

### **Pigs in a Pen**

This game has an odd and unsafe origin. This is a game my Grandmother played in the 1940s with 3 of her sisters and 2 of her cousins. My Grandmother grew up on a farm and they didn't have much money. So when her cousins came to play on the weekends, the girls invented a game to play without telling the adults what they were doing. This game is unsafe because it is played on a slanted tin roof 4–6 ft. off the ground. See (“Pig Pen Example” picture)

#### **Operational Rules (See Diagram 1)**

- A group of 5-8 players stand in the center of the roof.
- Everyone yells “Pigs, pigs in a pen!” Then they run to a corner of the roof.
- Only one player can be in each corner at a time, the 2 remaining return to the center.
- This is the end of the first round.
- Now only the 2 in the center yell “Pigs, pigs in a pen!” Everyone must run. If you are in a corner you have to get to a different corner, if you are in the center you must try to get to a corner before the others do.
- This is the end of round 2.
- Repeat this process.
- This process continues until the players become tired and decide to stop, or a predetermined win condition has been achieved.

- If you fall off the roof you are disqualified for the round and must go to the center, you do receive a point for this.
- If you bump or push someone off the roof you are disqualified for the round and must go to the center, you do receive a point for this.
- The person bumped off receives the corner and no point for falling off.
- If a player physically holds back another player, the player doing the restraining will be disqualified for that round and must go to the center, you do receive a point for this.

### **Win Condition**

- Every time a player is in the center, that player gets a point. Lowest score wins.

### **Alternative Win Condition**

- Whoever is not in the center after the last round wins.

My Grandmother claims that this was one of her fondest memories of her family growing up. While playing, you can feel an unrestrained happiness come over you as everyone begins to giggle and squeal, running from corner to corner. She says that no one really ever got mad about having to go to the center; they just wanted to get to the next round to try and get out.

This game was intended for players ages 4-8. I doubt that it could hold the attention of a group of teenagers or adults. It is especially dangerous for teens, adults, and senior citizens because a tin roof on a pig pen can only hold so much weight. Not to mention the gravity issue, falling from a height of 6ft. Not many elderly are robust enough to walk away from something like that.

In this situation I think it is much safer to bring this game down to earth, on a level playing field. The game can be played with this constitutive rule set, without the equipment (pig pen roof). All rules will remain the same with the substitution of a marked square on the ground, for the roof. All you need is to define 4 points for corners, and the lines that connect them. This will simulate the tin roof, and establish the boundaries need to declare a player disqualified for a round. The size of the boundary box will alter the dynamics of the game slightly, but all players will be affected by it equally. So the size of the boundary box is more or less irrelevant.

The key goal in this game is to get to a corner before it is taken. One strategy is to wait a moment once the rhyme has been said to see where everyone is going. Then decide what corner would be the easiest to run for. Another strategy would be just the opposite, as soon as you can move, run as fast as you can without looking around at all the other players. This can be like playing chicken, if 2 kids have the same strategies and chose the same corner. A third strategy could be after gaining a corner, never run to the corner diagonal to it. This will be the longest run out of all you options, and your objective in this game is to get from corner to corner as fast as possible.

“Pigs in a Pen” only cheep win would be to push another player off the roof or holding one back from reaching the corner. These are both covered and prevented by the penalty of disqualification, gaining a point, and being put in the center.

The best tactical advice I can give is to follow the rules. Be mindful of your boundaries. Just by stepping outside them, you loose the round. Try several strategies to find which ones work best against whom. Honestly, the age group that this game is

targeted to will not be thinking strategy. They will just be trying to find the corner that they can get to the fastest while having a good time.

The game was originally played on top of a pig pen in the country. It was created by family members, for family members. The rules are fairly basic, and easy to pick up if you have never played before. During game play, a player must make a choice as to where they want to run to. Due to this choice, “Pigs in a Pen” is a prime example of meaningful play.

# Diagram 1

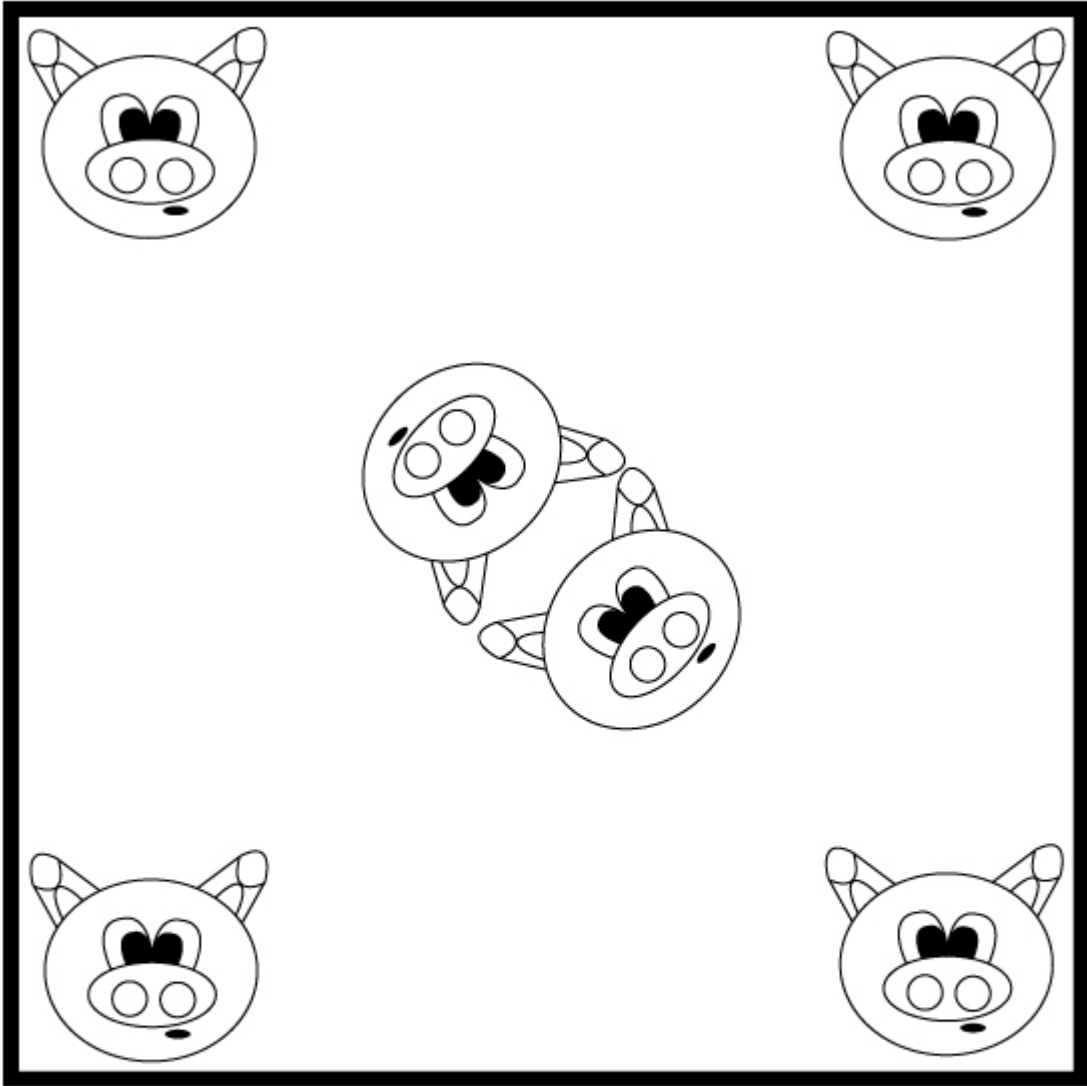




Diagram by Scott Stevens

## KEY

 = Pig  
(Player)

 = Pig Pen  
(Boundary Box)

# Pig Pen Example



Photo acquired from:  
<http://www.mofga.org/Publications/MaineOrganicFarmerGardener/Spring2006/RaisingOrganicHogsbytheTractorMethod/tabid/212/Default.aspx>

Yes, the game was originally played on the tin roof of the pig pen.

**I DO NOT RECOMMEND  
TRYING THIS.**