

One Room School Games



Formal education has been important in Kansas from the territorial period. After the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the territory to settlement in 1854, Euro-American pioneers rushed in to claim land and establish homes. Often make-do accommodations housed schools when they first opened. During the first year of Lawrence's founding a three-month school supported by contributions from the community was held in the Emigrant Aid building. Pioneer conditions continued to prevail during the early years of statehood. One

school in Pawnee County held school in a former saloon in 1873. The teacher used the bar as a desk. Frontier conditions continued even into the twentieth century in some areas of Kansas. Garden City students attended school in a chuck wagon in the early 1900s until a school could be built.

With no money for playground equipment during the early years of country schools, students and teachers relied on inexpensive games that could be played by students of all ages. Children attending Montgomery County's Centennial School District #9 appear to enjoy playing outside this school in 1892.



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Inside games:

- **Drop the Handkerchief** – Identify one player to be “it.” Remaining players should stand in a circle facing inward. It is important that players face forward and not continually watch the person who is “it.” With a “hanky” in hand, the person who is “it” walks around the circle behind the players. The “it” player should drop the handkerchief behind one of the standing players. The goal is to do this unobtrusively so as not to identify where it was dropped. The “it” player may choose to speed up, slow down, etc. to distract the standing players, hoping they would not notice where the hanky got dropped. When the standing player realizes the hanky was dropped behind them the player grabs the handkerchief and chases “it” around the circle trying to catch “it” before “it” reaches the spot the hanky was dropped. Once “it” reaches the open spot in the circle of players “it” joins the circle, and the player chasing them becomes “it.” If the person who dropped the hanky is caught, then they remain “it” for the next round of the game.
- **Hide the Thimble** – The goal is to find a hidden thimble. The first player hides a thimble while the rest of the group closes, or hides, their eyes. It is best if the thimble is hidden where it can be found without having to move anything such as behind the leg of

a chair, on top of a picture frame, in the fringe of an afghan, etc. After the thimble is hidden the person hiding it returns to their seat and lets the other players know the thimble is hidden. The others can then look for it. The player who finds the thimble gets to hide it next. A variation is to have one person leave the room while the others hide the thimble. When the player returns to search for the thimble the people who hid it can give “hot” and “cold” clues.

- **Button, button, who’s got the button?** – Players sit in a circle with their hands out, palms together. The person who is “it” holds their hands in the same way but with a button inside. The “it” person moves around the circle putting their hands between everyone else’s cupped hands. The button should be dropped in one set of hands without anyone else in the circle realizing who the button was passed to. When the “it” person has completed going around the circle they say, “Button, button, who’s got the button?” Players in the circle take turns guessing who has the button. When the right person is finally identified they become “it.”

Outside games:

- **Annie Over** – Use a playground ball. Divide students into two teams with one team on either side of a shed or small building. Decide which team will have the ball first (Team A). Team A yells “Annie, Annie, Over” and throws the ball over the roof. The opposing team (Team B) tries to catch it.
 - If Team B doesn’t catch the ball they continue by throwing the ball over the building and yelling “Annie, Annie, Over.”
 - If Team B catches the ball the person who caught it runs around the side of the building and has one chance to throw and hit a player on Team A with the ball. If a player on Team A is hit with the ball they join Team B. If no one on Team A is hit with the ball Team A gets to keep the ball and restart the game and the Team B player returns to his/her own team.
- **Fox and Geese** – This is a good tag game to play in the snow. Make paths in the snow in the shape of a wagon wheel – an outer circle with spokes leading to the center. In the center, where all the spokes meet, stamp down a four-foot diameter circle as the safe zone, or home. Select one person to be the fox; the rest are geese. The fox chases the geese attempting to tag one. When a goose is tagged the roles are reversed and the game begins again. During the game all players must stay on the paths, and they cannot jump from one path to another. The center home, or safe zone, is a place where geese may take a break for a short period of time. The fox cannot enter “home” in pursuit of a goose who pauses there or to tag a goose already in the safe zone. A fox may run through “home” when pursuing a goose if the goose does not stop in the safe zone but rather runs through it.

- **Steal the Bacon** - This game is played between two parallel lines. Players line up with half of them on each line. An object such as a cap or scarf is placed halfway between the lines. At a signal from the caller one student runs from each side to grab the object, and the one who does is the winner. The winner then gets to signal “go” for the next round.
- **Pom Pom Pull Away** – The game is played between two parallel lines about thirty to fifty feet across. One person is designated to be “it.” That person stands between the two lines, and the remainder of the players stand behind one of the lines. The person who is “it” calls any player by name. (ex: “John Doe, Pom Pom Pull Away!) Come away or I’ll fetch you away!” The player called by name (ex: John Doe) then attempts to run across the opening and the opposite line without being tagged by the person who is “it.” If the player makes it safely across the other line, they stay there and the play begins again with another player being called. If the player gets caught they join the person in the center who is “it” and help to tag the future players running between the lines. After everyone has been called the players who safely got across the opposite line are once again called upon to cross back over the beginning line. The first of these people to be tagged becomes “it.”
- **Gunny Sack Races** – This is a relay race. Determine the length of the field for the race. Place one chair, bucket or other object per group at the end of the racing field that groups will need to hop around. Divide players into groups. Each group needs a gunny sack or pillowcase. Line each group up single file about 3 yards apart at the starting line. Give each group a sack. At the signal to start the first person in each group will step into the sack, hold the sides up, and hop across the racing field, around the object, back to their team, and hand off the sack to the next person in line. The first group to have all its team members race is the winner.
- **Crack the Whip** – All the students hold hands in a long line. The student at one end pivots and all the students swing back and forth until the student at the end of the line looses their grip and the whip has been cracked.