

Child's Play

Task 1 Childhood activities

Work in groups. Think back to when you were younger. Choose a specific age if you like.

- How did you use to spend your time?
- How do you spend your time nowadays? Fill in the two columns.

Childhood activities	Activities nowadays

- Compare the two columns.
- Do you think children today spend their time in the same way you did when you were a child?
- Do you miss any of your childhood activities?
- Do you think you will ever do any of your childhood activities again?

Task 2 Top 3 children's games

What were your top 3 games that you used to play when you were a child?

Think carefully and write your three favourite games here:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

- Now look at your classmates' top three and compare with your own
- Ask them about their choices. " Why did you like ...?"
- Ask your teacher about his or her top three games. Are they very different to yours?
- Are there any games that are more or less the same but with different names?

Task 3 Conkers or bonkers!

Read the article about the way break times in British schools are changing. Try to guess the meaning of these words from the context of the article. When you have guessed, use a dictionary or ask your teacher to check the answers.

Word from the article	I guess it means...	It really means...
Conkers (horse chestnuts)		
Bonkers		
Litigious		
Blame		
Sue		
Banned		
Weapons		
Skipping		
Far fetched		
Daisy chains		
Climbing frames		
Whispering		
Whistling		
Clapping games		
Slide		
Swings		
Red tape		
Safety goggles		

Conkers or bonkers! Article from Trend UK

Summary: Due to an increasingly litigious society, the nature of play in Britain's schools has radically changed.

Changing society

The UK is quickly becoming a 'blame and sue' society. A number of UK schools have banned traditional playground games in case pupils are hurt whilst playing the games on school premises, leading to suing by angry parents.

Banned games

Conkers are banned by some schools as they fear the horse chestnuts could be used as 'offensive weapons'. One school banned skipping after some girls fell over.

One far-fetched example is preventing children from making daisy chains, in case pupils pick up germs from the flowers. The charity The Children's Society said the bans were 'ludicrous! When you ban climbing frames or don't allow children to make daisy chains, we've gone too far. Why can't they be allowed to have fun?'

Pupils' viewpoints

The bans have had a negative response from the pupils.

Emma is 13 and from Birmingham. 'The end of playground fun was ages ago at our school! No daisy-chains, no skipping, no running games, no taking paper and pencils outside, last five minutes in the shade on a hot day, no Yo-yo's, no football, no staying inside, no sitting down until the last five minutes, no drinking or snacks, no singing or dancing, no shouting or talking, only whispering, no whistling, no laughing; only walking and whispering, not even hand clapping games!'

Yasmin, who is 14 and from London, is upset by the situation. 'In our school we had a really good playground with a long slide, climbing frame, swings, and a large mound type place which you could climb. Now all of that has been taken away for safety reasons. What are people supposed to do at break times?'

Breaking through the red tape

A head teacher of a Carlisle primary school has bought safety goggles so that his pupils can continue playing conkers. Speaking from his school he states 'I said they would have to wear goggles to play, mainly because they could get bits of conker in the eye. They thought it was a great idea. It's just being sensible. We live in a litigious society.'

Perhaps other schools need to follow Mr Halfpenny's example and invent a way of playing games safely thus allowing the pupils to enjoy their childhood and not live in a sterile, play free environment.

Nelly

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Discuss in groups:

- Do you think it is right to ban these games?
- Is your country a 'blame and sue' society?
- How do you feel about Emma and Yasmin's comments?
- What do you think about Mr. Halfpenny's idea?

Task 4 Traditional playground games

- Read the description of these traditional playground games. Don't worry if you don't understand every word. Just try to get the general idea of the game.
- Do you have the same game or a similar version of these games in your country?

Traditional playground games – Article from Trend UK

Hopscotch (banned)

Game played with a stone thrown on a chalk grid players then hop on the grid and pick up the stone and mark off the square. The game is over when all the boxes have been marked.

Skipping (banned)

A fun way to develop rhythm. A minimum of three players are required - two to wave the ropes and sing chants while the other dances between them.

British Bulldog (banned)

Notorious for being banned because of the heavy emphasis on violence. The game begins as a kind of David and Goliath challenge, with one child standing alone as a mass of pupils charge directly at him. His job is to 'bring down' as many as possible. Those caught then also assume the role of 'catcher' against those that slipped through.

It/Tag

A perennial favourite, mainly because of its simplicity. You are 'it', so you run around the playground until you 'tag' someone making them 'it'. And so on. Kiss chase is one popular variation, where the act of tagging involves kissing your victim.

Marbles (banned)

Low on physical exertion, but good for hand-eye co-ordination. Marbles are small, hard balls made out of glass, steel, baked clay or even onyx. The object is to roll, throw or drop your marbles against those of your opponent, to knock them out of a prescribed area and so win them.

Leapfrog (banned)

One pupil bends over with his hands on his knees and back bent over in an arch shape. Another pupil jumps over him legs straddled, using his back as a leverage point.

Conkers (banned)

A conker is the seed of the horse chestnut tree. Each player has a conker hanging on its string. Players take turns at hitting their opponent's conker. The game goes on in turns until one or other of the two conkers is completely destroyed.

- Which of the games do you like the best?
- Which do you think could be the most dangerous?
- Choose a traditional playground game from your country and write a description of it.

Task 5 Play time!

Listen to your teacher's instructions and play some games to revise your English vocabulary.

Task 6 Child's play role play

Work in groups of five. Choose a role and imagine you all meet to discuss the issue of banning traditional playground games in schools.

A – You are a seven year old child. All the games you love to play in the playground have been banned.

B – You are a child psychologist and believe that children need to play to learn and develop.

C – You are the head teacher of a school and have had to ban the games. Although you don't agree with it you believe it would be dangerous not to ban them. If a child had an accident the school would be sued.

D – You are a very protective parent and are happy that the new rules are in place. Your son was injured by a conker last term!

E – You work for the education department and have introduced the new rules to ban the games from all school playgrounds.