of 'Knucklebones' appears to be the loss of accompanying verbal formulae. Many older Australians told me that long verbal rituals (now forgotten) were a part of the Knucklebones game they knew prior to 1900. The other important change has been the simplification and shortening of the game, as has been stated before.

When, where and by whom the game of 'Knucklebones' is played in Australia in the mid-twentieth century are three questions whose answers involve many factors of local and national life as well as an analysis of the nature of the game and its play function. The 'seasonal' nature of children's games has been the subject of research by Dr. Brian Sutton-Smith of New Zealand, who has found that 'children's play seasons result from the interaction of children's groups with a variety of influences in their environment'; and he dispels the romantic notion that 'some general intuition,' some 'magic,' some 'mysterious way' of children determines when a game is in season.<sup>6</sup>

'Knucklebones' is a quiet game of finger dexterity which requires patience, skill and time, much more time – even in its most truncated current versions – than most games on playgrounds nowadays. It cannot be taken up and dropped in a moment at any stage like a game of 'Tiggy' or a marble game of 'Follow Me Taw,' but must conform to a set ritual of words and actions to a formal ending according to group agreement. It requires, besides the bones or stones, a smooth, hard surface to play on. Also the ritual must be learned from instruction from another child, usually an older child; and the skills must be developed by laborious individual practice since every player is an individual competitor.



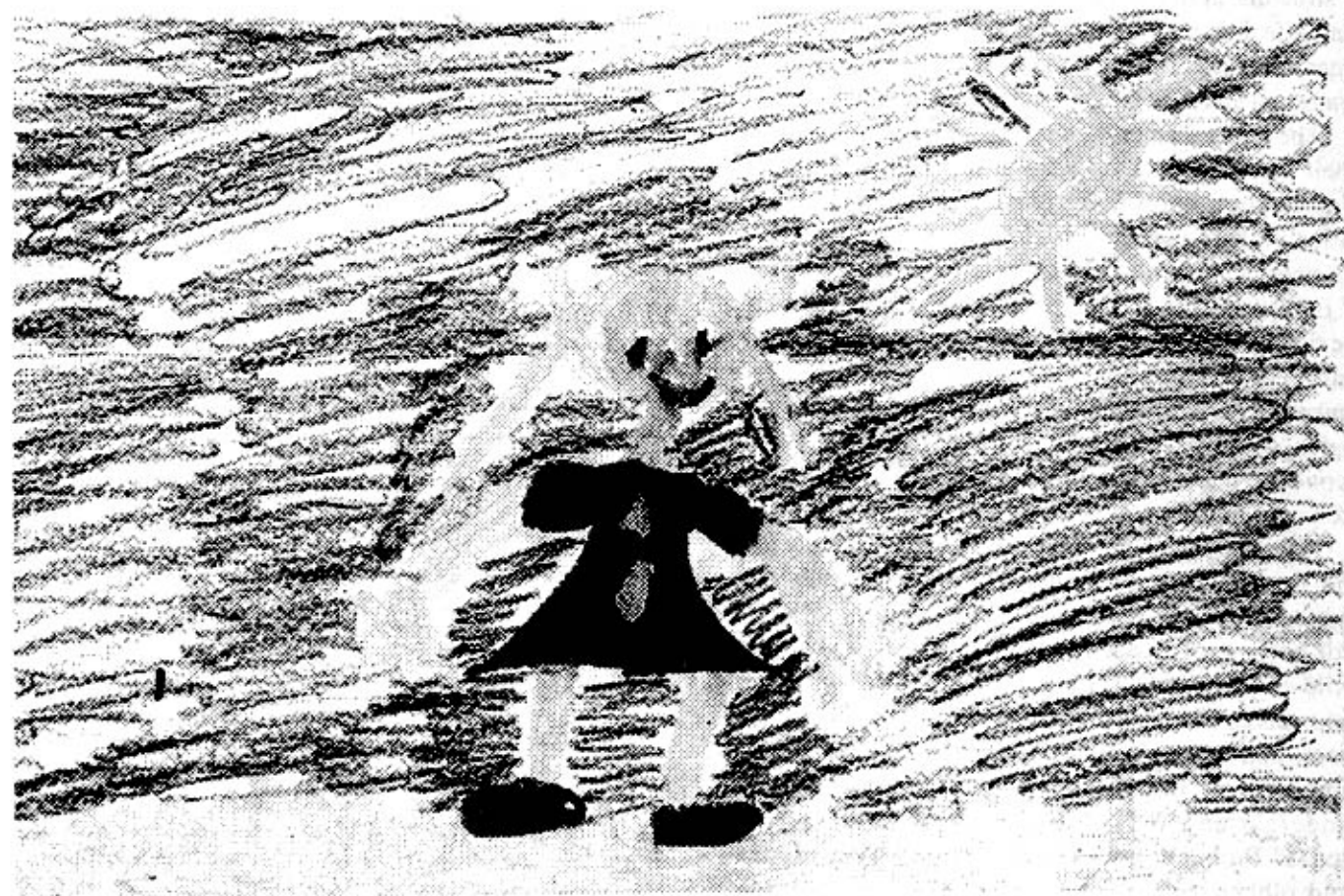
When is the game played – at what season and where? In September, 1954, I saw my first game of 'Knucklebones' in Australia in Brisbane, Queensland, played by two little sisters – one eight years old, the other ten, on the concrete floor under their grandmother's house, which was built high off the ground. They told me they also played at school at recess time on the 'bitumen' covered playground and also on the concrete 'footpaths' (sidewalks). September (Americans must remember) is early Spring in Australia and early Spring in Brisbane, which lies a little south of the Tropic of Capricorn on the mid-eastern Australia Coast, means gentle, warm breezes that justify the travel folder's name of 'paradise'. Other games of 'Knucklebones' observed and reported in Brisbane were played on school playgrounds – government schools and private – by groups of boys or groups of girls from eight to thirteen years old. One schoolmistress writing from Gordondale, Northern Queensland (in the tropics) called the game a 'summer game'.

From all reports, the favourite play place for this game in Queensland is under the house or school-house. It has long been the custom there, because of climate, to build the houses on high piles (architectural styles are now changing and houses are being built lower on the ground – with no cellars). And the space underneath makes a good cool summertime play area for many games, the children told me.

In October when I followed the sun south to Sydney, New South Wales, and visited government school playgrounds, I found 'Knucklebones' 'Coming In' or 'In' in outlying suburban schools where free play was permitted. At the Artarum (Sydney) Government Primary School (a school for girls), twelve games were in session at one time on the bitumen school yard. Girls played in groups of three, four or five, according to ages – about eight to eleven. All were playing with real or plastic bones except for two groups of smaller girls who played with stones.

In Melbourne, Victoria, still farther south of the equator, I saw 'Knucklebones' games in progress late in November and again early in January, 1955. The players were all girls from eight or nine to about twelve. They told me the game is a girls' game; that occasionally a brother or neighbour boy can be enticed into playing but not often. They told me they play the game 'anywhere at all', any time of year, and that when they play in the wintertime, they play indoors.

I saw no 'Knucklebones' games in Tasmania when I visited there in January, 1955 (summertime). School masters and mistresses and parents and children with whom I talked, told me that most Tasmanian children play with real bones. One twelve-year-old girl in Swansea, a village on the eastern coast, told me she plays the game the year round, outdoors in summer, indoors in winter. The game was



reported current in Swansea, St. Helens and Hobart on the east Tasmanian coast and in Launceston and Wynare on the northern coast. In Scottsdale, an isolated community near the northern coast, four little girls of ten, eleven and twelve had never heard of the game and did not recognize it from a demonstration.

In Adelaide, South Australia, and nearby country communities, the game was reported current but out of season (February and March, 1955 – Autumn) and little information was forthcoming on the nature of the present-day game nor of its history.

In Perth, Western Australia, the game was 'out of season' in March and April, 1955. One ten-year-old boy at Mt Lawley Government Primary School brought a set of real bones to school to demonstrate the game he plays, then made me a present of the set of bones to bring back to America, saying he had another at home. Data collected from adults and children specified that the game is played by groups of boys, groups of girls and by mixed groups.

When, in April, 1955, I set sail from Fremantle, I had a long, long voyage home with time to assemble the collected facts about Australian children, their life and ways and playways and time to examine the facts. The data on the game of 'Knucklebones', its history and present practices, demonstrates sociological adaptation by Australian children (unconscious modification of social activity in adjustment to cultural surroundings). There has been considerable modification of structure in the game and weakening of function in play life because of the demands of adult society organized into larger and larger cities, more and more congested and more highly industrialized each year.

The Australian culture pattern is changing rapidly. Their historians say, because of their plight in World War II, they know they must become a powerful nation in their own right as soon as possible. Migrants are now pouring into all their cities from many parts of Europe, modifying the predominantly British complexion of their population. Hitherto a nation of 'city-states' depending on an agricultural economy, the continent is fast becoming a highly industrialized and highly socialized democratic British Commonwealth. Economic interdependence with the United States has grown since World War II.

These changes reach into every aspect of daily life and modify ways of living and playing. What will happen to children's traditional games and why? What will become of 'Knucklebones', a game of skill and child-tribal ritual? Will Australian children resign themselves to plastic knucklebones in a few years more; and will younger and younger children play a simpler and simpler game until the game dies in kindergarten? Will children revert to the use of stones? Probably not. Or will metal-double-tripods (and rubber ball) be imported from China or Japan

and the game become more like the game of American children today?

Or with the increasing emphasis in Australia on professional sports – and training for world competition in those sports – will the old traditional games of skill like 'Knucklebones', 'Hopscotch', marbles, ball-bouncing, rope-skipping and 'Mumble Peg' disappear completely and be found only in the archived collections of folklorists?<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alice Bertha Gomme, *Dictionary of British Folklore*, Part 1, *Traditional Games* (London: David Nutt, 1894), Vol.1. Gomme lists the names: 'Hucklebones', 'Jackstones', 'Dabs', 'Snobs', 'Tali', 'Checkstones', 'and 'Chucks'. W. W. Newell, *Games and Songs of American Children* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883). Newell lists: 'Fivestones', and 'Otadama' or 'Japanese Jacks'. Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Historical and Psychological Significance of the Unorganised Games of New Zealand Primary School Children* – a doctoral thesis, University of New Zealand, Wellington, 1954. Dr. Smith lists: 'Knucklebones', 'Jacks', 'Knuckles', 'Chuckstones', and 'Hucklebones'.

<sup>2</sup> Gomme lists small stones, square pieces of tile the size of dice, marbles, hucklebones (sheep's knucklebones), 'four checks and a ball', round bits of iron punched out in making rivet holes in boiler plates, five cubes, and a small bagatelle ball, five sea shells. Newell lists: stones, pebbles or bones, seven little silk bags (for the game 'Otadama') filled with rice – one of a different color called the 'Jack', 'little tripods of iron (four) and the fifth a ball or marble.'

<sup>3</sup> Gomme lists as the name of the fifth bone, stone or marble: 'Tally' and 'Buck'. Names for different figures or tricks: 'Cradle', 'Ups and Downs', 'Dish clout', 'Peggy' and others. Newell lists 'Jack' as the name of the fifth stone, bag or marble. Names of different figures or tricks: 'Jumping the Ditch', 'Knock at the Door', 'Set the table', 'The Well', 'Horses in the Stable', 'Feeding the Elephant', and many others.

<sup>4</sup> Sir James Orchard Halliwell, Alice Bertha Gomme and Norman Douglas (England); W.W. Newell and Paul G. Brewster, (United States); Brian Sutton-Smith (New Zealand); Dorothy Howard (Australia) Paul G. Brewster, *American Nonsinging Games* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953). Brewster lists two versions of 'Jacks' and cites sources ranging from Aristophanes and Pollux to contemporary researchers geographically covering Greece, Czechoslovakia, Armenia, Egypt and Hawaii.

<sup>5</sup> Under a Fulbright research grant and sponsored by the University of Melbourne, I made a collection and study of Australian children's traditional play customs (from July, 1954 to April, 1955). The material is being prepared for publication as articles and in book form.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, 'Marbles Are In: Some Observations on the 'Seasonal' Nature of Children's Games in New Zealand,' *Western Folklore*, XI (1953), 186-193.

<sup>7</sup> Credit and appreciation for much of the information in this report go to: Adults – Miss Gladys V. Beckham, Miss Heather Giffen, Mrs. John Grahame, Mrs. Jennings, Miss Lillian Kelly, Miss Milligen, Miss Marion Paterson, Mrs. Fairlie Taylor and Miss Marjorie Warham. Children – Rosalind Beattie, Lorraine Jessup, Kay Kerrison, Carol Northeast, Pat Wingrove and to dozens of other children who played 'Knucklebones' oblivious of adult observation.



# Foo Foo Come to School

## A case study in place-making traditions in a primary school playground

Heather Russell

A: This is where we get away sort of – we're expected to be – to not play babies games but this is where we remember what we played – this is our memory place cause we used to play Foo Foo ...

HR: So when you want to go back to being a baby again ...

A: Yeah, we play Foo Foo – is that what you mean?

T: Yeah we remember what we played – people tease us if they see you playing it now, like [we used to] in Gd 2&3 – we like to remember things that's fun ...

This conversation with myself (HR) and A and T took place behind the shelter shed on a playground tour with three Grade 6 girls who roamed their school grounds recalling their 'childhood'. The primary school playground – located in Melbourne's outer north east – is large and leafy, providing children with a diversity of play environments.

The tour of A & T's favourite places in the playground triggered the girls' memories of specific games played in specific places. Their cultural knowledge of the playground was far from the list of games, rules and rituals that I had expected. Their play traditions clearly incorporated specific features of the landscape, such that special meanings, games and rituals were attached to specific places and didn't occur anywhere else. The specificity of these place traditions and the number of years that they had been passed on through successive generations of children intrigued me. My own first-hand observation of the Foo Foo tradition being passed on intensified my interest in the game of Foo Foo.

*My first observation of Foo Foo. Grade 4s are helping Preps to play, initiating them in to the game and the location. It's probably the first time these Preps have played here. I am witnessing the passing on of a substantial tradition – the game with its site specific rituals. (HR's diary, March 1992).*

What is the game of Foo Foo and what did its special place look like?

The siting of Foo Foo was particularly notable for its ordinariness. An uninitiated teacher or adult would certainly never anticipate the significance of the site

in the cultural landscape of the playground. Foo Foo was played behind the shelter shed, utilising a seat running along the back and side of the shelter shed and a rail fence two and a half meters from the shed. How many years the game has been associated with this site is unknown, but we do know the association goes back at least seven years.

Foo Foo is a delightful schoolroom parody. One player is selected as Foo Foo. He/she hides around the corner of the shelter shed. Someone else plays the teacher and stands 'out the front' of her class on the rail fence. The rest of the 'class' sit on the seat along the back of the shelter shed. Foo Foo chooses a 'land' eg. colour land, car land, music land, etc. If colour land is chosen, each 'pupil' chooses a colour and passes this information on to the teacher. The 'pupils' all chant the rhyme:

*Foo Foo come to school  
Teacher wants to talk to you*

Foo Foo bends over, touches his/her toes and is whacked on the bottom by the teacher. Teacher then tells Foo Foo the colours she can choose. Foo Foo chooses one and on hearing her choice, the 'pupil' who is that colour runs off around the shelter shed and back to her spot with Foo Foo in pursuit trying to tag her. Foo Foo, the chaser and the teacher all change roles.

Foo Foo was collected as 'Foolie, Foolie come to schoolie' by Lindsay and Palmer in 1981 in Brisbane.<sup>1</sup> The Opies (1969) have also recorded versions of the game.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly a game with a long history, and one of the few games that ritualistically mimics the classroom power play between teachers and pupils.

My guess is that Foo Foo was played behind the shelter shed because it provided a convenient corner to hide behind, and the rail fence offered height advantage from which the teacher could assume her position of power. Interestingly, only one teacher knew the game, even though it had been played for at least seven years in the same place. This suggests that the private, out of the way location might also have been a key to its long-lived survival in this location.

As far as I am aware, Foo Foo was not played anywhere else in the playground. My discovery of Foo Foo and the confirmation of this 'place' tradition by



the Grade 6 girls alerted me to another aspect of playground culture and ritual that I had observed in a other playgrounds but had not had demonstrated to me in so much detail. Understanding the many place traditions that I subsequently became aware of in this playground, allowed me to 'read' the landscape and its play potential in much the same way as the children.

These place traditions imposed another layer of order on the apparent disorder of recess and lunchtime activity. Place traditions defined appropriate areas for certain types of play without having to have exclusive age-related play areas dictated by teachers.

Further descriptions of place-making traditions and an analysis of their impact on children's play will be published in a later issue of *ACFN*.

*Heather Russell explored the invisible play-lines of a school playground in her M.A. thesis in 1995.*

#### NOTES

1 P. L. Lindsay & D. Palmer, *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*, AGPS, Canberra 1981

2 Iona & Peter Opie, *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, OUP, Oxford 1969

## The Moe Folklife Project

Gwenda Davey

*During 1995, six local residents of Moe worked under the supervision of Dr Gwenda Davey to document six major aspects of the traditional culture and folklife of Moe, one of the three towns in Victoria's brown-coal mining region, the La Trobe Valley. The forms studied were handicrafts, music and dance, storytelling about working life, foodways, customs and celebrations, and children's games. Researchers Fay Pollock and Nancy Schakau studied children's games and rhymes in two schools in Moe, the Moe (Albert Street) Primary School and Newborough East Primary School. The following are extracts from Gwenda Davey's final report for the Moe Folklife Project.*

*The Project was funded by the National Library of Australia and the Department of Communication and the Arts, and auspiced by the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University, Melbourne. The final report will be printed by the Department of Communication and the Arts and placed on the Internet.*

#### CHILDREN'S GAMES

It is commonly said in the 1990s that television and video games have destroyed children's independent play culture. Whilst it is true that 'street play' is no longer as easy to observe as in previous generations, children's traditional play is alive and well in the Australian school playground, not least in Moe. For this project, more than one hundred and sixty traditional playground games and rhymes were documented in two schools, Moe Primary School (Albert Street) and Newborough East Primary School (see attached Tables). Only seven of these games involved commercially produced toys, namely *bounce ball* (super ball), *Matchbox cars*, *POG*, *stunt planes*, *walkie talkie* and of course *basketball* and *football*.



*POG* stands for 'pineapple, orange and guava', a fruit juice produced in Hawaii in packs with decorated round cardboard tops. These tops quickly became children's collectables in Hawaii in the 1990s and the craze moved elsewhere in the world. The basic *POG* game involves throwing one *POG* into a group of others, a variation of much older games using (for example) cigarette cards.

Apart from these few games using commercial products, all others documented in the Moe Folklife Project were traditional games as described in classic works such as Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1969), or depicted

even earlier, for example in Peter Breughel's 1560 painting *Children's Games*. Many of the eighty-plus games depicted in Breughel's *Children's Games* such as *chasey*, *hidey*, *horses* and '*mothers and fathers*' were observed in Moe. The Moe games and rhymes collected during the project were classified according to headings used in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at the University of Melbourne, as follows:

- ball games and rhymes
- clapping games and rhymes
- skipping games and rhymes
- counting out rhymes
- pursuit games
- games using commercially produced toys or equipment
- imaginary games
- miscellaneous games
- miscellaneous rhymes

Children's playground games are one of the world's most ancient and interesting traditions, highlighting the power of oral transmission and the intriguing duality of continuity and change which characterises much folklore. A few examples and issues will be discussed below.

## PURSUIT GAMES

Otherwise known as *tiggy*, twenty-six variations of pursuit or chasing games were found in Moe. The list of their titles is of interest:

alien tiggy	off ground pole tiggy
bob down tiggy	posts tiggy
chasey	Power Rangers
chicken poop (pole tiggy)	red letter
gang chasey/gang tiggy	regular tiggy
gang octopus	releaso
Gladiators	save me
hide and seek	seat tiggy
kiss chasey	stations
line tiggy	tiggy
nick off	tyre tiggy
off ground tiggy	we are the children of the woods
off ground barrel tiggy	world tiggy

Only two of these variations of *tiggy* borrowed from television programmes, namely *Gladiators* and *Power Rangers*. *Gladiators* also produced two miscellaneous games based on components of the *Gladiators* television programme, *gauntlet* and *hang tough*. Other pursuit games utilised physical features of the school playground, such as *tyre tiggy*, *seat tiggy* and *pole tiggy*. One of the chasing games, *We are the children of the woods*, has a clear resonance from former generations. *We are the children* is complicated, involving

the selection of a person to be 'it' who is then engaged in dialogue:

We are the children of the woods -  
What can you do?  
Anything!  
Then do it!

The children then act out a silent charade, until 'it' guesses what they are acting. If 'it' guesses correctly, all run and 'it' attempts to capture a replacement.

## MISCELLANEOUS GAMES AND RHYMES

Like *tiggy*, miscellaneous games also showed an inventive use of the playground environment and a sense of contemporary life. *Bunjee jump* and *Flush the dunny* used the stacks of treated pine logs in the adventure playground, which is used for more than simple climbing. Children playing *Bunjee jump* took it in turns to jump from a fair height; *Flush the dunny* required children to press the bolts holding a square of logs together and then to 'jump into the toilet'. Children's earthy humour is ever present in their games and rhymes which sometimes challenge adult taboos with words like *ip dip dog's shit* or *ugga bugga* in two counting-out rhymes. Other counting-out rhymes have the characteristics of an incantation:

Ibble bibble  
Black bubble  
Ibble bibble  
Out!

*Elastics* is an elaborate game where girls stand up to two metres apart and loop a circle of elastic around their ankles, a position known as 'ground'. The height of the elastic moves to 'knees, under bum, waists and under arms', and the shape of the elastic loop is called 'thins, fats, ordinary and diamonds'. Elaborate patterns of jumping and catching the elastic are sometimes accompanied with a rhyme:

England  
Ireland  
Scotland  
Wales;  
Inside  
Outside  
Monkey tails!

*Elastics* is a relative newcomer in children's play, and has not been documented before the late 1950s in either England, the United States or Australia. Some folklorists believe the game came to western countries from South-East Asia, where the game is popular, perhaps as one of the few positive outcomes from the Vietnam War. There is, however, no known published evidence about the game in South-East Asia before

the 1950s, so its sudden appearance at that time remains (like Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain') something of a 'mystery wrapped in an enigma'.

## FOLKLORE FOR CHILDREN

Children's playground games, as described above, can be characterised as folklore OF children, their own lore which is passed down from one generation of primary-school-aged children to another. There are other dimensions of children's folklore, such as folklore ABOUT children, for example 'old wives' tales' such as 'if you tickle a baby's feet you'll make it stutter'. There is also a huge body of folklore FOR children, such as lullabies, nursery rhymes, fairy tales and games which adults tell to their children. For the Moe Folklife Project, a number of mothers and grandmothers were interviewed, both individually and in groups, in order to determine which traditional items they used with their children or grandchildren. Parents and grandparents were interviewed about lullabies, songs, sayings, games, customs and rituals.

The adults interviewed used few traditional lullabies, apart from 'Rock-a-bye baby on the tree top', but some popular songs such as 'Puff the Magic Dragon'

were used. In contexts other than bedtime, more nursery rhymes such as 'Twinkle Twinkle' and 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' were common, as were advertising jingles from television and songs from children's television programmes such as *Play School* and *Sesame Street*. These results confirm other reports that parents use a wide variety of materials to sing to their children other than the traditional canon of nursery rhymes.

A number of family or baby games were reported, such as Peekaboo, Ipsy Wipsy Spider, Clap Hands or tickling games. Few family sayings such as 'little pigs have big ears' were noted, possibly because of the young age of the adults' children or grandchildren. Father Christmas and Easter Bunny rituals were very common, and a number of adults interviewed mentioned using these occasions as an opportunity to get rid of a child's dummy, telling the child that Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny would take it away and leave a present or Easter Egg in its place. No information was obtained as to the long-term success of these stratagems! Overall, unlike the rich proliferation of children's traditional games in the school playground, family folklore for children, in this small study, was fairly thin on the ground.

The Moe Folklife Project: Table 1

<b>MOE PRIMARY SCHOOL (ALBERT STREET)</b>				
<b>GAMES - IMAGINARY</b>			Chicken poop (pole tiggy)	Power Rangers
Dentists	Sand play		Gang tiggy	Regular tiggy
Mothers and babies	Wars		Gladiators	Release
Power Rangers			Line tiggy	Save me
			Nick off	Seat tiggy
			Off ground tiggy	Tyre tiggy
			Off ground barrel tiggy	World tiggy
<b>GAMES WITH COMMERCIALY PRODUCED TOYS</b>			<b>COUNTING OUT RHYMES</b>	
Bounce ball (super ball)	Stunt planes		Boy Scout	Little Miss Pig
Cars (Matchbox toys)	Walkie talkie		Bubble gum	Little Miss Pink
Pog			Eeny meeny miney mo	My mother told me
			Eeny meeny miney manny	One two three
<b>GAMES - MISCELLANEOUS</b>			England Ireland Scotland	Racing car number nine
ABC (clapping)	Horses		Wales	There's a party on the hill
British bulldog	Forty-four I see		Fat boy	Ugga bugga
Buzz	Four square/My square		Ibble bibble	Walking through the jungle
Clothes lining	Kings of the ring		Ip dip dog's shit	Who crossed the water
Colours	Kings and queens		Little Miss Muffet	
Crocodile rock	Kites		<b>RHYMES - MISCELLANEOUS</b>	
Dices and squares	Making a dance		Ching Chong Chinaman	Michael Jackson
Donkey	Monkeys		Crocodile crocodile	Not last night
Elastics - England,	Octopus		Fat and Skinny	On top of Old Smokey
Ireland	Skipping		Happy Birthday	Pardon me for being
Elastics - tree tops	Spider Man		Happy little condoms	so rude
Elimination	Stations		Hey diddle diddle	See the little idiot
Equipment rounders	Sticks		I'm a little Dutch Girl	Speeding down the highway
Gauntlet	Tyres		Inky winky wonky	Superman
Hang tough	Wall poison ball		Jingle Bells	Teddy bear
Helicopter	Yo ball		Knick knack paddy whack	Tom and Mary
Hit the spot or Goals			Little Miss Blue	Twinkle twinkle
<b>TIGGY - VARIATIONS</b>				
Alien tiggy	Off ground pole tiggy			
Bob down tiggy	Post tiggy			



# **NEWBOROUGH EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **BALL GAMES AND RHYMES**

Around the world in forty days  
Ball, ball  
Four square  
Mark the pack  
Poison ball  
Tiggy

## **CLAPPING GAMES AND RHYMES**

A,B,C,D  
Cinderella dressed in yella  
Elvis Presley  
I went to a Chinese restaurant  
Katie  
Kumbaya  
My boyfriend  
My mother, your mother  
A sailor went to sea  
Teacher, teacher  
Under the apple tree

## **COUNTING OUT RHYMES**

Boy Scout, you're out  
Eenie, meenie, minie, manny  
It bit, dog shit  
Somebody must go out  
There's a party on the hill  
We have a party on the hill

## **MISCELLANEOUS GAMES**

Bunjee jump	Mother may I take another step?
Cubbies	Mothers and fathers
Chinese whispers	Oranges and lemons
Flush the dunny	Power rangers
Hopscotch	
Horses	Power rangers, fixing ship
Hula Hoop	Roley poley
Kittens	Roley poley on the see-saw
Legs	Stole ya pole
Limbo	String games
Maze	

## **PURSUIT GAMES**

Chasey	Mother may I take another step?
Colours	Red Letter
Gang octopus	Releaso
Gang chasey	Stations
Hide and seek	Tiggy
Hot chocolate	We are the children of the woods
Kiss chasey	

## **SKIPPING GAMES AND RHYMES**

Captain Cook  
Coffee shop  
Down the Mississippi  
In comes  
Jolly pepper  
Over the moon  
Teddy bear

# **LETTERS**

Ms Gwenda Davey,  
Editor.

I am writing a biography of my mother born in the SA bush in 1893 and who died in 1983.

Throughout her life she recited poetry, enjoying particularly tongue twisters. I believe poems, songs and musical theme items given by very young people were a part of the entertainment at bush dances in her time. Tired children they must have been for the dances often went on to 3.00 am.

I understand that she and her four sisters were trained in elocution, ready to take their part on the stage. Some of the pieces were recited to a dramatic accompaniment on the piano.

The authorship and origin of one fragment alludes me, and I wondered if you or any of your readers could help.

The sound rather than the spelling is reasonably accurate.

"... No nicka - haka - stuk  
A nicka  
Nicka, Nicka  
Chinese fiddle, a Chinese song

Oh I no go back to China  
I do very well back here  
Cheat old American merchant  
And drink the chowder beer  
Work all day in the mopoke ..."

To date I've received willing help from the Adelaide Press, and the Children's Literature section of the SA Public Library, but no answers unfortunately.

You have been recommended. I hope you can assist.

With kind regards,  
Gerald O'Callaghan.  
Box 215  
Meadows SA 5201

Can readers help?

# The Collecting Habits of Children

Merryn McDonald

The folkloric traditions of children have been studied in many publications. However, an area of children's folklore which tends to receive less emphasis is that of collecting. By collecting, I refer to the gathering or acquiring of similar items or objects to keep in or as a collection. In 1910, Dr. Percival Cole of the Sydney Teachers' College, published a study into the collecting habits of a group of Sydney school children (Tables C and D). Although his assumptions and conclusions may seem long-winded and out of date, they still have relevance today. Cole's research gives us an insight into the lives of children in the early part of this century. It is also possible to compare his 1910 study with an equivalent study of children in 1992.

In September 1992 I presented a survey identical to Cole's to eighty-four children at a local primary school in Knoxfield, an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne. The children were in grades five or six, and were aged between 10 and 13. Overall, seventy-seven questionnaires had legible names and were suitable to study (five boys either wrote celebrities' names or refused to consider the questionnaires). The surveys were answered in the children's classrooms without prior warning or time to reflect on answers. (See Tables A and B for summaries of findings).

In my study of children's collecting habits, which will be referred to as the Knoxfield survey, there were 37 girls and 40 boys. Although Cole had a much higher number of children – 140 girls and 182 boys – comparisons can still be drawn between the two studies.

In terms of how children go about accumulating their collections, several important comparisons can be drawn between Cole's 1910 survey, and the Knoxfield study of 1992. Firstly, of the 342 children surveyed in Cole's original study, only two refer to buying as a means of acquiring objects for a collection. In the Knoxfield study, nine girls and seventeen boys of a total of seventy-nine children collect solely by buying objects. Further, of the different combinations of ways to collect (for example, buying and finding) 65 per cent of girls and 55 per cent of boys include buying as one of the ways they collect things. The general emphasis on money as an essential prerequisite for collecting, especially the seemingly highly valued objects, such as overseas or foreign money, is shown in 10 year-old Simone's statement: 'I would love to collect other countries' money but I can't.'

This emphasis on buying to build up collections correlates with the type of things children in 1992 collect. Of the ten most popular items that girls have collected (see Table A), only four are things which can be traditionally associated with swapping as a means of gaining possession: money/coins, stamps, swap cards and marbles. Of the ten most popular items that boys have collected (see Appendix B), six are things associated with swapping: stamps, money/coins, marbles, football cards, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cards and Garbage Gang cards. However, as only two girls and five boys actually said they collect by swapping, this can be discounted to a certain extent. Perhaps due to the lack of warning they had for the survey, and given that they had relatively little time to think about their answers, some children may have forgotten that they sometimes swap in order to obtain new items for their collections.

There has been considerable change in the collecting habits of children since 1910. Children have become much more oriented toward buying objects for their collections. This is more probably a reflection of the changes the wider society has undergone since 1910, than a strict statement about the direction childhood seems to be heading. Although there appears to have been some clever manufacturing by adults to entice children into widening their collections, the persistence, desires and tastes children exhibit in compiling collections, essentially have not changed. As Factor (1985) contests, children's folklore appears to be universal, continuous, inventive, and co-operative. This can be seen through the comparisons of Cole's 1910 study and the 1992 Knoxfield study. Though there appears to have been a shift in the types of items and objects valued and collected, and the methods children have of acquiring them, most children still collect something, however unaware they are of their collection. It is this lack of awareness which produces limitations for this study. Given more time, children may have come up with a greater variety of things which they have previously and continue to collect.

The marketing in 1992 of the *Herald Sun's* collection of foreign notes proved very popular. Thirty-five per cent of boys, or fourteen of forty, collected money, including overseas money and overseas notes. For girls, the number was slightly lower: thirty-two per cent, or twelve of thirty-seven, collected overseas



money or notes. A total of eight children, five boys and three girls, wanted to start collecting money. It is unknown how many of these children collected money before the newspaper's production of the notes began.

Even without the benefit of a follow-up study, it is possible to estimate the effect fads and crazes have on the collections of children. In 1910, post cards were very popular amongst girls; approximately ninety per cent of the 140 girls surveyed (Cole, 1910) claim to collect post cards. This is in contrast to the popularity of post cards in 1992, where only two girls, and one boy claimed to have collected post cards. Cole maintains that the collection of post cards 'is better endowed with possibilities of an educative nature than teachers and parents have generally recognised', so perhaps this is one of the motivating factors for so many girls collecting them.

One possible explanation for their greatly reduced popularity in 1992 could be the sophistication of the visual media children are now exposed to. Perhaps the natural progression of interests explains the change in popularity of post card collections. Ten-year-old Roxanne makes this thoughtful comment about why people collect different things: 'When people start collecting them, they collect them for a while and then it goes out of fashion and then they lose them.'

The Knoxfield survey found the most highly desired collection to be stickers. Although the numbers who either had or would like to have had a collection of stickers was not as dramatic as those of post cards in 1910, they are still considerable. By grouping football stickers and stickers together, they become the most popular collection for boys with nineteen out of forty boys collecting them. One other boy would have liked to collect stickers. For girls, stickers were clearly the most popular collectable. Of the thirty-seven girls surveyed, twenty-six girls, or seventy per cent, collected them, and two other girls wanted to collect them in the future.

The popularity of stickers in the group of ten-year-old girls surveyed is particularly interesting. Of the twelve girls, eleven collected stickers and the twelfth wanted to collect stickers. Not all of these girls were in the same grade. Perhaps the popularity of stickers is due to the effect of peer pressure.

Despite the apparent switch to the more materialistic acquiring of objects for collections, the old-fashioned inventiveness of children's collections hadn't been swallowed up altogether. Children still recog-

nised and valued the significance of collections, no matter how different they might be to their own tastes. Whilst I was in the classrooms speaking to the children about the survey, several children approached other class mates and gave them pencil sharpenings and pencil leads to add to their collections. This shows that children are still inventive and can still find pleasure in the simple act of collecting and sharing, beyond the objects specifically developed for them by adults.

At first glance the collections of children in 1992 seem to have lost the innocence and simplicity of the collections of children in 1910. The predominance of the more sophisticated and complex objects children are now collecting overshadows the more traditional items associated with collecting. However, there persists in children the ability to think creatively and develop other ways of using things. For example, collecting the sharpenings of pencils is a pastime peculiar to children. The process of using or doing something being considered of more value than the product achieved (Faragher and MacNaughton, 1990) seems to be illustrated here. Children can see the value in simple and uncomplicated items, as well as sophisticated and complex ones.

One surprisingly popular collection for the children in the Knoxfield study was stamps. Fourteen girls and seventeen boys collected stamps, stamps being the most popular single item for boys. In Cole's 1910 study, a total of seventy girls and seventy-two boys, or forty-four per cent, indicated they had collected stamps. In 1992, twenty-six per cent of the children surveyed had collected stamps, and a further eight children – seven girls and one boy – wanted to start collecting them. This suggests the continuing and widespread popularity of stamp collecting.

In his 1910 study, Cole states that the 'collections of the girls are more numerous and better cherished than those of the boys.' This trend was observed in the Knoxfield study. The girls, of whom thirty-seven were surveyed, collected a total of seventy-two different items. On average, girls had nearly six different collections each. The forty surveyed boys collected a total of sixty-seven different items; only fifty-nine different objects if football cards, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cards, Garbage Gang cards, swap cards, basketball cards, and cricket cards are grouped together. On average, each boy only had between one and two different collections. Of course there were a couple of children who collected considerably over the average, but generally the boys collected less than the girls.





In 1910, Dr Cole reached a number of conclusions on the basis of his research into the collecting habits of a group of Sydney school children. Cole's research still is valuable, even today. It is an important study into a little understood element of children's folklore. The Knoxfield study I completed has shown that there is a continuity and consistency to the seemingly spasmodic and craze-ridden collections of children. Collecting is just as popular today as in years gone by. Ten-year-old Emma's comment shows how innocent children and childhood have remained, even with the seeming encroachment of adults into children's folklore. 'I love collecting things and even to the day I die because collecting things is great, mate.'

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## GIRLS MELBOURNE (1992)

## TABLE A

### Collecting habits of 37 girls aged 10 to 12 years

#### ITEMS COLLECTED

stickers (26)	badges (3)
money/coins (15)	stationery (3)
stamps (14)	gem stones (3)
shells (12)	key rings (3)
rocks (9)	pencil sharpenings (2)
pencil leads (9)	feathers (2)
swap cards (9)	flowers (2)
marbles (8)	pens (2)
jewellery (7)	post cards (2)
books (6)	pencils (2)
soft toys (6)	soap and "body stuff" (2)
letters (5)	make-up (2)
hair accessories/ scrunchies (5)	horse cards (2)
dolls (4)	certificates (2)
erasers (4)	clothes (2)
posters (3)	birthday cards (2)

#### Other items listed (1):

sand, seeds, photos, grey leads, lollies, pictures of cats and dogs, tapes, ribbons/trophies, beads, diamond shaped objects, memorabilia of places visited, drawings, "junk", egg-shells, ancient things, comics, craft, whale and dolphin figurines and brooches, hats, whale and dolphin pictures, rabbit statues, leaves, rubber bands, newspaper football medallions, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cards,

number plates, computer games, basketballs, lego, medals, chocolates, scrap book, clowns, business cards, horse items, Barbies, magic, pocket purse, planet rings, pumpkin seeds.

#### REASONS FOR COLLECTING

Because it is fun to keep things so you can show your kids when you are older and it is good to look back on things. *Kim N, 11.*

Some of my collections make me feel secure. *Nicole S, 12.*

It's fun, it's something to do, and you can look at them when you are bored. *Anne G, 10.*

It's fun when people start collecting them. They collect them for a while and then it goes out of fashion and then they lose them. *Roxanne S, 10.*

It's fun and when I'm bored it takes up time. *Emma L, 10.*

Fun looking at all the things you have collected. *Erin B, 10.*

For a hobby, something to do besides Basketball and BMX. *Rebecca P, 11.*

Something to do and it's fun. *Jessica M, 11.*

So that I can say that I have that and mainly because it is fun. *Kimberley D, 11.*

It gives me something to do. I can collect them then keep looking at them and hand them down to my children. *Rosie Q, 11.*

I enjoy looking at them every once in a while.

*Lauren R, 11.*

I think people should collect things because it is fun.

*Janelle H, 12.*

TABLE A (CONT.)

## WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO COLLECT?

pets/animals (9) stamps (7)  
 nothing (6) computer games (3)  
 money/coins (3) clothes (2)  
 Beverly Hills 90210 books (2)  
 cards (2) stickers (2))

## Other items listed (1):

special spoons, bottle tops, jewellery, posters, pens,  
 keys, erasers, flags, projects, lollies, paddlepop  
 sticks, rocks, plants, diamonds, birds, skulls,  
 Gameboy games.

## HOW DO YOU COLLECT?

I go out to buy them, or with stamps, I get them off  
 all the letters we get.  
 By buying, finding or accepting.

I buy them off friends, family, relations give them to me.

I keep them and I find them and I buy them and I put them together and it makes a collection and I keep doing it.

Well if we go somewhere and we see the things I collect. We buy them.

I go all over the place and spend my money.

If you like something a lot that you just bought you want to get more of them and you just get more.

I get the posters out of magazines. Sometimes you have to send tokens then they send you posters.

Different ways.

I buy them and make them and swap them.

By buying and given and by look around on the ground etc.

Buy them and get them off other people.

## BOYS MELBOURNE (1992)

## TABLE B

## Collecting habits of 40 boys aged 10 to 13 years

## ITEMS COLLECTED

stamps (17) rocks (4)  
 money/coins (16) books (4)  
 marbles (9) shells (3)  
 football stickers (8) pens (3)  
 computer software basketball cards (3)  
 games (8) cards (3)  
 Teenage Mutant Ninja erasers (2)  
 Turtle cards (4) soft toys (2)  
 Garbage Gang cards (4) hats (2)  
 key rings (4) autographs (2)  
 swap cards (4) basketballs (2)  
 models (4) pencil leads (2)  
 badges (4) certificates (2)

## Other items listed (1):

comics, Beverly Hills 90210 magazines, bottle  
 tops, Mad magazines, spoons, Gameboy games,  
 trophies, posters, trolls, old pens, reptiles, mice,  
 skulls, smurfs, tennis balls, stationery, tapes,  
 pencil sharpenings, lego, footballs, souvenirs,  
 watches, matchbox cars, toys, cricket cards,  
 Nintendo magazines, computer magazines, post-  
 cards, awards, scraps of paper, advertising material,  
 games, Harley Davidson t-shirts, stationery, jew-  
 ellery, pets, cars, cricket cards, Batman cards.

## REASONS FOR COLLECTING

For the fun of it. *Mathew H, 12.*

Because I like them. *Rowan M, 12.*

Because they will be worth (something) some day.  
*Gary B, 11.*

To show my friends. *Chris T, 10.*

Because I like to collect them for fun. *Graeme L, 10.*

Because lots of tourist attractions often have them (key rings) and every time I look at what I bought it reminds me of the place I went to and the fun I had. *David B, 11.*

Because I find watches interesting and I pull them apart and put them back together. *Gavin B, 11.*

They may be valuable in the years to come.

*Tiriki O, 11.*

Because its fun and to swap with other people.  
*Steven K, 11.*

Because I like Harley Davidson. *Dale T, 13.*

Because I'm usually bored. *Jason T, 10.*

## WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO COLLECT?

nothing (5) vintage cars (2)  
 money/coins (5) cars and motorcycles (2)  
 planes (3) basketballs (2)

## Other items listed (1):

stamps, valuable stones, cricket bats, animal teeth, computer games, posters, Star Wars figurines, Harley Davidson motorbikes, videos, stickers, cricket cards, basketball posters, autographs, treasures, rocks, swap cards, badges.

## How Do You Collect?

Buy or keep things that you have got over the years.  
I buy things, swap and copy computer games.

## Buy them.

With cards I buy about \$5 worth and start putting them in order and see the ones I need and swap.

I get skulls from Arnhem Land and I have pens passed down to me.

I usually find watches on the ground and I keep them and if they don't work I get parts of another watch and fix them.

I go out and buy it.

By spending saved money.

## GIRLS SYDNEY (1910)

## TABLE C

## Collecting habits of 140 girls aged 9 to 14 years\*

## ITEMS COLLECTED

postcards (127)	coupons (8)
shells (92)	patches (8)
stamps (70)	tickets (7)
cigarette cards (59)	ferns (7)
beads (39)	flowers (6)
bonejacks (39)	toys (5)
scraps (39)	Christmas cards (4)
Sunday School texts (29)	fairytale books (4)
coins (24)	dolls (3)
books (22)	music (2)
autograph albums (22)	dolls' clothes (2)
marbles (11)	boxes (2)
cigar bands (8)	balls (2)
photos (8)	

## Other items listed (1):

buds, eggs, birds, sovereigns, tiles, wool, scent bottles, butterflies, birthday presents, buttons, book-marks, chalks, leaves, pins, plants, skin, seeds, tobacco tins, crabs, nibs, caterpillars, fossils, ribbon, flags, letters, siren soap wrappers, money for the Benevolent Asylum.

## REASONS FOR COLLECTING

It's interesting for visitors.  
To think of your friends.  
To show your friends.  
When anyone comes you can show them.  
Nice to look at.  
I'm fond of pictures and colours.  
For novelty.  
To learn about other countries.  
For Philanthropic purposes (money).  
Pennies for the blacks.  
To study and make things.  
Because I like collecting.  
For illustration.

## My mania.

It's my hobby.

Just for company.

I can play with them.

To comfort other people, not only myself: when I go to the hospital. I take the children what I have in the box for them.

Because they are strange.

## WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO COLLECT?

coins (43)	shells (2)
stamps (13)	diamonds (2)
flowers (5)	butterflies (2)
scraps (4)	beads (2)
birds (4)	rubies (2)
art treasures (3)	postcards (2)
antiques (3)	jewels (2)
dolls (3)	jewellery (2)
curios (2)	

## Other items listed (1):

pearls, money, autographs, beche de mer, coloured glass, coloured paper, clam shells, emeralds, fans, fancy work, farthings, feathers, gold, island curios, ivory nut, Japan novelties, leaves, music, opals, pearl shell, rubber, relics from other lands, rare old oil paintings, patches, pictures, sapphires, silver, spears, skins and whales' teeth.

## HOW DO YOU COLLECT?

Save up.

Friends give things.

Get them off my cousin.

Go out to gather things.

Exchange things.

Gift and exchange.

\* Summary of research by Percival R. Cole, Sydney Mail, 19 October 1910; in Factor, 1988.



**BOYS SYDNEY (1910)**  
**Collecting habits of 182 boys aged 9 to 13 years\***

**TABLE D**

**ITEMS COLLECTED**

cigarette cards (107)	matchbox lids (5)
postcards (81)	ferns (4)
marbles (75)	birds (3)
stamps (72)	magazines (3)
eggs (30)	butterflies (3)
shells (29)	timbers (3)
tops (15)	tram tickets (2)
cigarette boxes (11)	coins (2)
cigar bands (9)	plants and ferns (2)
newspaper scraps (8)	moths (2)
beetles (8)	buttons (2)
school papers (8)	autographs (2)
silkworms (5)	

**Other items listed (1):**

cartridges, caterpillars, slides for rotoscope, cocoons, curios, furs of Australian animals, fairytale books, flower seeds, fowls, games, gold, labels, locusts, metals, minerals, models, money boxes, novelties, puzzles, stones, pictures, tins, tin-tags, tools, tobacco tags, tobacco tins.

**REASONS FOR COLLECTING**

- To see how many things I can get.
- To play with.
- To pass the time.
- It's nice.
- To save up.
- For fun.
- For a prize.
- For information.
- To learn about nature.
- To find out about them.
- To get more knowledge of the surrounding world (postcards).
- Because they are pretty (cigarette cards).
- Because they are beautiful (plants).
- I can watch them grow (plants and ferns).
- For curiosity.
- To learn about soldiers and flags (cigarette cards).
- It makes you think.

To show friends.

To learn all I can about nature (butterflies and eggs).

Friends like it.

It is an education in itself.

**WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO COLLECT?**

birds' eggs (26)	books (4)
silkworms (19)	insects (4)
birds (18)	shells (4)
stamps (15)	marbles (3)
coins (13)	birds' nests (3)
minerals (7)	seeds (2)
butterflies (7)	beetles (2)
wood species (6)	magazines (2)
animals (4)	New Guinea butterflies (2)

**Other items listed:**

grasshoppers, precious stones, different parts of animals and birds, money, books from other countries, moths, flowers, scrapbooks, gold and silverfish, stones, leather, furs, pictures, antique guns and weapons, Pompeii curios, sea specimens, worms, postcards, small models of steam engines, curios, new cigarette cards.

**HOW DO YOU COLLECT?**

- Ask friends, men and boys.
- Exchange.
- Searching, looking, climbing trees, picking up things.
- A person finds a thing, they say, 'I can make a collection'.
- Finding.
- Get them from relatives.
- Buy them.
- Communicate with people in other countries.
- Some are given, or picked up, bought, exchanged.

*\*Summary of research by Percival R. Cole. Sydney Mail, 20 July 1910; in Factor, 1988.*

*Merryn McDonald conducted this research while studying at the School of Early Childhood Studies, Melbourne.*

**Questions used in Cole's survey**

**TABLE E**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. What is your full name?                                   | 6. Which of your collections do you like the most?         |
| 2. What is your age (last birthday)?                         | 7. Why do you collect?                                     |
| 3. What things have you ever collected?                      | 8. How do you collect?                                     |
| 4. What things do you still collect?                         | 9. Which is your largest collection?                       |
| 5. What other things would you like to collect if you could? | 10. How many articles have you in your largest collection? |

# Children's Folklore in Children's Museums

by June Factor

*Between August 1995 and March 1996, June Factor worked on a consultancy report for the Museum of Victoria. There is to be a new museum built in Melbourne by the year 2000, and a section has been designated as a children's museum. It is this section which Dr Factor was asked to consider in her report.*

*What follows is an extract from the lengthy report, dealing with the general lack of understanding in children's museums of the importance of what may broadly be called children's folklore.*

## NEGLECT OF CHILDLORE

Perhaps because of its concentration on learning through discovery, the children's museum has not generally been a site for the exhibition or exploration of childlore. The intellectual grounding of these museums may be various, but it rarely extends to the inclusion of research and theory in the field of children's own traditions of play, language and ritual.

In this neglect the children's museums have merely reflected a wider institutional silence. The study of childhood has been relegated in the 20th century to the spheres of paediatrics, psychology and pedagogy. Consequently, the lives of children have not featured in culturally and socially important centres such as museums, other than as part of anthropological exhibits and in more recent times as a significant component of the museum clientele. The children's museum, although revolutionary in its recharacterisation of the role and function of museums, has continued to view children more as learners of adult-devised information than initiators and creators of their own.

As a result, there are very few children's museums that concern themselves with the lore and language of children, those 'accumulated traditions...inherited products and practices'<sup>1</sup> which mark out the young in all cultures as participants, conservers, adapters and inventors of linguistic and kinetic play. What a scholar has called 'the triviality barrier'<sup>2</sup> is another explanation for this neglect. In the pragmatic, educationally hierarchical and often instrumentalist societies which typify what is known as the 'developed' world, it is difficult to take seriously the repetitive, seemingly absurd and non-functional play of the young.

Museums, like schools, value order, clear categorisation, learning which has as its goal increasing competence in intellectual, physical or social 'performance'. Children's museums insist that play - carefully stimulated and channelled by knowledgeable



adults - will help children achieve these goals. 'Children's museums create numerous participatory exhibits to help children understand the world in which they live through delightful play.'<sup>3</sup>

But even in a setting which reveres play, few (other than preschool educators) recognise the developmental utility for a child of pretending to be a fairy, playing Tag, speaking Pig Latin, or chanting:

Mary had a little lamb  
Her father shot it dead  
And now it goes to school with her  
Between two chunks of bread.

Such behaviour may be considered a little wild; it is not easily controlled, does not defer to adult priorities, and rarely finds a place at the centre of the museum culture.

## IMPORTANCE OF CHILDLORE

Lost to the museums by this marginalisation of childlore is the opportunity to study a central feature of child life. As I have written elsewhere, child-initiated play



is the medium and the message, the evolutionary mechanism by which the young of our species make sense of a bewildering world without danger to limb or reputation. Safely anchored in what one theorist has defined as the 'third area' between the external world of objects and people, and the inner world of dream and thought,<sup>4</sup> children creatively and imaginatively explore their own experience, and look with a quizzical eye at the universe of adults that surrounds them ... Children together, in the collaborative interaction of play, enhance the communicative possibilities of each individual child.<sup>5</sup>

Through traditions of play, children are able to move outside the limitations of the immediate moment, the here and now, the status of smallness, weakness, ignorance and powerlessness. There is no mere imitation of adult life, or practice of skills useful in the distant future. These engagements of mind, heart and imagination are forms of creative invention built on tradition. Everything is possible in play – if the rules allow it.

In its own way, the playlore of childhood functions for children as the arts do for adults: the flux and chaos of life is temporarily ordered, given form and pattern and meaning. Robert Louis Stevenson understood this when he wrote: 'Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child: it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life.'<sup>6</sup>

One facet of childlore is play with toys. Although often presented without historical and cultural context, toys are familiar objects in children's museums. Many include toys as playthings, and facsimiles of 'olden times' toys may be used as historical artefacts. Collecting or exhibiting play material is another matter. Determined not to be associated with a parallel institution, sometimes called a Museum of Childhood, where children's playthings and the paraphernalia of well-to-do nurseries are displayed, a number of hands-on museums refuse to engage in a practice they regard as narrow and static.<sup>7</sup> In the words of an Australian children's museum director, '[r]elatively uninterpreted collections of adult-made "childhood" artefacts drawn overwhelmingly from a narrow spectrum of society may serve only to reinforce inadequate or wrong stereotypes regarding a small aspect of the life of young people.'<sup>8</sup>

A few children's museums, such as the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia – the first American museum to specialise in children under the age of 8 – have moved beyond the toys/no toys polarity. Here the staff have recognised the intrinsic importance to an understanding of childhood of a scholarly approach to the world of children engaged in their own self-directed play.

In 1985, the Please Touch Museum presented an unusual exhibition: *Children's Play: Past, Present, & Future*. Intended as a project to 'illustrate the history of children's play in the Delaware Valley', the exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue equally surprising: instead of the customary annotated listing of items in the exhibition, this catalogue contained a series of short essays by leading specialists in the history of childhood and children's folklore. The editor of the catalogue, Brian Sutton-Smith (then both Professor of Education and Professor of Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania), used his final comments to point to the dilemma facing those who would harness play for their own – adult – purposes:

[T]here is a common romantic assumption that play is functional and is always worthwhile. At the same time, adults are in general so scared of it that, unless it is called 'game simulation', or 'adjustment', or 'cognition', or 'problem solving', they would rather have nothing to do with it. By calling all of a child's intelligent activities 'play', the modern generation of educators and psychologists manages to suppress play on behalf of education and supervision.

Present trends indicate that there will be much more of such usurpation of play's potential to go wherever the players want to take it.<sup>9</sup>

As their own contribution to documenting and studying the patterns of children's play, the board of the Please Touch Museum established a Childlife Center within the museum in 1987. Determined that the museum would 'increasingly become known as a center for research and study of American childhood',<sup>10</sup> the Executive Director persuaded the association of toy manufacturers in America to donate the most popular toys each year to the Center, while continuing to add historical material to an existing collection of objects, including home-made and child-made play artefacts, and audio tapes of childhood memories.

As a result, a children's museum which started, like so many others, as a lively, interactive, hands-on learning centre based on Piagetian principles, has begun a deliberate evolution into something more: a significant institution in American cultural and intellectual life, and one of the few to take the experiences of childhood seriously. A by-product of this development – and one which the museum consciously sought – is to 'speak directly to [their] adult audience who constitute some forty percent of ... visitors.'<sup>11</sup>

The Children's Museum in the Museum of Victoria followed a similar trajectory when it determined that its second exhibition would focus on the



play  
cultures of

childhood. The first exhibition, *Everybody*, opened in 1985 and was acclaimed for its originality and accessibility to the young. It explored concepts of the human body through sculpture, 'touch and feel' exhibits and a variety of imaginative activities for children. *Everybody* is an example of a first-rate interactive exhibition which fulfilled one of the Children's Museum goals: to present 'high quality and enjoyable activities for children which stimulate them to discover the [natural] world'.<sup>12</sup>

*You're It!*, which opened in 1988 and benefited from the talents of *Everybody's* designers, Mary and Grant Featherston, was developed from a quite different perspective. A rare instance of a children's museum making the folklore of the young a central project, the museum utilised the resources of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, the major public archive documenting the play cultures of childhood in Australia.

This exhibition featured the traditional games of generations of children in this country: Marbles, Hopscotch, string games, spinning tops, paper cut-outs, Knucklebones. In order to 'highlight the universality of children's traditional games',<sup>13</sup> the exhibition included old play practices no longer current, such as Diabolo and Cup and Ball, relatively recent innovations such as Elastics, and non-Anglo variants of games: Aboriginal string games, Japanese Knucklebones (O-Tedama), etc.

Visitors were able to expand their repertoire of play by observing and practising Aboriginal string games, learning a Calabrian string game rhyme, and playing American, Japanese and Vietnamese versions of Knucklebones. Indirectly but most effectively, children were encouraged, through their games, to recognise their common humanity. Alone, this would not be sufficient to alter ingrained prejudice or antipathy; in

an environment which consciously reinforced reflection on the universality – and attractiveness – of the play traditions of children from other cultures, such activities enhance a museum's efforts to foster respect for difference and challenge bigotry.

Furthermore, by focusing on the non-official, outside-the-classroom traditions of child life, the Children's Museum provided an exceptionally efficacious bridge between generations. To observe a grandfather and grandson kneeling together in the marbles ring at the 'You're It!' exhibition, sharing their often differing knowledge of rules and procedures, was to recognise the potential for such an exhibition to evoke congenial and mutually satisfying interaction between children and adults. Both young and old were experts here, both had much to teach and to learn.

Programs built around the traditions and rituals of childhood create a special space, rare in contemporary culture, where children are acknowledged as teachers and leaders, and adults willingly accept tutelage from the young. No other museum project, in my experience, facilitates such reciprocal and egalitarian relationships between generations.

Once again, the Children's Museum produced an attractive and extremely popular hands-on exhibition. This time, however, it was not a feature of the 'real' world important to adults that was reinterpreted for children's delectation and enlightenment. Here was an exhibition which celebrated a central characteristic of childhood: play. In the words of the designers:

Play is at the very heart of childhood. The theme of play provides an opportunity for the Children's Museum to present an exhibition, not only for children, but also ABOUT children – children's own culture ... It will be a lively, participatory exhibition to rekindle memories and stimulate shared experiences across generations ...

Play is essential to every aspect of children's development – social, physical and cognitive – but it is still regarded by many, including teachers, as peripheral and ephemeral. In presenting this exhibition, the Children's Museum will give new status to play and games.<sup>14</sup>

Here, as in the Please Touch Museum, there was an awareness of the responsibility of a children's museum to enhance the status of activities of special importance to children. As well, the planners and designers of *You're It!* acknowledged the cross-generational bonding which the experiences of play, common across generations, can engender. Adults bring children to the museum, and there is every reason to consider opportunities to encourage their involvement in the museum's projects. Heather Russell, a consul-



tant to the exhibition and later its archivist, commented in a report written in June, 1989:

Thousands of people of different ages and cultural backgrounds visited the exhibition, and, in the case of adults, were inspired and delighted to relive childhood memories of playground games. Children were impressed that here was an exhibition in the Museum where they were the experts – they had the knowledge and the expertise which we adults ... wanted to know about. This reversal of the flow of information – from child to adult – contributed significantly to many children's appreciation and enjoyment of the exhibition.<sup>15</sup>

For many teachers bringing school groups to the C.M., the *You're It!* exhibition was something of a revelation. Teachers are rarely educated to appreciate the informal learning and artistry that develops amidst the hullabaloo of their school playgrounds. Most regard yard-duty as a necessary but unloved chore. The discovery, through the exhibition and related materials produced by the children's museum, that their students are tradition-bearers of ancient subcultures, and irreverent adapters and innovators as well, surprised – and delighted – many. Some spoke of their own youth, and felt a renewed sense of affiliation with their charges.

The C.M. encouraged teachers to observe their students at play and recognise the extraordinary cultural richness and collaborative learning that takes place outside the classroom. Instead of the customary guide-dog/sheep-dog role often forced on teachers by the traditional museum ethos, there was now an opportunity to interact with the children's museum staff as colleagues. Most teachers, after initial hesitation, responded enthusiastically.

Exhibitions of this kind, with their focus on children's interests and capabilities, have the capacity to draw together youngsters who otherwise are separated by culture or convention. When *You're It!* was taken to schools as part of the Children's Museum's Outreach Program, teachers remarked on changes they observed among their students:

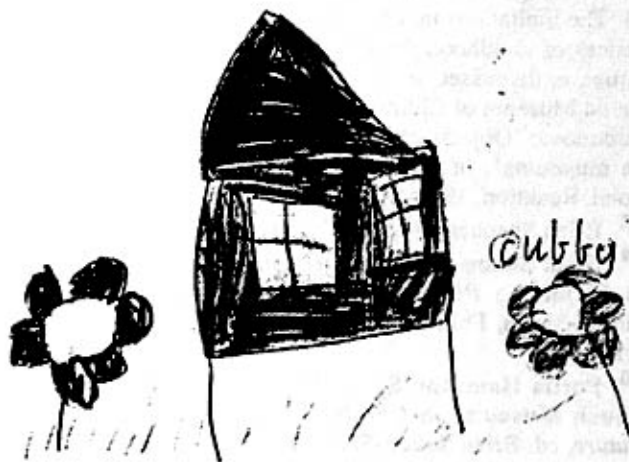
You'd think with all those children, with a huge group of them playing Marbles, that you'd have a few blues. Hardly any of that has gone on and it's really good because it's got boys and girls, children of different nationalities, different ages, all playing together. It's something they all enjoy. Marbles is something you don't have to be really sporty to be good at playing. It crosses a lot of ability barriers, age and sex stereotypes barriers. Yes, especially for some of the Asian children,

who knew some of the games the Children's Museum brought out, they relate to those very well and teach the other children how to play. I think it's really helped them socially too.

[The games] generated a lot of interest from kids with different migrant backgrounds ... They brought their games along and taught other kids how to make the equipment e.g. for Elastics using rubber bands threaded together ... Before [the Children's Museum] came none of the kids from Asia had volunteered any stories to me about what it was like in the camps in Thailand, etc. All of a sudden it was 'This is what we used to play in the camps in Thailand.' ... 'So that's the way I played this game and I had to sit there and play while mum was selling food in the market to try and get us some money.'

They felt good because they were actually in a position to show somebody something else that they were better at. There weren't just the differences in these games. There were a lot of similarities discovered. That kids play the same games like Marbles in many parts of the world. They began to swap a lot of ideas e.g. How we played Marbles in Asia, etc. The kids were really receptive to each other.<sup>16</sup>

Such developments in a children's museum are of great importance. They provide the opportunity for youngsters to demonstrate and reflect, in a secure and comparatively non-judgmental environment, on the lore and language of their many cultures. They permit a more holistic approach to the lives and interests of children than that which has emerged historically: on the one side, hands-on, activity-based children's museums endeavouring to make the world of science and the arts (adult-constructed categories) accessible



and attractive to the young; on the other side, museums collecting childhood-related materials and artefacts for an audience of adults and children to look at and read about rather than handle or use.

Without representation of the world from children's perspectives and reflecting their priorities, a children's museum is still, in essence, a conduit for adult perceptions, adult criteria of importance (and usually a narrow range of adults at that). More-or-less voluntary, engaging, pleasant for the eye, ear and hand, the children's museum remains as it began: a progressive educational outpost. Lacking a commitment to reflect, analyse and celebrate childhood as children experience it, such a museum cannot be regarded as comprehensive, or, in an intellectual and cultural sense, truly innovative.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> R. D. Abrahams, 'Interpreting Folklore Ethnographically and Sociologically', in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. R. M. Dorson, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, p.345

<sup>2</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Folkgames of Children*, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1972, p.538

<sup>3</sup> J. Haider & T. Azhar, 'Children's Museums: Critical Issues in Architectural Design', *Hand to Hand*, 8:3, Fall 1994, p.2

<sup>4</sup> W. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971

<sup>5</sup> June Factor, *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia*, Melb. Penguin, 1988, pp. 20-21, 27

<sup>6</sup> R. L. Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', *Longman's Magazine*, vol.1, no.1, Lond. Longmans, Green & Co. 1882, p.5

<sup>7</sup> Not all Museums of Childhood are as limited as this description suggests. In Australia, for example, the Museum of Childhood at the Edith Cowan University in Perth has consciously and successfully challenged the 'toys and things' approach. See Brian Shepherd, 'Childhood's Pattern: appropriation by generation', in *Museums and the Appropriation of Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce, Lond. & Atlantic Highlands, NJ, The Atholone Press, 1994, pp.65-83. The limitations inherent in attempts to convey the experiences of childhood through adult-made and chosen playthings is discussed in a critical response to the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood in London by the historian L. Jordonova: 'Objects of knowledge: a historical perspective on museums', in *The New Museology*, (ed. P. Vergo), Lond. Reaktion, 1990, pp.22-40

<sup>8</sup> Brian Shepherd, *op cit*, p.72

<sup>9</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, 'Projections: The Future of Play', in *Children's Play: Past, Present & Future*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, Philadelphia, Please Touch Museum, 1985, p.19

<sup>10</sup> Portia Hamilton Sperr, Executive Director, Please Touch Museum, in *Children's Play: Past, Present & Future*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, Philadelphia, Please Touch Museum, 1985, p.2

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Another American museum to feature the traditions of childhood play rather than the artefacts of commer-

cial manufacturing for children is the Museum of the City of New York, which held an exhibition, *City Play*, in 1988-89. This exhibition proved aroused considerable interest and appears to have influenced other urban museums. See *City Play*, by Amanda Dargan and Steven Zeitlin, New Brunswick & Lond. Rutgers University Press, 1990. The annual Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, in Washington DC, always includes children's play and performance. See for example Diana Baird N'Daiye, 'Kids' Stuff: Children's Traditions of Play and Performance', *1993 Festival of American Folklife, July 1 - July 5*, Smithsonian Institution, pp.84-9

<sup>12</sup> *The Children's Museum, Museum of Victoria*, brochure produced by the Director and the Advisory Board of the Children's Museum in 1986

<sup>13</sup> 'Can You Help? The Children's Museum Needs Exhibits', leaflet produced by the Children's Museum, undated but probably 1988

<sup>14</sup> Mary & Grant Featherston, 'Concept Report', cited in the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, No.11, October 1986, pp.9-10

<sup>15</sup> Heather Russell, 'Collecting Children's Folklore at the Children's Museum of Victoria: December 1988 - June 1989', *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, No.16, July 1989, pp.15-16

<sup>16</sup> Teachers at Coomoora Primary School in Springvale, Melbourne, recorded by Cathy Hope and quoted in her article, 'Traditional Games in an Outreach program', *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, No.16, July 1989, pp.20, 21

