

Extract from  
The *Wonderfool* Book of

# Pirate Party Games

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## About this 'ere Book

In this book there are no step by step instructions, lists of materials, directions on how to prepare, or suggestions of what to wear, for this is a book of ideas. The aim is to stimulate the imagination and bring the spirit of play to life with stories, anecdotes and historical facts about Pirates, Pirate life, and in particular, the games that Pirates played.

Most games played at parties were originally Pirate games: Some were games that Pirates would play to while away the hours spent at sea, hanging around on tropical islands trying to remember where they buried the treasure, or trying to find where some other Pirates buried their treasure. Other games were devised to hone the essential skills required of any good Pirate such as lying, stealing, fighting, seamanship, pillage and murder. No wonder children just love Pirate Parties!

I firmly believe that children learn through play, and even party games can and should contribute to a child's development and education in the broadest sense. Balance, coordination, creativity, quick thinking, presence of mind, imagination, self control, memory, team spirit and a whole lot more life skills are learned simply by fun and creative play, but don't spoil it by telling them.

I only remember going to one party as a child, although I probably went to many more. The birthday girl's mum, who was dressed like a gypsy, sat us down and told us a wonderful story about the fairies of Bombleton Hollow who spun magical thread that when woven into cloth brings good luck and happiness to whoever wears it. Last night they flew over the garden and dropped a bundle of magic threads that landed all over the garden. We spent the next twenty minutes collecting scraps of coloured wool from the garden in the firm belief that they were all enchanted and we would live happily ever after.

I discovered years later that in those days, before children were injected with every known plague, that if a child had a party, it was usually so all the other children could catch whatever was going around. "Better to get it over with while

you are young” went the wisdom of the times. So much for the magic threads bringing instant happiness!

What this does illustrate is that children have a vivid imagination. If we had simply had a competition to collect the most pieces of wool, we would have become bored, and I doubt that I would have remembered the game fifty years later.

So it is really important when playing these games with children that you tell them the story of the game first. A hopping race is just a hopping race, but once they know about the Horrible Hairy Frogs of the Gal Flappagoose Islands, they'll join in with enthusiasm.

Some games are only suitable for a specific age, but most can be tweaked to make them suitable for the age range at the party.

Hopefully you'll be inspired and will adapt the games and even think up a few of your own. Don't try and cram too many into one party, you'll only need a few, and a small number of well prepared games is far better than just cramming them in. Try mixing up a few lively games with some quieter activities, and do remember to tell children the background story of the game before it is played. They will get far more pleasure from playing it, and so will you.

There isn't an easy way to categorise the games so this collection starts off with a few old favourites, but in their original Pirate form, after which the games are vaguely categorised by starting with energetic noisy games, that get quieter and more creative towards the end, which is the way to organise a party – burn off some energy first, then settle down later on.

To ensure accuracy, the stories and anecdotes told here are researched from historical records held in Pirate libraries and archives from all over the world, or from transcripts of interviews with the descendents (mostly illegitimate) of real Pirates. They are intended to convey the spirit of Pirates and their way of life, but do remember that Pirates are consummate liars and storytellers, so you know that Everything written here about Pirates is absolutely true, apart from the bits that are pure invention ...

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In this extract, Pass the Booty is an example of a pirate version of a traditional game, and Captain Turner is an original game.

# Pass the Booty

Bet you didn't know that 'Pass the Parcel' was invented by Pirates!

Of course the Pirate version was a little different, as its origins come from the Parlay, which was a discussion forum to sort out differences between rival bands of Pirates instead of killing each other.

As prelude to discussions, all the Pirates from the rival bands sat in a circle while one played tunes on a squeezebox

Each band prepared a parcel which was passed around. You know the rules, when the music stops, whoever has the parcel removes a layer of paper, and receives a small prize like a gold coin or piece of chocolate. Of course Pirates had a great sense of humour, and couldn't help adding a few surprises, so when your turn came, you might get something nice to eat or a small piece of treasure, but you were just as likely to get a dead rat, or some toenail clippings, or even a live scorpion or tarantula, and get stung and scream horribly, which would make all the other Pirates laugh. Of course when people laugh together at something really amusing, they tend to forget their differences, which is why it was such a good way to get in the mood for a serious discussion. If only our politicians would play this game just before Prime Minister's Questions - they would make a far better job of running the country ...!



So make up a parcel with lots of layers, and put in some chocolate coins or small prizes, but make it a bit more interesting and Piratical. Older children will love it if you tell them to watch out for live snakes and tarantulas, and it adds tension and excitement to what in its usual format is often a dreary game. Instead of live snakes include a few forfeits written on parchment: 'Imitate a parrot saying pieces of eight'; 'dance a sailor's hornpipe'; or (the most popular) 'make a rude noise'. If you are feeling subversive sneak in something educational like having to recite the four times table, or spell sausage, or count to five depending on their age, before they get their treat. Don't forget to have Pirate music playing while the parcel is passed around, and clear up the paper afterwards as it can be a fire hazard if there are any naked flames around - like birthday cake candles.

# Captain Turner's Prize

Captain Turner was a wily old sea captain, much loved by his crew and all who sailed with him, and this game owes much to the weekly competition he organised aboard his ship the Tate.

Pirates as you know were great artisans and craftsmen, so in order to keep his crew occupied during long voyages, he organised a weekly art competition, with a generous bit of treasure as the prize. Materials for sculpture and painting were limited aboard ship, or on an island if that's where they happened to be, so the artists had to use whatever they could find. Every week they would hold an exhibition on the forecastle and Captain Turner would award his prize to the work of art he liked the best.

However Captain Turner had very strange taste when it came to artistic merit, and he would usually award the prize to an exhibit that had no artistic worth, and seemed to have little to do with art. The crew quickly got wise to this and started to create really silly exhibits made from anything they could find, and it was usually a sculpture that was nothing more than a pile of complete rubbish that got the prize. Just about anything could win, and the sillier the better: piles of rotting fish heads, an old tent with writing on it, a shark cut in half, and one cheeky Pirate called his unmade bed a work of art and put it in the exhibition.

The tradition of the Turner Prize still continues today, although now it is an annual event, and not only that; Captain Turner created an excellent Pirate Party Game too!

Unbeknown to the crew, and everyone else, all Captain Turner was really interested in was getting the crew to tidy up the ship, which was about as easy as getting children to tidy their rooms, so he tricked them into clearing up all the rubbish that was lying around and making it into a piece of art.

The Turner Prize is the last game of the party. Get the children to make a piece of art from all the rubbish that is lying about – bits of burst balloons, wrapping paper, half eaten cakes and sausages, party popper streamers and anything else they can find. Perhaps they can just pile it up on a paper plate, or on the floor at one end of the hall.

Make a great show of awarding a prize for the stupidest sculpture or most pretentious piece of nonsense, and guess what – most of the mess has been cleared up for you and everyone has had a lot of fun!

Three cheers for Captain Turner!