

Sold to

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**THE LITTLE
BACKPOCKET
BOOK OF GAMES**

**FOR GYMNASTICS
COACHES**

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BACK POCKET GAMES

[bak-pok-it-geyums], *noun (pl)*

A quick-reference collection of activities for kids! They are so fun and easy to play that they can be “*pulled out of one’s back pocket*” at any time.

WHAT IS IN THIS BACKPOCKET BOOK?

How To Use This Book

Game Leadership Tips

Icebreaker Games

Active & Warm Up Games

Passive & Circle Games

Vault Games

Bars Games

Beam Games

Tumble Track Games

Trampoline Games

Pit Games

Conditioning Games

Quick Fun!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We've all had those moments while working with kids when your brain goes blank. Little Sally asks you if you can play a game before moving on to bars, or you've finished your beam circuit 5 minutes early and you forget every game you've ever played.

It is for these moments (and for any coach building their repertoire) that I assembled this book of Backpocket Games! It's meant to be a quick reference for games and time-fillers.

You will notice each game has been categorized into several easy-to-navigate sections, represented by a different coloured heading. Simple variations have also been listed, but I encourage you to invent your own!

My intention and hope is that this book will be starting point to jumpstart your creative juices. Try new games, or re-invent old ones. Take these and add a twist!

I would like to offer a generous thank you to all the people that have helped me fill my back pocket over the years. Of course, I'm always welcoming of feedback & new games. Send 'em my way at ali.stoffels@gmail.com! Play safe & have fun!

GAME LEADERSHIP TIPS

Ready to lead a game?

Consider the following:

When PLANNING the game:

- Safety first! What are the hazards & boundaries?
- Is the game age & developmentally appropriate?
- How many people are playing?
- Is it inclusive for everyone?
- How much time do you have?

When PRESENTING the game:

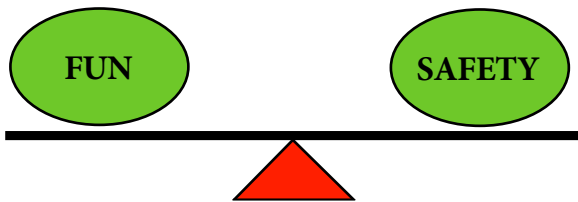
- Do you know the rules?
- Are you explaining the rules clearly & with demos?
- Remember your enthusiasm is infectious!
- Did you communicate the role of other leaders?

When PLAYING the game:

- Remember your role as the leader!
- Why not play along with the kids?
- Know how you'll end the game!
- Stop the game when kids are having maximum fun!
- How can you organize efficient clean up?

GAME LEADERSHIP TIPS

Strive for the **PERFECT BALANCE**



“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious. Play is really the work of childhood.”

- *Fred Rogers*

ICE BREAKER GAMES

WARP SPEED

Have the group stand in a circle. Sally will start holding the ball and will announce who she will throw it to by saying “Here, Tim” and tosses it nicely. Tim catches it and says “Thanks, Sally! Here, Kate”. This continues until everyone has had the ball and it returns to Sally at the end. Once you’ve gone through the group once, announce that the goal is now to see how fast the team can repeat the order! Make sure you time it! For the third time, take off 5-10 seconds and see if they can achieve that. Continue to set new goals, or try a couple of the variations listed below.

Variations: add in more balls or beanbags; add a weird object like a rubber chicken or foam cube; try going in reverse order; destroy the circle and try with the group scattered around the playing area; see how long you can go before the ball is dropped; try a combination of these variations or invent your own!

ICE BREAKER GAMES

NAME TAG

Review the names of everyone in the group while standing in a circle. One person is “It” in the centre holding half a pool noodle or similar tagging item. Call out anyone’s name to start. When someone hears their name, they must quickly name someone else in the circle before whoever is “It” tags them with the pool noodle. This continues until someone gets tagged before they have the chance to say another name. If they get caught, they are now “It” in the centre. Also - if anyone accidentally names the person in the centre, they become “It”.

Variations: moving the circle closer together or further apart will alter the games difficulty level; onces names are known, have the circle face outwards; instead of using names, have everyone pick an alias (maybe theme it - like different fruit, numbers, cartoon characters, etc.)

ICE BREAKER GAMES

PARACHUTE DROP

Divide the group into two teams and review names. Raise a parachute between the teams so that they cannot see each other. Each team will send one representative up to the parachute to stand opposite someone from the other team. Leaders should make sure to hold the parachute so that players cannot see who is on the other side. Count to three then drop the parachute. The first person to name their opponent wins. You can play for points, or to keep a continual mix of teams, have the non-winner join the winner's team.

Variations: if you don't have a parachute, you can use a tarp, or build up mats and flip the top layer down.

ICE BREAKER GAMES

TRUST CIRCLE

Frame this game by discussing the importance of trust, and stress that everyone must agree to build (and not break) the trust of their team in this activity. In groups of 5-8, have them stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder with their hands up like stop signs in front of them. One person is in the middle, straight like a board with arms crossing their chest. When the middle person is ready and sure the others are ready too, they will lean one direction (keeping feet planted). The circle will safely & gently pass their team member around the circle. Switch team members. See variations for increasing trust.

Variations: have the circle back up a little bit, so the middle person has to lean further; middle person can try closing their eyes. NOTE: not everyone will easily trust their group. Encourage trust, but do not push anyone to the point of panic - this can do more harm than good.

ICE BREAKER GAMES

SWITCHEROO

With the group in a circle, mark each spot with an item of some kind (bean bag, foam block, hula hoop, etc). One person is in the middle and they will say “Switcheroo if you _____” and then fill in the criteria. For example, “Switcheroo if you have a brother”. Anyone in the circle with a brother must leave their spot and take the spot of someone else who has a brother. At the same time, the person in the middle will take a spot, leaving a new person in the middle. Repeat as many times as you'd like with new criteria.

Sample criteria: Switcheroo if you... have been on a plane, like roller coasters, know how to play chess, are the oldest child, have a pet, can do a cartwheel, would ever go bungee jumping, etc.

Variations: have only a leader calling out ideas to avoid kids purposefully moving slow because they want to be in the middle.

ICE BREAKER GAMES

GET OFF THE BUS!

This game is pretty simple. Everyone starts standing on a line (a.k.a. on the bus). The leader is at the front pretending to motor along, and then dramatically stops the bus. Gesturing to one side, they will yell out “get off on this side if you _____” then gesture the other side and yell “or this side if you_____”. Kids have to make a choice and hop off the bus on the relevant side. Then they get back on the bus and repeat.

Examples:

Winter vs. Summer	Chips vs. Chocolate
Icecream vs. Cake	Baseball vs. Hockey
Cats vs. Dogs	Ninjas vs. Pirates
Math vs. Science	Rock vs. Paper vs. Scissors

Variations: tell them where to go instead of just hopping off the bus (“go to the white line if you ... or the blue line if you...”), this can allow you to add more options; make it active by jogging around in a line until you “stop” the bus.

ICE BREAKER GAMES

NUMBERS UP!

Divide into groups and hand out cards or slips of paper numbered 0 to 9 to each team. They can divide these cards amongst their team. From the other side of the floor, the leader will ask a question that can be answered with a number. Each team must send the person (or people if the answer is multi-digits) holding the correct number(s), to run to the leader. The first team there with the correct answer wins a point. The team with most points at the end, wins.

Sample Questions:

What year is it?

How many dwarves are in Snow White?

What is 8×7 ?

What is the total number of legs on 5 cats?

What day of Christmas brings swans-a-swimming?

Variations: set up an obstacle course to complete on the way to the leader.

ICE BREAKER GAMES

MINGLE

Everyone moves around the area with their hands together as if to swim through the crowd, singing “Mingle, Mingle, Mingle!”. The leader then shouts “get into groups according to...” and then adds criteria or a topic. The kids have 15 seconds to find those who are the same (if any). Go around and share everyone’s group before starting to Mingle again.

Get into groups according to...

- ... your favourite colour/food/animal/TV show!
- ... your age or grade!
- ... what you ate for breakfast this morning!
- ... how many years you’ve done gymnastics!
- ... your best subject in school!

Variations: change your criteria based on your theme; try allowing less time for them to find their groups.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

SMELLY ONIONS

Everyone sits in a circle, keeping one opening between two people. This is the “door” so mark it with pylons or blocks on either side. Next, name each participant “Ketchup”, “Mustard” or “Relish”. When you call out a condiment, all of those kids must stand up and run around the circle *one* time and then sit down in their original spot. The last to sit back down must go into the middle of the circle and becomes a “smelly onion”. Once there are several kids in the middle, yell “Smelly Onions”! They must exit through the door, run around one time and come back through the door. The first three through the door can go back to their original spots as ketchup, mustard or relish.

Variations: call multiple condiments at once; send all the smelly onions back when they go through the door; change the names from condiments to whatever suits your theme.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

SHIP, SHORE

One side of the floor is the “ship” and the other side is the “shore”. When you yell out one of these, the kids must run to that side. You can also yell out any of the following actions (be sure to tell the kids what they mean before you start):

Captain's Coming - stand in salute

Swab the Deck - on hands & knees cleaning

Man Overboard - lie on back and flail!

Submarine - lie on back with one foot in the air

Captain Hook - make a hook with hand & snarl!

Continue yelling out commands until kids are tired and all warmed up.

Variations: call multiple commands and have kids complete them in sequence; change commands & actions to suit your program's theme or use gymnastics terms (tuck sit, straddle, pike, etc.)

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

JUNK IN MY BACKYARD

Split the kids into two equal groups and assign them to opposite sides of the floor (their “backyard”). On each side, have an equal number of “junk” like bean bags or foam blocks. When the leader says “go” the kids must get rid of the junk in their back yard by placing the junk between their knees and hopping it to the other side. Then they can run back to their backyard and hop another piece over to the other side. Make sure kids are only transporting one item at a time! After 2-5 minutes, whichever side has the least amount of junk in their backyard wins!

Variations: If the kids drop the junk part way, they have to go all the way back; play with four teams - one in each corner; give different items different values like foam blocks are 2 points, bean bags are 5, etc.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

BALLOON KEEP UP

To start this game, tell kids that the goal is to keep the balloons in the air for as long as possible. No one is allowed to hit the same balloon two times in a row. The leader starts the game by throwing one balloon into the playing area. Kids will take turns hitting it, keeping it up in the air. After 10 seconds, a second balloon is added. The leader continues to add a new balloon every 10 seconds. The game is over when any balloon hits the ground. See how many balloons you can add before they fall!

Variations: Only allow participants to hit the balloon with a specific body part (i.e. elbows); allow 3 balloons to hit the ground before the game is over; make it a name-game by calling out a name when you hit the balloon up - only that person can hit it next.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

NOODLES

Split the group into two, with half on one line, and half on another line 10+m away. One person is “it” in the middle. The person who is “it” will repeat “spaghetti, meatballs, spaghetti, meatballs...” as many times as they see fit. However at any time, they can say “NOODLES!” and everyone needs to run across to the opposite line, without getting tagged. Once you are tagged, you are also it. Continue until only one person is left.

The person who is “it” is welcome to fake out the opponents by saying something other than “NOODLES” (i.e. “NUGGETS!”). If someone moves off their line, they are out.

Variations: Vary the distance between lines; have a few people “it” to start, and make it elimination style so that once you are tagged you have to sit out; only run from one side to avoid collisions.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

BONKERS

Suggested for kids age 7+. Everyone makes a BIG circle, with a “launching pad” in the middle (a block or an upside down bin). The “Bonker-er” is “It”. They will approach someone in the circle (the Bonk-ee) and hit them with a bonker (pool noodle) below the waist. Then the Bonker-er runs to place the bonker on the launching pad before racing to take the Bonk-ee’s place in the circle. At the same time, the Bonk-ee chases them to the middle to pick up the bonker from the launching pad. The Bonk-ee tries to hit the Bonker-er before he or she get to safety in the circle. If successful, the roles reverse and the Bonk-ee becomes the Bonker-er and must go place the bonker on the launching pad, then run back to the circle before getting hit.

Variations: Add more bonkers; if at any point the Bonker falls off the launching pad, a player can call back the person who dropped it to put it back - thus giving them a better shot of hitting them on the way back to the circle.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

ISLAND SWITCH

Place a landing mat in each corner of the floor (these are the islands). This game begins with one person “It” in the middle, and all other participants standing on any of the islands. When the person who is “It” yells “switch!”, everyone has to run to a different island without getting tagged. If they make it to a new island untagged, they are safe. If they get tagged, they also become “it” and get to help tag others when the switch is called. This continues until only one person remains!

Variations: place more than four corner mats around on the floor to allow for more “safe” zones; to allow more time for everyone to switch, have those who are “it” do three tuck jumps before they are allowed to tag anyone.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

LIKE THIS, LIKE THAT

You will need two leaders to run this game, which is kind of like Simon Says. Split the group into two and have them move to opposite sides of the playing area. One leader will be doing actions and saying “Like this, like this, like this..etc” and the kids must copy the action. However, if the leader then says “Like THAT”, any kids who do “that” must go across the floor to the other leader who is saying “Like that, like that, like that, etc.”. On this side, when the leader says/does “like THIS”, any kids who copy the action have to go back to the other leader. Play until kids get bored or until one leader is able to clear their entire side!

Variations: for younger kids, you can play just as “Simon Says” but when they are wrong, send them to the other side; be sure to speed of the pace to keep things exciting and active; try playing this on the beam!

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

KNIGHTS, HORSES, CAVALIERS

This old favourite starts with the leader explaining the partner actions for Knights (one partner kneels with one leg up for their partner to sit on), Horses (one partner on hands/knees with other partner riding on top) and Cavaliers (one partner is being held in the arms of the other). Put music on and have the kids run around and mingle. When the music stops, yell one of the three actions. The kids must find a partner to complete the corresponding action. The last group to assume the position loses and has to do 10 tuck jumps (or a different appropriate consequence).

Variations: Make up your own calls and actions to suit your theme; make the kids find the same partner every-time, or find a new one; after older kids may enjoy playing elimination style where once they lose, they are out - play until only one pair is left.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

HUNGRY, HUNGRY HIPPOS

Start by dividing everyone into teams of 2-4 people and give each team a hula hoop to place on one side of the floor. Spread out many items (bean bags, foam blocks, etc.) across the floor - this is the “food”. The players are the hippos, and when the leader says go, each team will send one hippo to grab ONE food item. They must bring it back to the hoop before the next team member can go collect an item. Continue to collect until all food is gone. The team with the most food wins!

Variations: don't forget to theme this game however you see fit; change up how the hippos move (jump with item between legs, one foot hops, crab walks, etc.); have the team members waiting do some activity (hold front support, splits, jumping jacks, etc.); have different items be worth different points.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

BUILDERS & BULLDOZERS

You will need plenty of pylons or similar items that can be knocked over for this game. Divide the group in two - half as Builders and half as Bulldozers. Scatter the pylons across the playing area. On “go!” all of the Bulldozers will use their hands (not feet - safety first) to knock over the pylons. Simultaneously, all the Builders will be attempting to put them back upright. Play in multiple short rounds, or one long round!

Variations: feel free to add a theme; add one neutral person to be “it” who can freeze anyone the touch - you can decide how they get unfrozen;

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

EVERYBODY'S IT!

This game is exactly as it sounds! Make sure the boundaries are clear. When the game starts, everyone will be trying to tag each other. If you get tagged by anyone, you must squat down. If two kids tag each other at the same time, they must play rock, paper, scissors and the winner can continue on. In the most active version of this game, when you are tagged and squatting down, you must watch the person who tagged you. If they get tagged, then you are back in the game! The game doesn't really have an end (unless one person tags everyone), so play until kids lose interest or time is up.

Variations: instead of squatting, have the kids do 10 jumping jacks before re-entering the game; play elimination style - if you get tagged you are out - and play until there is only one person left.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

TAG GAMES

There are so many variations on tag that you can play. Just make sure you set the boundaries and keep an eye on fair play! The basics of tag are that one person is “it” and they are chasing the other kids, trying to tag them. Depending on the game, the outcome of the tag has different consequences.

FREEZE TAG - when tagged, kids must hold still like a statue with their legs apart (alternative - hold a push up position). To be unfrozen, another child needs to crawl under them. You can also play so that kids can unfreeze themselves by doing 10 jumps or 3 push ups, etc.

TOILET TAG - when tagged, kids kneel with one knee up and an arm out as the flusher. To be unfrozen, another child must sit on their knee and press their arm down (flush sounds encouraged!)

LINE TAG - kids must stay on the lines of the floor (no skipping corners!). When tagged, they become a road block, and children cannot pass them.

ACTIVE & WARM-UP GAMES

TAG GAMES, CONTINUED

ISLAND TAG - kids lock elbows with a partner and spread out across the playing area. They are the islands and stay where they are while there is one person it and another being chased around. When the chased person links arm with one partner, the other partner is set loose. If they are tagged, they switch who is it and who is being chased. For more action, have more than one pair being chased & it.

BLOB TAG - One person starts as it. When they tag someone, they link arms and continue tagging others who then need to link on as well. This continues until the Blob tags everyone.

MAT TAG - spread out flat-bottomed mats and shapes across the playing area - enough so kids can jump safely from mat to mat. Everyone needs to stay on the mat. If they get tagged or step on the ground, they come to the side and do 5 sit ups before joining back in the game. Be prepared to end the game if kids start to become reckless or unsafe.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

EVOLUTION

Everyone starts off as an Egg with their arms in a circle above their heads. They must find and challenge a fellow Egg to a game of rock, paper, scissors (RPS). The winner evolves to become a Chicken. The non-winner stays an egg and will have to try again with a different Egg. Chickens walk around with hands tucked under their arms as little wings. They must find & challenge a fellow Chicken to RPS. The winner evolves to an Eagle (arms spread out as long wings). The non-winner drops down the evolutionary chain, back to an Egg. Eagles, when challenged by a fellow eagle, must play RPS. The winner remains an eagle, while the non-winner devolves back to a chicken. Continue for a set amount of time. See who is what creature at the end.

Variations: alter your creatures to fit your theme; add more evolutionary levels.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

SQUIRT

Everyone stands in a circle with a leader in the centre. The leader puts their hands together as if to hold a squirt gun. To start, they make eye contact with one player in the circle, point their fingers at them and call “squirt”. That person must immediately duck, as if to miss the water. The people on either side of the one ducking must turn to each other and attempt to squirt the other one first. Whoever is slowest is out and sits down. The person ducking stands up and joins back in the game. If anyone squirts or ducks at the wrong time, they are out. It will become tricky as players increasingly have to squirt over those who are sitting. When only 2 players remain, have a “squirt off”. Starting back to back, they slowly walk away from each other as someone tells a story. When they hear the word “squirt” they must turn around to squirt their opponent first!

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

NINJA

Set up various pieces of equipment for kids to hide behind, like spotting blocks, panel mats, etc. At one end of the floor there is a Guard of the treasure (a pool noodle or bean bag on the floor just behind them). The “Ninjas” (everyone else) will start at other side of the floor and their goal is to grab the treasure. The Guard’s back is to the Ninjas so when he or she says “Go” the Ninjas start sneaking to the treasure, careful to stay hidden. When the Guard says “STOP!” he or she turns around and calls out anyone who is visible. Any Ninjas called out must return to the start line. The game continues until the treasure is reached by a Ninja. Switch the Guard and start again!

Variations: Give it a theme - it doesn’t have to be ninjas and a Guard; vary the difficulty by adjusting the equipment - change the size of equipment or the number of pieces available to hide behind.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

FLINCH

Have everyone make a circle and keep a leader in the centre. The game begins when the leader either gently throws or fake-throws a ball to any of the players. If the ball is thrown, the player must catch it. If they drop it, they are out and must sit down. If the leader fake-throws, the player must not flinch (not even a little bit!!) If they flinch, they are out. Continue until only one person remains.

Variations: have more than one leader and ball going around; arms can go behind players backs; instead of being out, players can have a second chance, but the penalty is that they must kneel; play in a line or on a beam.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

QUICK SHUFFLE

With the group in a circle, give everyone a flat shape (or hula hoop) to stand on. Elect one person to come to the centre - leaving one empty spot in the circle. To start the game, one person shuffles to move into the empty spot beside them. Now their spot is empty and their neighbour has to move to that. Everyone must continue this shuffle as the empty spot moves around the circle. At the same time, person in the centre tries to take back the empty spot - if they get there first, they can stay and someone else goes in the middle. If they tie - the shuffle continues and the person in the centre must try again. You have to move quick!

Variations: with large groups consider having more than one empty spot and more than one person in the centre;

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

LOOK UP, LOOK DOWN

Gather the group into a circle - everyone must be able to see each person's eyes. The game begins with everyone looking down. The leader will call out "1, 2, 3, look up" and each person has to look up into the eyes of someone standing in the circle. If that person is looking directly back at them, both throw their arms up and die a dramatic death - they are out and sit down. If a player looks at someone who is NOT looking back at them - they are safe. It is imperative that players do not change who they look at (cause for automatic disqualification!). The leader will announce "look down" and the players look back at the ground. The leader starts again and repeats the pattern until 1 or 2 people remain as the winners!

Variations: Play in teams by having them stand in two lines across from each other (3 teams/lines in a triangle or 4 teams/lines in a square).

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

CUT THE PIE

This is a variation on Duck, Duck, Goose. Everyone sits in a circle and one person is the Pie Cutter. He or she will walk around the circle as the others chant “cut, cut, cut the pie!”. The Pie Cutter will choose a place to karate chop between two people in the circle. The people on either side of the chop must stand up and run opposite ways around the circle (remind them about safety when their paths cross). Meanwhile the Pie Cutter stands still with hands extended for high fives. The first person to run around the circle and tag the Pie Cutter wins and becomes the new Pie Cutter.

Variations: Alter the game’s name or Pie Cutter title to suit your theme;

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

MEMORY

Gather the group to make a large circle. Have them lie down on their stomachs and facing the middle. Split the circle into two teams (A & B). In the centre, lay out card sets of matching pairs - face down. The leader will call out one person from Team A and one person from Team B and then say "GO!". The players must then race to get up and flip over 2 cards at a time until they find a match. If they want to try a different card, they have to turn one of the other cards back face down. Whoever find the match first wins the point for their team and can bring the cards back to their spot. Continue until all cards have been flipped! The team with the most points wins!

Variations: eliminate the team element and just call out random names of those in the circle; don't allow players to try again - they are only allowed to turn over two cards each turn; instead of a circle, arrange the teams in 2 lines.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

GHOST

One or two players are chosen to be Ghosts. The rest of the group needs to scatter across the playing space and choose a spot to stand and close their eyes. The Ghosts will roam about the playing space and will try to haunt the people by standing close behind one player at a time. If the Ghost remains behind them without them knowing for ten seconds (counting silently), the ghost will tap them on their shoulder and they will sit down quietly for the remainder of the game. If a person suspects a Ghost is behind them they can ask, “is there a ghost behind me?” If they are right, the ghost should say, “yes”, then that person becomes a ghost. If they are wrong they are out and must sit down. Continue until everyone is either sitting or a Ghost.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

NOODLE PASS

You will need enough pool noodles (cut in half is best) for each person. Alternatively - you could try this with bean bags.

This game is essentially a series of challenges for passing one or more pool noodles around the circle. Start by passing just one pool noodle around with both hands. Next try with one hand. Next add in more pool noodles - start with two hands and then try one hand only. Up the challenge so that everyone starts with a pool noodle. Again, use both hands to start, then try with one. If your group is especially proficient, ask them to switch directions (someone will have to count down to the switch or set up a pattern). See what other variations they can come up with!

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

JAMACKWACK!

This can become a loud and funny game. Split the group in two. One half will be the very rare Jamackwack birds. Not only are they blind (eyes closed), but they only walk backwards and bent in half (holding ankles). The other half of the group will make a circle surrounding the Jamackwacks, holding hands. They are the Island that won't let the birds leave. Once the Jamackwacks have all closed their eyes, the leader will choose one opening to the circle - the only way for the birds to leave the island. When the game begins, the Jamackwacks will quietly manoeuvre to find the exit. When they find it, they are allowed to open their eyes & signal to their flock by calling out "Jamackwack!". The Island can rebel by making other noise as distraction. Once all the Jamackwacks are free, the groups can switch roles!

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

SMAUG'S JEWELS

Gather the kids in a circle and have one person to be “Smaug” in the middle. Smaug stands over the jewels - which is a bean bag, set of keys or something similar. They will be blindfolded and will wield a pool noodle to help protect the prize. The other kids will be in a circle surrounding Smaug and when the game begins they must take turns trying to steal the jewels! However, if Smaug tags them with the pool noodle (or with their other hand), they are frozen. Each player will make an attempt and the game is over when someone get the jewels, or until Smaug has frozen everyone!

Variations: instead of being frozen permanently, the players can be frozen for 30 seconds when tagged by Smaug; make it harder - the player must also return to their spot with the jewels - if they get tagged on the way back they are frozen and the prize is dropped where they are.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

FOLLOW THE LEADER

One person from the circle is selected to be the detective. They are asked to leave the circle and hide their eyes & cover their ears while the circle chooses a leader. The leader starts doing an action (like slapping knees, clapping, snapping, etc) and the detective comes back to the centre of the circle. The leader need to subtly change the action every 10-20 seconds and the group will non-chalantly change with them. The detective must look around - they have 3 chances to guess who the leader is. Remind the group not to just stare at the leader - this gives it away!

Variations: alter this to play “murder wink” - the idea is the same except instead of leading actions, the leader is the murderer and will secretly wink at others in the circle (or stick out their tongue if they can't wink). Once winked at, the circle members act out a dramatic death and watch as the detective attempts to locate the murderer.

PASSIVE & CIRCLE GAMES

OH DEER!

Split the group into two. Half start on one side of the floor as “Deer” and the other half opposite them will be “Life Needs”. Both teams start facing away from each other. The “Life Needs” choose ONE of the following options they would like to be this round (and do the corresponding action).

- *Shelter* - hands in a point above their head
- *Water* - hand cupped in front of their mouth
- *Food* - hands on belly

The Deer will also choose & do the action for one need. Once everyone has selected a need, the leader will say “GO!”. The Life Needs turn around and stay still as the Deer run to find a matching Life Need (only one Deer per Life Need). If they do not find their match, they become a Life Need for the next round. Repeat the step (choose new Needs) and watch the deer population fluctuate!

VAULT GAMES

RACES

You can do so many different kinds - crab walk, bear walk, wheelbarrow with a partner, jumping, running, etc. Set up and obstacle course for the kids to jump or climb over. Send one at a time and time them, or send two at a time in a face-off. Be creative!.

RUN LIKE A WHAT?

This very simple game can be pretty funny if you have creative kids. Each kid picks an animal and lines up at the end of the vault runway. As they run the length of the runway, they act and pretend to be that animal (i.e. running all fours while roaring - like a lion) then they have to run back and the other kids need to guess what animal they were pretending to be.

Variations: this game can also be played with jumps on a tumbletrack or jumping off a beam in the game "Stick";

VAULT GAMES

CHASE ME

To help children learn that they need to run fast for their vault approach, you can have one child chase the other down the run way.

SWITCH!

Set up a circuit and have the kids do it forwards in the usual way. But, when the leader announces “Switch!” then they need to do the whole thing backwards! For example, a forwards jump off a block switches to a backward jump on to the block. You can also have the kids go sideways, or try only one foot, etc. depending on the circuit!

LONG JUMP

At the end of a runway, set up a soft land mat. Have the kids run and jump as far as they can. Measure how far they get and see if they can beat their personal bests!

VAULT GAMES

RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

This classic game can be played on the vault runway. The leader stands at one end with their back to the kids, who are at the other end. When the leader announces “green light!” the kids begin running to the leader. When the leader yells “red light!” the kids have to freeze! The leader turns around, and if anyone is still moving they must return to the start. The kids can start running again as soon as “green light” is re-announced. The first child to reach the leader is the winner!

Variations: add in “yellow light” where kids have to move in slow motion; adjust the locomotion required - instead of running try crab walking, skipping, inch worms, etc.; alter the consequence of getting caught to completing a conditioning exercise before re-joining; have the winner be “it” for the next round.

VAULT GAMES

MOVING ISLANDS

This is a game that requires teamwork - this should be emphasized by the leader throughout the activity. Place two mats one in front of the other at the end of the vault runway. When the leader says go, it is a race to get to the other end, only stepping on the two mats. They will need to stand on one mat and then lift and place the other one in front of them. The only rule is that they are not allowed to step off the mats and the whole group must participate. Stop the clock when a mat (or participant) can touch the vault. If time, repeat trying to beat their previous time.

Variations: on the second run, teach about non-verbal communication by disallowing some (or all) the participants to talk; for short runways, or lots of time to kill, have them move mats there and back.

BARS GAMES

SINGLE BAR VOLLEYBALL

Place a parachute over a single bar (height of bar will vary based on the height of your gymnasts, but generally around eye-level for the kids works). Using a beach ball, kids can play “volleyball” over the bar. One team starts by throwing or hitting the ball onto the other side. Each side has three hits to get the ball back to the opposite team’s side. A point is awarded if the other team lets the ball drop, fails to get it over the bar after 3 hits, or if the other team hits it out of bounds (off the mats). This game works best with no more than 4 kids on each side of the bar. Ensure that all children are aware of safety precautions (bar wires, uneven surfaces, etc.).

Variations: use balloons for younger kids to allow more time to react to the ball; adjust bar height for added difficulty or ease; add more than one beach ball or balloon!

BARS GAMES

BEAN BAG TOSS

Set up three to five hula hoops on the dismount landing mats from a high bar (or low bar for smaller kids). Place some hoops close to the bar and some far. Inform the kids of the point values for the hula hoops - the further the hoop, the higher the point value (i.e. 1 point for the closest hoop and 5 points for the farthest hoop). Kids have to swing on the high bar with a bean bag between their feet and release the bag at the right moment to land in a hoop. No points if they miss all the hoops. Establish a certain number of rounds and whoever has the most points at the end, wins!

Variations: set this up on a low bar, but do glide swings (further the extension, the further the bean bag); a single bar at medium height could also work; change up the sizes and point values of the targets;

BARS GAMES

STRENGTH CHALLENGES

This game can also be used for conditioning. Spread the kids out so they have a bar to use (double or triple them up on a bar if needed). Kids can get points for completing each challenge and the most points at the end wins (or if as a group they achieve a certain number of points, they can collectively earn a reward). Here are some sample challenges - for timed challenges, be sure to set achievable time increments:

- Timed tuck hang, holding a ball on their lap
- Timed straddle hang
- Timed inverted hollow hang
- Timed front support holds (bar at thigh or knee height)
- # of skin the cats (through and back)
- # of consecutive pullovers
- # of ball passes between two people (hanging, no dropping)
- # of chin ups/leg raises
- # of hanging grip changes (over to under)
- Invent your own! Be creative!

BARS GAMES

GLADIATORS

You will need a pit bar for this game and it is not recommended for smaller kids. To begin, two kids hand from the pit bar next to each other, using which ever grip they want. The leader says “Gladiators ready... 3, 2, 1, go!” and on “go” the two hook legs around each other (no kicking!). The last one to fall into the pit wins. Play for points, for fun, or in “sudden death” elimination style. Be sure to speak to the kids first about how to safely fall into the pit, and that if their opponent calls to stop, then they must do so!

BEAM GAMES

FIRE, WATER, LAND

This game is played on a floor beam. One side of the beam is fire (marked with a red mat or similar visual reminder) and the other is water. The beam itself is land. When the leader calls out water, the kids must jump (with two feet) to the water side of the beam. Similarly, when fire is called, kids must jump over the beam to the corresponding side. When land is called, kids must jump with two feet on to the beam. If at any point a player fails to jump up with two feet, jumps to the wrong side or falls off of land when it is called, they are out and must step aside to watch the end of the game. The leader can increase speed as kids become more comfortable with the game.

Variations: play for fun and don't worry about eliminating kids when they would normally be out; let the winner be the caller the next time; change the names to suit the theme.

BEAM GAMES

CURLY, LARRY, MOE

Line kids up on a beam and name them “Larry”, “Curly” or “Moe”. Set up & explain a mini obstacle course on the beams (over/unders, jumping over a low beam 5 times, tuck ons, straddle overs, beam walks, etc - get creative) and at the end have a “prize” (a bean bag or pool noodle or a high five from a leader). When you shout a name, like Moe for example, all the Moes jump off the beam, complete the obstacle and try to be the first to get the prize (safety tip: make the prize available in an obstacle free space! Some kids like to dive for it!). Change up the obstacle course after everyone has tried it a couple times.

Variations: set up a course in another area of the gym - no need to stick to beam for this one; give different names to suit your theme, simplify the course for younger kids and make it more difficult (but still safe in a race) for more advanced groups.

BEAM GAMES

OLD FASHION RELAY

Set up an obstacle course on the beams including jumping over or under beams, maybe walking along one of them or doing bunny hops. Set two more teams against each other and see which group finishes first. Be on the lookout for cheaters, which are very common in relay games (and ruin the fun for those playing fair!).

MAKE YOUR OWN ROUTINE

Give the kids 5 minutes to invent their own routine. Be sure to offer criteria like a mount, dismount, a pose, a jump, a turn and/or a skill of their choice. Let them practice then have them show it to the group!

SIMON SAYS

The old classic, where kids copy the leader's actions while standing on beams. Kids should only copy the leader when they say "Simon Says" first before the action. If they copy incorrectly, they can be out, or they can move onto a lower beam or just keep going.

BEAM GAMES

CLASSIC STICK

An old favourite, “Stick” is a game that teaches kids the important skill of landing properly! The classic version of this game has kids lined up on the beam. Starting with a simple straight jump, kids jump one at a time (or all at once if you can monitor them all). If they can land on two feet and stick the landing (no steps at all, no hands touching the ground, no falling on their knees or butt), they are safe. If they do *not* stick, they get a letter “S”. Jumps progressively get harder (tuck, star, straddle, pike, half turn, full turn, backwards, like an animal, etc.) and if they don’t stick, they continue to get letters until the spell “S-T-I-C-K”.

Variations: invent new or crazy jumps; play in teams; vary the height of the beam; use more difficult beam dismounts; venture off the beams and try Extreme Stick on different apparatus like mini-tramps, floor blocks or more!

BEAM GAMES

BALL TOSS

This game works best if you have two beams that run parallel to each other. Put half the kids on one beam (team A), and the rest on the other (team B). The teams need to face each other. Review everyone's name in the group. To start, one person on team A will have the ball. They name a person on team B and toss the ball to them. If they toss the ball to the wrong person (not who they named), or have a wild throw, they sit on the beam and are out. If the person catching the ball drops it, they are out. The teams take turns naming and throwing the ball until there is only one team left standing.

Variations: play individual style, so you can toss the ball to anyone, not just someone on the opposite team; have more than one ball in play (safety first, though!); instead of being out, make things harder for that person like have them catch with their elbows or stand on one foot.

BEAM GAMES

QUICK LINE UP

Have the group line up on a beam and then number them 1 to 10 (or however many you have in the group), from right to left. Tell them their goal is to rearrange themselves in reverse order from 10 to 1 - without falling off the beam. They need to talk to each other and figure out how to safely pass each other while staying on the beam. If they fall off, you can make them start over!

Note: There are many techniques to pass each other, but the easiest method is usually when one person lies across the beam (with legs and body hanging off the sides) while someone steps over.

Variations: have them line up in alphabetical order or by birthdate; instead of having them start over, you can have them go back a step or two; try having them do it without talking; put a pad on the beam if they are struggling; have them try on a lower beam to eliminate fear of falling.

TUMBLE TRACK GAMES

DODGEBALL

Place a leader at either end of the tumble track, with all the kids spread out between them. One of the leaders will roll (not throw!) the ball down the tumbletrack and the kids need to avoid getting touched by the ball. If they get hit, they step off beside the tumble track. The leaders continue rolling the ball back and forth until there is only one person left untouched!

Please note, that as a leader you will need to be attentive to safety in this game and apply rules about personal space as needed.

Variations: have more than one ball going at a time; move leaders in closer as fewer kids remain; divide the tumble track in half and have two games going at a time (you will need one or two people in the centre to roll the balls back) - this can be a team challenge to see which side can last longer.

TUMBLE TRACK GAMES

JELLY FISH BOUNCE

I first played this game as part of a Finding Nemo theme program. Draw with chalk a series of “jellyfish” (blob shapes with some wavy lines hanging off the bottom) along the length of the tumble track. They don’t need to be equal distance or exactly lined up. Like in the movie Finding Nemo, the kids are fish that can only pass to the other end by jumping on the jellyfish (the blob part of the shapes). The kids have to make their way through without getting “stung”.

Variations: change up the locomotions - try running, one foot jumps, donkey kicks, backwards jumping... etc.; Count how many times an individual (or the whole group) gets “stung” and then re-try so have fewer stings; change up the theme - it doesn’t have to be jellyfish!

TUMBLE TRACK GAMES

LAST SECOND

This game is very simple, but fun to play! Essentially, just before the kid takes off for a jump, the leader will call out what type of jump they should do. They get one point if they actually manage to complete the jump and land on their their feet. You can play it off the end of a tumble track onto a mat or into a pit. You can also play it on the trumble track only with 3 prep jumps before the “Last Second” jump.

Variations: make it easier by giving them more warning or giving them a warning of 2 or 3 jumps you might call out; instead of regular shape jumps like tuck and star, have an animal themed round (sound effects encouraged!)

TUMBLE TRACK GAMES

PENNY ROLL BASKETBALL

This is a two player game. At least one player must know how to do a penny roll (also known as a front turnover or 3/4 front somersault - jump and rotate forward to land on your back, then return to feet) . One player has the ball and will be the “roller” while the other stands about 5 metres away with their hands clasped together to make a human basketball net. When both are ready, the roller will jump to their back, but *before* they land on their feet, they must toss the pass to their partner, who will move to catch the ball in their net. On the next turn, have the participants switch roles. Keep track of points - the team with the most points at the end wins.

Variations: vary the distance between players; don't allow the “net” to move - give them a hula hoop they must stay inside; change the ball to something else like a foam block or rubber chicken!

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

POISON BALL

A game played just a “seat drop war” with an added challenge. Two participants are on the trampoline facing each other and must stay on their side and repeatedly do seat drops (jump from feet to seat, feet, seat, feet, and so on). The leader then will drop a ball (“poison”) onto the trampoline. The participants must try not to touch the ball or take any extra bounces.

Variations: give out penalty points - for touching the ball, extra bounces or if they cross the middle - the person with fewer penalty points wins; play for an allotted amount of time or until a certain number of points have been accumulated; add extra balls (or bizarre objects like rubber chickens)

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

Two players are on the trampoline facing each other. Both will do three preparation jumps at the same time, followed by one of the following:

Rock: seat drop in a tucked position

Paper: seat drop in a pike position

Scissors: seat drop in a straddle position

Winners are determined as they are in standard Rock, Paper, Scissors games.

Variations: play one round or best two out of three; play tournament style where winners move on to the next round until there is an ultimate champion

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

CRISS CROSS

The trampoline is divided into four quadrants, with two players starting in diagonally opposite corners. The leader will call out “criss” or “cross” and both participants must jump accordingly. The first to make a mistake loses!

Criss: jump to the square beside you (left or right)

Cross: jump to the square in front or behind you

Players should be jumping at the same time, so should never be in the same box - if that happens it means someone made a mistake!

Variations: play one round or best two out of three; play tournament style where winners move on to the next round until there is an ultimate champion; consider adding in some new rules or jumps - shapes or turns or more!

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

CLASSIC ADD-ON!

This game is an old favourite. The game begins with player 1 doing three preparation jumps followed by a jump or skill of their choice. Player 2 goes next and repeats exactly what player 1 did, and then adds their own jump or skill at the end. Players take turns and continue adding on new jumps to the sequence. If a player fails to complete the jumps in order, they are out. Continue until only one player remains.

Variations: make the game harder by being strict about the rules - no extra bounces or pauses; apply guidelines to the types of jumps (to make them easier, harder or sillier!)

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

HOW HIGH?

Participants get 10 jumps and the leader will time how long it takes from the first take off to the final landing. The higher the jumps, the more time it takes! Remind participants that they must still be in control of their jumps or the clock will stop for safety reasons. The goal is to beat your previous time.

HOW MANY?

There are two versions of this game. First - see how many of a certain skill you can do in a row (swivel hips, back drops, etc.). Second - see how many of a certain shape you can do in a single jump (results are often hilarious).

TRAMPOLINE GAMES

CHANGE IT UP

This is a game of memory and thinking fast. Everyone must be able to see the trampoline and get on it quickly when it is their turn. The first person will do a jump or skill of their choice. The next person in line has 10 seconds to think of and perform a jump that hasn't previously been done. If they are too slow, or repeat a jump that's already been shown, they are out.

Variations: instead of being out, they have to do a conditioning exercise; play between two people, both on the trampoline at the same time; vary the time needed to think of a jump to make it easier or harder.

PIT GAMES

TREASURE HUNT

In this game, all the children hide their eyes while a leader hides objects (balls, pool noodles, laminated characters or similar things - though beware that small things like tennis balls are really hard to find!). Once everything is hidden the kids can jump in and start digging! Continue until they find the treasure!

Variations: if you know where an object is, but the kids cannot find it, you may wish to play “hot and cold” so they get closer!

HIDE AND SEEK

Same as the old classic, just in the pit! One person hides their eyes while the others bury themselves in the pit. Once hidden, whoever is “it” can carefully climb in to find their friends!

PIT GAMES

KNOCK OFF!

Place a spotting block or similar equipment in the centre of the pit (far from the sides). Two kids climb on and holding foam blocks - one in each hand. When the leader says “go!” they will attempt to knock their opponent off of the block using only the foam in their hands. The last person standing on the block wins the round!

Variations: use just one foam each, keeping two hands on it at all times; use two separate smaller blocks instead of one larger one; depending on the size of the pit, you can have 3 or more players battling at once!

PIT GAMES

MARCO POLO

A variation of the swimming pool game. Everyone starts in the pit. Whoever is “it” has their eyes closed and their goal is to tag someone else in the pit. When they aren’t sure where anyone is, they can say “Marco!” and everyone else must respond “Polo!”. If Marco thinks someone may be out of the pit, walking on the edges, they can say “fish out of water?”. If no one is out of the pit, the game continues. If someone is out of the pit, they are caught and become the next Marco.

PIT CASTLES & TOWERS

Always a hit! Children love building pyramids, towers and castles. Build a tower and have them knock it over! Or, better yet, build a tower then knock it over on top of them (with their permission, of course)!

PIT GAMES

SHARKS & FISH

The shark chases all the fish in this basic tag game. When the fish are touched, they can freeze (hands on head so others know) or you can have them climb out and do some conditioning exercises before joining back in.

COLOURS

Everyone is lined up at one end of the pit. Whoever is “it” is standing out of the pit above them, with their back turned. All the kids pick a colour. “It” will start naming different colours, and when a player’s colour is said they must sneakily start crossing the pit. At any time, “It” can turn around and chase after anyone who is crossing! However, if they turn around when no one is moving, they must then kneel (then sit, then lie down on belly). If a player is tagged before reaching the other end, they are “it” next.

CONDITIONING GAMES

TEAM HOLDS

Divide your group into teams of 3 or so. Choose a position to hold (straddle press on floor, chin hold on bars, L hang on parallel bars, leg holds, etc.). The first person from each team starts at the same time. As soon as the first person tires out and comes down, the next person from their team must start. When that person comes down, the next person starts. Continue until the whole team has gone and see which team can hold for the longest!

Variations: have team members do something different while waiting for their turn to hold; stay as one big group and keep track of total time - see if they can improve from practice to practice.

CONDITIONING GAMES

BINGO

This game takes some preparation. Create a bingo sheet with different conditioning exercises appropriate for your group's level and ability in each box. Ask participants to make any line(s) of their (or your) choice, get four corners, or an 'X'. Be mindful that if you make it a race to get BINGO, some exercises will be rushed and potentially not done properly.

Variations: make the BINGO squares so difficult that the kids will have to work towards earning their square over time.

CONDITIONING GAMES

HOLLOW BODY BRIDGES

Get the kids into strong hollow push up positions. Their hands can be on a line or on a low beam. Once everyone is sturdy, one participant will army crawl under all their team mates from one side to the other. Repeat until everyone has had a turn to go. Leaders will need to fix body positions as time goes on.

Variations: come down for a rest after each person crawls through; keep everyone up the whole time, but make it a race to see how fast they can get everyone to crawl through; throw a ball back and forth a few times instead of crawling through (works for rear support too); consider varying the height of their feet or hands.

CONDITIONING GAMES

PARTNER PASS

In pairs, have the kids lie down on their backs, head-to-head, body extended with arms up to hold hands with their partner. A ball (or block of foam) starts at the floor between the ankles of one partner. Keeping their knees straight, both partners must lift their legs and carefully pass the ball to their partner (this part happens right above their faces, so use a ball that will not hurt if dropped). Once passed, both partners lower their (straight) legs to gently tap the floor before lifting again to switch the ball back to the original person.

Variations: set a certain number of switches they must do, or see how many switches they can do in a set amount of time; don't allow their feet to touch at all then have them roll to their stomach and back before they lift again.

CONDITIONING GAMES

HANDSTAND CHALLENGES

This activity is for gymnasts who have mastered a controlled handstand. Each member of the group can get a piece of equipment to add to a mini-obstacle course to be completed while in handstand! It can be a hula hoop to move around, a small block to try to go up, a line to side shuffle along, a flat shape to pirouette on - it's up to the gymnasts to be creative and decide!

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Allow each participant to choose a conditioning exercise that the others must follow for 1 minute (or shorter/longer). Switch to the next kid after the allotted time. Leader may have to intervene if exercises aren't appropriate to the group's ability.

CONDITIONING GAMES

RPS CONDITIONING

Everyone starts at one side of the floor with a partner. The leader will announce a conditioning exercise (5 push ups, for example). When the game starts, the partners will play Rock, Paper, Scissors. The winner does their 5 push ups on the spot, while the loser has to run to the other side of the floor and do 5 push ups there before returning for another round of “RPS”. Change up the exercise after a couple rounds (sit ups, v-snaps, hollow body rocks, etc.).

Variations: change up partners by having the losing partner run back to a different winner than the one they were just at; have the winner to a completely different conditioning exercise (“winner does A, and loser does B”);

QUICK FUN!

PUSHY, PUSHY

Partners stand an arms length away facing each other, legs shoulder-width apart (can be closer for added difficulty) and hands up in a “high ten” position. On “go” players “push” their partner via high fives or high tens. They can also move their hands to avoid their opponent’s pushes. You are out if you step even the smallest step or if you touch your partner anywhere but their hands.

POKEY, POKEY

Partners stand facing each other. With one arm, they hold hands like they are having an arm wrestle - but with their pointer finger extended. On “go” the object is to poke the opponent’s body (anywhere appropriate). Players can move their feet and dodge a poke however necessary as long as it’s safe and they do not let go hands.

QUICK FUN!

THUMBS AWAY!

Another partner activity! One player extends an open hand, palm facing up. The second player places his or her thumb in the centre of their opponent's palm. When a third player (or leader) says "NOW!", the second player has to lift his or her thumb out of the way before the first player can grab hold.

GROUP KNOT

Stand in a circle of 5-10 kids. Everyone reaches to the middle and takes the hands of two different people - making a human knot. The goal is to untangle the knot without letting go. To make it harder, do not let them change their grip!

Variations: Have two groups race each other; eliminate the ability for some or all participants to speak; have one group member on the outside giving instructions and tips.

QUICK FUN!

TOE JUMPS

Originally a traditional Inuit game, toe jump is harder than it sounds! Kids will bend forward and grab their toes. Without letting go, they need to see how far they can jump! Be careful not to crush any fingers!

HULA HOOP PASS

Gather the group in a circle holding hands. The leader will have one hula hoop linked in the circle next to them and explain the goal is to move the hula hoop all the way around the circle without anyone letting go of their hands.

Variations: Time how long it takes to go one direction, then send it back the other way to see if you can beat your original time; send two hula hoops - one each direction - and see which one goes faster!

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