

Is this the end of traditional British playground pastimes?

Section A

A survey has suggested that traditional pastimes are increasingly being banned at break times in primary schools. Number one on the list is the chasing game British Bulldog, followed by leapfrog and conkers.

Section B

Despite its name, British Bulldog is a game that does not involve animals, and is played all over the world in a number of variations. In its basic form it involves runners trying to get to the other side of the playground without being caught by the chaser, the 'bulldog'. If caught, they become a bulldog too, until there is only one person left: the winner of the game. 'Conkers', on the other hand, is genuinely British as it is a game that was invented in England. The players bring their own 'conker' – a horse chestnut attached to a thick piece of string that goes through the middle of the nut and is knotted underneath. Players pair up, wrap the string around one of their hands and try up to three times to hit the other person's conker by swinging the conker back and forth. They take turns doing this until one of the conkers is destroyed. That could be the end of the game or the winner could go on to play against others. There are different types of scoring methods in place. The game is also played outside the school playground, with a world championship taking place in England every year.

Section C

It will come as no surprise that people have had accidents resulting in a broken arm or leg while playing British Bulldog, or simply while walking across the playground when a game was taking place! It is also not difficult to imagine that many conker players manage to hit their opponent's hand rather than their conker. Horse chestnuts are very hard and being hit with one hurts, as many school children will tell you proudly.

Section D

Banning games is not something new. In the past, we have heard stories about schools banning tig and musical chairs. There is also anecdotal evidence that some schools have banned marbles and even hopscotch, duck-duck-goose and skipping. The main reason for forbidding these games is the fear of injury. Sometimes the justifications given for the ban are strange and perhaps not actually true. For example, tig, a chase game where the chaser catches a person by touching them (who then in turn becomes the chaser), may pass on germs. And conkers might also be a problem for children with nut allergies.



Section E

Sporting activities are also becoming rarer in the playground, often because there is a lack of staff available to supervise them. Apart from banning these, there are also more original

solutions, such as allowing students to play touch rugby only – a form of rugby where tackles are not allowed – and playing football with a soft ball rather than the traditional leather one. Having said that, these activities are often not popular with children, and this may discourage them from playing the traditional versions.

Section F

Your comments:

This is just ridiculous! Illnesses and injuries are part of growing up! *Sean, Watford*

I used to play all these games, and more. I think I split my lip once when I fell over during a circle game, but so what? It can't compare with the hours of fun I had with my friends. *Susan, Bournemouth*

I don't think it's wrong to question whether we should allow violent games in schools. After all, violence should not be tolerated in an educational environment. Perhaps this could lead to healthy group discussions involving teachers and pupils about rules and behaviour, but at the same time, it should not result in banning healthy running games such as circle, tag or chase games. Otherwise all P.E. and sports activities should also be banned on health and safety grounds, which would be mad. *Kiran, Cardiff*

Let's ban active playground activities. Let's keep kids inside classrooms during break times and pay extra staff to supervise them and keep them safe. Let's watch them become fat and very boring adults! *A. Watson, Sheffield*

Allowing children to play games that involve the occasional risk, such as British Bulldog, teaches them to make intelligent decisions about their safety. *Mohammed, Scotland*

Glossary

leapfrog: a game that children play, in which a child bends over, while others jump over their back. • **horse chestnut:** the nut of a horse chestnut tree (a large tree which has leaves with several pointed parts and shiny reddish-brown nuts) • **marbles:** a children's game played with small balls, usually made of coloured glass, in which you roll a ball along the ground and try to hit an opponent's ball