

Shmanners 528: Playground Games

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[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: [holding back laughter] And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove. What's so funny?

Teresa: [laughs] You!

Travis: 'Cause I couldn't find the right pillow placement!

Teresa: And yet you're looking at me, expecting me to giggle at you.

Travis: Well, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause at first, it starts as a sincere thing where I can't find the right pillow placement. And then I think, "It is ridiculous the way I'm behaving, trying to find the right pillow placement. I know: make it seem like it was a goof the whole time, and not like you're the princess in *Princess and a Pea* who has a hard time getting comfortable because you aren't meant to have a corporeal body. I'm meant to be an ephemeral cosmic being." Don't you think that about me all the time? You don't look at me and say—

Teresa: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Travis: "That man was not meant to have a corporeal form."

Teresa: All the time.

Travis: "He should be an ephemeral cosmic being."

Teresa: You're exactly right.

Travis: Beam? Being. Bean.

Teresa: [through laughter] Bean.

Travis: Should be an ephemeral cosmic green bean.

Teresa: Hooman bean.

Travis: A hooman bean. That's the problem! I'm a hooman bean. I should be a cosmic bean!

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And that's what we're talking about on today—

Teresa: [through laughter] No, it's not.

Travis: No.

Teresa: No. Hey.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Hey, most kids?

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: They're back in school. Yay...

Travis: But not our kids. We need `em to work the farms.

Teresa: [laughs] No, that's not true.

Travis: No. They're in school.

Teresa: But at this point, across the United States, most children are in school. And...

Travis: Our kids have got a new gaga court? Gaga...

Teresa: Pit, I think it's called?

Travis: That makes it sound like a gladiatorial thing.

Teresa: [laughs] I mean, it is a little bit! They're smacking each other in the legs with a ball.

Travis: I guess you're right. Are we teaching our kids gaga fighting? [laughs]

Teresa: Yes. Anyway, we've talked about playgrounds before.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Today, we're gonna talk about playground *games*.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Because—

Travis: The playground is where we spend *most* of our days.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Chilling out, maxin', relaxin' all cool. Playing some gaga outside of the school.

Teresa: We know from our previous show that playground *structures* vary widely, right? And so kids, people, have always been making up games.

Travis: Tell me. When you were in, let's say, elementary.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: What was the go-to playground game?

Teresa: Four square.

Travis: Yeah, okay! That was mine as well.

Teresa: We're not going to be doing that one today. [laughs]

Travis: Oh, really?

Teresa: No, not today.

Travis: If right now, you had to take a written test, how well do you think you could remember the rules of four square?

Teresa: Oh, not at all. Not at all.

Travis: The only thing I remember, at least at our school, you would enter the four square... port, quadrant? Quad? Whatever.

Teresa: Square?

Travis: At one, and work your way up if the people above you got out. Right? And four would serve, right? So four was like a power position to serve from.

Teresa: Okay. I don't remember doing that. I just remember you had to bounce the ball and catch it, right?

Travis: I think you just had to keep moving. It was like tennis rules, where if it bounced into your quadrant and you weren't able to return the serve, you were out.

Teresa: Yeah, but it wasn't like you weren't hitting it.

Travis: But I don't think you caught it. I think— Catching seems illegal to me.

Teresa: It was like a rebound-ey thing.

Travis: Well, you were serving it back! Maybe we *should* do four square in this episode.

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: They'd eat you alive out there, Teresa! If you tried to get into a four square court right now?

Teresa: [laughs] Well, Alexx didn't research four square, so that we wouldn't have an impartial referee for the correct rulage.

Travis: The one that always blew my mind was tetherball. Is tetherball in there?

Teresa: Mm, yeah. Tetherball's in there.

Travis: Tetherball's in there?

Teresa: No, not in here.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: No, in my memories, tetherball—

Travis: Tetherball is terrifying to me. Right? Because you could have a friendly game where it's like, "Aw, we're batting it back and forth. And if it wraps around, ahh, so be it." And then you have those people that are sending it like a comet.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And you're like, "I actually don't care that much. There's no way I'm putting my hand in the way of this! Like trying to stop a fan blade."

Teresa: I don't think that kids play tetherball anymore.

Travis: No, of course not! Look at it!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You're swirling a mace around! That's a morningstar; it's gonna take somebody out! That would knock a kid— Kids are very little. And this is— And tetherball? Knock them right off their feet, easy. You catch a kid at the right angle, they're flying off.

Teresa: [laughs] Hey, let's talk about some of the ones that [giggles] Alexx *did* research.

Travis: I'm saying, at least four square, very little chance— You might get a skinned knee. Tetherball? It's gonna take out your head, [laughs] if you're not careful. And Pogs got a lot at my school.

Teresa: Yeah, Pogs too, yeah.

Travis: 'Cause you could capture 'em. And the teachers are like, "I think it's betting? I don't know. You're not allowed to do it anymore."

Teresa: I mean, if you were nice about it, you could give 'em back.

Travis: Then what's the point?

Teresa: I guess you're right. We're gonna talk first about jump rope. Did you ever jump the ropes?

Travis: I want you to take everything you know about me as a person and think, "Is that the Travis kind of game?"

Teresa: [giggles] No, it's not.

Travis: No! What did it require? Aerobic stamina, coordination, not having a giant head [laughs] that makes you very top-heavy.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay, so how you play is you get some rope or some cord.

Travis: I did have to do Jump Rope for Heart.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And I remember pushing it to the limit, so I could get a hacky sack. And that sentence, "I did Jump Rope for Heart, and pushed it as hard as I could to get a hacky sack," is one of the most '90s things I've ever said.

Teresa: [giggles] Sometimes too— Which double dutch, I could not do. I was never very good at that. Usually, the idea is that you switch the people in and out through a rhyme that you're doing.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So you would enter in the jump, the rope, you would do a few jumps to the rhyme. And then you would have to leave, and the next person would come in and do more jumping to more rhymes, or whatever it is. And you would try to keep it going without getting tied up in the rope.

Travis: Now, I'm going to be honest. My initial reaction – unfounded, mind you – is that jump rope is not a game. Jump rope is an *activity*.

Teresa: But I just explained to you the game part.

Travis: But can you win? But can you *win*?

Teresa: Yes. Yes, you can. Because the person who gets tied up in the rope, like trips over it or whatever, they lose. So then the person who's left that hasn't done that wins.

Travis: So you keep cycling through, 'til there's only one left.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And that's how you win.

Teresa: You can, yes.

Travis: Okay, great. So you can win. Then it's a game. Okay, great.

Teresa: Okay. Okay.

Travis: I don't have a lot of experience with jump rope, as established.

Teresa: Okay. You just thought that it was an activity.

Travis: Just a thing you do!

Teresa: Let's go into the origin of the jump rope game.

Travis: So you know a rope? One day, a guy tripped over it, and he said, "Let me try that again."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Watch this."

And they said, "Woah, you jumped it! Can you do it again?"

And he's like, "I don't know, man. Set it up." And then— Same with— [laughs] Oh, no. Now, I can't think of it. When you go— Limbo. Same with limbo. Guy bumped into a bar, said, "Let me try again."

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: And then he did it. That would've been better if I could've pulled the word limbo right away.

Teresa: 1600 BCE. That's a long time ago.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The Egyptians.

Travis: Before checkers, even. That's what it stands for.

Teresa: Before checker— [laughs] Yeah. Used vines instead of rope, right?

Travis: Cool.

Teresa: And there's evidence of jump rope, the game, in medieval paintings of children. And then also across the world, we have the aboriginal people in Australia were also known to use flexible bamboo and vines to play a game that was very similar to jumping rope.

Travis: Now, I have played this before. And I remember, during a cultural fair, a version where you have the sticks and you bounce them, and you're kind of hopping between them. And they can smash your ankles.

Teresa: I thought that was associated with the Philippines.

Travis: Yeah. Polynesian, I believe, so yes.

Teresa: Yeah. Okay.

Travis: Can we all agree that the greatest innovation in jump rope technology was when they added those plastic bead long tube—

Teresa: Oh, to the cords, so it smacks.

Travis: And you would get the like, “Click, click, click, click.”

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: When it hits the ground. Oh, my God, that’s the best sound.

Teresa: Pretty cool.

Travis: It’s *so good*! Especially when somebody does it and they have beads, or jewelry, or something that will also jingle while they’re going. Oh, God! Rhythm of the city. It’s the rhythm of the city, you know?

Teresa: [laughs] So if *you* are playing a game like double dutch, for example, here’s some etiquette. Make sure that you’re taking turns; don’t hog the game. And be flexible with your rhymes, because sometimes the rhymes can be a little risque for school.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: Or maybe they have people’s crushes, names in them, or things like that.

Travis: Or maybe outdated.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Terms we don’t really use anymore.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: [gasps] "The name double dutch comes from 17—" No. I don't know that as true. It is the first result. "Comes from 17th century New York, then the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam where Dutch children played jump rope games with two ropes."

Teresa: Maybe!

Travis: Dutch—

Teresa: Is that an AI overview?

Travis: Yeah. Let me look at something that's real.

Teresa: [giggles] Try and keep your jumps relatively low, and land on the balls of your feet. That's always a good rule for jumping rope. It will be better for your ankles, and it will help you last a much longer time. If you're bringing your knees really high up, I think that is the problem I see with children learning to jump rope, is they feel like they are jumping *over* the rope. When really, you only have to lift your feet very, very shortly off the ground.

Travis: Yeah, you're stepping, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. It's more of a step than anything. [crosstalk].

Travis: "So the Dutch are credited with bringing it to North America in the 1600s, with one of the games evolving into double dutch. Girls were particularly attracted to it, with jumping becoming easier once they began to wear pantaloons in the 1800s."

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: Let's see. It—

Teresa: We've talked about pantaloons.

Travis: Indeed, we did. "It is widely acknowledged that modern competitive

double dutch originated in the United States among girls in predominantly Black urban communities during the 1940s and 1950s, who congregated on street corners to display a new rope trick and repurpose clothes lines as ropes.”
Amazing.

Teresa: Awesome. Here’s another game you can play with no equipment. Patty-cake! These kind of hand-slap games, right? They don’t have to be *exactly* patty-cake, but it’s *usually* the same sort of thing, where it’s clapping and then left to right hand, or front to back hand, or things like that. These hand-clap games have been around for a *very, very* long time.

Travis: This is another one I’m not good at.

Teresa: Oh, yeah?

Travis: The problem is— And I don’t know if this is an ADHD thing, or I don’t know, Travis is bad at things thing. But I can memorize stuff and do patterns, as long as I’m still doing the pattern. But once I lose it, it’s gone. You know what I mean?

Teresa: Huh.

Travis: Like, I can’t get back onto the track.

Teresa: *Oh*, okay

Travis: It’s like, “Oh, yeah. I’m uh— Uh, eh!” Because then my brain is trying to move to catch up with my body, and it can’t do that. Same with my mouth.

Teresa: So you have to start all the way over?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Or just stop. And say like, “I’m gonna go do other things that I’m good

at.”

Teresa: [laughs] Like I said, patty-cake is a very early one. The rhyme going, “Patty-cake, patty-cake, baker’s man, bake me a cake as fast as you can. Pat it, roll it, mark it with a B. Put it in the oven for baby and me,” right? And you can slap around for that.

Travis: You know what part of the market with “And with a B” is? This is true.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: There used to be communal ovens.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And so when you would bake a loaf of bread, you would need to mark it. I know this from sourdough baking. You would need to mark it in such a way that it could be identified when it was done baking as yours, ‘cause these were big communal ovens.

Teresa: And you wouldn’t want to steal somebody else’s bread.

Travis: Yeah. They would put multiple loaves in at the same time to bake, which is where the scoring and stuff that you see on sourdough loaves, where they crack open and that kind of thing we get in rustic loaves, was because of that. You would score it in such a way to create a distinct pattern.

Teresa: Very cool.

Travis: Then you’re like, “That one, with the leaf and the swirls around it, that’s mine.”

Teresa: Yeah! There are endless variations of the rhyme, and then endless variations of all the other ones. Like Miss Mary—

Travis: I don’t think you would mark a *cake*, though. You don’t mark *cakes*,

right? You wouldn't score a cake. Are you icing it before you're putting it in the oven, Mr. Baker Man? Because that's a terrible mistake. You need to ice it after it cools! You don't ice the cake and then bake it!

Teresa: No, I think that it's something else. Cake not in the same way that we think of cake.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: The game can be traced back to 17th century England. Patty-cake *specifically* is 17th century England.

Travis: But then it was Lady Patricia Cake, and that was a lot harder to say.

Teresa: The rhyme paired with the hand movements was thought to be a great way to teach very young children basic hand-eye coordinations, as well as how to clap their hands. Which is something that we teach babies very early.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And I think that the whole crossing of the mid line is really good for the babies.

Travis: You and I were doing this the other day, like bedtime while the girls are getting ready. And Dot looked over, and she was mesmerized. And she was like, "Now, do me." But she'd never done it before with me.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: [laughs] And it felt like she was trying to sneakily beat me up.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: 'Cause she'd like, clap, slap me in the chest. And I'm like, "No, no..."

Teresa: [chuckles] "No, that's not it."

Travis: "You gotta— Our hands gotta meet." She's like, "Oh, you got—" And I kept waiting for her to just start slapping me in the face, and like, "Like this?"

Teresa: In that vein, some of the etiquette regarding patty-cake is to make sure that you match the speed of the hand movements to the skill and age of the child that you are playing the game with, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It can get intense. You can go quite fast. I think that there's a really cool *Bob's Burgers* episode where they call it caking.

Travis: Well, 'cause they go to see the show.

Teresa: They go to see the show, and the whole thing is patty-cake.

Travis: Yeah. Now, if you *wanna* play slap wrestling, you can do that too. Which my brother and I and our friends—

Teresa: Slap...?

Travis: That's where you stand, facing each other with your feet shoulder-width apart.

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: And you're basically about if you put your hands not fully extended, and the other person put their hands out, your hands would be touching, right?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And the idea is, you hold your hands up, and the only two moves is you can smack their hands, right? Or you can move your hands away, if they try to smack you. And the first person to take a step forward or backward and lose their balance loses.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: So the idea is you can either shove them, like if you can make contact with their hands, then you can off-balance 'em, and they would step back to catch themselves. Or if you can move *your* hands fast enough, their momentum's gonna carry *them* forward, and they're gonna lose their balance and step forward.

Teresa: This seems like a McElroy special, AKA Taste My Steel. [chuckles]

Travis: No! 'Cause you're not slapping them in the *face*.

Teresa: No, I'm saying that like, I don't think that this is a game that other people played.

Travis: No, Taste My Steel wasn't even a real game. It was throwing a metal bat at each other.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But this was a real game.

Teresa: This was a real game that other people, other than the McElroy brothers, played.

Travis: I don't think we invented it. If we did, we're geniuses. It was great.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. When you are playing this game, one of the ways that you level up is you go faster and faster until you mess up, right?

Travis: Yeah. Hopefully, it's like a slow build up, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause that's fun to watch.

Teresa: It is.

Travis: Not fun to do. Fun to watch.

Teresa: And a lot of hand games, also you might add in counting to the end. There's a really famous TikTok of the *Bridgerton* actors playing hand-clap games in between takes. And one of the ones that they are doing is, they are adding in back hand slaps. And so they are going up to five or six until they start the rhythm again. And that's the easy place to get out, because you're repeating the same one over and over again.

Travis: Man, I'm looking up slap wrestling now, and it's just pulling up power slap, where people slap each other. That's not what I want! I want slap wrestling.

Teresa: Okay. Another game—

Travis: Well.

Teresa: What?

Travis: Before we do that.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: How about a word from another Max Fun show?

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

[ding-dong]

Janet: [over speaker] Friends, it's your captains Janet Varney and John Hodgman.

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John: We hope you've enjoyed your journey with us, and we look forward to traveling with you again soon. Please stay seated, until the podcast comes to a complete stop.

[ding-dong]

Ella: Hey, Alexis.

Alexis: Hey, Ella.

Ella: What animal has the most teeth?

Alexis: I would guess a shark.

Ella: A snail.

Alexis: No, snails don't have teeth.

Ella: They have thousands, and they are *freaky* looking.

Alexis: No, I don't want that to be true. Okay.

Ella: [giggles]

Alexis: Did you know that the hippocampus in your brain is named after the half-horse, half-fish sea creature found in Greek mythology?

Ella: I didn't know that, but doing animal trivia, and hippocampus isn't a real animal.

Alexis: Well, that doesn't matter on *Comfort Creatures*.

Ella: You're right. It doesn't matter at all. [laughs]

Alexis: *Comfort Creatures* is a cozy show for lovers of animals of all shapes and sizes, real and unreal.

Ella: If that sounds like your cup of tea, then join us every Thursday with new episodes on MaximumFun.org.

[ad break ends]

Travis: Now, I want another game.

Teresa: Red Rover.

Travis: Okay. Dangerous.

Teresa: Very dangerous. This was outlawed for *my* school, for a while.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: My elementary school, where we have had the— We had a great big field behind our playground. And we *loved* to play Red Rover, and it was all fun and games until somebody got clotheslined, right?

Travis: You get clotheslined. Or, if you really hit those arms hard enough, you're

gonna create kind of— You know like those clacky balls that you swing on a stick?

Teresa: [laughs] Where they smack—

Travis: Where it's like, suddenly you just pull two kids right into each other.

Teresa: You need at least six people to play, but you can have as many as you want. In order to start the game, players are divided into two equal teams and stand in parallel lines 20 to 30 feet apart, all of them holding hands.

So each team takes turns chanting, "Red Rover, Red Rover, send Travis right over," or whoever's playing, right? And the player who's named then runs and tries to break one of the links of the opposing team's handheld chain, right? If the player can break through the opposite team's handheld chain, then the player returns to their original team. I've also played it where you take a prisoner as well, you have to—

Travis: If you break the chain?

Teresa: If you break the chain...

Travis: Yeah, you— Yeah.

Teresa: ... you take someone back with you.

Travis: One of the people you broke.

Teresa: Right. That's not officially a rule.

Travis: Oh, it's not.

Teresa: No. I mean, all of these have their own kind of house rules, right?

Travis: See, I would say that should be a standard rule. Because then, there's strategy involved in it. If I could look at the kids who I think have the weakest arms, the weakest connection, right, and I could break them, but then I'm also having to take them back to my team. You know what I mean?

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Or am I gonna go for the people who are like, those two hands are locked together, that's vice grip, but I think I can break it. And then I'm bringing one of those strong people back over, you know?

Teresa: That's a good strategy! That's a good strategy. And so—

Travis: Let me play against some schoolyard kids now!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Actually, if I have to run— If I can slowly walk through them, and just keep walking until their hands break, I'm in it. I don't wanna run. Look at me. [laughs] I'm 42.

Teresa: So what happens is, you end up with one team with all the players, and then one team with only two players, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And when you finally break through those two players, that big team wins. We don't know the origins specifically of this game, *but*—

Travis: It was Clifford the big red dog.

Teresa: No?

Travis: That's what I've always associated with it too.

Teresa: Oh, really?

Travis: I can't be crazy. Red Rover? Red dog. Clifford the big red dog. It's what my brain always pictures when I hear the game Red Rover.

Teresa: Huh!

Travis: It's like in my head, it's just like, "And here's a picture of Clifford the big red dog. You're welcome."

Teresa: [giggles] Some sources suggest that English children used this as a taunt directed at viking invaders? The color red held great significance in viking dress, and symbolized strength, power, and vitality, making it a preferred color to wear in battle. A rover was also a name for a traveler, a pirate, or a thief. So the idea of calling a viking a red rover was a great way to poke fun at the people invading your village, I guess?

Travis: Well, I could also see where if you're looking at it like, you know, like a front line, or like the line of an advancing troop, right? And it's like, "You can't break through our lines."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of that being a very military-feeling metaphor, you know, of "This is the line." You know what I mean?

Teresa: So I guess this is kind of like the kids playing cops and robbers, right? Where like...

Travis: Maybe?

Teresa: The English were like, "You have to be the vikings, and we're gonna call you over." But then it doesn't make as much sense. There would be an opposite taunt, right? So like—

Travis: Well, but this is what I'm saying. Is if you were saying, well, then you would take turns. Now, *they'd* become the vikings. And you're calling the viking over.

Teresa: Oh. So in our eyes, we're always the good guys.

Travis: Yeah? Both in the game and, I think, metaphorically.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But it also makes me think of like, I think there was a scene in Troy where they sent out Achilles versus Hector. And it's like, "We're just gonna do a one-on-one battle." And it very much feels like, "We're sending our strongest guy over!" You know what I mean?

Teresa: Okay! I can get that. But also, another theory, which is a little more grounded but perhaps both are true, is that Red Rover is named for an 1828 steamboat of the same name that ferried passengers back and forth across the Hatchie River. So the chant was started as a nod to the boat ferrying people back and forth, which also makes sense because people going across the gameplaying field kind of feels like a ferry, and you take someone back with you, and...

Travis: Yeah, but did the boat have to break through a wall every time?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Do you think that evolved— Maybe just started like, "We're just gonna send people back and forth."

And then one kid was like, "Hey, I have an idea." [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Hey, do you guys wanna spice this up a little bit?" [laughs]

Teresa: I mean, maybe.

Travis: "What if we involved clotheslining, and possible trachea damage?"

Teresa: And that's where the etiquette comes in.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Playing Red Rover is less about following the rules, and more about making sure that nobody has to go to the hospital, right? So always play on grass or another soft surface, because people will fall over. When holding hands, truly hold the hand and not the wrist, because that is actually more dangerous, should there be a break. Because your hands have a weak point, right? But if you're holding onto somebody's wrist, you can easily break their thumb, or you can break their wrist bones, actually.

Travis: I would also say keep your hands down, and not like we're stretch out to like—

Teresa: Yeah. Not stretched out at the top.

Travis: So we've created a perfect kind of neck-height guillotine experience.

Teresa: Yeah. Also, don't lower down and try and trip the person. That's another strategy I've seen people do.

Travis: Oh, no.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: *No.*

Teresa: Where you take a knee, and you try and trip 'em as they go across.

Travis: [gasps]

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: Dirty pool! Dirty Red Rover.

Teresa: So it is possible to play this game and still be respectful and safe, but like, be careful. [chuckles]

Travis: Yes. You could do it— No. I'm trying to think of a— I was about to say like, "Holding lengths of rope to hold onto."

Teresa: No.

Travis: But then it's like, that's gonna be worse.

Teresa: Rope burn?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's gonna be worse?

Travis: That's worse.

Teresa: Here's another game. Jacks. We had to explain jacks to Bebe once, because she got a *Peanuts* book where Lucy is playing jacks, and she was like, "I don't understand what this game is." But it is where a player throws a small rubber ball up in the air, and attempts to pick up one jack with the same hand and catch the ball before it hits the ground. The retrieved jack is then transferred to the other hand, and the process is repeated until all the jacks have been picked up.

And again, you can make it harder by picking up more than one jack at a time. You can make it harder by having to bounce the ball around or something. There's a lot of different ways that you can just keep improving on the jacks.

Travis: Jacks and marbles and fighting tops, right, these all seem like, "And no one's touched these since 1953," right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It doesn't feel like— If I went to a schoolyard today and saw kids playing jacks, I'd be like, "Oh, no. I'm in the Twilight Zone."

Teresa: [wheeze-laughs] But it has been around a long time! It goes all the way back to ancient Greece.

Travis: I believe it. And I wouldn't be surprised to find out there are social clubs that get together and play jacks, like people do domino. I believe it. *I'm* saying...

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: ... that can you picture a 12-year-old rolling up to school and being like, "Guys! My mom and dad got us a new set of jacks! Let's play!"

And kids being like, "That's awesome, Doug!" Like, [through laughter] there's no way!

Teresa: Apparently, this may have also been called knuckles, or knucklebones.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Because instead of playing with small metal objects, you could play with sheep bones or small rocks.

Travis: I thought knucklebones was like a dice game.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Okay. Because I've heard about this in different period piece kind of stories, and everything.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And I always thought knucklebones was like throwing dice.

Teresa: That would also make sense.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: 'Cause when you rattle dice around the cup...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: ... they could sound bony.

Travis: But the second you said knucklebones, I was like, "Ah. It makes a lot of sense; they are kind of shaped like jacks."

Teresa: So it's always best, when you're playing, to walk through the rules of the person that you're playing with. You *can* play jacks on your own, but it's much more fun to make it a kind of competitive game where I bounce the ball, and I get one, and then *you* bounce the ball and you get one. And then I bounce the ball, and I get two, and now you have to get two, making it kind of like horse.

Travis: Horse? Yeah.

Teresa: Yes. Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So it's helpful to make sure that you both know the rules that you're playing by, and even if you might need—

Travis: And the stakes. Jacks for life! Ah, this is a game— Or jacks life and death!

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: "The winner leaves town, and never shows their face here again! And *I* shall marry Miss Amelia! Okay, so if I get one jack, you have to get a jack. Okay."

Teresa: You may also need an impartial judge, because there can be several close calls and near-misses, and you didn't transfer your hand, and the ball bounced already, and all that kind of stuff. You might need—

Travis: You can't catch it with your mouth.

Teresa: Yeah. You might need someone to arbitrate.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: The next one I want to do is hopscotch. Did you play hopscotch?

Travis: No... No—

Teresa: But you know what I'm talking about.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: The grid with the numbers on, one to eight or one to ten, are drawn where there are some of the numbers are in single profile, some are in two.

Travis: I always pictured it one, two, then three and four are side-by-side, five, six, seven eight are side-by-side, nine, ten. That's how I would do it, if I was drawing it right now. I don't know if that's regulation or whatever.

Teresa: I'm not sure that— I think that it's cultural.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Depending upon how you draw it out. If there's either three in a row that are single—

Travis: Like is it Salisbury steak or chicken fried steak? That kind of thing?

Teresa: [chuckles] Something like that.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Something like that. I've seen it drawn where there are three singles, and then the double, single, double, single, double. And then I've also seen it drawn two singles, and then double, single, double, single.

Travis: I could listen to you say, “Double, single, double, double, single,” over and—

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: I was *mesmerized*. There is something about that that was *very* hypnotic.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: “Double, single, double, single, double, single.” I was like...

Teresa: [through laughter] Okay.

Travis: I just got lost in it! I think part of my brain was trying to keep track of how many you said.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And the other was just hearing the sounds, and not turning them into words. So I was just hearing like, the “Duh buh, sing uh—” And I was like, I’m lost in the moment.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: What’s happening?

Teresa: The important thing about hopscotch is you need a marker. Marker as in a thing to mark the spot, like a rock or a bean bag or a bottle cap or something like that.

Travis: Yes. This is the part that I don’t understand. What is this, now?

Teresa: Okay. So depending on the way the numbers are drawn, a player may have to hop on one leg or two, right? And—

Travis: Double, single, double, single, double, single.

Teresa: [laughs] Yes. Yes. You start off the grid, right? Off the boxes.

Travis: You're making your own power, making your own food.

Teresa: You throw your marker to number one, okay? And you need to jump *over* that entire box to start your jumping, okay? Then, you have to turn around while still staying in the boxes at the end, whether it's a single box or a double box. You have to turn around and put your feet appropriately. Come back—

Travis: So if you're on one foot, you have to pivot on one foot?

Teresa: Or turn around, yeah, on one foot.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And then you have to come *back*, pick up your marker without falling over, and then jump back to the beginning, right?

Travis: Okay. So this gets especially hard when you get to the doubles, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because then you're jumping from one foot— Can you switch feet, like go right to left? Or you—

Teresa: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You can switch feet. There are some players who say that on your way back, you still have to skip the one that your marker was on. Some say that you don't.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And the way that you make this a *game*, right, is you have several people lined up, taking turns and getting up to ten. Or up to eight, however many squares you've made.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So that I start on one, and then you go on one. And then I go on two, and then you go on two. But maybe you messed up, so then you have to go on two *again*, but *I* get to move up to three.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Right? And you do that, all the way up. First one to the top wins. It is difficult. It seems like a simple game, but the throwing of the marker and the jumping in the squares—

Travis: What happens if I don't land the marker on the right square?

Teresa: You have to— You take another turn.

Travis: So if I— 'Cause ten is very far, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: So if I throw on ten, and I don't hit the box, then *you* get to go.

Teresa: Right. Then it's my turn, yeah.

Travis: Well, now we get into the challenge!

Teresa: And you have to stay inside the squares when you're jumping. If you jump on a line, or if the marker ends up on a line, it doesn't count.

Travis: You die!

Teresa: You stop it— No, you don't.

Travis: No. Okay.

Teresa: You don't die, *but*—

Travis: In the game of hopscotch, you win or you die!

Teresa: Well...

Travis: What? Wait. [laughs] What?

Teresa: Some sources think this goes all the way back to Roman training exercises.

Travis: Why? [laughs]

Teresa: Now, listen.

Travis: What did the Romans know about combat that I don't?

Teresa: In Roman-ruled England, Roman soldiers would train on hopscotch horses that were 100 feet long— No, courses, sorry. Hopscotch courses [chuckles] that were 100 feet long.

Travis: I knew what you meant. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] So the soldiers were expected to do the full course in their armor to approve their agility.

Travis: Okay. I guess at that point, they don't have the context of, "This is hopscotch." [chuckles]

Teresa: Yeah, probably not.

Travis: Where if it had *started* as hopscotch, and then a Roman general— Like, something from *Remember the Titans* or *Ted Lasso*. And they were like, “I got a great idea for how I’m gonna improve my Roman soldiers’ agility!”

And then they draw out a giant hopscotch course. And the Romans all just were like, “Uh, Coach, this is hopscotch!” But then they did it, and they got really agile!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That’s probably not what happened.

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Apparently also, the word “scotch” is derivative from the word “scratch.” So you would hop over the scratches that you made in the dirt, right? Making the boxes.

Travis: I wonder if there’s also a connection there— Probably not. But my brain also went to if you overshoot— Like, if you knock the cue ball in in pool, you’ve scratched, right?

Teresa: Mm, yeah.

Travis: So something about hitting the line or missing the box, right?

Teresa: Maybe!

Travis: Being like scratch, right? I don’t know.

Teresa: It’s possible. Make sure that you wait your turn while you’re playing, and you don’t trip over anything, right? Make sure the playing field is level and even, and so that you don’t hurt yourself.

Travis: A regulation scotch course.

Teresa: Regulation. And now, here's our last one.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Kickball.

Travis: Ye— Yes.

Teresa: Yes. You've played?

Travis: Like baseball, but kicking.

Teresa: Yes! Yes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Baseball rules, but kicking.

Travis: This one I've done. Yeah, this one I've done.

Teresa: And that's the whole thing. Baseball rules, but kicking. And here's the thing, right? Kickball was actually invented in Cincinnati in 1917.

Travis: Get out!

Teresa: I will not. I'm saying here, where they invented kickball.

Travis: Man, Cincinnati has given the world so many wonderful things. And some not-wonderful things, but some wonderful things.

Teresa: Here's the other half of that, the other side of that coin. It was invented for small and uncoordinated children. [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: Oh, that's why I'm so good at it!

Teresa: [through laughter] Yeah!

Travis: Well, not— I wouldn't say *good*.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But better at it than baseball!

Teresa: The idea was that kickball not only required minimum equipment, but kicking a rubber ball was *way* easier than giving—

Travis: Well, it's a lot bigger!

Teresa: Yeah, than giving a person a baseball bat.

Travis: And it's on the ground! You know exactly where it's gonna be; it's on the ground!

Teresa: Exactly. It was originally celebrated because it was an accessible sport for any child, regardless of athletic talent.

Travis: And still basically teaches you at least the concepts of baseball.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: So that you could enjoy the Cincinnati Red leagues more.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. My 1920, gym teachers across the country had adopted the game for their students, and it was being played in baseball fields all across the United States.

Travis: And then one day, a gym teacher picked up the ball and said, "But what

if I threw this at a kid *really* hard?"

Teresa: [laughs] Dodgeball?

Travis: Argh!

Teresa: Dodgeball was more like Red Rover, I'd think.

Travis: No, dodgeball is just when a gym teacher is like, "You know what? It's been a rough week, dealing with all of you."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Speaking of gladiatorial games, oh, my God. Dodgeball?

Teresa: Dodgeball.

Travis: *Whew!*

Teresa: What they need is a dodgeball association, like they have for kickball.

Travis: There's a kickball association?

Teresa: There's a world kickball association. Okay. So here are some of the rules, specifically. Do not argue with the other players. Kickball—

Travis: Isn't that true of most games?

Teresa: Yes... Yes.

Travis: Are they like, "We love it when players argue in golf"? Like, I think in general...

Teresa: But apparently, there are rules that if you argue, you get sent back to the bench.

Travis: Aw.

Teresa: 'Cause it's for young children, the idea, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: You don't get to play if you argue. Time out is something that occurs in kickball that isn't really in baseball.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: So make sure that everybody knows that you have, like, a signal for time out and things like that. And there is no sliding in kickball.

Travis: Is there crying in kickball? There's probably crying in kickball, considering it's for uncoordinated children.

Teresa: Maybe.

Travis: I definitely have cried when I played it before.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I cried when I played baseball too, though.

Teresa: But you can slide!

Travis: So I don't know what Tom Hanks was talking about when he was like, "There's no crying in baseball." I disagree, Mr. Hanks. I cried quite often when I played baseball.

Teresa: You can slide in baseball, but you're not allowed to slide in kickball.

Travis: And you gotta pitch on the ground. You gotta roll it on the ground. It's

not in the air, right?

Teresa: Yes. Well, we're gonna talk more about that next week.

Travis: What?

Teresa: We're gonna do an all-kickball episode!

Travis: Oh, my God. This was just the pre— Oh, this was the prelude. [chuckles]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Prelude to a *Shmanners*. Hey, everybody, thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we wouldn't be able to do the episodes. Thank you to our editors, Rachel and Gino, without whom we would not be able to make the episode. Thank you to *you* for listening. You're the jacks that we pick up when we throw the ball.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: Yeah. The ball is the episode. We throw the episode up in the air—

Teresa: The ball is the episode.

Travis: And we pick up the listeners.

Teresa: And you guys catch it.

Travis: And then we catch the episode.

Teresa: Oh. *They* don't catch the episode?

Travis: No. Why would the jacks catch the episode? They're inanimate objects.

Teresa: But the listeners—

Travis: The jacks don't have hands.

Teresa: But the *listeners* catch it.

Travis: No, we throw—
[thud]

Travis: Ah, I hit the microphone.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: The metaphor got away from me, but the microphone didn't.

Teresa: Keep going.

Travis: [clicks tongue] Um...

Teresa: [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: What else, Teresa?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What did I forget?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook Group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

And as always, we are taking your topic submissions, your ask *Shmanners* questions, your idioms, your slang. Please, send it all. Send it all to Shmannerscast@gmail.com and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single

one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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