Zai Qe / Hide the Egg

Site of Documentation
Ban Na Ouane, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Description

*Hide the Egg* is a traditional game that is widely enjoyed by children living in the village of Ban Na Ouane near Luang Prabang. A simple guessing game that requires only a small stone, *Hide the Egg* is frequently played by groups of Hmong children for fun. In the game a player has to correctly guess which of the other players is hiding the ‘egg’. Depending on whether their guess is right or wrong, the players will join one of two teams. The game eventually culminates in a boisterous ‘Tug of War’ between the opponents.

Who Plays?

The game requires at least eight players. Both boys and girls under 10 years of age can play.

Accessories/Equipment

To play the game children need to find a small stone that is used as the ‘egg’, although this can also be substituted with a coin or bottle top. It doesn’t really matter what the object is, as long as it’s small enough to hide in the palm of a child’s hand.
Time and Place

This game usually takes about 20 to 30 minutes to play, depending on whether the players want to include a final ‘Tug of War’. It can be played at any time of the day, as long as there is plenty of room to manoeuvre and the weather is cool. The game is best played on a smooth, flat surface so that players don’t accidentally injure themselves if they fall down. A game area of approximately 5 x 5 meters is ideal for groups of eight players.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

Players need to be able to guess which of their opponents is hiding the small object in their hand. To be a good player, children need to carefully read the faces and movement of others, while those hiding the stone need to be able keep a straight face or bluff convincingly. These skills can be developed through frequent practice and experience of the game. In the final stage of the Hide the Egg, physical strength is important if teams are to beat their opponents in the ‘Tug of War’.

Popularity

The children of Ban Na Ouane played Hide the Egg continue to play it at least once a month. Played for a fun, to improve their focus and to keep fit; most children were taught this game by their peers or older siblings. As a team sport, the game also provides a great opportunity for children to form stronger bonds with their peers and forge new friendships.

History of the Game

Enjoyed by generations of children, Hide the Egg was traditionally played at night, when the moon was full and there was just enough light with which to see the other players. Back then, the game was enjoyed after a hard day working in the fields and would sometimes be played until daybreak.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** To start, two players need to volunteer. One player (Player A) will hide the ‘egg’, while another (Player B) needs to guess where the egg is hidden. All the remaining players need to sit in a long line with their hands outstretched.

**Step 2.** Next, Player A needs to pick up the egg and move along the line of players, pressing it into the palm of each player’s hand. Each player will pretend to hide the egg, as Player A passes. Player B will sit behind the row of players, watching each one closely.
Step 3. Player B will then try to guess which player is hiding the egg in their hands. If they guess correctly, then that player (Player C) will join Player B and form a new team. However, if Player B is wrong then Player C joins Player A, and forms a new team. The game continues until there is only one player remaining in the original line up. Player A and Player B then compete in a game of chance to see whose team the final player will join. They can draw a line on the ground and stand on either side, while another player throws the rock up into the air. The team whose side the rock lands on wins the player. Alternatively Player A and Player B can play a round of Rock, Paper and Scissors.

Step 4. In the last stage of the game, the two teams compete against each other in a ‘Tug of War’. In it, the teams form two long lines and stand facing each other, on either side of a line that is drawn on the ground. 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. The player that guesses has to be positioned behind the row of players while the egg is being passed between them.

2. Teams can opt out of the final ‘Tug of War’ if they are not evenly matched in size at the end of the guessing game.