Punctuation

Site of Documentation

Ethnic Chinese community, Kheng Tean National-type Elementary (Vernacular Chinese) School, Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia

Description

*Punctuation* is a simple elimination game played by Chinese children living in Georgetown, Penang. In it, children have to chant a series of words which are accompanied by a sequence of hand movements and actions. At the end of the chant, each player must produce a hand sign (similar to *Rock, Paper and Scissors*) to determine the winners. The winner then ‘punishes’ the loser by pretending to slap them.

Who Plays?

This game requires two players. It is played by both boys and girls aged 7-10 years.

Time and Place

Each round of *Punctuation* takes around five to ten minutes to play and can be played anywhere, at anytime. Typically children play it during school breaks or at the end of the day when they are waiting to be picked up by their parents.
Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

*Punctuation* is easy to play and for the most part only requires listening and movement skills. The best players have excellent hand coordination, speed and a sense of rhythm. Those that are alert and can accurately predict the moves of their opponents will also have an advantage over others.

**Popularity**

*Punctuation* is one of many popular games that involve clapping and chanting rhymes. Played for fun and to pass free time, games such as these are played, particularly by girls almost every day. Most children are taught the game by friends or family members.

**History of the game**

The origins of *Punctuation* can’t be easily traced back within the local community, although the game is similar to those played by many members of older generations when they were young. Back then, the most popular games were *Sek Sek Sek, Bom Bom Bom* and *1, 2 Ta Li Som*.

Nowadays, there are many additional versions of this type of game, each with different rhymes and sequences of movements. Often the games’ lyrics incorporate contemporary terms and objects which reflect the modern day. Many of these games such as *Omega* and *Hamburger* have very similar structures so it is possible that they are all variations of one original game.

**How is the Game Played?**

**Step 1.** First the two players stand facing each other, with their arms bent and palms pressed together, hands pointing up.
Step 2. Next, the players have to chant the words, “Biao Dian Fu Hao, Pom Pom, Cha Cha, Pom Pom Cha”. As they chant each word they have to complete a specific action.

The actions are as follows:

1. Biao Dian Fu Hao: Both players imitate a fish swimming in water by moving their hands left and right in a continuous, wave-like motion.

2. Pom Pom: Both players clap their hands together twice. One clap for each ‘Pom’.
3. Cha Cha: Each player slides their forearms, from one side to the other across their chest. One slide for each ‘Cha’.

4. Pom Pom Cha: Both players clap their hands together twice. One clap for each “Pom”. As they say, “Cha” they each make a Scissors, Cloth or Stone shape with one of their hands.

Traditionally in this game, players would chant, “Scissors, Cloth and Stone” and as they said, “Cloth” they would each make one of the shapes with their hands.

The outcome is determined by: Cloth beats Stone, Stone beats Scissors and Scissors beats Cloth.
5. Both players then say, “Pik Piak”. As they say it, the winner of the game pretends to slap the loser’s cheeks by moving their hands across the loser’s face, without touching it. As they do this the loser pretends to receive the slap by moving their head in the direction of the winner’s hand.

6. If during, *Scissors, Cloth and Stone* both players show the same shape, there is a draw. Both players then say, “Jelly Jelly”. As they do so, they imitate a jellyfish by raising their hands over their heads and wiggling their fingers (like tentacles) as they drop them back down again.
**Step 3.** The players can keep repeating the game until one of them makes a mistake. The player that makes a mistake must undergo a forfeit.

![Step 3](image1.jpg)

**Step 4.** In the event of a forfeit, the loser has to bend their head down and the winner places a finger on the top of it.

![Step 4](image2.jpg)
Step 5. The loser then has to guess which finger the winner has placed on their head. If they guess wrong, the winner changes fingers and the loser keeps guessing until they get it right. As a punishment the winner can slap the loser's hand as many times as they guessed wrong. If the loser guesses correctly on their first try, there is no punishment.