

Creeping Games

Laurie and Winifred Bauer

INTRODUCTION

In this report we present data gathered in New Zealand on variable names for some children's games. We show that old names may be used for new games, and that new names can be introduced for the same game. We illustrate how difficult it can be to determine from children's own descriptions of their games precisely what is involved, and thus how difficult it can be to determine what counts as 'the same game'.

We sent a questionnaire to 150 New Zealand schools with children in Years 7 and 8 (normally 11-12 years old). Our aim was to see whether there were regional variants in children's playground vocabulary. As a by-product of this research, we have acquired a lot of information which is potentially of interest to folklorists. One of the areas we explored was games which we knew had more than one name, including the game described like this:

One player stands facing a wall. The other players stand behind a line some distance away. They try to creep up and touch the wall. The player facing the wall can turn round at any time. Any player seen moving must return to the base line. The first player to reach the wall takes the place of the player against the wall, and the game begins again.

*Do children at your school play a game like this? (If you do not play it **exactly** like this, do not worry.) What do you call this game?*

This was supplemented by an optional question requesting details of any variations.

Eighty different names were provided, although many names were partly similar, and many were reported only once. Some of them appear at first glance to be names of completely different games, while others are apparently names for variants of this game rather than the game described above. However, the descriptions of variations made it clear that there is a cline between variants of this game rather than a number of discrete games, and even within one school the same name may be applied to a game with variable rules.

It was commonly reported that this game was played by children younger than the age group we were targeting, but in only one case did they report that they could not remember what it was called. It also appears that it is largely played by girls.

The full list of names is given below. Many schools reported more than one name. The number of occurrences is in brackets after each name. The names have been grouped as far as possible to keep similar names (or names we suspect are similar) together:

Statue (3), Statues (38), Moving Statues (1), Freeze (30), Mummies (1), Stiff Candles (1), Snowman (1), Trees, rocks, stars (1)

Creep Up (9), Sneak (1), Sneak Up (1), Sneaky-wreaky (1), The Sneaking Game (1), Sneak Tag (1), Sneak Up Granny (19), Creep Up Granny (2), Sneak Up On Granny (3), Creep Up On Granny (2), Creep Up Jack (4), Sneak Up Jack (2), Creep Up On The Giant (1), Creep Up On The Man (1)

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Grandma's Footsteps (5), Granny's Footstep (1),
Granny's Footsteps (3), Granny Footsteps (2),
Mother's Footsteps (1)

Grandma, Grandma (1), Grandma (2), Granny
(1), Old Granny (1), Granny's Watching (1),
Grandma's Wall (1), Grandma's Garden (1),
Grandma's Keys (2), Granny's Keys (2)

Catch The Keys (1)

Giant (1), Giants (1), Giant's Treasure (1), Giant's
Treasures (1), Sleeping Giant (1)

What's The Time, Mr Wolf (29), What's The Time,
Mr Wolfie (3), What's The Time (1), Mr Wolf (7),
Mr Wolfie (1), Wolf (1)

Red Light, Green Light (17), Green Light, Red
Light (1), Traffic Light (5), Traffic Lights (4), Stop
Lights (1), Red Light (2), Stop-Go (2)

Hot Chocolate (6), Chocolate (1)

Colours (1)

Letters (1), Letterman (1), Poison Letter (1)

Around The World (2), Go Home Stay Home (2),
Spotlight (1), Hit The Deck (1), King (1), Queeny-
Queeny (1), Touch (1), Snake (1), Hello Mrs
Brown (1), Go Home Stay Home (2),
Commandoes (1), Kick The Bucket (1), Cow 1-2-
3 (1), Pussy Cat (1), Bus Stop (1), Black Cat (1),
Strawberry (1), Cheese, Cheese On The Wall (1),
Mother May I (1)

We know that some of these names (e.g. Stiff Candles,
Touch, Go Home Stay Home) are used in at least some
schools for games which are not creeping up games,
but tag games. However, we discovered that we
cannot dismiss any of them as irrelevant out of hand,
because it appears that a game with the same name
may be played in very different ways from one school
to another.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Gomme (1894) does not list these names, and nor do
'creeping (up)' games appear in her categorisation
(1894, 461ff). There is thus nothing to suggest that they
were imported from Britain by the earliest settlers. Nor
are they recorded in Newell's study of American
children's games (1903).

Sutton-Smith (1972), in his New Zealand research,
does have a category of 'creeping games', noting that
they are principally played by girls of 7-9 years (1972,
66). The only name recorded by Sutton-Smith prior to
1920 which resembles any of these names is Giant
Steps. However, in the period 1920-1950, many more
were noted by Sutton-Smith, though he states (1972,

70) that Creeping Up was most common. It is of some
interest, then, that this name was not reported from
any of the schools which responded to our
questionnaire, although some of the other names he
reported as regional variants are still reported from the
same regions. He notes that in some versions, the
person with their face to the wall counts to a specified
number before turning round. The other names he
records are: Steps; Creepy-Crawly; Creepy; Creeping
Jack; Creeping; Creep the Curtain; Peep Behind the
Curtain; Grandmother's Footsteps; Go, Go, Stop. Of
these, only Grandmother's Footsteps, Creeping Jack
and Go, Go, Stop appear to have direct descendants in
our data.

However, Sutton-Smith (1972, 70) also has a category
of 'treasure' games, which introduce some object
placed behind the leader which has to be stolen
without the leader catching the players moving. It is
clear that some of the games reported in answer to our
question are of this kind. The most relevant names
Sutton-Smith records are Giant's Treasure; Creeping
Jack; Get the Keys; Find the Key.

One of the authors grew up in New Zealand, and
attended primary school in the period just after Sutton-
Smith's work in NZ stopped (mid 1950s). At that time,
Creeping Up (as the author knew it) was played just as
described on p1. It may be worth noting that there
were two principal strategies for success at this game.
The first was to take steps as large as possible, and to
take relatively few steps each time the 'in' person
turned away. This had the disadvantage that if you
were caught in the act, it was hard to stabilise the
movement. The other technique was to take tiny steps,
in the hope that it was easy to remain steady when the
'in' person turned around. These two techniques may
have given rise to the 'giant' and 'granny' in the names
now in use.

VARIATIONS IN THE RULES FOR THESE GAMES

We discuss here the rules for playing the games given
most frequently in answer to our original questions on p1.

SNEAK/CREEP UP

Everything we have been able to find out suggests that
all the names involving 'Sneak' or 'Creep', and all
those involving 'Footsteps' can be played as described
on p1, with the possible addition of counting (usually
to 5) before turning around.

For instance, the teacher at one school described
Creeping Up as 'a variation on Sneak up on Granny'.
However, the rules supplied do not make the claimed
difference clear:

*A player faces the wall, the other players creep up
on them. The 'in' person turns around quickly to
spot them.*

This teacher copied out information on variants from the children's work, rather than sending us the originals. Because of this, we do not know whether the children used the name Creeping Up, or whether this was supplied by the teacher. (It was not recorded as an answer to our questions at that school.)

Here is a description of the game which the student writer called Creep (although, interestingly, that name was not reported in the responses from the school concerned):

Person stands against a wall facing their back to the other people and they count up to five while the other people are trying to creep up to the person standing against the wall. When that person turns around then everyone has to freeze and if anyone is caught moving they have to start again. If anyone touches that person they have a turn at standing against the wall.

Apart from the counting, that is identical to our original game description.

From another school comes the following information:

'Creep up on Granny' is a variation of 'What's the time Mr Wolf?'. It is the same except no-one needs to call out a time. The same is true for 'Granny Steps'.

(The name Granny Steps is another not recorded in the responses to our questions.)

However, games with these names need not be pure creeping games. Sometimes it is clear that games with this name are what Sutton-Smith calls 'treasure' games, as in this student's description of Creep Up:

One person stands facing a wall with a bunch of keys next to his [sic] feet. The others have to creep up and get the keys, passing them back to the beginning line. The person 'in' can turn around at any time and if he sees someone moving or guesses who's holding the keys, the person has to return to the line, and/or return the keys. This game can be played with any other noisy objects. Once the game is finished another person is picked to be in.

Similarly, the modern version of Sutton-Smith's Creeping Jack, Creep/Sneak Up Jack is still sometimes a treasure game and sometimes a pure creeping game, as shown by the following description:

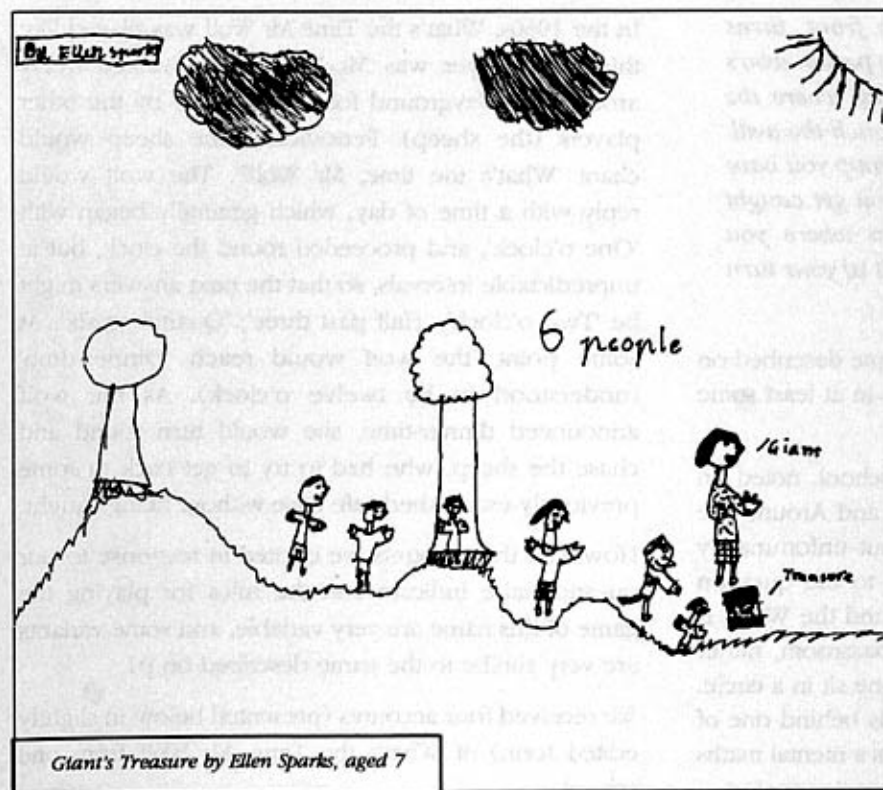
Creep up Jack

Sometimes we have to touch an object (like a shoe) in front of the person facing the wall. Sometimes we also just have to tag the person.

TREASURE GAMES, E.G. GRANNY'S KEYS

Here is an extremely competent student outline of Granny's Keys:

In this game one player is chosen to be 'Granny' and is blindfolded and sits in a chair. A bunch of keys is put under 'Granny's' chair. The other players sneak up to try and get her keys. When 'Granny' hears footsteps she has to point to where they came from and if that person gets caught they go back to the start. When someone reaches the chair they have to try and get the keys and get back to the start without 'Granny' knowing. If 'Granny' can hear the keys she yells out 'Keys' and the person with the keys puts them back under the chair and goes back to the start. If they are also heard from their footsteps they go back to the start. The person who gets the keys back to the start is now 'Granny' and the game starts again. If 'Granny' calls out 'Keys' fifteen times when no one has them the person who is nearest to 'Granny' then becomes the new 'Granny'. Also 'Granny' is not allowed to sweep her hand around to get everyone out.



Giant's Treasure by Ellen Sparks, aged 7

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This is clearly a treasure game, and as such, a variant on the basic creeping game, rather than simply another name for it. We have assumed that any game with a name involving keys or a substitute will be a treasure game and not a pure creeping game.

STATUES

In the 1950s in NZ the game of Statues was played in two different ways. In the first version, one girl was chosen, and she held each other player by the hand in turn, and spun them round fast before letting go. As she let go, she called out a stance which the spun player was supposed to assume and hold without moving (e.g. tree, star, old woman). When all the players had been spun, the spinner would select the player she deemed to have landed in the best imitation of the required stance, and they would take her place as the spinner.

In an alternative version, everyone had to move round vigorously, and keep moving until either the music stopped or the leader called 'Statues'. At that point the players had to stop exactly as they were. Any player seen moving by the leader was out, and the last person left stationary was the new leader.

Neither of these is a creeping up game.

However, it is clear from the descriptions which we elicited through our questionnaire that Statues is now the name for the creeping up game. Consider this (slightly edited) description of Statues:

The person who's 'in' goes up the front, turns around and faces a wall. When the person who's 'in' turns around and isn't looking where the group are, you run up and try to touch the wall. When he [sic] turns to look at the group you have to stand still like a statue. When you get caught moving, you have to go back to where you started. When you touch the wall [it is] your turn to be in.

This is not distinguishable from the game described on p1, and we must take it that Statues is in at least some schools a pure creeping game.

However, the teacher at another school noted in answer to our questions that 'Statues and Around the World have slightly different rules', but unfortunately did not elaborate, nor send answers to the question about variations. (In one school, Around the World is an educational game played in the classroom, rather than the playground. All players but one sit in a circle. The remaining player (Player S) stands behind one of those seated, Player A. The teacher sets a mental maths problem (or similar), and Player S competes against

Player A to answer it. If Player S is first with the correct answer, they move one person round the circle, and challenge Player B. If Player A is first with the correct answer, A and S change places. The object of the game is for Player S to move right round the circle (and thus Around the World). We would not describe this as 'having slightly different rules' from the game described on p1, and thus suspect that there are other rules for Around the World in other schools.)

FREEZE

Freeze is not mentioned in Sutton-Smith (1972), and we have no evidence of earlier records or recollections. However, we have a little information about this game from our questionnaire.

Some children specified that it is played exactly as described on p1. However, one child from the same school added 'when someone says "freeze" you freeze'.

It thus appears that Freeze is a name for the same game, with the possible addition of the warning word.

(WHAT'S THE TIME) MR WOLF?

Sutton-Smith (1972) lists the game Wolfie in a list of 'modern' tagging games, but provides no further details. Gomme (1894) lists the games Wolf and Wolf and Lamb but these are entirely different from the game in question.

In the 1950s, What's the Time Mr Wolf was played like this: One player was Mr Wolf. They walked freely around the playground followed closely by the other players (the sheep). Periodically, the sheep would chant 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?'. The wolf would reply with a time of day, which generally began with 'One o'clock', and proceeded round the clock, but at unpredictable intervals, so that the next answers might be 'Two o'clock', 'Half past three', 'Quarter to six'. At some point, the wolf would reach 'Dinner-time' (understood to be twelve o'clock). As the wolf announced dinner-time, she would turn round and chase the sheep, who had to try to get back to some previously-established safe base without being caught.

However, the accounts we elicited in response to our questionnaire indicate that the rules for playing the game of this name are very variable, and some variants are very similar to the game described on p1.

We received four accounts (presented below in slightly edited form) of What's the Time, Mr Wolf from one school.

- 1 First you need a group of people. One person goes in. They are called Mr Wolf. Everybody else stands in a line and walks behind the wolf. Mark where the people are standing with a jersey or something. They all start walking behind the wolf and say 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' The wolf turns to the group and says any time e.g. 1.00. They carry on doing this until Mr Wolf turns and says it's dinner time. The line of people have to turn and run as fast as they can to the line while the wolf chases them. If the wolf tags somebody that person's in. But if the wolf can't get anyone, they are in again.
- 2 One person faces a wall and a group of people stand behind a line. The people (behind the line) call 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?', and they start walking towards the wolf. The wolf can call any time. If Mr Wolf calls 'Dinner time', all the people try to run back over the line without the wolf catching them. If someone is caught, they are the wolf. If the wolf can't get anybody, they are in again. The first person to the wall/to tag the wolf wins. [Another account corroborates this version.]
- 3 One person faces a wall. Other people stand in a parallel line to the wall. The people who are in the line have to get to the wall. The wolf who is facing the wall is allowed to turn around at any time. If the wolf sees anybody moving, the person who was seen gets to be the wolf.
- 4 One person stands at one side of the court and the rest of the players stand behind the line on the other side of the line and start walking to the wolf and say 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' The wolf says 1.00 or any number and when the wolf says what time it is he or she turns around and everyone has to freeze. If anyone is still moving, they're out. When the wolf says dinner time the wolf chases the others and if someone gets caught, they're also out. The first person to reach the wolf wins.

In an account from another school, What's the time Mr Wolf is described as a variation on the game on p1: 'when the person who's playing wolf says "12.00 lunch" you all run away'.

The following account comes from yet another school:

What's the Time Mr Wolf: the wolf faces the wall, the others call 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' as they creep up. If the wolf answers 'Dinner time' they all run back to the line without being caught.

Thus it is impossible to be sure whether this is an alternative name or the name of a variant of the game on p1, involving at least a warning of the turning around, but sometimes more radical departures.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS

Perhaps not surprisingly, no games of these names are recorded by Sutton-Smith or Gomme, and we have no reports from earlier periods. The questionnaire elicited only one description of this game:

Same [as game on p1] except the person facing wall says 'Green light, orange light, red light'. When he says 'Red light' he turns around.

This is clearly a variant with a warning to precede the turning around.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main lesson which we draw from this is that names of games without accompanying descriptions are of little value to anyone involved in gathering such data, particularly in historical contexts.

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- Sutton-Smith, Brian, 1972, *The Folkgames of Children*. Publications of the American Folklore Society, Vol. 24. Austin & London: University of Texas Press.
- Laurie and Winifred Bauer teach in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University, Wellington.*

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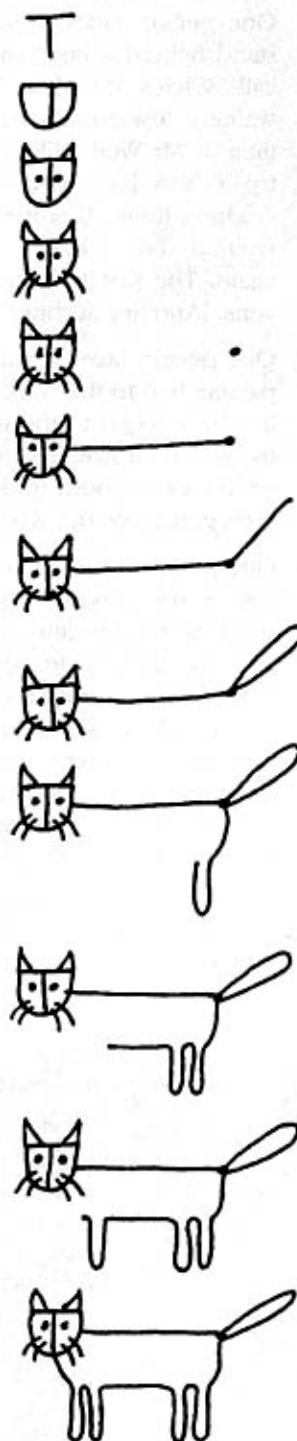
DRAWING STORIES

Erik Kaas Nielsen

The following traditional stories have been told to children by their parents or grandparents since about the middle of the last century. In Denmark and Sweden these stories are called 'drawing stories'. What is special about such stories is that the storyteller draws on a blackboard with a piece of chalk or today on a flip-over with a speedmarker while telling. It is a kind of story that fascinates children up to 9-10 years of age.

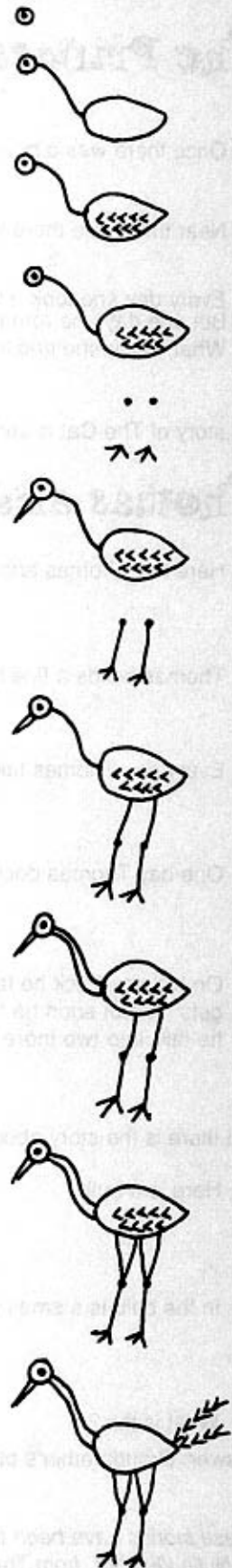
The Cat

- 1) Here lives Thomas.
- 2) He builds a fine round house.
- 3) He puts up two chimneys on the roof and makes two round windows in the house.
- 4) Then he goes out and sweeps in front of the door.
- 5) In the neighbourhood lives Kresten (a male first name). He owns nothing but a big barrel of beer.
- 6) Now Thomas goes to visit Kresten.
- 7) But he is not at home, so Thomas takes a walk into the fields.
- 8) Then he goes back, and now Kresten is at home. He invites Thomas to drink all the beer he wants, and Thomas drinks and drinks.
- 9) But at last he must go home. He is very drunk. He can't even remember the way to go home. He takes the wrong way, and suddenly he stumbles and falls, but he gets up again.
- 10) Then he falls again, and again he rises. Now he must be careful that he does not fall again, so he walks with care. He walks a long way but...
- 11) ...then he falls again! It is very difficult to pick himself up, but he manages to do it. Now he can see his house.
- 12) He forgets to look where he is going, and he falls for the fourth time. He can hardly pick himself up. But at last he gets up, and now he carefully walks home. Guess who is waiting for him.
(The cat!) Oh how good it is to be home again!



The Stork

- 1) Here lives Ole in a round house. There is a small window, so he can keep a lookout.
- 2) Ole owns a pond, and there is a path down to the pond from his house.
- 3) The pond is full of fish, and Ole is afraid that somebody will come and catch his fish.
- 4) Below the pond there are two small, round hills, and below each hill three thieves are lying in wait. They would like to catch Ole's fish. Ole has not seen the thieves.
- 5) But now Ole takes his long telescope, and he sees the lurking thieves. They run to hide themselves behind the hills.
- 6) A little later Ole sees them running up to the pond. They will steal his fish!
- 7) Ole is in a hurry, but he does not take the path, for then the thieves would hear him coming. He runs in the grass beside the path and gets down to the pond.
- 8) Then the thieves discover him. They shout loudly in fright and hurry back to the small hills where they hide.
- 9) But the fish are so frightened that they all jump out of the pond. Ole is sorry. Now he has no fish at all. But there was someone who was glad. Who do you think it was? (The stork!)



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DRAWING STORIES ...continued

Another drawing for smaller children is told like this:

The Princess and the Key

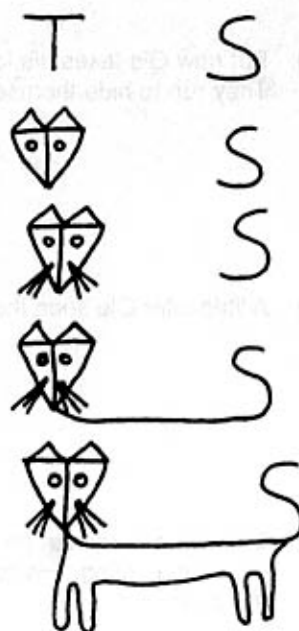
- 1) Once there was a princess who lived in a castle.
- 2) Near the castle there was a lake.
- 3) Every day she took a walk around the lake.
But one day she returned home and she had dropped something.
What was it she had lost? (The key!)



The story of The Cat is sometimes told in another way:

Thomas and Signe

- 1) Here live Thomas and Signe (or another name beginning with an S).
- 2) Thomas builds a fine house with two dormers and two windows.
- 3) Every day Thomas takes a broom and sweeps in front of his door.
- 4) One day Thomas decides to visit Signe.
- 5) On his way back he falls into a deep hole outside Signe's door. Thomas gets up, but soon he falls into another hole, and before he reaches home he falls into two more holes.



And there is the story about **The Light Bulb:**

- 1) Here is a bulb.
- 2) In the bulb is a small wire and below is a thread.
- 3) What is this?

Answer: Grandmother's bum (from behind) - with her trousers at her feet!



These stories have been translated from the Danish. The illustrations of 'Thomas & Signe' and 'The Light Bulb' are by Nulle Øigaard, from The Game Book by Karen Sigsgaard (1972). All other illustrations are by Christian Sekjær.

A RURAL CHILDHOOD

Blair F. Smith

The following descriptions are extracts from a letter written to June Factor by Blair Smith of Rockhampton, Queensland, in which he recalls his childhood in the 1930s and 40s. Unfortunately, the location of these childhood games is not listed, although the species of tree mentioned is native to the coastal regions of Queensland and northern New South Wales.

Our upbringing on our isolated dairy farm in the 30s and 40s would, by today's standards, be considered rather unfavourably - in fact, we would probably be taken from our parents and placed in a 'home', so that we weren't exposed to 'moral danger'. On reflection, our lives were simple, natural and just above subsistence level - but I wouldn't swap it for any other upbringing if I were to have life over again.

As for games and play, they were somewhat few and far between, as Saturdays and Sundays were maintenance days ... but we loved our swimming hole in the creek which flowed through the property. It was spring-fed, and water flowed from it when the creek went dry, and nakedness was the norm.

*About this time of the year we played one dangerous game. On the banks of the pool were several huge Moreton Bay Chestnut trees - *Castanospermum australe*. They had huge trunks and substantial branches which grew horizontally. This made the tree easy to climb, and you could walk out on the branches over the water whilst using the hands to hold onto the branch above. Bouncing on the branches was fun, and if you fell you landed in the water (if there were no branches below).*

The tree had large bean pods, 15 to 20cm long, each containing 4 to 5 large seeds. These grew from the branches all the way along from the trunk outwards. The older children, one at a time, would pick the beans and throw them at the children below, who inevitably stayed out of range. After hitting the ground the pod would burst, releasing the seeds, which were then thrown at the person up the tree.

The extraordinary thing was that we learned about trajectories. If you were near the tree you threw vertically - there was very little horizontal velocity and if the person was well up the tree there was almost no vertical velocity. Thus a 'hit' on the person in the tree was by an object which was almost stationary. On the other hand, if the person was well down the tree, the throw was from further out and more horizontal. In this case, the seed had a fair speed horizontally and caused smarting when hit.

There were rules. If the person up the tree said 'stop', we should stop. No throwing at the person up the tree occurred until that person said he/she was ready. If the person had to move up or down, no throwing occurred during this re-positioning.

One unusual word we had was 'goners'. We called the flat, circular stones which we skipped over the water 'goners', as we often said as the stone skipped, 'going - going - gone'. I have not encountered that word anywhere else.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

A GAME TO FIGHT ABOUT?

A British Government publication recently recommended avoiding the children's game Musical Chairs, because it encourages competitive and aggressive behaviour. That report has given rise to considerable debate in Britain. We reprint here some extracts from the differing points of view.

We would be interested to hear from our readers on the subject of children's games, competition and violence.

LONDON (Reuters) 23 May 2000 - For generations Musical Chairs has been harmless fun for children, but a booklet launched by the government urges teachers to ban the game on the grounds that it encourages aggression. The booklet's author, Sue Finch, has conceded that advice might surprise some adults, *The Times* reported.

'A little bit of competition is fine, but with Musical Chairs the competition is not fair because it is always the biggest and strongest children who win', Finch was quoted as saying. 'Musical Statues is better because everybody wins', she said.

Theresa May, education spokeswoman for the opposition Conservatives, slammed Education Minister Margaret Hodge for launching the booklet, saying it was 'political correctness gone mad'. 'Children have played and enjoyed it for years', May said.

RESPONSES TO THE PUBLICATION

Email from Stephen Rennie, Leeds Metropolitan University, 23 May 2000

Musical chairs was always a game to humiliate the small and the unpopular. I have never seen it played by children's choice in all my years of playwork. It is one of that great family of games, whose principal entertainment value is for supervising adults to see children fall over comically and for those adults to get a chance to practice their first aid skills.

Article by James Tweed, Musical Chairs is not the real issue (from Nursery-world), 24 May 2000

The publishers of a booklet promoting non-violence initiatives for young children have condemned media claims that they want to ban the game of Musical Chairs for promoting aggressive behaviour.

The Forum on Children and Violence, which launched the booklet *Towards a Non-Violent Society - Checkpoints for Early Years* last week, said the serious issues the booklet addresses had been trivialised by the media. Forum Co-ordinator Will McMahon said, 'It's sad when people say they are concerned about the level of violence in society and then criticise an initiative which looks at ways to eradicate bullying and

violence by focusing on young children. For the booklet's launch to be hijacked in such a way is completely indefensible.'

At the booklet's launch in London at the start of National Childcare Week, its author, Sue Finch, suggested Musical Statues would be a better game to play because it included all children, while Musical Chairs by its nature excluded disabled children and would be won by the strongest and fastest child.

She said, 'I was horrified at the coverage. I am sad that the issue of children and violence has been trivialised to such an extent. The booklet's aim is to provide positive suggestions to help nursery workers to teach non-violence and to develop an anti-violence policy in early years settings.'

The Forum was set up after the murder of toddler James Bulger in an attempt to answer the questions of how we can live in a society where a toddler can be murdered by two ten-year-old boys. This should be addressed, not Musical Chairs.'

Email from Jan Cosgrove, Fair Play for Children - for a World Fit for Children to Play in, 24 May 2000

My own youngest recalls Musical Chairs as the game that he cheated at. He says he always managed to get near to winning or to win by calculating tactics - e.g. keeping a close eye on 'the chair in question', 'staying close', nipping in (as one of the youngest and smallest) whilst the older, larger bods found it harder to 'pull up'. I remember now watching him at 'such a tender age' and thinking 'the crafty little sod'. Darwin spoke of the survival of the fittest. Size, age and maturity may not be the qualities to ensure survival. Maybe Musical Chairs suggests something (nasty? good? useful? un-pc?) about the game of life? Play is not necessarily, or at all what we adults may or may not approve of. I have seen children react with glee to the prospect of Musical Chairs. For the Playworker, a working knowledge of this game's finer points may be axiomatic as we navigate the systems of local government, central govt. departmental life, trusts and their objectives etc. [See also 'Hoop Jumping'] As for the Bulger connection suggested in the press, I bitterly resent such garbage. The two boys who killed the toddler seemed to me to be very disturbed youngsters whose lives, already

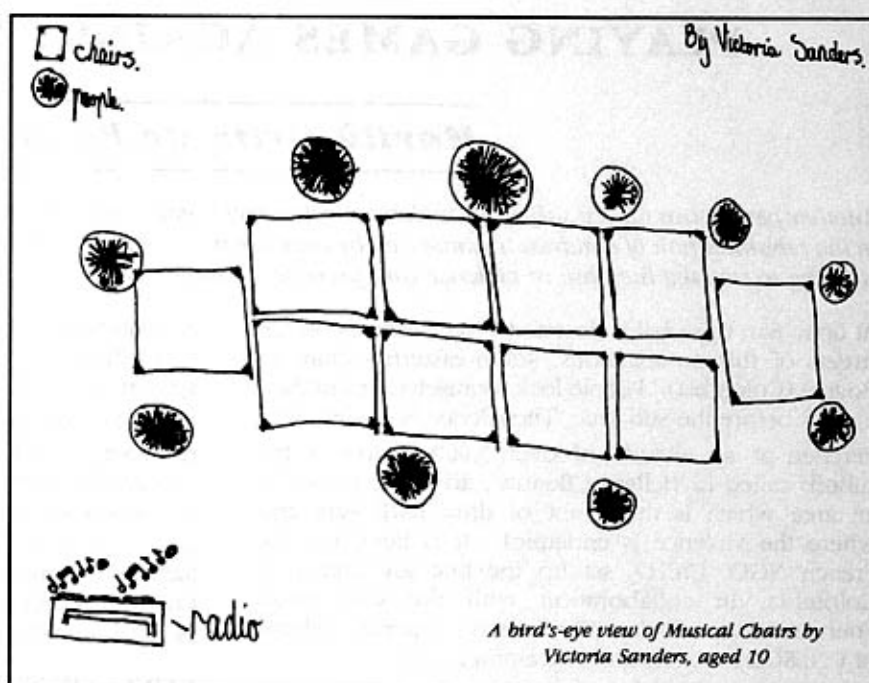
blighted enough, were further destroyed by a media circus and a supine legal system which allowed their basic rights to be trampled - thank goodness for the Human Rights Act and also for the European Convention. If one watched the very short piece of home video of one of the boys at school (shown recently on TV) you might have detected the 'runt' image, the kid whose co-ordination was poor, whose posture was stooped and whose whole demeanour shouted volumes. I see far too many kids like him for my liking in Sunny Old Bognor (where we now Discover 'Deprivation' - it's Official). Maybe this has more to do with (dare one suggest it): low birthweight, small-for-age, low self image, parental-child non-communication, boys-and-their-inadequate-fathers, emotional abuse (the most common and least detected form), low educational expectation, and much more of relevance than the nonsense once again trotted out by this government's Lack-of-Education Department.

I have always wondered what might have happened had there been, say, a Fun Bus or a Drop-in Play Centre, or a Vennie close to that shopping precinct, and open to boys skiving off school. But that costs money.

Email from Edward Wallace, Senior Lecturer, 'University of Plainspeak', 24 May 2000

May I stake out my stall at the outset. I am in favour of banning all children's games which promote any form of violence. I was delighted to hear that Sue Hawk has suggested the banning of 'Musical Chairs', ably supported by the Government's Children's Protector-General, Margaret Bodge. For many years this violent and aggressive activity, central to most children's parties, has been an insidious force for the promotion of warlike tendencies in the under-8s. The psychological damage done to young minds as they confront their failure to obtain a seat and remain in the arena can be compared only to similar experiences of aspiring politicians.

May I suggest, also, that the progenitors of this latest suggestion have, in fact, not gone far enough. Why have they not addressed the truly appalling, terror-filled blood-fest which is known as 'Pass the Parcel'? This, surely must rank alongside the darkest of games in the cannon of violence-fed fantasies. I could also wish to see the end of 'Musical Statues' (a disturbing anti-action game which feeds on society's demands for conformity) and 'Sleeping Lions' (which, I



understand, will be the subject of a Green Paper later in the summer). There are a host of other candidates for abolition: 'Postman's Knock' (soon to be privatised), 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey' (the subject of a Donkey Sanctuary March on Downing Street) and 'Blind Man's Buff' (renamed temporarily until its prohibition as 'Differently Visually Empowered, Non-Specifically Gendered, Non-Competitive Attempt at Tactile Recognition').

Gosh, isn't it a wonderful thing that we, and our children are looked after so well by our government....

Email from Wendy Russell, 24 May 2000

What's wrong with the non-competitive version that I have been playing with children since New Games in the 70's, old hippie that I am. Instead of being out if you don't get a chair to sit on, you just sit on a person on a chair. At the end, when there are only one or two chairs left it is an art to get everyone sitting on just a few chairs. It does take children a while to work out they don't have to dash to sit on a chair.

Stuart Lester has written an interesting piece called 'Musical Worms' about how playworkers could intervene or not in children making up their own rules for a game following on from playing Musical Statues. It illustrates quite simply the concept of leaving children to determine their own rules for play.

Response from 2 Melbourne children, Victoria Sanders and Victoria Sparks, aged 10, July 2000

Musical Chairs is a fun and exciting game. It is not violent and kids love to play it. We think it is pure luck if you get a chair. It lights up the whole party. It is great for all ages right up to 12-year-olds.

PLAYING GAMES AGAINST VIOLENCE

Marilù Ortiz de Rozas

Another perspective on the subject of violence and games comes from this article about the use of games to assist in the rehabilitation of children traumatized by violence in Colombia. A network of toy libraries in Latin America is trying to stop the increase in violence and prevent delinquency.

At 6pm, San Cristobal is deserted. Not a soul is on the streets of this mountainous, south-eastern suburb of Bogota (Colombia). People lock themselves up in their houses before the sun sets. The silence is deafening.

Perched at an altitude of over 3,000 metres is the suburb called La Belleza ('Beauty', an ironic name for an area which is the haunt of drug traffickers and where the violence is endemic). It is here that the French NGO, CIELO, set up the first toy library in Colombia, in collaboration with the Colombian Foundation Apoyar and the backing, amongst others, of UNESCO's Co-Action Programme.

HOMICIDE

CIELO draws its life-blood from the determination and participation of a group of local young people from the area. The idea was to create a harmonious space where games can be used to teach children and adolescents a set of codes and behaviour patterns that will keep violence at bay. The kids understand that a toy library can help pre-empt delinquency. Colombia's homicide rate is by far the highest in Latin America, at 77 deaths per 100,000 people - way ahead of Brazil, which has 24 deaths per 100,000.

Isabel, 15, is from the San Cristobal area: 'My elder brother died two years ago. He was just 17. The police and the army literally carry out elimination campaigns against delinquent groups in our area. There are several groups like that here. The problem is when they move in at night, they don't take the time to identify them properly and distinguish those who belong to a group, from those who are simply returning home after a party. They shoot at random. That's how my brother died.'

The NGO opened its first toy library in 1996 in Chile. Located in Penalolén, one of the most underprivileged suburban areas of Santiago, the capital, it was an immediate success. The community's enthusiasm and creativity helped surmount all obstacles and make the most of the modest \$4,000 start-up budget.

Later this year, a toy bus will start 'game tours'. Filled with toys and games, the bus will travel through three areas of Santiago. The children have already named it 'Father Christmas' sledge', but this sledge has an unbeatable advantage: it will run the whole year round.

In Colombia, the San Cristobal toy library opened on February 13, 1998. But only a few months later, the CIELO coordinator, Claudia Rodriguez, was attacked while buying a big stock of toys. She could have given up, but was determined to carry on. It proved, she says, that 'Colombia has to learn to win the tug of war against violence.' She is not the only one in this

adventure however, and the tiny 30m2 pre-fabricated room has been transformed into a resistance base against violence.

From the very beginning of the Chilean project, CIELO president, Patrick Bernard and the head of the toy library in Santiago, Myriam Salas, started a training programme for supervisors working in the library. Myriam, who grew up in a poblacion (slum) in Penalolén, near Santiago, shares her professional experience with her Colombian colleagues - she, like them, knows the rules of survival and the language of exclusion.

RULES OF THE GAME

Children form a large part of San Cristobal's 600,000 strong population and they have quickly adapted to the pink and blue library with its toys and games. And even if most of them come alone, they meet other children, who are also victims of violence. Gradually, they learn the rules taught in the establishment, especially how to respect other children and public property - when they get a game with 20 pieces, they promise to return it with the same number of pieces. The results are encouraging - 220 children from the area used the toy library in the first two months, and the number keeps growing.

In September 1998, two social workers who received training from CIELO opened two new toy libraries. One in Monteria, in the Caribbean region of Colombia, and the other in Nobsa, north-east of Bogota. The first is situated in a refugee town, which houses more than 40,000 displaced people, victims of violence. CIELO has also established toy libraries in Bolivia and Ecuador, and funding is now being sought to get them going in the countries of Central America.

These libraries facilitate the psychological rehabilitation of children traumatized by violence, providing 'treatment' through games. This activity, as old as humanity itself, can open up new horizons and instil hope. Playing helps children enter into contact with others, to relax and sometimes share experiences with other children or adults, to understand the importance of the rules and follow them. It also helps them to vanquish their fears. It is an essential element in the emergency education packages developed by UNESCO for refugee children or those living in war zones for example.

As the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda once wrote: 'a child who does not play is not a child, but the man who doesn't play has lost for ever the child who lived in him and who he will miss terribly.'

This article was first published in the UNESCO 'Sources' magazine, No. 116, October 1999.

MORE VIOLENCE?

COPS & ROBBERS

At primary school our current craze is playing cops and robbers. You can have as many people playing as you like. You have about four people starting off being cops, the rest go and hide. The cops count to fifty and then they go and try to get the robbers. If the cop gets one of the robbers they have to grab them and say, 'Cops and robbers, one, two, three'. They have to take the robber to a barlie ring and then another robber can come and save them by tagging them. If they get tagged twice they become It.

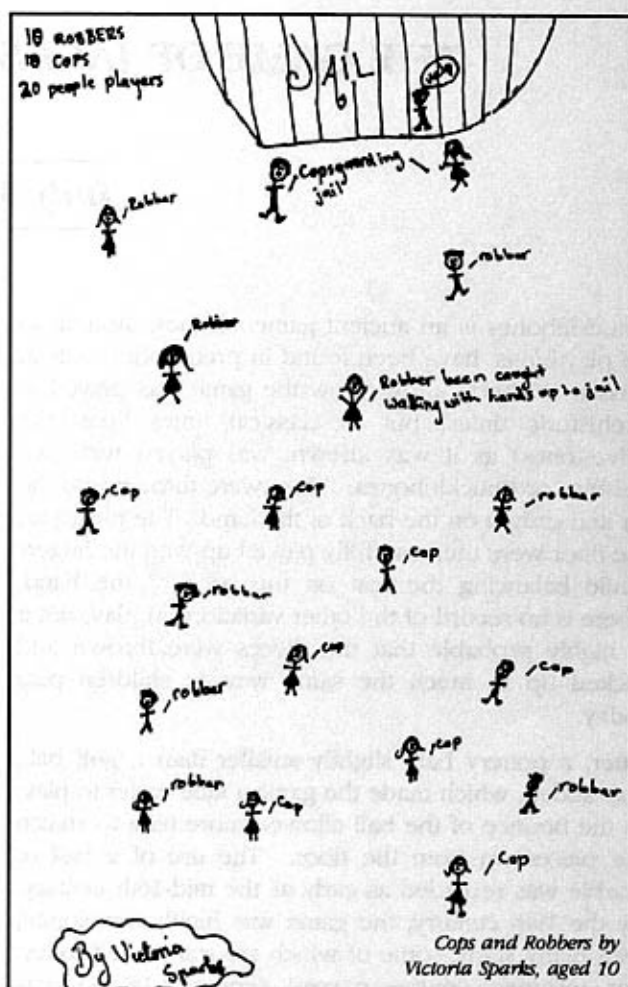
This description of Cops and Robbers was written by Maddy Leman, aged 11, who goes to Alphington Primary School in Melbourne. We welcome more contributions from children.

BUSHIES & BOBBIES

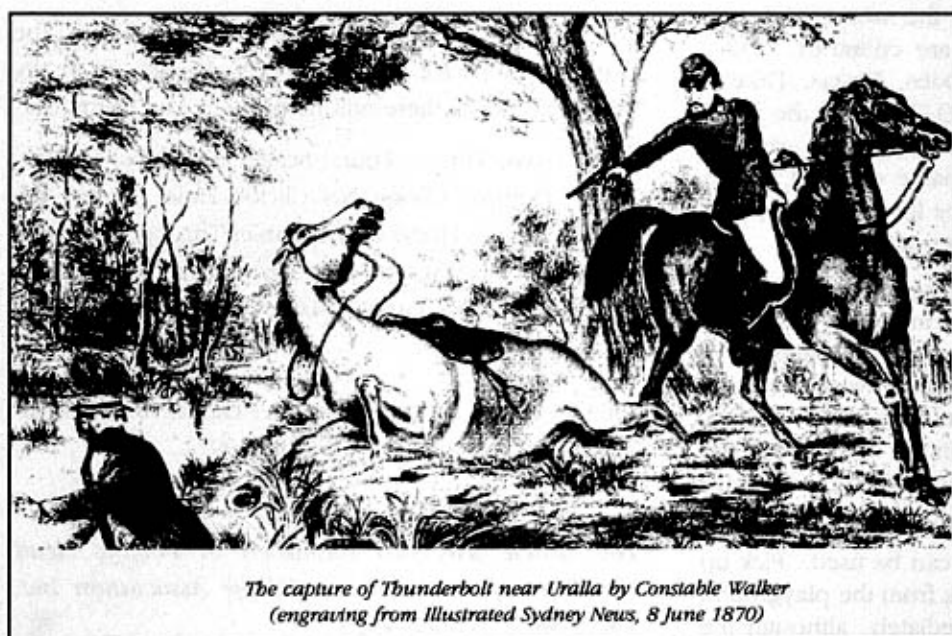
The following is a slightly edited transcript of an oral history recording made by Rob Willis at 'Rose Cottage', Thirlmere, NSW on 24th August, 1992. Willis interviewed John Meredith about his childhood games, played in the 1920s in rural New South Wales. Here Meredith briefly describes the game of Bushies and Bobbies, an Australian version of Cops and Robbers.

RW: WHAT ABOUT BOBBIES AND BUSHIES?

JM: Bushies and Bobbies! It was always Bushies came first. Well, that was short for Bushrangers and Bobbies [Police], of course, or the old Cops and Robbers. The Bobbies got together in a group, and the Bushies always got a start. I don't know whether they [the



Cops and Robbers by Victoria Sparks, aged 10



The capture of Thunderbolt near Uralla by Constable Walker (engraving from Illustrated Sydney News, 8 June 1870)

Bobbies] counted - they probably counted up to 50 or something or other. The Bushies all raced off and hid behind fences and trees, and the Bobbies came along as a team and they had to chase the Bushies and catch them. And I think it was either played with a tennis ball - like Brandy - to hit them with, in which case they were shot and caught, or to touch them. It involved lots of running around the playground and ducking behind trees and hiding, and so on.

Dibs, Dobs, Chucks and Snobs

THE GAME OF JACKS THROUGH THE AGES

Judy McKinty

Knucklebones is an ancient game. Bones, thought to be playthings, have been found in prehistoric caves in Russia. Nobody knows how the game was played in prehistoric times, but in classical times Pentalitha (Fivestones) as it was known, was played with five pebbles or knucklebones. They were thrown into the air and caught on the back of the hand. The pieces on the floor were then carefully picked up with the fingers while balancing the rest on the back of the hand. There is no record of the other variations in play, but it is highly probable that the pieces were thrown and picked up in much the same way as children play today.

Later, a pottery ball, slightly smaller than a golf ball, was added, which made the game a little easier to play, as the bounce of the ball allowed more time to snatch the pieces up from the floor. The use of a ball or marble was recorded as early as the mid-16th century. By the 19th century, the game was highly developed, with many steps, some of which are still played today. For instance, 'passes-passes' (France, 1800s) was played in the same way as 'through the arch' in Australia and 'köprü' ('gate' or 'bridge') in Turkey, where the pieces are pushed through an arch made by the thumb and index finger of the left hand.

The game is known throughout the world, and may have as many names as there are countries. Dibs, Chuckstones, Snobs, Chucks, Dabs, Bestas, Diketo, Terrespil, Pacheta, La Payanita, O-Tedama - the list is endless. In English-language countries, the game is usually called by the common name of Jacks, which has also been adopted as the name for the small spiked metal playing pieces used in America.

From earliest times, sheep's knucklebones have been replicated in a wide range of materials, including precious stones and metals, ivory, wood and plastic. In the days before coloured plastic pieces were so readily available, children in Australia dyed their sheep's knucklebones by soaking them in ink or boiling them on the stove in a tin filled with water and flower petals.

Jacks is one of the most accommodating of games - almost anything of the right size can be used. Pick up a few stones or pieces of tan-bark from the playground and you can start playing immediately, although the

playing pieces should have enough weight to land on your hand without bouncing off, a common failing of the mass-produced plastic knucklebones currently available from toy shops and novelty stores.

The game is also played with ceramic cubes, spiked metal jacks and little bags filled with beans, rice or sand. One very skilful version, played in Asian countries, uses chopsticks or lengths of bamboo as playing pieces, and a lime or lemon in place of a ball. The steps in the game are based on the traditional work of women in the home, and include 'grinding the rice', 'sweeping the floor', 'carrying water', 'washing the clothes' and 'knitting'.

The eminent American folklorist, Dorothy Howard, visited Australia in the 1950s, collecting the play lore of Australian children. She subsequently published a paper entitled *The Game of Knucklebones in Australia*, largely based on material collected in Western Australia, where the game was played with a passion. Her research material is now in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, located among the collections of Museum Victoria.

In case you've forgotten, here are some of the Australian steps for Knucklebones or Jacks from the 1950s. No doubt there will be more to add to the list:

Ones; Twos; Threes; Fours; Scatters; Sweeps; Dumps; Colour Dumps; Clicks; No Clicks; Little Jingles; Big Jingles; Juggles; Horse in the Stable; Through the Arch; Over the Line; Pigs in the Sty; Thread the Needle; Catching Flies; My Pussycat Loves Fresh Milk.

Ref: Opie, Iona & Peter, *Children's Games with Things*, Oxford University Press, London, 1997.

This article was first published in Folklife News, Newsletter of the Victorian Folklife Association Inc., Vol. 5 No. 2, Winter, 1999

CONFERENCE

CALL FOR PAPERS

TRADITIONS AND TRANSITIONS:
FOLK NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD
13TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FOLK NARRATIVE RESEARCH
16 - 20 JULY, 2001, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

In July 2001, the 13th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) will convene in Melbourne, Australia. This is the first time in the 40-year history of the Society that it will meet in the Southern Hemisphere. The Congress is being organised by the Victorian Folklife Association in cooperation with The Australian Centre (University of Melbourne), The State Library, Museum Victoria, Curtin University (WA), the City of Melbourne, the Australian Multicultural Foundation, the Australian Folklore Association and the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

The Congress will bring together several hundred scholars from around the world, with particular efforts being made to involve for the first time scholars from the Asia-Pacific region. Sessions will be structured thematically, and will consider papers which deal with broader issues and concepts of race, gender, cultural and social difference, language and linguistics; with issues of theory and critical discourse, methodology and case studies. Indigenous voices are welcome in every stream.

SUB-THEMES

- i. **Rediscovered Histories** (memory; oral history; interpretation of history through folk narrative)
- ii. **The Colonised and the Colonisers** (interpretation; national myths; cultural colonisation/imperialism; tradition/transition; ideologies and narrative; collective memory/individual memory; narrative, education and history; globalisation)
- iii. **Dislocation and Belonging** (migration; diaspora; marginality; private/public identity; community identity; locality; globalisation; insider/outsider)
- iv. **Tales, Tellers and Textualisation** (textualisation; structural analysis; field work; linguistic anthropology/folklore studies; associated theoretical and critical issues)
- v. **Generation and Regeneration**: folk narrative by and about children)

- vi. **The Fantastic and the Mythologised** (urban myths; heroes; tall tales; contemporary legends; streetlore; the supernatural; stereotypes)
- vii. **Fertile Environments**: new forms, new stories, new media
- viii. **A Critical Approach** (institutions, collections, policies and politics; cultural diversity and hybridity; public/private; community arts; internet tourism)

Please note the following guidelines:

Abstracts: up to 250 words

Papers: maximum length of 4500 words, or equiv. max. 20 mins. presentation

Expressions of interest in giving a paper should include:

- Name of Author/s and Presenter/s
- Institution
- Position held
- Title of paper
- Sub-theme under which the paper is proposed
- Visual aids required for the presentation
- Biography (100 words)

Amended date: November 1, 2000

To express your interest in giving a paper or registering to attend the Congress please contact:

Susan Faine
Director
Victorian Folklife Association
folklife@connexus.net.au
PO Box 1765, Collingwood VIC 3066
AUSTRALIA
TEL/FAX 61 3 9417 4684

ARTS VICTORIA

The Victorian Folklife Association acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria - Department of Premier and Cabinet, to produce the 13th Congress of the ISFNR in 2001.



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Phone: +61 3 934



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Folklore

Director, Australian Centre

35 Fax: +61 3 9347 7731



Play and Folklore

Contact: Dr June Factor, Australian Centre
University of Melbourne, Victoria, 3052

Phone: +61 3 9344 7235 **Fax:** +61 3 9347 7731

Email j.factor@history.unimelb.edu.au