

## Children Play for Keeps

All games, except perhaps kissing, are competitive. Grown-ups try for an edge: they buy expensive, light, strong, perfectly balanced tennis rackets or golf clubs and take lessons from pros. Children jump right in with their individual advantages and disadvantages on display. They use whatever is at hand, including vacant lots and hand-me-down equipment.

Some games, such as kick-the-can, require no expenditure of any kind. It is played in endless variations all over the world: the keeper of the can tries to capture the others, one by one, until he has captured them all or until someone kicks the can and sets them free. In northern Quebec kids play a version called British bulldog. One player (possibly the bulldog) is at one end of a lawn, and everyone else is at the other. The first player must drag the others across a mid-field line. Each one dragged over becomes a member of his team. Finally only one opposing stalwart is left. That player (maybe he is the bulldog) is finally hauled across by everybody.

Quebec youngsters also play fox and hare in the snow. Americans call it fox and geese. A network



of trails is tramped out. The fox is in the centre in a safe circle. The hares are on the edge. The fox chases the hares who must stay on the trails. Those who make it to the centre circle are safe; those who are caught become foxes. Excitement grows as the hares try to remember who is now a fox.

In the simplest games the equipment is provided by nature. Horse chestnuts, for example, fall from trees. In *The Swing in the Garden*, Hugh Hood, remembered conkers as played in Ontario forty years ago: ". . . the large horse-chestnut tree standing on the front lawn, source for the boys along the street of strange, green, spiny balls that yielded pale lumps when split open, yellow-white nuts which darkened upon exposure to air, forming the fibrous casing we used to test in formal battles. We would attach these chestnuts to strong cords to play a game . . . [called] 'conkers,' a word that probably means just what it sounds like. The object of the game was to conquer your opponent's chestnut by splitting it with a blow from your own, swung sharply overhand with a snap of the wrist."

## Jump Rope and Other Rhymes

My mother and your mother  
were hanging up the clothes.

My mother gave your mother  
a punch in the nose.

What colour was the blood?  
G.R.E.E.N.

[As you spell it letter by letter  
you go around a circle of kids.]  
Out goes you.

I'm a little Girl Guide dressed in blue.  
These are the actions I must do:  
Stand at attention,  
Stand at ease,  
Hands on hips, bend your knees,  
Salute to the Captain, bow to the Queen,  
Turn your back on the washing machine.  
How many turns? 1, 2, 3, 4 etc.

Fudge, fudge, tell the judge  
Mary has a new baby.

Wrap it up in tissue paper,  
Put it on the elevator.

See how much the baby weighs — 1, 2, 3, 4 etc.

The wind, the wind, the wind blows high,  
Blowing [name the child jumping]  
through the sky.

She is handsome, she is pretty,  
She is a girl from Montreal City.  
She goes courting, one two three.  
May I ask who he will be? A, B, C, D, E etc.  
[She will marry the boy on whose  
initial she misses.]