

Games To Encourage Imitation

~ Ruth Ker and Nancy Blanning

Adapted from *Please, Can We Play Games*, edited by Ruth Ker (WECAN, 2018)

There is much conversation in the field of early childhood education about some children's inability to imitate the example of the adults around them. The following games create opportunities for the children to imitate both the adults and their peers. Games can be a helpmate in our practice when we want to give opportunities to the children to find their way back to this natural intrinsic impulse of childhood—imitation.

It's important to be aware that the younger children may not want to go into the middle of the circle. This can be a painful experience for them socially so please

do respect their need to dream into the game and not be singled out at the center. However the younger children often like to participate on the periphery of the circle and the older children can delight in being asked to go into the middle. Some games can be adapted to circle format where the younger child can sit by the teacher or even on the teacher's lap at circle when it is their time to have a turn. It is always good for the adult to show the way when a new game is presented.

The King and Queen

Song and Game by Eleanor Winship

The king and queen are walk - ing, the king and queen are walk - ing,
'round our cas - tle walls, 'round our cas - tle walls. 1. O - pen the gates and
2. La la la la la
let them in! O - pen the gates and let them in! Now we all
la la la, la la la la la la la la la
dance and sing, now we all dance and sing.
la la la, la la la la la la la la la

Round I: Children stand in a circle holding hands while the King and Queen walk around them.

Round II: Children in the circle raise hands ("open the gates") so that the King and Queen may enter. All dance!

Note: This game, as written, uses traditional, archetypal language of "king" and "queen." In this sense, we can picture that these are individuals who guide and care for others out of their nobility. Yet this usage can be problematic in our times. A non-gendered and more inclusive wording can be used instead, like the alternative wording offered here:

*Two good friends are walking, two good friends are walking
'round our castle walls, 'round our castle walls.*

As the game progresses, "walking" can be replaced by skipping, jumping, hopping, twirling, etc.

Old King Cole

Traditional Nursery Rhyme, adapted by Ruth Ker, alternative version by Nancy Blanning

This is another imitation game where King Cole or “Old Friends Cole” (as a possible alternative wording) calls out new activity.

In this game, the teacher-selected leader (Old King Cole or Old Friends Cole) can call for whatever action they desire. Each time a new leader (or leaders) calls out a different action (jumpers, drummers, clappers, pianists, hoppers, pointers, running-in-place), the children do the action in their place around the circle. It is ideal if other children playing instruments and adult musicians can visit to classroom to play. The children then have an authentic movement gesture to imitate. This more complicated game is appropriate for the older children in the kindergarten.



Old King Cole was a mer-ry old soul, and a mer-ry old soul was he. He
called for his pipe and he called for his bowl and he called for his fid-dlers three; and he
called for his fid-dlers three; and he called for his fid-dlers three. Ev' - ry fid-dler had a
ver - y fine fid - dle, a ver - y fine fid - dle had he, and
we'll all fid-dle for Old King Cole, and be as mer-ry as he.

Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe and
He called for his bowl
And he called for his fiddlers three.

And he called for his fiddlers three.
And he called for his fiddlers three.
Ev'ry fiddler had a very fine fiddle,
A very fine fiddle had he.
And we'll all fiddle for Old King Cole
And be as merry as he.

Circle around together, one child in center

*Stop and face inward; King Cole beckons
three friends into the center.
King Cole and fiddlers do fiddle motion*

Everyone do the fiddle motion

Alternative wording:

Old Friends Cole were merry old souls
And merry old souls were they.
They called for their pipes
And they called for their bowls
And they called for their fiddlers to play.
Every fiddler had a fine fiddle,
very fine fiddles had they.
And we'll all fiddle for Old friends Cole
And be as merry as they.

* * *

Toes Tiddlying, Toes Tiddlying

Author unknown, submitted by Morgan Wade

This and the following are two fun body-geography touching games with rich language.

Toes tiddlying, toes tiddlying
Shin shanking, shin shanking
Knees napping, knees napping
Inchy, pinchy... inchy, pinchy
Whiney bulgy, whiney, bulgy
Breast berry, breast berry
Chin cherry, chin cherry
Moo merry, moo merry
Nose nipping, nose nipping
Eyes blinking, eyes blinking
Over the croon and away with it

Wiggle toes
Rub shins
Hands up and down on knees
Squeeze thighs
Rub belly
Hands crossed, up and down chest
Caress chin with right, then left hand
Soft rotation of mouth
Quick nip of nose 2 times
Blink eyes
2 arms raised, reach over shoulders and back again

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Brow, Brow, Brinty

Traditional, source unknown

Brow, brow brinty
Eye, eye winky
Nose, nose nebbly
Cheek, cheek cherry
Mou, mou merry
Chin chopper, chin chopper,
Chin chopper, chin

Tap forehead in rhythm with speech
Pointer fingers tap near eyes
Tap nose in rhythm with speech
Tap cheeks as above
Tap sides of mouth
Tickle under the chin