Khleng Chab Koun Moan / Eagle Catches Baby Chickens

Site of Documentation

Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

Description

*Khleng Chab Koun Moan* is a game of ‘Catch’ played by children living in both urban and rural areas of Cambodia. The aim of the game is for the Eagle to try to outwit the Mother Hen and catch the Chicks that she is trying to protect.

Who Plays?

The game needs a minimum of five players, although groups can be unlimited in size. Both boys and girls can play and it is most suited to children aged between 7 and 16 years.

Time and Place

This game usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes to play. It can be played at any time of the day as long as there is plenty of room to maneuver 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 10 players or more. The more players that participate in a game, the larger the required space.
Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

This is a game of speed, mental alertness and agility. As the Eagle, players need to be ready at all times if they are to outwit the Hen and catch the Chicks. As the Hen, players need to be aware of the Eagle’s impending attacks and be quick enough to fend them off as they occur. Players with long, strong arms that can be used to prevent the Eagle from getting closer to their Chicks will always have an advantage over others. The Chicks need to be good at running and be able to hold each other’s waists at all times, no matter how quickly their team mates move.

Popularity

Popular with children living in and around Phnom Pehn, this game is most often played around the time of the Khmer New Year in April. Children prefer playing the game at school where there are plenty of willing participants. Played for fun, most children were taught this game by their peers or older siblings.

History of the game

Enjoyed by generations of Cambodian children, *Khleng Chab Koun Moan* was traditionally played at night during Khmer New Year. At this time of year, children would build a bonfire in the game area and while it was burning, they would tease the Eagle by singing:

"Catch a baby eagle; play with a baby vulture,
Sparrows have many babies, I have only one,
Dig a hole and plant morning glory,
The rabbit hides as the morning glory grows,
A pair of candles, our Lord shelters us from above,
Raise your hands in prayer and ask grandma for the fire"

Once the song finished, the Eagle would approach the bonfire and say, “May I ask for the fire, grandma?” The Hen would then reply, “Catch the broken one” and at that, the game would begin. Nowadays, the game is played without a song and bonfire which has made it much easier to play in any surrounding.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First, two players need to volunteer to take on the roles of the ‘Eagle’ and the ‘Hen’. The remaining players will become baby ‘Chicks’.

**Step 2.** Once the roles have been determined, the players have to take their positions. The Chicks line up behind each other and place both their hands around the waist of the player in front, forming one long, linked line. The Hen then stands at the front of the line with their arms outstretched wide. The Hen must use their arms to try to fend off the Eagle as they attack.
**Step 3.** The Eagle stands facing the Hen and runs forwards and backwards, lunging to either side to try to get past the Hen and catch the Chick at the end of the line. The Hen must do all they can to stop the Eagle from getting past, moving backwards and forwards with each of the Eagle’s attempts.

![Image of children playing]

**Step 4.** As the Hen and the Eagle battle it out at the front of the line, the Chicks must hold on as tightly as they can to each other. They also need to avoid the Eagle’s attack and must run forwards and backwards without letting go of each other. If one of them loses their grip then they are disqualified from the game.

![Image of children playing]
Step 5. If the Eagle succeeds in catching the Chick at the end of the line they must use their best acting skills and pretend to eat their prey! After the Eagle has finished their ‘meal’ the game continues until either all the Chicks have been caught or the participants are too exhausted to play on.

Step 6. Players are free to request role changes at the start of each new game. If no players want to change, then the Eagle and Hen keep the roles from the previous round.

Rules

1. Chicks must keep holding onto each other’s waists throughout the game and work together to avoid losing their team mate at the end of the line.
2. Chicks that are either caught by the Eagle or lose their grip on the player in front are immediately disqualified from the game.

3. This game is played for fun! There is no penalty for the loser or prize for the winner.