Site of Documentation

Urban Chinese Community of Suburban George Town, Penang, Malaysia

Description

*What is the time, Mr Tiger?* is a simple game of catch where one player plays the role of the ferocious ‘Mr. Tiger’ while the others are his ‘human’ prey. The game has been played by generations of Chinese children from the suburbs of George Town in Penang, Malaysia.

Who plays?

The game needs a minimum of five players, although groups can be up to 10 players in size. Both boys and girls can play and it is most suited to children aged between 7 and 12 years.

Time and Place

This game can be played either indoors or outdoors throughout the year. As each round only takes around 15 minutes, it is perfect for playing during school break times or when waiting to be picked up by parents at the end of the day. As the game requires a lot of running, it is best played on smooth flat surfaces such as lawns, school yards or corridors where the children are less likely to hurt themselves if they fall over.

Skills, Strategies ad Qualities of a Good Player
Players need to be quick, agile and alert to be able to avoid being caught by Mr Tiger. The best players are those that have fast responses, good running skills and are able to anticipate when the tiger may shout, “It’s 12 o’clock”. When playing Mr Tiger, children will have an advantage if they can sense (with their back turned) how close the other players are behind them and when it would be easiest to turn and catch them.

**Popularity**

As this game requires no props and only limited space, it remains a popular game to play for children of younger age groups. Played for fun, most children learnt this game from their peers or older siblings.

**History of the Game**

Although the history of the game can not be easily traced within the local community, it has many similar attributes to the European game *What’s the Time Mr Wolf?* and it could be that it was adapted from it by choosing an Asian animal that children could relate to better. Played by many of the older generations, the rules of the game have remained the same across the ages, although some recall that the ‘humans’ were once known as ‘sheep’ and Mr Tiger would wear an item (such as a scarf or shirt) to indicate their role.

**Preparation**

1. First, children must decide on a small area to be the players’ ‘house’. This area forms a safe haven for the players that they run to when being chased by Mr Tiger.

2. Players can draw on the ground with chalk, drag a line in the sand or use markers, such as pillars or doorways to define the area of the house.

**How Is The Game Played?**
**Step 1:** First the players need to select who will play the role of Mr Tiger. To do this they play an elimination game called *La-La-Li-La-Tam-Pom.*

1. All the players sit in a circle and chant:

   
   "La La Li La Tam Pom,
   A Pek Bei Ah Pom,
   A Pom Lim Lou Hai,
   A Pek Jiak Kau Sai".

   **Translation:**
   
   *La-La-Li-La-Tam-Pom,*
   Uncle sells Apom*,
   Pancake rolls into the sea,
   Uncle has to eat dog’s droppings.

   *Apom is a type of local pancake.

2. While the players chant they each wave one hand in front of them. At the end of the chant the players each flip their palms either up or down.
3. The odd player out (e.g. the only player with his palm up while all the other players have their palms down) becomes Mr Tiger.

4. If more than one person has their palm in a different direction compared to all the others, then the game continues until finally one player is selected.

**Step 2.** Now, all of the players stand next to each other forming a line in front of their house. Mr Tiger stands in front of them with his back turned, at a distance of approximately 10 metres.

**Step 3:** The players walk slowly towards the tiger and ask, “What is the time Mr Tiger?”

**Step 4:** Mr Tiger is allowed to respond with any time (“It’s eight o’clock” or “It’s six o’clock”), and with each response the players have to take a few steps closer. The players repeat the questioning and with each answer, take a few more steps forward. This continues until Mr Tiger replies, “It’s 12 o’clock” (lunch time!). When the players hear this time it is the cue for them to run as fast as they can away from Mr Tiger, who will turn and try to catch them.
Step 5: If any of the players can not run fast enough they can get into a squat position which immediately makes them safe. However, once in a squat they are not allowed to move and must rely on other players to save them. Players can do this by touching the squatting player with any part of their body.

Step 6: The first player caught will change roles and become the next Mr Tiger.

Rules

1. Once the players reach their house they are safe and Mr Tiger is not allowed to catch them.

2. Players who successfully reach the house can choose to leave the house and re-join the game for fun or to save one of their team mates.
3. There are no winners. When Mr Tiger catches a ‘human’, that player immediately swaps roles and the next game begins.