School-Yard Games

Construction Instruction

MY FAMILY moved from Cleveland, Ohio back to Pennsylvania in 1939, and there we attended Dean School, a one-room country school of 23 kids outside of Cochranton. I was in second grade, and my brother and sister, LaVon and Maxine, were third and fourth graders.

One winter day, after finishing lunch, we went outside to play and the older boys began building a snow hut. Pretty soon, more and more of us small fry were being allowed to join in, and the size of the hut increased with the enthusiasm of the builders.

By the time the hut expanded to three rooms, almost every kid in the school was involved.

When our teacher, Mrs. Darrow, rang the bell and came to the door to gather us in, she was amazed to see the spontaneous construction project. Very quickly, she donned her hat, coat and boots and was there with us, laughing and joining in the fun.

Tree limbs were brought in for roof timbers, and evergreen branches were thatched over them. Smaller boys then rode on the shoulders of older boys to layer snow on the thatching.

With the lunch hour now way beyond its limit, someone asked, “Mrs. Darrow, aren’t we going to have school this afternoon?”

Smiling as she continued to pack snow, Mrs. Darrow replied, “This

snow house will be our school lesson for this afternoon."

—Chet Cutshall, Willowick, Ohio

"Lemonade" Mixer

WHEN MY SISTER, Ruth Kraft, and I were kids growing up, in southern Illinois, in the 1940s and early '50s, we played a game called lemonade.

It was a game of tag with two opposite teams that began play with these responsive chants: "Here we come." "Where from?" "New York." "What's your trade?" "Lemonade." "Get to work and show us something, if you are not afraid."

The first team then started acting out an activity, and the second team tried to guess the action. If the answer was guessed, the second team chased the first team, and any tagged individuals would become part of the second team.

Team roles were then reversed, and play continued until all were on one side.

—John Gunter, Starkville, Mississippi

Manhole-Cover Races

IN 1943, when I was in seventh grade, a large cement area against the school building had six large manhole covers that guarded the chutes used to pour coal down into the basement for the furnaces.

We invented a game called kitty in the corner that required players to stand on the manhole covers. A whistle signaled the players to run to another cover before anyone else could get to it.

While waiting to run, I remember, we would pick at the tar that helped seal the covers. Someone discovered that we could pull it, stretch it and chew it! Whenever I smell charcoal, I think of the fun I had with that tar.

—Loretta Waddell, Mission, Texas

Favorite Jump-Rope Rhymes

IN 1949, rope jumping was the "big-time recess activity" of Annette Fisher when she attended sixth grade, in Foxboro, Massachusetts, where she still lives. This was among the jump-rope rhymes she recalls:

"Sister had a baby. She called him Tiny Tim. She put him in the bathtub to see if he could swim. He drank up all the water. He ate up all the soap. He tried to eat the bathtub. It wouldn't go down his throat."

EV KADLEC from Eden Prairie, Minnesota sends this 1925 jump-rope rhyme shared by her dear friend Ruth Thorud, who said she and her six sisters also chanted it in a circle even into adulthood, just for fun.

"Johnny in the sugar bowl, ha, ha, ha. Johnny in the sugar bowl, tra-la-la. I told Ma. Ma told Pa. Johnny got a whooping, ha, ha, ha."

AS SOON as the snow was gone in spring, in the late 1920s, recalls Belle Brown from Bristol, Connecticut, a jump rope was cut from the previous year's laundry line for jumping "before school, during recess, at lunchtime and after school." She remembers this rhyme:

"Mother, Mother, may I go out? All the boys are waiting for to take me out. First they give me candy, then they give me cake, then they give me 50¢ for kissing me at the gate. How many kisses did I get? One, two, three…"