Site of Documentation

Luang Prabang Children’s Cultural Centre, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Description

Lou Li Rice Grain is a simple game that is played by children living in Luang Prabang when they need to devise two teams. Once the teams have been devised, the game culminates in a lively ‘Tug of War’ between the opponents.

Who Plays?

The game requires 10 players. Both boys and girls aged between 14 to 18 years old can play.

Accessories/Equipment

To play you only need a small item with which to draw out the game area. This could be chalk, a stick or sharp stone, depending where the game is being played. Alternatively, players can take off their shoes and line them up to create boundaries.
**Time and Place**

On average, this game takes around 10 minutes to play. It can be played either indoors or outdoors throughout the year, as long as the weather is cool and dry. As the game requires a lot of physical contact (tugging and pulling), it is best played on smooth, flat surfaces such as lawns or school yards where the children are less likely to hurt themselves if they fall over.

**Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player**

*Lou Li Rice Grain* is a simple game that for the most part only requires listening skills and movement. In the final stage of the game, physical strength is important if teams are to beat their opponents in the ‘Tug of War’.

**Popularity**

*Lou Li Rice Grain* is a popular game with children aged over 14 years. On average, the game is played weekly and is a particular favourite with children because it teaches them about teamwork and tests their strength. Most children learned this game from friends, at school or when visiting the local Cultural Centre.

**History of the Game**

*Lou Li Rice Grain* was played by members of the older generations much in the same way as it is played today. Back then however, once the children had determined the teams, they would play a game called *The Police Must Arrest the Thief*. In this game team leaders would give each of their team mates a random code name such as Duck, Flower or Rice. Each player was given a different name which had to be remembered for the duration of the game. Players were allowed to share their code names within their teams, but were allowed not let their opponents overhear. Once they each had a code name, the teams sat in a line facing their opponents, while the team leaders stood behind them. See the diagram below.

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O
X X X X
O O O O
X
X = Banana team players
O = Orange team players
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The team leaders would then play *Rock, Paper and Scissors*. The winner would pick an opponent and blindfold them. Once blindfolded, the leader would call over a member of their own team (using their code name). This player then had to tap the blindfolded player’s hand and return to their seat. The blindfold was then removed and the player had to guess the identity of the ‘mystery’ player. If they guessed correctly, the mystery opponent was eliminated from the game. If they guessed incorrectly they themselves are eliminated. Next, the other team leader would repeat the process. The game would continue until only one player remained. The team this player belonged to – won the game.

How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First, two players must volunteer to be the Team Leaders. Next, these two players have to agree on two random objects (such as an orange and a banana) to be their team names. They do not tell the other players which object belongs to them. The Team Leaders then hold each other’s hands, high above their heads, making an archway. The other players must then walk under the archway singing:

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“Lou Li, Lou Li Rice grain,
Green leaf, Green leaf, Rice bran,
Two little chaffs were blown to a green leaf,
Two please help one,
It is not good to have just one nephew,
I think I will have a baby in December”
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**Step 2.** When the players sing “December”, the team leaders lower their arms around the player who is passing under them at that moment. They then ask the player to choose one of the objects (for example a banana or an orange). The player then joins the team with that name. As the names were agreed secretly between the Team Leaders, the rest of the players will not know which Team Leader they are joining until after the end of the game. The children then sing the song again and the game is repeated. Once all the children have made their choice, the Team Leader’s reveal which team is theirs.

If too many players select one of the objects, then the team leaders can reorganise the teams so that they are equal.
**Step 3.** Both teams need to form two lines by standing one behind the other. The teams should stand face to face on either side of a line marked on the ground. The line can be marked in chalk, with a stick, shoes or flowers.

**Step 4.** Finally, the two teams compete against each other in a ‘Tug of War’. The players at the head of the lines grab each other’s hands and hold on tight. Both teams then try to pull the other team towards them. The first player to be pulled over the line loses and has to join their opponent’s team. The tugging continues until one team has won all the players and therefore wins the game.
Rules

1. If too many players select only one of the objects and the teams are uneven, it’s up to the Team Leaders to reorganise the players.

2. During the ‘Tug of War’ players must hold onto the player in front of them at all times to avoid accidental injuries.

3. There is no prize for the winners, although if they like, they can ask the losers to entertain them with a silly dance or song.