

Marbles



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History of Marbles

Marble games are perhaps nearly as old as mankind itself and were played locally from the early 1900s. However after the Second World War (1939-45), through the 50s, into the late 60s and possibly even the early 70's, playing marbles was all the go among most school boys during their early school years. Nearly every boy came to school with a few marbles in his pocket. The keener players often carried a bag of marbles; 'alleys' as they were more fondly called. A big factor promoting marble games during this period, was their increasing availability at a cost that was affordable to a much wider number of people. Prior to this, marbles were hard to come by and at best, were only purchasable by more well to do families.

There were a variety of marble games. Common names were Big Ring, Fish, Hole, Follows and a number of others not readily remembered.

A game could be played for 'fun' or 'keeps'. With a fun game, all marbles won during the course of the game were returned, so that each player left with the same number they started with. When a game was for keeps, you got to keep all the marbles won, or as it was said, 'scun' off the other player.

Some games involved only two players, but others like Big Ring could include any number of players. Big Ring was always popular because of this fact.





Agates



Baldys



Big Toms



Bots



Cats Eyes



Glassys



Little Toms



Honeys



Bloods



Blues



Rainbows

Marble Types

Agate	A marble formed from rock/chalcedony.	Little Tommy	A small Tom-Bowler.
Baldy	A ball bearing of varying size that was gained by visiting a garage or service station, to see if they had any old bearings taken from vehicles. If you had the knuckle strength to fire a sizeable bearing, they made good stickers.	Rainbow	Clearly named, because such marbles were streaked with rainbow like colors.
Big Tommy	Very large Tom-Bowler.	Tom-Bowler	A marble that was much larger than a regular size marble
Bloods	A multi-coloured china marble with the predominant colour being red/blood like; hence Bloods.	Tommy	Slang name for a Tom-Bowler
Blues	A basically blue coloured glass marble, with wavy whitish colour through it.		
Bots	These were taken from old bottles that came with a marble in the neck. These marbles acted as a stopper. Usually the bottle had to be broken to gain this marble like stopper.		
Cats Eye	Glass marbles with a variety of colored centrepieces that made them look a bit like an eye, hence likened to a cat's eye.		
Glassy	A very shiny, silver like clear glass marble.		
Honey	A honey colored glass marble, usually with a whitish wavy streak through it.		

Marble Lingo

Alley	Slang name for a marble.	Keeps	Game played where you get to keep the marbles won from other player/players.
Alley Bag	Small bag used to carry marbles.	Rules	Rules for playing marbles were quite flexible and varied amongst players. Usually, it was the proper thing to agree on the rules before you started playing a game. For example, it might be that swaps or changes were either allowed or disallowed. It was always important to get this sorted out from the start, otherwise the game could end in a big argument, with each accusing the other of cheating.
Changes	This was a term called out during a game if you wanted to change your Taw for another one in your pocket or bag.	Scun	Slang term used when speaking of marbles won or scun from another player/players.
Cheat/Cheating	The term was levelled against another player/players, if it was thought that they were not playing fairly, were ignoring the agreed rules of a game or fudging.	Sticker	A marble that could stick in the place of a marble that was the object of one's aim.
Cribbing	A form of cheating where a player didn't shoot from the given line, but cribbed (moved) forward a little to help minimise the distance of the shot to the targeted marble. Also, when playing a game such as Follows, not retaining the position of your marble but moving it slightly to make it more difficult to hit. Or moving your hand forward a little when taking aim at your opponent's marble.	Swaps	If agreed at the start of a game, this was a term you could call out when playing some games. It allowed you to swap the marble that was in play with one that was much smaller, making it harder for your opponent to hit your marble when he was attempting to do so.
Dribble	An attempt to slowly roll a marble close to another marble or line.	Tally	The number of marbles won by the end of a day, if you had been playing for keeps.
Fudge	A frowned on method of firing or shooting a marble	Taw	One marble chosen to be a player's main/regular shooting (firing) marble.
Fun	Game played for fun, which involved returning marbles won to other player/players when the game was over.		

Marble Trivia

Beginnings

The beginnings of marble games are uncertain. There are some who believe that they started in Egypt, from where they spread to the rest of the known world. It is certain that marble games were played by Roman children. It is understood that examples of marbles dating from around 4000 B.C., are held in the British Museum, London.

Cats Eyes

The popular and widely used Cats Eyes, owe their origin to Japan where they were invented during the 1950s.

Game Names

There are a multitude of names for marble games. For example what is called Ring may well be called Ringer or Big Ring. The description/name of a game could differ in other communities but the nature of each could well be very similar.

Language/Lingo

Terms used during the course of a game were wide and imaginative and like the rules and marble names, they varied considerably amongst different groups/communities. Fudging may simply be called cheating by some.

Marble Names

Names given to the different types of marbles; like rules, varied from place to place. A Baldy may be called a Steely by some. Honeys or Blues, were called Swirls, Spirals or Onionskins by others. Glassys might be called Micas because of their mica like sheen. The plain glass ones might be referred to as Clears. Names given to marbles often depended on how they were described by the dominant player/

players in an area. Hence, what they called them caught on and was generally accepted/used.

Marble Types

A wide variety of marbles exist. The range covers different sizes, colours and compositions. Materials from which they were made during early times of history included: clay, alabaster, marble, flint, carnelian, agate, onyx and wood. Later arrivals using more advanced methods of manufacture, were comprised of china, glass, steel and plastic.

Production

Marble making took a significant turn during 1846, when a German glass blower invented a mould which made it much easier to produce quantities of marbles. It caused marbles to become more popular, leading to the establishment of marble manufacturing factories sometime during the 1890s. This enabled marbles to eventually become more affordable, and to spread their popularity worldwide.

Rules

There were no formal or official rules for marble games. Rules for similar games often varied from country to country, locality to locality, even between different schools. More often than not, they were made up or agreed to on the day of play, by participating players.

Why Marbles?

It is generally thought that the term 'marble', to describe the round ball like objects in use, originated during the 1800s when marble chips were fashioned into the round ball shape. Hence the name 'marble' was born.

Rules of Play

Big Ring

When two or more players decided to play Big Ring, each agreed how many marbles they would place in the ring, and whether the game was going to be for fun or keeps. It had to be one or the other, no half between as some often tried to argue for.

With a game and players decided, a large ring was then scribed on the ground, using whatever was available to mark out a good clear circle. The participants then placed in the centre of the ring, the agreed number of marbles each was to contribute.

In order to decide who would shoot first, a line was drawn on the ground and everyone playing stood back from the line, at a distance of approximately 6 to 9 feet (2 - 3 metres). Each player then took turns at seeing who could roll a marble closest to the line. The one who got closest, earned the privilege of taking first shot at the marbles placed in the centre of the big circle. If two or more players seemed to hold equal position when rolling to the line, then those two/three players would roll again, until only one person was clearly the closest.

Once the first to shoot was decided, each player in turn (usually decided, by the ranking gained when rolling marbles to the line) took up shooting (firing) position on the circle line, and endeavored to knock one or more marbles out of the big ring.

There was a strategy in playing the game, as you needed to be careful that you did not set the marbles up for an easy shot for the next player. An easy shot was when a marble, or marbles had been knocked very close to the

line within the circle. This usually allowed the next player to easily hit the marble and knock it out of the circle, thus scoring a win.

Selection of the right taw was important when playing Big Ring. A taw was a marble that you favored as your number one shooting marble, because it had characteristics that suited a player's shooting style. Most players always wanted a very good sticker. A sticker was a marble that when it hit or connected with a marble that was the subject of one's aim, would hit the marble with sufficient force to knock it out of the ring, and hold the advantage of being able to stick in the place of the marble that was moved. When this happened, you were suitably set up close to other marbles for a second shot.

Whenever you were successful in knocking a marble out of the big ring, you immediately earned another shot. This could go on until you totally cleared the ring if you were an exceptionally good shot. This seldom happened, however there were players who were known to have achieved such success.

When the big ring was cleared of all marbles, the game was over. If the game was played for fun, then players collected their marbles until the number started with was regained. If it was played for keeps, each player went their separate ways and counted up the tally of marbles won.

Rules of Play

Fish

Hole

Another popular game was Fish. This involved scribing a fish shape on the ground, or if on asphalt or concrete, it was drawn using chalk. More than one player could play, though usually no more than six. Each player placed an agreed number of marbles in and around the fish, with every marble being equally spaced out. It was always determined up front whether the game was for fun or keeps. Like Ring, order of play was decided by each player rolling a marble towards a line.

The one closest to the line got to have the first shot. A line was drawn about 6 feet (2 metres) away from the fish, and from this line each player took their first shot. The objective was to knock a marble out of the fish. If a miss resulted, then the next shot in turn, was made from the position where your shooting marble came to rest, unless it stopped inside the fish. Then you had to return to the starting line for your next shot. If a marble was knocked out of the fish another shot was immediately gained. The player could continue shooting if they were an exceptionally good shot, until all the marbles had been taken.

When all the marbles had been cleared from the fish, the game was over. Marbles were then either returned to all participants or kept, according to whatever was agreed upon from the outset.

There were a number of variations for this game, but the main one involved making a small hole in the ground around which each player placed marbles. There were usually only two players, however more could play if everyone agreed. It could be one or more marbles from each player. The marbles were positioned evenly around the hole about a hand span distance from the hole. Order of play was usually decided the same way as with Ring and Fish.

A line was drawn on the ground anything up to 9 feet (3 metres) away; always approximations by simply stepping it out; one, two, three or more step distances. First shots were made from this point. The objective was to hit one of the marbles placed around the hole, and to knock it into the hole in order to win it. If successful, a further shot was gained. If you missed, when it was your turn again, your next shot was made from where your Taw marble stopped. Unless it actually stopped/rolled into the hole, then you had to return to the starting line for your next shot.

The game was over when all the marbles had been knocked into the hole. The outcome as to whether the game was for fun or keeps, would have been pre-determined.

Rules of Play Follows

This game was often the first choice when only two players were involved. More often than not, it was played for keeps. Also, it was the simplest of the marble games. All it involved was agreeing who would take first shot, then the one to start would shoot their marble on to the ground and the other player, still in the initial standing position would kneel to the ground, and try and hit the other player's marble that had been shot to the ground. It involved taking very careful aim. If you missed, then the other player then attempted to hit your marble, wherever it may have come to stop. This game could result in a lot of following before a player managed to hit the other player's marble.

Depending on what was decided, you may get to keep the marble you hit. It could be one, two, or three hits before you actually got to keep the marble. If you had a reputation for being a very good shot, then anyone who agreed to play a game with you, may say that they would only do so, if keeps applied after the second, third or more hits. Nobody liked to be easily scun by a player who was known to be an exceptionally good shot. Follows was the main game where you could call changes or swaps during the course of the game, to improve your chances of scoring a hit or reduce your opponents chance of hitting your marble. These concessions had to be clearly spelt out and agreed to before a game was started.

GALLERY



ALABASTER CLAY MARBLES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.



BIG TOMMIES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.



CAT EYES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.

GLASSYS



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.

LITTLE TOMMIES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.





BLUES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.

RAINBOWS



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.

PRE WORLD WAR II MARBLES



Courtesy Fred & Robin C.B.

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Contributors: David & Debbie Hibbert
Photographer: David Hibbert

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