

# Games And Pastimes In The Past

Many of the pastimes that Irish people enjoy have been around for a very long time. Games include things like sports, board games and card games. Just like games, a pastime is something that people enjoy doing to pass the time. Pastimes in Ireland include playing Irish music, storytelling and taking part in céilí dances.



## Traditional Music and Dance in Ireland

Irish traditional music and dance is today enjoyed all over Ireland and in other parts of the world. It is often described as 'folk' music and dance, which means that it comes from the people.

Early written records mention famous Irish singers and harp players as early as AD 921. Folk songs and tunes were taught and passed down from one generation to the next without being written down.

During the Great Famine of the 1840s hundreds of thousands of Irish people emigrated. They brought their music and dance traditions with them to Britain, the USA and beyond.

Instruments that have been played for hundreds of years in Ireland include fiddles, flutes, harps and whistles. The Irish hand-held drum called a **bodhrán** adds great rhythm to the music.

## Irish Dancing

Communities came together at **céilís**, gatherings for dancing, which are still common events today. Set dancing also remains very popular today. This type of dancing involves sets of couples dancing together. It was inspired by a similar type of dancing from France.



You can click on the bodhrán to hear an example of some traditional Irish music.



## Games

Just like today, children have always enjoyed playing lots of different types of games. In the past in Ireland, children would have played playground games, some of which would have been quite similar to some of the games you still play today.



Here Mrs. Elsie Cullen from Dublin describes a game called 'Tig and Cock-a-Rooshkie' which she remembers playing in the schoolyard in the 1920's:

*"A crowd lined up at one wall and two stood in the middle, and then they would be called to come across and everyone would rush and the two in the middle would try to grab a few of them as they came along and that was it. It was great excitement to try and get across. They would always catch the slowest ones first, so I don't know when the game finished, probably when the master came out and said, "Come in, that's enough of that." I'd imagine the half hour lunchtime would be up by the time we'd finish."*

Here, Bernadette Marks describes some of the games she and her friends played in the 1940's and 1950's. She describes how the children used the local landscape to help spark their imagination:

*"During the 1940's and 1950's there was a wood near our house. All the children played in the wood, which some days was the "wild west" or others "the jungle" with Tarzan swinging from the trees. This depended on the latest film being shown at the local cinema. The wood also played the part of a skating rink when a pond was frozen in winter and at the bottom of the hill, depending on the season, was a football pitch. Hopscotch and Skipping were played*

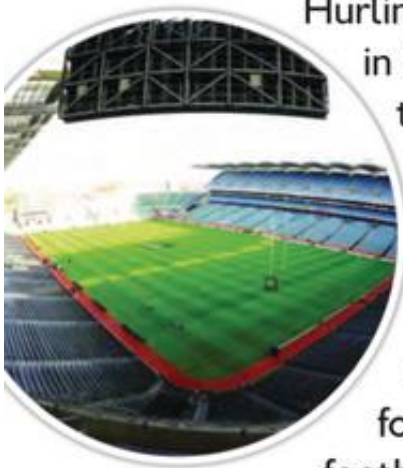
*on the road. At this time there was almost no traffic except for Mr Daly's car or Mr McQuillan's lorry with the funny-sounding horn. Mr Daly was the local vet and had to have a car to get about."*

Click on the picture below to see a short video showing some children taking part in different games in the 1950s. What different games can you spot? Are any of them like games you still play today?



## The GAA

The GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) was founded in Thurles, Tipperary in 1884. It was formed to revive and organise Irish games such as Gaelic football, **hurling**, **camogie** and handball so that more people all over Ireland could enjoy them and take part.



Hurling has been played in Ireland since ancient times. We know this because it is mentioned in myths and legends that go back to the time of the Celts in Ireland. There is a tale in which the hero Cúchulainn plays hurling at a place called Eamhain Mhacha, located in County Armagh. Gaelic football has also been played in Ireland for many centuries. It has links to older varieties of football played in Ireland, known collectively as *caid*.

Today, the GAA is active in almost every town and village all over Ireland. Its headquarters are in Croke Park, Dublin, where many big matches and All-Ireland finals are held.

## Wednesday: Activity A

### **1. Answer the following questions in your SESE copy:**

- a) Why is Irish traditional music and dance often known as “folk” music and dance?
- b) Why did hundreds of thousands of Irish people emigrate from Ireland in the 1840s?
- c) Name three instruments that have been played for hundreds of years in Ireland.
- d) Describe how the game 'Tig and Cock-a-Rooshkie' was played.
- e) Talk with your parent or grandparent and write a short paragraph about some of their favourite games or pastimes when they were your age.

### **2. A Game From The Past To Try Out:**

This is a game which children played in Ireland in the past. You might like to try it out yourself. You will need a small ball, a wall to throw the ball against and another person to play with.

- You stand facing the wall. The person you are playing with calls out one of the words listed below. You then must throw the ball against the wall, perform the action and then catch the ball again before it hits the ground.
- If you do so, you get a point, if you don't catch the ball you don't get a point. You have ten turns and see how many points you can get out of ten.
- Then it is your partner's turn to throw and catch the ball while you call out the words for the actions they have to do. The person with the most points out of 10 is the winner!

Here is the list of the words to call out and the actions:

Plainey- ball thrown against wall and caught again

Clappy- clap hands before catching ball

Roley – Roll hands and arms forward before catching ball

Poley- Roll hands and arms backwards before catching ball

Backey – Hands are clapped behind the back before catching ball

Right Hand – Ball caught in right hand

Left Hand – Ball caught in left hand

Under the arch – the ball is thrown under the right leg

Round the back – the ball is thrown from behind the back

Tip the ground- the ground is touched before catching the ball

Burley round – the player spins around in a circle before catching the ball.

## Thursday/Friday: Activity B

### **1. Answer the following questions in your SESE copy:**

- a) What does GAA stand for?
- b) When and where was the GAA founded?
- c) How do we know hurling has been played in Ireland since ancient times?
- d) Why was the GAA set up?
- e) What is the name given to older types of football which used to be played in Ireland?

### **2. My Local Club:**

Imagine you have been asked to design and draw a poster for your local GAA club. You might like to include things like the club crest, club colours or a picture of the jersey.

You might also be able to research and add in some facts or details such as the year the club was founded, details about the pitch where they play or information on successes or important matches in their past.