

Traditional Chinese Games

(Taken directly from: http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/traditional_chinese_games.htm)

Enjoy some of these traditional Chinese games with your family, perhaps when you are learning about China or celebrating Chinese New Year.

Blind Man's Bluff



This is a very old favorite, thought to date back to Tudor times at least! It was originally known as Blind Man's Buff. There is also a traditional Chinese version known as "Blind Man" or "Chicken".

Age: 6+

You will need: All you will need is a blindfold and enough space for some excitable children!

How to play: Choose one child to be "it", and blindfold him or her. Turn her round a few times to disorientate her a little, while the other children group themselves around her. Then let her try to tag one of the other children, who will then become "it".

Variation: Play as above, but when a child is caught the blindfolded child must try to guess who it is by carefully feeling their face and hair.

Cat Catching Mice

This traditional Chinese chase game can cause much screeching and excitement! Play outdoors - or indoors, if you have a large room. It is also known simply as "Cat and Mouse".

Age: Any

One child is chosen to be the Cat (the chaser) and one child is chosen to become the Mouse. All the other children form a circle, holding hands, with the Mouse inside and the Cat outside.

The children in the circle move around while calling out the following rhyme:

"What time is it?"
"Just struck nine."
"Is the cat at home?"
"He's about to dine."

When the rhyme stops, the children stop moving and the Cat starts to chase the Mouse, weaving in and out of the ring of children to do so. However, the Cat **MUST** follow the mouse's path. When he catches the Mouse he can enjoy pretending to "eat" him, and then two more children take a turn.

Catching Seven Pieces



Originally played with small inch-square rice bags, this traditional Chinese game is similar to Jacks and Knucklebones and can be played with either, or even a collection of pebbles, if you don't want to make your own "pieces".

Age: Any

You will need: 7 small inch-square bags filled with beans or rice. These are a fun project for kids to make themselves, and they will enjoy playing the game even more when they have their own "pieces" to play with. Instructions to make the little bags are below.

How to play: Children sit or stand around a table, or sit on the ground. Take turns to play as follows:

Holds all seven pieces in one hand. Drop them onto the surface, trying to spread them out so that the pieces aren't touching - but don't spread them too far or the game will be difficult!

Pick one of the pieces up and toss it in the air, grabbing another piece from the surface with the same hand before catching the original piece before it falls back to the surface. Still holding two pieces, throw one up in the air, grab another from the table, and catch the air-bound piece again. Continue until you hold all seven in your hand.

Obviously the game gets harder the more pieces you hold in your hand. If at any time one of the pieces falls out of your hand, the air-bound piece falls back onto the surface, or any of the pieces not being grabbed are touched or moved, play passes to the next player.

When you get good at this level, try picking up 2 pieces at once, then 3 pieces, and so on - until you are throwing one piece up into the air and scooping all remaining 6 pieces into your hand before catching that first piece again.

Tiu-u (Fishing)

This game of Chinese dominoes may sound complicated but is in fact very simple to play. The name 'fishing' comes from the idea that players 'fish' for matching dominoes. The game was originally played with bone or wood dominoes. You can either print out our dominoes or, for a more authentic set, use popsicle sticks and draw on the dots with black and red pens.



Players: 2

Age: 4 years plus

You will need: 2 sets of our **Chinese dominoes printable**, or Home-made wooden dominoes

Instructions for home-made Chinese dominoes: If you are making wooden dominoes you will need 64 popsicle sticks and red and black permanent markers. Using our print-out as a guide draw the dots on to the sticks. Remember to make two sets.

To play: Shuffle the dominoes and deal them into 16 piles of 4 dominoes. Lay these piles face down on the table. Take 4 piles and lay these face up in the playing area between the two players.

Each player then takes 3 piles of dominoes and looks at them. If they have a pair of 6's they put the pair in front of them.

Player 1 then looks at the dominoes in the playing area. If they can make a pair with one of the dominoes in their hand they take that domino from the playing area, match it with the domino in their hand, and lay the two dominoes in front of them.

Player 1 then picks up a domino from one of the face-down piles. If it matches a domino in their hand, again they lay the pair in front of them. If not the domino is laid face up in the playing area between the two players.

Player 2 then has their two tries to 'fish' for pairs.

Play continues until all the piles of dominoes are gone.

Scoring: The winner is the player with the most points, which are worked out as follows:

First, unpaired dominoes are put to one side. Now, each player splits the pairs they have won into 'minnows' (dominoes with less than 8 dots) and 'large fish' (dominoes with 8 or more dots).

Minnows score one point for each red dot. When you have the total minnow score this is rounded up to the next 10 (so a score of 4 becomes 10, and a score of 16 becomes 20).

Large fish score two points per dot (in either color)

Fingers Out



This is a simple guessing game for which you just need two kids! Great for passing the odd waiting moment or car journey.

Age: Any

The children face each other and count to 3. On "3" they put out one hand - either as a fist or with 1, 2 or 3 fingers extended, shouting out at the same time a number between 1 and 6.

Add up the number of fingers extended. If a child guessed the exact number of fingers shown they score 2 points. If they guessed nearest the number of fingers shown, they score 1 point. If there is a tie, no points are scored. The first to a given number or points - perhaps 5 or 10 - wins.

For older children, or larger number of children, try "Throwing Fists."

Four Seasons

The Four Seasons game is a traditional Chinese game used to teach the names and order of the four seasons in a classroom or group setting.

Choose one child (or an adult) as a leader, to give directions and keep score. Divide the rest of the class or group into teams for each of the four seasons and sit them in a ring, in seasonal order (ie spring, summer, autumn, winter).

The leader starts by saying, "I am Spring. I am leaving."

The children in the Summer team must immediately stand up and say, "I am Summer. I am coming."

The leader watches to make sure that all the team members stand up promptly and correctly and make the right statement. If so, the team is awarded a point.

The leader would then continue, "I am Summer. I am leaving," and the Autumn team would stand up.

Variations: When the children can manage the seasons in order, the leader should start to jump between the seasons. When the children are consistently scoring good points, muddle the children up so that they are no longer sitting with their team members or in any particular order.

Hawk Catching The Young Chicks



This is a traditional Chinese chase game, to be played outdoors. It is a good game to play with a mixed age-group.

Age: Any

One child is chosen to be the Hawk, and another the Hen. All the other children are Chicks, and line up behind the Hen, holding onto the clothes of the child in front of them.

The Hawk and the Hen face each other, and the Hawk now tries to catch the Chicks. The Hen protects her Chicks, holding out her hands and moving from side to side (with her Chicks swaying in a line behind her).

Any Chicks which are caught move over to stand behind the Hawk, and the line of Chicks closes up.

Honor

This is a simple, traditional Chinese boy's game which needs no props!

Age: Any

Boys pair up and link the first fingers of their right hands. They then start to pull apart. As soon as their fingers break apart, but not before, each boy calls "Honor". Whoever says it last sits down. His partner then finds another boy to play against, and the game continues until there is an overall winner.

Hopping Chicken



This traditional Chinese game can be played with two players or in two teams, indoors or out. It is similar to Hopscotch.

Age: 6+

Each player or team (of two) has 10 sticks, each about 12 inches long. They are laid on the ground like a ladder, about 10 inches apart, one ladder for each player or team.

How to play: One player from each team starts, hopping over the sticks without touching any of them. If a stick is touched, the player is disqualified.

When the player has hopped over all the sticks he stops, still on one foot, and bends down to pick up the last stick. He then hops back over the remaining sticks.

Reaching the beginning again, he drops the stick and sets off again to hop over the nine remaining sticks, pick up the last one, and return.

Play continues until all of the sticks have been picked up.

Remember, a player is disqualified if he puts both feet on the ground at any point during his turn, or if he touches a stick with his foot.

Individual game: Count your mistakes. The winner is the player who finishes with the least mistakes.

Team game: The winner is the team which has got the furthest along when all players are disqualified! If both teams finish, the winning team is the one which finishes with most players left.

Variations: Play as a race game. If you make a mistake, you start over. Play as a relay. The first player hops over ten sticks, returning with the tenth. The second player hops over nine, the third hops over eight, etc. This works very well with mixed age groups, where the younger children play towards the end of the team's go. Try changing the foot that you hop on each round!

Knocking The Stick

This is a traditional Chinese game, played outdoors by boys of all ages and needing nothing more than a few sticks and some dirt or reasonably flat ground.

Draw (or otherwise mark) two lines in the dirt, about 8 feet apart. Place a stick in the middle of the lines.

Now each child picks his own stick and takes turns trying to knock the stick over one of the lines.

Look For Gold

This girl's traditional Chinese game is similar to Jacks or Knucklebones, and is played with a collection of pebbles.

Age: Any

Gather together a handful of pebbles. Throw them up into the air and let them land.

One child starts by drawing her finger between any two pebbles (to mark the two pebbles she is going to use). She then "snaps" one of the pebbles with her fingers towards the other one. If she hits it, she takes both pebbles and puts them aside, then has another go. If she misses, play passes to the next player.

Obviously the first player has the advantage of being able to choose the closest, or otherwise easiest, pair of pebbles. Each time you start the game again, the first play should pass to a new player.

Striking The Stick

This traditional Chinese outdoor game requires a certain amount of skill, practise and ingenuity, as well as some flat ground.

Mark out a square, about 5 or 6 feet wide. One child (the "striker") stands within the square, placing his feet wide apart and trying to dominate the square as much as possible. He holds a stick.

Another child then places a small wooden block somewhere within the square, trying to put it in a position that will make it difficult for the striker to hit it.

The striker is now allowed to move one foot out of the square and hop around (keeping the other foot fixed tight) to find a good position from which to throw his stick at the block, trying to shove it outside the square. If he fails to move the block out, the child that placed the block takes his place.

If he manages to push the block outside the square with his first throw, he then gets to try the "challenge", as follows:

First, he hits the ball hard from above to make it jump into the air. When it does so, he then hits it as far as he can away from the square (as you would hit a baseball with a baseball bat). He has 3 goes like that, trying to move the block an agreed number of feet - say 50 or 100 - depending on the age and skill of the child.

Shuttlecock Games

The shuttlecock - a flying object made out of feathers, known to most of us through badminton, has been used traditionally in kicking games of skill in China.

Age: Any



You may already have (or be able to purchase) a shuttlecock. Alternatively, you can follow our instructions to make your own shuttlecock - it makes a fun craft activity to do with the kids, with the added bonus of some games at the end of it (although the home-made shuttlecock may not last long!)

1 person games: Throw the shuttlecock into the air, then keep it in the air bouncing from one palm to the other. How long can you keep it going?

Throw the shuttlecock up in the air, then keep it up in the air using only your feet. See how long you can keep it going before it hits the ground!

When you have had some practise at this, try hitting it up into the air with your knees.

Now try alternating between your feet and your knees, and between left and right, too!

2 person games: How about playing with a friend? One of you throws the shuttlecock up in the air, and the other kicks it back. How many times can you pass the shuttlecock between you?

Group games: Play with more than 2 children: stand in a ring and see if you can keep the shuttlecock in the air using only your feet, passing it around the ring.

Put your best player in the centre of the circle and pass it from the centre out and back each time.

One person throws the shuttlecock high into the air and calls out the name of the child who should hit it next. That child hits it at high as possible, too, with the palm of her hand, calling out the next player, and so on.

See if you can pass the shuttlecock down a line of children with your palms, your feet or your knees.

Make your own badminton game: String up a "net" - perhaps using a rope tied between two trees - at just above chest-height. A traditional badminton net is 5ft 1inch high, but you will want it to be lower than that for children. Stand either side of net and see how long you can keep the shuttlecock going between you, using your palms, tennis racquets, or whatever else you can find if you don't have badminton racquets!

Make Your Own Shuttlecock



Shuttlecocks are fun to make - and we have many ingenious shuttlecock games of skill in which your children can use them to while away the hours, both on their own and with friends.

You will need: Scraps of corrugated card, Coin, Four feathers, Sticky tape

Cut two circles about 5cm in diameter from card. Use tape to fasten the coin and four feathers to one circle.



Tape the second circle of card on top.

The Chopsticks Game



I played The Chopsticks Game often in my childhood and became quite accomplished at it! It makes a fun racing game for parties and Chinese New Year gatherings. You can play as individuals or teams.

Age: 6+

Each child will need a pair of chopsticks, and each child or team will need two bowls and a number of marbles, maltesers, smartees, peanuts or marshmallows.

Place the bowls about 6-8 feet apart, on tables or chairs. Put the objects in one of the bowls. When you call "start", each child must pick up one of his objects, using only his chopsticks, and carry it to the empty bowl. He then returns for the next object, and so on until he has moved all his objects safely across and is the winner.

Hands must not be used at any time! If an object is dropped, it must be picked up and put back in the first bowl. You are only allowed to move one object at a time.

You can make this game easier by varying the objects. Marbles are hardest, marshmallows are easiest!

If you are playing with individual children, we suggest at least 10 objects to make the game last a decent time. For a team challenge, you might want only 3 or 4 objects, depending on the number of children in the team.

Throw Coins

This is a traditional Chinese boy's game, similar to marbles. Children "win" coins in this game, so you will need to decide whether to play with real coins as the prize or to claim them back at the end!

Age: Any

You will need: Coins, A wall

Each child holds a coin up against a wall, with its edge touching the wall, and lets it drop.

The child whose coin rolls furthest away from the wall then gets the first turn. He picks up his coin, marking its place with his foot (which he must not move). He then pitches his coin at the other coins lying around. If he touches a coin, he wins it and has another go. If he misses, everybody picks up their coins (or, if they have lost their coin, brings out another one or drops out) and starts again.

Throwing Fists



This traditional Chinese game can be played by 2 players or quite a large group. It develops quick thinking, addition and logic skills - but it's also fun!

Age: 6+

On the count of 3, the children throw their fist out in front of them with anything from 0 fingers to 5 fingers extended. At the same time, one child (take it in turns) calls out a number. If the fingers extended add up to that number, the child wins.

Obviously, the child must call out a number which might come up. So if 2 children are playing, the numbers can be between 0 and 10; if 3 children are playing, between 0 and 15, and so on. Children must be careful to throw their fists on time, too, so that no child can be accused of changing her fingers after the number is called!

Kids will soon learn that if they are displaying zero fingers themselves they should call low, etc.

Teachers could use this game to learn about odds ("if three children are playing, what are the odds that the number will be called correctly")

Younger children might like to try "Fingers Out" instead.

Throwing The Square

Throwing The Square is a traditional Chinese game which can be played with two players or teams, indoors or out.

Age: 5 up

Preparation: Draw a rectangle, about 24 inches by 12 inches, on the ground with chalk or scrape it in the dirt - or cut one out of paper or felt for an indoor game. Divide the rectangle in two so that you have two squares side by side. Draw or mark a further line about 8 feet away from the rectangle (you can adjust this according to the ages of your players).

The game is played with two players or teams. Each side will need a throwing object - perhaps a miniature Frisbee, a beanbag, a flat rock or a wooden disk.

How to play: One player places his object in one square. The other player moves to stand behind the line and tries to throw his object to land in the same square as the other player's object. Score as follows:

The same square: 2 points

The other, empty square: 1 point

Outside the target: 0 points

The first side to an agreed score - perhaps 10 - wins.

Ideas: Children could have fun designing a portable felt version of this game to be played indoors. First make the "board" out of felt, and add decoration with marker pen as desired. Then make two flat felt beanbags in different colors. You could make a simple drawstring bag to keep the game in, too.

For an outdoor game, kids could make up a set of two evenly-sized pebbles, painted or otherwise marked to distinguish them and a piece of chalk. Pack in a small bag or box and you have a game that is easy to pop into a backpack to take with you to the park or on a picnic.

Going to Town



This traditional girl's Chinese chase game can be played with a large group of kids - or just two. Boys enjoy it too, and it causes much giggling! Children have to learn to work together in this activity.

Age: Any

Children stand back to back in pairs and link arms. One bends down so that the other lies flat on her back, with her legs in the air. Then they return to the middle, and the other bends down.

Still linking arms, each pair sits on the floor. Now, without letting go or arms, try to stand back up again!

Forcing The City Gates



Forcing The City Gates is a traditional Chinese game for boys - and one which requires a fair amount of energy and some outside space to play! This game can get rough.

You will need a group of at least 6 boys. Two captains are chosen, and each picks him team-mates. The two teams line up opposite each other, holding hands.

Now one boy from one team starts by hurling himself at the other side's line, trying to break through between two boys. If he breaks through, the boys on either side of him must go back with him and join his team. If he doesn't, he stays and becomes a member of that team.

Alternate between the teams until one team's wall is broken up.

Chinese Ball



This traditional Chinese playground game develops children's ball skills and their concentration - it really keeps them on their toes!

Age: 6+

Children stand around in a circle with a ball as appropriate for the age group (such as a basketball).

The ball is thrown quickly around and across the circle. When a child catches the ball, the children on either side must raise one arm - the arm nearest the child with the ball - and hold it in the air until the ball is passed on to another child.

If a child fails to catch the ball, or fails to raise the correct arm when their neighbour catches the ball, or is too slow to pass the ball along, they drop out. When there are only 5 children left in the circle, they are all declared winners, and the game starts again.

Catch The Dragon's Tail



This traditional Chinese game is great fun for the playground. You will need a large group of children - at least 10, but the more the merrier!

Age: Any

The children all form a line with their hands on the shoulders of the child in front. The first in line is the dragon's head, the last in line is the dragon's tail.

The dragon's head then tries to catch the tail by manoeuvring the line around so that he can tag the last player. All the players in the middle do their best to hinder the dragon's head. Don't let the line break!

When the head catches the tail, the tail player takes the front position and becomes the new dragon's head. All the other players move back one position.

Moon Cake

This traditional Chinese playground game reinforces addition skills. It is good to play with a class of kids, divided into teams, and can be adapted to suit different ages. It can be very exciting!

Age: 5+

A large circle is drawn on the playground with chalk. The radius of the circle should be at least as long as 4 large child-sized steps.

Divide the circle through the centre into segments, according to the age and abilities of your child, and write a number in each segment. Younger kids, for example could play with the circle divided into quarters, with the quarters marked 1, 2, 3 and 4. For older kids you might want to divide the circle into 12 and number 1-12. You can also number the segments randomly if you wish.

Divide the children into teams. Take one child from each team and stand them in the centre of the circle, blind fold them, and turn them around 3 times to disorientate them a little. Now let the child take 4 steps in any direction, take of the blindfold, and discover the number of the segment he has landed in.

When one member of each team has had a go, choose another player from each team. Continue until all children have had a go, and add up the numbers. The winning team has the highest score.

Notes: If you choose to use random numbers, make sure at least one is "0" and 1 or two are high enough to cause some excitement amongst the teams!

You can play this game with a whiteboard or large piece of paper for the children to record their numbers on, if you like. Appoint one child in each team to keep score, or ask each child, when they have finished their go, to write their own number under their team's total.