



# Play and Folklore

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### Play & Folklore – A New Venture

This issue of *Play & Folklore* is the first to enter the 'virtual reality' of the web. Museum Victoria, the home of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection since 1999, will now publish *Play & Folklore* on its web page. As before, it will appear twice a year; as before, it is edited by June Factor and Gwenda Beed Davey and will continue to publish childlore and play research, memoirs, debate and reflection – lively and thought-provoking material from across the globe.

Freed from the costs of printing and postage (although *Play & Folklore* will still be available in hard copy if required), we can now welcome a much wider readership, and, we hope, new contributors. The old, true notion of knowledge as a public good, freely available to all who wish to partake, is now a reality – at least for *Play & Folklore* readers. In the future, we hope to publish an Index covering all issues of *Play & Folklore*, and to reprint key articles, building up an archive of valuable material.

Send us your email address, and we will send you each issue. We look forward to your comments complimentary and critical – and your contributions.

## ▣ DOROTHY HOWARD MEMORIAL LECTURE

**to be presented by PROFESSOR BRIAN SUTTON-SMITH**

Information about the time and place of the Dorothy Howard Memorial Lecture will be provided as soon as possible. Keep checking the website – [www.museum.vic.gov.au/playfolklore](http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/playfolklore)

The pioneering American scholar, educator and ethnographer, Dr Dorothy Howard, was born in Texas in 1902 and died in Massachusetts in 1996. During her long life she made a signal contribution to the study of children's folklore in the US. She was probably the first person in the English-speaking world to gain a doctorate (in 1938) for a study of children's 'folk jingles' – the rhymes, chants and songs of American children in the 1930s. 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'. In recognition of her outstanding scholarship, The Association for the Study of Play (TASP) presented her with its first Distinguished Achievement award in 1981.



Dorothy Howard noting the rules of marbles, Perth, Western Australia, 1955. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria.

Dorothy Howard was also a pioneer researcher in Australia. In her ten months in Australia in 1954-55 as a post-doctoral Fulbright scholar, she travelled across the land, collecting and documenting children's games and verbal lore in cities, country towns and small rural communities. Her meticulous work laid the foundation for research into children's folklore in this country. All the material she collected at that time, including photographs and a large correspondence from informants, is held in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, at Museum Victoria. A selection of this material has been exhibited at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

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. The Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne and Museum Victoria have initiated a lecture series in her name, at which internationally respected childhood scholars and researchers will have the opportunity to present a public lecture in the city and the university in which she was based during her time in this country. It is expected that the lecture will be broadcast and later published.

The inaugural lecture in Dorothy Howard's honour will be given by the eminent American folklore scholar, Dr Brian Sutton-Smith. Dr Sutton-Smith is originally a New Zealander, where his ground-breaking study of children's games in that country, *The Games of New Zealand Children*, was first published by the University of California Press in 1959. Dr Sutton-Smith, the recipient of prestigious national and international awards, is an emeritus professor at the University of Pennsylvania and widely regarded internationally as the leading active scholar and writer in the field of children's play and playlore. His visit to Australia, hosted and sponsored by the Australian Centre and Museum Victoria, is supported by a Senior Specialist Fulbright Award.



To complement the lecture, the Museum will present a display of material from the Dorothy Howard Collection in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. It is also hoped to republish, for the first time in Australia, the eleven monographs written by Dorothy Howard about aspects of Australian children's folklore.

**DOROTHY HOWARD:**  
**AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE**

Traditional Games and Play of Australian Children, unpublished, 1954-55

Folklore of Australian Children, *Journal of Education*, Vol.2, No.1, March 1955

The Game of "Knucklebones" in Australia, *Western Folklore*, Vol.XVII, No.1, January 1958

Australian "Hoppy" (Hopscotch), *Western Folklore*, Vol.XVII, No.3, July 1958

Ball Bouncing Customs and Rhymes in Australia, *Midwest Folklore*, Vol.IX, No.2, 1959

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Marble Games of Australian Children, *Folklore*, Vol.71, September 1960

Counting-Out Customs of Australian Children, *New York Folklore*, Summer 1960

Notes & Queries: The "Toodlebuck" – Australian Children's Gambling Device and Game, *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.73, No.287, 1960

String Games of Australian Children, *Folklore*, Vol. 72, June 1961

Folklore of Australian Children, *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, Vol.X, No.3, Fall 1965



Cock fighting or 'Hoppo Bumpo', Melbourne, Victoria, 1954. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria.



'Wash the dishes, dry the dishes, turn the dishes over', Melbourne, Victoria, 1954. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria.

## ▣ PLAYGROUND RHYMES KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES

*Janice Ackerley*

Iona and Peter Opie's research has shown us that children's nursery rhymes and playground rhymes has a firm grounding in history. Many of the rhymes currently heard in the New Zealand school playground can be traced to origins in the United Kingdom, as far back as Elizabethan times. The skipping and clapping rhymes have origins in Black American culture.

As Course Director of the National Diploma of Children's Literature paper, 'Patterns of Language', I have the privilege of receiving and filing many examples of playground lore, collected by students of this course. Each year I receive hundreds of samples of playground rhymes and chants. On closer examination of these gems I have been interested to notice that a number of these rhymes have been adapted to fit in with our world of hectic change. In a world of ever changing fashions in clothing, food, music, entertainment, technology and language, the rhymes of our playground have also been adapted to reflect the changing social trends and the consumerism that is part of today's society.

The rhymes of New Zealand school children deal frankly with social issues, including drugs, gangs and even the recent foot and mouth scare in the United Kingdom. There is a strong Maori – Pacific Island influence, and Aussie knocking is also featured. Our national anthem has many variations that reflect different aspects of our cultural identity. The influence of commercialism can be seen in the many rhymes including popular brand names and television programmes and movie stars.

One rhyme that was received from both ends of the country was a parody sung to the tune of 'Row, Row, Row your Boat':

<i>Roll, roll, roll your dope</i>	<i>Roll, roll, roll your dope</i>
<i>Scrunch it at the end,</i>	<i>Scrunch it at the end,</i>
<i>Spank it up</i>	<i>Puff, puff</i>
<i>And have a smoke</i>	<i>That's enough</i>
<i>And pass it to your friend</i>	<i>Now pass it to your friend.</i>

On the same theme and also parodied is the Maori song 'Po kare kare ana':

*Po kare kare ana  
I was smoking marijuana  
I gave it to the teacher  
She said, "Come here!"  
I said, "No fear.  
I'll be back next year  
With a bottle of beer,  
To rub in your hair."*

Gang warfare is featured in this rhyme sung to the theme of the television series 'Beverley Hillbillies':

*There once was a man and his name was Tower.  
He went down town to join Black Power.  
There once was a man and his name was Bob.  
He went down town to join Mongrel Mob.  
Along came Tower with his 303  
And he blew those boys right out of Beverley  
(Hills – that is)*



The recent foot and mouth scare in Britain brought forth this version of the nursery rhyme, 'Mary had a Little Lamb':

*Mary had a little lamb,  
Its feet were covered in blisters  
Now its burning in the paddock  
With all its brothers and sisters.*

Playground rhymes with a specific New Zealand flavour can be seen to have a Maori – Pacific Island influence. The popular pastime of skipping has developed rhymes based on the Maori language:

*Rahina, rahina, one, two, three,  
Ratu, ratu, skip with me.  
Rapa, rapa, turn around,  
Rapere, rapere, touch the ground  
Ramere, ramere, touch the sky  
Rahoroi, the rope swings high  
Ratapu, you're too slow,  
End of the week, so out you go.*

A rhyme touching on a more taboo subject of sexuality and body parts:

*I am the ghost of a place named Venus,  
Come near me and I'll bite your penis.  
I am the ghost of Hone Heke  
Come near me and I'll bite your teke.*

Maori language is also included in parodies of traditional nursery rhymes:

*Twinkle, twinkle little star,  
Hemi had a paru car,  
Like a diamond in the sky,  
Hemi lives in a pig sty.  
Twinkle, twinkle little star,  
Hemi had a paru car  
(paru = dirty)*

The coconut trees of the Pacific Islands are part of this counting out rhyme. In this ritual participants hold out a fist for the counter to tap as they rhyme is chanted. The person who receives the 'crack' is out, and the ritual continues:

*Co – co – nut, co – co –nut, co – co – nut.  
CRACK!*

Mary, her lamb and her little 'bro' – a New Zealand slang term used by both Maori and Pakeha - feature in these variations:

*Mary had a little bro  
She took him to the fair.  
She saw a lamb that she loved so  
And swapped him then and there!*

*Mary had a little lamb,  
She called it Little Bro  
One day she took it skiing  
And lost it in the snow.*



Taunts against pakeha, and our sporting rivals, the Australians, are also prevalent in the playground:

<i>Catch a little pakeha, Put him in the pot, Mix him up with puha, And what have you got? Puha and pakeha stew</i>	<i>God of Nations, in the scrum, Kick the Aussies, in the bum. If it hurts, serves them right. Blow them up with dynamite.</i>	<i>I'm an Australian, Born and bred, Long in the legs, And thick in the head.</i>
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Variations of our national anthem abound, with some creative examples shown here:

<i>God of Nations, smell my feet, In the local pub we meet, Don't buy whisky, it's too dear, Buy our local DB beer.</i>	<i>God of Nations, smell my feet, In the bonds of Shortland Street. Hear our voices, tweet, tweet, tweet. God defend our toilet seat.</i>	<i>God of nations, in thy toes, In the bonds of panty hose!</i>
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Playground rhymes are not spared the effects of commercialism and media influence. Many of the trendy food brand names, such as McDonalds, Pepsi, Coke, Barbie and our own icons of Marmite and barbed wire fences are included in the folklore of New Zealand children. A 'step on a crack, marry a rat,' variation:

*Step on white,  
Marry Marmite,  
Good night.'*

As a challenge we find:

<i>Wanna fight? – Marmite If you wish. – Jellyfish Bring it on – Tampon</i>	<i>Cows are in the meadow, Sheep are in the corn. Don't climb the barbed wire fence. You'll get your knickers torn!</i>
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An action rhyme involving precise hand movements features the ever favourite takeaway brands:

*McDonalds, McDonalds. (make a big M with hands)  
Kentucky Fried Chicken (flap arms like a chicken)  
And a Pizza Hut (form a ^ with arms)*

Popular drink brands form part of a partisan school chant:

*Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola, Lion Brown  
We're gonna hypnotise, paralyse and knock them down.  
With a F-I-G-H-T  
We're gonna score S-C-O-R-E  
We're gonna fight, we're gonna score  
We're gonna win 'em all  
Gooooooooo \_\_\_\_\_ (name of school)*



And also as playground taunts:

*Boys are spastic, made out of plastic.*

*Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi.*

*Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi.*

*Boys are rotten, made out of cotton.*

*Girls go to the gym, to get more slim.*

*Boys go to rugby, to get more ugly.*

Elastics, the girls' playground game, also features these traditional food favourites, including pavlova:

*Ice cream soda, pavlova*

*Coca Cola, my friend out.*

*Passion fruit and ice cream soda,*

*Yum, yum, yum, it's pavlova.*

*Fanta, Fanta, my friend Fanta.*

*Is the nicest of them all*

*My friend Fanta.*

The television advertising has a feature in this parody of 'Jingle Bells':

*Jingle bells, jingle bells*

*Santa Claus is dead.*

*Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,*

*Shot him in the head.*

*Barbie doll, Barbie doll,*

*Tried to save his life.*

*But a GI Joe from Mexico*

*Stabbed her with a knife.*

Television and movie stars, The Simpsons, Barney, Batman, Xena, Warrior Princess, Men in Black and the Spice Girls are included in recently collected rhymes:

*Bart versus Lisa,*

*Who will win*

*Their father's fat*

*And their mother's thin.*

*Their grandpa smells of whisky and gin.*

A parody on the theme song of the beloved Barney, the purple dinosaur, shows no finer feelings for the sensitivities of the younger children:

*I hate you, you hate me,*

*Let's get together and kill Barney.*

*With a one punch, two punch, three punch, four*

*No more purple dinosaur!*

Batman and Robin have long been favourites, and I'm sure many are familiar with the problems Wonder Woman had with her bosom:

*Jingle Bells, Batman smells,*

*Robin laid an egg.*

*Oh what fun it is to see,*

*The duo split today.*

*HEY!*



Our own super heroine, Xena the warrior princess, is featured in a hand clapping rhyme as a starter to the traditional game of paper, scissors, rock and stone:

*Xena (clap) Warrior (clap) Princess,  
Came here last year.  
Xena Warrior Princess  
Came here last year.  
Over, over, over.  
( This is followed by the game paper, scissors, rock)*

Hand clapping rhymes feature variations on the 'double this, double that' rhyme:

<i>Double, double, men, men.</i>	<i>Double, double spice, spice.</i>
<i>Double, double, black, black.</i>	<i>Double, double, girls, girls.</i>
<i>Double men, Double black.</i>	<i>Double spice, double girls.</i>
<i>Double, double Men in Black.</i>	<i>Double, double Spice Girls.</i>

When considering this selection of 'playground rhymes that change with the times', I also became aware of the many different categories of rhymes that have been collected by students of the Patterns of Language course over the last few years. Many of these rhymes have changed very little over the passage of time and those that were favourites of parents and grandparents are still around today. Some of the other categories of playground rhymes include parodies of songs and nursery rhymes, insults and taunts, counting-out rhymes, tongue twisters, chants, nonsense rhymes, skipping, clapping and elastics rhymes, politically incorrect sexist and sexy rhymes and rhymes that are simply just for fun.

Despite concerns that the technological revolution is responsible for taking the play out of our children's lives, these collections show that the rhymes of the New Zealand playground are still alive and well.

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*Janice Ackerley teaches at Christchurch College of Education. This article was first published in New Zealand, in 'Talespinner' March 2002.*





## ■ TEACHERS DON'T PLAY! CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF PLAY AT SCHOOL

**Sue Dockett**

What do children say happens at school? As part of a larger project, we asked children who were just about to start school, and who had just started school, what happened at school. Of the 50 children we asked, most said that school was for work, but they thought there might be some time for play. The distinction between play and work was mentioned often. Generally, children indicated that they played outside at break times, and did work during the rest of the day.



### **Do you play at school?**

The children at school said that they played after recess; only after lunch; or sometimes at lunch. Greg was clear about the 'rules' of play:

*Interviewer:* Do you play at school?

*Greg:* Sometimes at lunch.

*Interviewer:* In the classroom?

*Greg:* No ... yeah... we do but you are not allowed to shout and you are not allowed to touch and not allowed to fight...

The children who were about to start school also distinguished between work and play, with the expectation that play followed work:

*Interviewer:* What happens at school?

*Brad:* You've got to do art work and after you do art work you get to play outside.

*Interviewer:* What else do you think you will do at big school?

*Bill:* Playing games.

Even when play was considered a possibility within the classroom, it was evident that some of the activities planned by teachers were not considered play by the children involved.

*Gary:* Paintings are boring

*Interviewer:* Gary, do you like painting?

*Gary:* No, because Miss Ball tells us what to paint.

*Interviewer:* So, is that work or play?

*Gary:* Work. Because it's boring ... I would like there to be no teacher. Because it's fun and you get to draw whatever you like ... I like being outside and then we don't have to do what the teacher tells us to do.



## Do teachers play?

None of the children said that the teachers played. The following comment suggested the opposite:

- Interviewer:* Who do you play with at school?  
*Fred:* Everyone. And you need to be fair and share  
*Interviewer:* Does the teacher help you play?  
*Fred, Jack, Jim:* No!!!!  
*Fred:* She goes and eats her lunch  
*Interviewer:* What does the teacher help you do?  
*Fred:* She helps us do work.

## Playing with friends

The children indicated that one of the best things about school was the chance to play with friends. Often the combination of best things was playing with friends outside. In Bianca's case, food was also important:

- Interviewer:* Do you play at school?  
*Bianca:* Sometimes you do and sometimes you do school work.  
*Interviewer:* What is the best thing about school?  
*Bianca:* Playing and having lunch.

There was a clear message that friends were vital to play in schools.

- Interviewer:* What are the best things about school?  
*Connor:* Playing with my friends.  
*Interviewer:* Are there some kids who don't have friends?  
*Connor:* Yes.  
*Interviewer:* What happens to them?  
*Heidi:* They get really sad.  
*Interviewer:* Do you help them?  
*Heidi:* Yes. You can't leave anyone alone with no friends.  
*Connor:* We play with them. We be their friends and play with them.

These comments are similar to those described by Blatchford (1994, p. 26) as he cites the work of Goodnow and Burns (1985): "To be at school—specially on the playground—surrounded by peers but without friends is awful ... Life brightens considerably when a friend appears." Starting school can be an anxious time for some children. Having a friend to play with helps make the transition much more comfortable and positive.



## Big kids and playgrounds

School playgrounds can be large, noisy, bustling places. For children who are just starting school, big kids can be fun to be with, or scary. Sometimes children spoke of the fun they had playing with big kids; other times the anxiety produced by big kids was emphasised.

*Hannah:* I like playing with big kids. My brother—when I first started school I played with my brother here and Nathalie. He is in Year 5 and I played with him too.

*Interviewer:* Do you like being in the playground with the big kids?

*Greta:* No. I like it when the classes are not there and it's just the Kindy kids and you get to do what you want to do and there's no big kids bossing you around.

*Gary:* The time the big kids get in trouble is mostly line-up. You don't feel real happy that they get into trouble but sometimes they are mean to you.

The big kids and the playground are issues raised by children about to start school. Brett's comments reflect some anxiety about this aspect of starting school:

*Interviewer:* What do you think will happen at big school?

*Brett:* A boy might push me over on the cement.

*Interviewer:* Is that what happens at school?

*Brett:* When you are at school they might push you over because you are little and they hurt you. And you get bad sores.... And stitches ...

One of the other issues about playgrounds is often that there is very little to do—often there is limited play equipment, or restrictions on what equipment may be used by different groups and when and where it can be used.

*Liam:* [School] has a bigger playground. You could do more stuff on it, my brother goes [to school] and it has a huge playground.

*Gay:* [My school] doesn't have a playground ... it has grass.

## Removal from play as punishment

Several of the children discussed the removal of play time as a punishment. Such a punishment was regarded as dire, as play time was generally replaced with having to sit outside the principal's office, or on seats outside. Andy's comment was typical of the comments:

*Andy:* Sometimes kids get into trouble...If it's before play time then she [teacher] won't let you play outside because you've been naughty.

## Differences between preschool and school

Children in both school and preschool settings indicated that these settings were quite different, in terms of play and play opportunities:

*Mark:* I think preschool is more fun [than school], cause I can play.

*Shane:* [School] it's like preschool but you can't make noise. You can't play all day, but we did in preschool.



## Children's perspectives: An overview

When these young children described play at school, their focus was on playing with friends, generally outside the confines of the classroom. Play was regarded as a time to be with friends and to make friends. There was an expectation that all children would have friends and that friendships were accomplished and maintained through play. In addition, several of them spoke with caution about older children and the illicit nature of their play, emphasising the ideas that older children get into trouble and can cause harm. The preschool children expected to play at school, but also expected to do work and homework. They commented on the playground—its size, noise level and number of children and the equipment in it, suggesting a level of concern about these elements.

## Issues and implications

There are several possible reasons for why we should be concerned with what children think about play at school. Firstly, if we value play as a means of children learning about the world and the people and places within it, it makes sense to see play as having a valued and valuable place within a school curriculum. Clearly, it is the view of these young children that this is not the case. Other research suggests that teachers also tend to regard school as a place for learning, rather than play, and that many teachers regard work and play as incompatible, much as the children themselves have reported. (Dockett, 2001; Dockett & Meckley, 2002).

Secondly, it is of concern that children regarded teachers as non-players and that children do not see teachers as having any role in play. Adult roles can be a major factor in promoting play, maintaining play and helping develop complexity. Adults can also have a major part in assisting children who do not play, do not appear to have friends, or who are excluded from play. If teachers distance themselves from play, they are unlikely to realise what it is that children are playing and why it is important to them, or if some children are excluded from play for various reasons.

Thirdly, if we regard play as a disposition that is learned from being around others who demonstrate that disposition, we need teachers who can be regarded as playful to demonstrate the importance and value of play. This doesn't mean that teachers should control or direct play; rather it suggests that teachers who show that it is all right to play encourage children to play. In broader sense, it is also possible that teachers and children who engage in play use similar skills in problem-solving and creative tasks.

Most of all, children's play matters. It is important to the players and deals with issues, areas, themes and roles they regard as interesting and worthy of attention. It gives children opportunities to explore, challenge, investigate, connect and have fun. It provides adults with many insights to the world of children. If we are to take children seriously, we need to reflect upon what is important to them and the provisions we make, and the encouragement we give, for them to play.



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- Sue Dockett is Associate Professor in the School of Education and Early Childhood Studies at the University of Western Sydney*

## ■ CHILDREN AND THEIR PASTIMES IN ASIA

### Nepal

#### **Gokul Prasad Pokhrel**

Many of the privately managed schools have become too commercial and cram children into hired premises. The children are encouraged to learn by rote, especially English conversation drills which make the parents happy. Heaps of books are prescribed indiscriminately, without assessing the capacity of children to cope with the burden. Very few schools provide physical facilities for sports, outdoor games and other cultural arts which are often beyond the reach of children.

About 60% of the school-going age group find their way to formal school education, but the rest are denied the opportunity. Of those 60%, the school-going children of the urban areas do less homework and show less aptitude for reading. It is due to over-exposure to television programmes which the children view along with the parents for longer hours in the evening. While TV exposure has helped broaden perceptions about external environment, the input of reading textbooks has drastically decreased. However, no reliable studies have been made on the adverse effects of television programmes on the school-going age-group children. Neither is there any action to alert parents to the harmful effects of TV and entertainment programmes.

Boys in schools like to participate in outdoor games and sports while girls prefer cultural arts, singing and dancing and indoor games. The children are also fond of reading comics and illustrated stories when available. The intrusions of video games and electronic comics are yet to make their debut in Nepal.

### Pakistan

#### **Ahmad Faraz**

Children of today are the nation builders of tomorrow. It is the obligation of every parent and teacher to find ways and means to make their children physically fit and mentally strong. The children of Pakistan, like those of other countries, have their own characteristics and identities. Our culture is reflected in their pastimes, in their behaviour and attitudes, which they learn through trial and error and through different ways and means.



The pastimes of our children differ from class to class and from place to place. The activities of children residing in urban areas are mostly computer, video games, watching cartoon films, playing badminton, tennis, cricket, kite flying, snooker and of course reading books including comics, horror stories, folk tales, jokes, riddles, etc.

The children residing in rural areas are physically much stronger as they take an active part in helping their parents in agricultural work. The nature of agricultural work is laborious, hard and time-consuming. Their life style is very different to that of the children residing in urban areas. The children of rural areas, despite their tough life style, find time for their traditional games, which make them physically strong—the games include wrestling, kabadi, swimming in canals and ponds, hockey, volleyball and football. Library facilities are almost non-existent in the rural areas, so the studies of children there are confined to school subjects.



## Philippines

### **Neni Sta. Romana-Cruz**

What's with Filipino children these days?

Even with the lure of technology, there is nothing like old-fashioned pleasures such as climbing trees and enjoying fruits picked from the backyard.

The illustration on the left is based on a traditional story where a bug guava fruit turns out to be an evil character from Philippine folklore believed to be capable of assuming different forms. When the big guava is picked, it turns into a python who swallows the scampering children whole!

The retelling of tales such as this is another favourite preoccupation.

Illustration by Lyra Abueg Garcellano

*This article first appeared in the 30th Anniversary edition of ABD (Asian/Pacific Book Development), Vol. 30, No. 3, published by the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO*

## ■ HANDCLAPPING GAMES

### *Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal*

Gwenda Davey and Graham Seal have submitted to the publishers Simon and Schuster (Sydney) the manuscript of their *Dictionary of Australian Folklore*, which is due for publication in 2003. The following entry for Handclapping rhymes and games is one of the many references to children's folklore in the Dictionary.

Hand-clapping games are one of the most popular of children's traditional games, usually played by girls. They can mostly be observed in the primary school play-ground, but will often be played to pass the time out of school hours. The games involve rhythmical hand movements including clapping and almost always a verbal chant such as the very old rhyme:

*Mary Mack, dressed in black  
Silver buttons her back.  
She likes coffee,  
She likes tea,  
She likes sitting  
On a black man's knee.*

Some of the chants accompanying hand-clapping games are very long, such as the life-cycle chant When Suzy was a baby, which ranges from Suzy's babyhood to death and status as a ghost/angel. Hand-clapping games are usually played by two girls, though sometimes larger numbers may be involved, perhaps in a circle of up to ten players. Lindsay and Palmer (1981) gave detailed descriptions of twenty-five different clapping games in Brisbane primary schools during the 1970s, and the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria includes many dozens more. One of the most well-known hand-clapping games is A Sailor Went to Sea:

*A sailor went to sea, sea, sea,  
To see what he could see, see, see;  
But all that he could see, see, see  
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea.*

The rhymes may have some variations in the text although they are surprisingly stable over time and place. Many hand-clapping games popular in Australia are also found in other English-speaking countries, and in foreign-language versions elsewhere.

### **Reference**

P.L. Lindsay & D. Palmer, *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1981.





## Designing modern childhoods

One of the editors of *Play & Folklore*, June Factor, presented a paper at an unusually diverse conference at the University of California at Berkeley in May. The conference, titled 'Designing modern childhoods: landscapes, buildings and material culture', brought together historians, anthropologists, sociologists, architects, folklorists, geographers, landscape designers, planners and educators. In the words of the organisers, the work presented over the very busy two days of the conference incorporated 'comparative, cross-cultural research, uses of new analytical tools to scrutinise the place that schools, parks, playgrounds, and other settings take in children's daily life, historically and in the present day, and bringing to light children's points of view.'

It was children's points of view which were the focus of Dr Factor's paper, 'Tree stumps, manhole covers and rubbish bins: the invisible play-lines of a primary school playground'. The experience, understandings and attitudes of Australian children in school playgrounds over a period of 50 years – including the findings of the pioneer American scholar, Dr Dorothy Howard, during her 10 months in Australia in 1954-1955 – aroused considerable interest and discussion at the conference.

A number of the papers presented at the conference, including 'Tree stumps...', are to be published. For further information, contact Dr Marta Gutman at Berkeley [mgutman@uclink4.berkeley.edu].



## Book Feature: HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD

The current interest in the history of childhood is evident in a flurry of conferences and journal articles. Now a British social historian, Colin Heywood, has added to the literature with his scholarly and accessible book, *A History of Childhood* (Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001, 231pp, 14.99 pounds). While the title is somewhat misleading (the book focuses on Europe, and later North America, from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century – a vast period, to be sure, but omitting most of the world's children), it is none the less a valuable attempt 'to highlight key issues in the history of childhood and children'.

In the next issue of *Play & Folklore* we hope to offer a considered review of the book.



## Websites

For those with the time and equipment, some interesting websites.

- A site that looks at children's games and people's uses of them:  
<http://www.firebirdtrust.sagenet.co.uk/explorer.htm>
- The site of the English organisation, London Play:  
<http://www.londonplay.org.uk>
- A new online magazine of Australian social history and folklore:  
<http://simplyaustralia.mountaintracks.com.au>
- Folklore Australia - an online resource base for those interested in all aspects of folklore and folklife:  
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~cknow/>

