

# SIMPLY MARBLE-OUS



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**I**MAGINE playing something that's hundreds of years old. Too weird, you say?

Well, you may be doing it already, without even realising it!

That's because if you ever play marbles, you *are* playing something hundreds, even thousands, of years old.

Of course your marbles aren't that old. But the *game* of marbles is. Back in the first century BC a young Roman boy who grew up to be the famous emperor Augustus

played marbles all the time — it was a popular game with Roman children of those days. They didn't use the kind we do now. Our kind hadn't been invented yet. But round pebbles, nuts and fruit-stones made great rollers — good enough for playing all types of marble games.

That was more than two thousand years ago. And people may have been playing marbles even earlier than that. Scientists exploring prehistoric caves have discovered small round objects. And the small

round objects, they think, might — just *might* — be baked clay marbles. They probably didn't roll perfectly, but well enough, perhaps, for cave play!

Much later, in the eighteenth century, someone had another idea. What about the very hard stone called marble? How about using small chips of that stone to make the little balls? It must have been difficult, but it worked! It worked so well that people kept making them. They started to call those little balls “marbles”. And the name stuck.

Some marbles today are still made out of stone, such as agate, or out of plastic or steel. But most marbles we use nowadays are glass.

Hmmm, you may be thinking, glass . . . But how does ordinary, boring glass become those perfectly rounded, beautifully coloured little balls?

First, the glass must be hot. Actually, it must be very hot. That's because when it's very hot, glass is soft. It's so soft that colours can be mixed into it.

That's exactly what happens. The colours go swirling in. Then the marble-makers cut the glass into little cubes, like miniature ice blocks. When the cubes have

cooled, they are sent through special rollers that shape them into balls. *Voilà!* Out come the marbles: cat's eyes; rainbows; glassies (clear glass marbles) . . . and lots of others besides. No wonder so many people collect them. (You can even look at photos of some people's favourite marbles on the Internet.) They shine! They sparkle! They're beautiful! They're ready to roll!



And all over the world marbles of many colours and sizes do roll. They roll in playgrounds, parks, footpaths, driveways — wherever children or adults are playing marble games. For some people, marbles mean serious business. These people practise so hard at marble games that they pack up their best marbles and head off to local, state or even national marble tournaments.

The object of most marble games is to get your marble to hit the other person's. What's the easiest way to do that? Just roll your marble by giving it a push with your fingers. You can also flick it with your first finger. But with some practice you can also “shoot” your marble the official way. That's called “knuckling down”.

### HOW TO KNUCKLE DOWN

1. Turn your hand over so your knuckles are resting on the ground.
2. Bend your first finger a little and rest your marble in the bend.
3. Bend your thumb back too.
4. Flick your thumb towards the marble and hit it.

Once you've mastered knuckling down, try shooting your marble towards another smaller marble. When you've got the idea of that, all you need is a flat outdoor surface, some friends to play with and, of course, marbles. Then *you're* ready to roll too!

Keep practising, and who knows? One day you may find yourself knuckling down in a tournament with other marble sharp-shooters. But even if you end up staying in the local park, the most important thing of all is simply to have a *marble-ous* time!



# PLAYING MARBLES

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IF YOU'VE NEVER played marbles, Countlings, here's a game to start with: it has been played since my grandfather was a champion.

## Setting up:

1. Draw a large circle on the ground — about three metres from one side to the other. You could draw the circle on a footpath with chalk, or scratch it in hard dirt with a stick.
2. Place 13 marbles in the ring in the shape of a cross; leave about 8 centimetres between each marble and its neighbours. Some people call these target marbles *mibs*.
3. To decide who goes first, everyone has a turn at firing their shooting marble — called the *taw* — into the ring. Whoever comes closest to the centre marble has first turn.



## Playing:

1. The players take turns shooting from anywhere on the ring, aiming to knock one of the mibs out of the ring.
2. If you knock any mibs out of the ring, you can shoot again *so long as your taw stays in the ring*. Your turn ends when you shoot but don't knock any mibs out of the ring or when your taw rolls out of the ring.
3. Players keep any marbles that they knock out of the ring.
4. The winner is the player who has knocked out the most marbles when the ring is empty.

You can play this game

- *for keeps*: each player puts some marbles into the centre at the start, and at the end everyone keeps the marbles they have won
- or
- *just for fun*: at the end of the game, everyone takes back the marbles they have put in.

There are plenty of other marble games, but this is a good one to start with. Knuckle down and have fun!