

Traditional Games in Turkey and Oregon

Family Geography Night Activity

By Nancy Hunt

Objective: No matter where they live, children enjoy playing games. Students and their families will learn about three traditional games that have been played around the world for centuries. The focus will be on versions of these games played in both Turkey and Oregon (and other parts of the United States). After discussing the roles of human migration and oral tradition in the spread of culture, families will have the opportunity to play the games.

Supplies/Materials

- Pre-games discussion
 - World Map
 - Colored stickers -- 3 different colors (i.e. red-Mangala, blue-marbles, yellow-Bes Tas)
 - Background information (see lesson)
- Mangala
 - Flat plastic box with soil (to make holes to play Turkish Mangala)
 - Rocks or lima beans
 - Instructions for playing game
 - Purchased American Mancala or Kalah game
 - Optional: Space Walk, and Oh-Wah-See games (popular modern American and European versions of Mangala)
- Gulle Oyunu (Marbles)
 - Carpet or large piece of felt and string (if playing inside)
 - Chalk (if playing outside)
 - 5 to 10 marbles for each player
 - Instructions for playing both Turkish and American versions of Marbles
- Bes Tas (Five Stones)
 - One set of 5 smooth stones for each group of players
 - Optional: Tiny bean bags to use in place of stones (see Resources for pattern source)
 - Instructions for playing Bes Tas
 - One set of American Jacks and ball for each group of players
 - Instructions for playing American Jacks

Procedures/Process

- Pre-games Discussion
 - Share general information about Turkey:
 - Turkish culture is unique in the world because it has influenced, and been influenced by, cultures and civilizations from China to Vienna and from the Russian steppes to North Africa for over a millennia.

- Even today, Turkey is predominately rural, so children and adults often amuse themselves by playing traditional games.
 - Background and brief history of each game—ask students to place colored stickers on countries/continents as information is shared. See background information below.
- Geographic Concepts: After sharing information about the 3 games, the teacher will lead a discussion of the following questions:
 - Why are each of these games found in countries all over the world, and why are they similar in so many ways? (Discuss how human migration carries culture from place to place.)
 - Why do we find differences in rules, and materials used, in playing the games? (Discuss oral traditions as a sharing of information; and the use of available materials for homes, food, and clothing, as well as for games.)
- Games, with posted rules, should be set up around the room. Students and parents now have the opportunity to play the games. Some of these games, especially Marbles and Jacks, may not be familiar to today’s students and their parents. Perhaps some Grandparents would be willing to show off their talent at playing these games!

Games Background Information and History

Mangala

The origin of this family of games dates back to very ancient times in Africa. The games were played with little counters (seeds or pebbles) in holes dug into the ground. Movement consists of emptying one of the players "own" pits and distributing ("sowing") the pieces in subsequent pits. The goal of the game is usually to capture more seeds than the opponent.

The oldest actual game boards were excavated in Ethiopia, and believed to be at least 1300 years old. Traditionally, the game was played in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia, with rules often varying from village to village. One of the earliest references to Turkish Mangala (Turkish spelling) is in the story *The Arabian Nights*. Today, the game is also popular in Europe and the United States. The main modern variations are Kalah (United States and Germany), Oh-Wah-Ree (United States), and Space Walk (Germany).

Gulle Oyunu -- Marbles

Traditional games of Marbles are popular the world over, and fall generally into three categories: chase games in which players shoot marbles at each other in a meandering course; games in which marbles are shot at other marbles contained within a marked- off area; and hole games in which marbles are shot into a successive series of holes.

In Turkey, Cyprus and Indonesia, children play a traditional marbles game, in which players shoot their marbles at their opponent’s marbles, and try to hit them. If they strike their opponent's marble, they win that marble. Usually, the object of the game is to win as many marbles as possible. Even young children play games with marbles. It is a sign of “power” among children in Turkey to have the most marbles.

Marbles have an extremely old origin and represent one of the earliest games ever played. Earthen monuments of the ancient North American Mound Builders contained marbles along with other artifacts. Two thousand years ago, the literature of the Greeks and Romans recorded their use of marbles. Egyptian children also seemed to have played with marbles, as some of these spheres have been found in the ruins of that culture.

In the United States, the game is called Ringer, Immies, Mibs, or simply, Marbles. George Washington was a marbles player, as were Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, and Abraham Lincoln.

In England, Scotland, and Ireland, it is Taw, Boss, or Span. In Brazil, children play it as Gude; in parts of Africa, it is Jorrah, and in Italy, Pallina di vetro. In West Virginia, it is played with agate or glass balls. It has been played in Australia with balls of polished wood, and on the street of New York City with steel ball bearings. In Iran, Turkey and Syria, Marbles are played with balls of baked clay or with the knucklebones of sheep. Chinese children play at "kicking the marbles," and kids in Tasmania play at Pyramids.

In the United Kingdom, in the early 1970s, a marble game called "grids" was popular. The object was to be the first to land one's marble into a hole. A makeshift board was created using manhole covers—with plenty of ready-made holes!

Bes Tas (Five Stones) and Jacks

In Turkey, "Beş taş", or "five rocks," is played with five pebbles. One pebble is tossed into the air and the player tries to pick up those on the ground one by one, two by two, etc., before catching the pebble in the air.

Five Stones is a traditional children's game played the world over. Rules vary from country to country. The game of Five Stones is believed to have originated in Ancient Asia. During the Siege of Troy in 1184 B.C., Greek soldiers played the game using the knuckle bones from cloven-footed animals, like cattle and sheep. The game of Jacks, which is popular today, originated from this old game of knucklebones.

A variation of this game known as "gobs" was played in Cork, Ireland in the 1950s using five pebbles (often quartz) found on the beach. Another variation, played in Australia, uses five knucklebones from a lamb shank or colored plastic objects that resemble lamb knucklebones. In the North East of England, the game with five cubes (wooden rather than metal) is called "chucks."

In the United States and Canada, Jacks is primarily a children's game played with six or more six-pronged iron or plastic jacks and a small ball. A variation played by Israeli boys is known as "kugelach." Instead of jacks and a rubber ball, five dice-sized metal cubes are used, and the cubes are tossed in the air.

In modern day Korea, a form of Jacks called *gonggi* is played by children. In this game, there are five weighted plastic 'stones' called *gonggi* and the game is played without a rubber ball. In Japan and in China, a similar game is played using tiny cloth bags filled with rice, sand, or beans.

In parts of central Europe, girls play the classic game using six seeds. Players perform each maneuver first with the right hand, then with the left hand. Jewish girls of Eastern Europe traditionally played *ghop bagi* with five bones.

In Egypt, children use no more than 10 apricot seeds for each player. Players in turn scatter all but one of the seeds, toss that one into the air, and snatch as many as possible from those on the ground before catching the falling seed. The winner is the one who amasses the most seeds.

Rules for Playing the Games

Mangala - Turkey

- Each player digs seven small holes in the ground in lines opposite each other and places five stones (or seeds) in each hole.
- At his turn, the player takes all the stones from one of his pits and drops them one at a time into the following pits counterclockwise.
- If the last stone is dropped in a pit that contains 1 or 3 stones (2 or 4 with the one just dropped), all those stones are captured by the player.
- Also, if there is a continuous line of pits with either 2 or 4 stones before the one where the capture has occurred, all the stones in those pits are captured as well.
- Players may capture on either side of the board.
- The game ends when all the pits are empty. The player who captured most stones wins the game.

Mancala or Kalah – United States

Use purchased Mancala games. As an option, Oh-Wah-Ree and/or Space Walk may also be played. Games can be purchased from on-line sources, or perhaps one of your school's families may own one of them.

Gulle Oyunu -- Marbles -- Turkey

- Draw a triangle 2 to 3 feet wide. Use chalk on asphalt or concrete, a stick in dirt, or a string on carpet.
- Place all the marbles in the middle of the triangle. Select your shooter. Shooters are designated marbles used to knock the other marbles out of the triangle. Your shooter should be larger than the other marbles, so it is powerful enough to do its job. It should also look different from other marbles, so you can distinguish it from them easily.
- Taking turns, shoot the marble into the triangle. Shoot by kneeling on the ground and flicking the marble out of your fist with your thumb. Or, fire the shooter by squeezing it between the thumb and forefinger.
- The object is to hit the other marbles.
- Any marbles that are shot outside of the triangle are collected by the player who hit them.

- Shoot again if you knocked any marbles out of the triangle. Let the next player shoot if you have not knocked any marbles out and/or your shooter remains in the triangle.
- Continue shooting in turn until the triangle is empty.
- Count your marbles at the end of the game. The winner is the player with the most marbles.
- Return the marbles to their original owners unless you're playing 'keepsies.' In that case, each player keeps the marbles he or she won during the game.

Marbles -- United States

- The rules are the same, except that the shooting area is a circle, instead of a triangle.

Bes Tas (Five Stones)—Turkey

- To start a turn, the player throws five stones into the air with one hand and tries to catch as many as possible on the back of the same hand. The stones that were caught are then thrown up again from the back of the hand where they came to rest and as many as possible are caught in the palm of the same hand.
- If no stones end up being caught, the player's turn is over.
- If, however, at least one stone was caught, the player prepares for the next throw by keeping one of the caught stones in the same hand and throwing all remaining stones on the ground.
- The player then tosses the single stone into the air, attempts to pick up one of the stones, and then catches the stone that was tossed, all with the same hand.
- The player repeats this until all the stones have been picked up.
- That done, the player throws down four of the stones again, throws the single stone in the air, attempts to pick up two stones with the same hand before catching the tossed stone. This is repeated again and a final toss sees the player picking up the last stone.
- The process is then repeated for three stones, followed by one stone, and finally, all four stones are picked up before catching the single tossed stone.
- For skillful players, the game can continue in an agreed way with further challenges. For instance, the other hand could be used to throw the stone, the player may have to clap hands before doing the pick-up, or perhaps slap both knees.

Jacks – United States

- The first player starts by throwing the five jacks on the ground and then picking up the ball.
- The player throws the ball into the air, picks up one jack with the same hand and then catches the ball before it hits the ground. The jack is then put into the other hand. This is repeated until all the jacks have been picked up.
- The player then throws the jacks back on the floor and starts again, but this time, two jacks must be picked up each time, except for the third and final throw when, obviously, only one jack is picked up.
- Once this is achieved successfully, the player starts again, but this time with three jacks and then again with four jacks. Finally the ball is thrown up, and all five jacks are picked up at once before the ball is caught.

- When the player misses the ball or does not manage to pick up the required number of jacks, the turn is over, and the next player has a try.
- Some people allow the ball to bounce one before it must be caught. This should make the game a little easier.
- Experts can experiment by continuing the play in the form of harder challenges. For instance, the ball might be bounced downwards instead of thrown upwards, or a clap of the hands must be performed before the pick-up, or perhaps the other hand must be used as a second round.

Internet Resources:

<http://www.brighthub.com/video-games/family/articles/120351/p2/> (kid-friendly international Marble games)

http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/Mancala_Family (Mancala history and variations)

<http://www.turkishculture.org/lifestyles/turkish-culture-portal-326.htm> (Turkish Cultural Foundation)

<http://www.refinerofgold.com/marbles/history.html> (history of Marbles)

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/298918/jacks> (history of Jacks)

<http://www.historylives.com/toysandgames.htm> (traditional American games)

<http://wendigratz.blogspot.com/2011/02/free-pattern-five-stones-game.html> (pattern--tiny beanbags)