

Backyard Games Unit: What You Have & How To Use It

Designed to pair with the SPARK Event: The Backyard Games Invitational

Introduction

This unit organizes accessible, low-equipment backyard games to develop object control, striking, throwing, catching, accuracy, teamwork, and fair play. It is designed for middle and high school classes and is adaptable for large groups and limited space. The culminating experience is the Backyard Games Invitational—a celebratory event that showcases skills and knowledge in inclusive, student-centered stations.

Backyard Games in This Unit

- Cornhole
- Kan Jam
- Bocce Ball
- Paddle Ball
- Roundnet

What You Have

Teacher-facing resources organize instruction, assessment, and event management. Use or adapt these components to fit your class length, facility, and equipment.

- Unit Overview and daily lesson plans for each game with clear learning targets and success criteria.
- ASAP warm-ups and movement routines to start lessons quickly and safely.
- Inclusion strategies and equipment/language adaptations to support diverse learners.
- Skill Progressions that move from fundamental technique to small-sided gameplay.
- Assessment Toolkit: observational checklists, performance rubrics, quick self-checks, and exit slips.
- Peer Coaching Cards with cues for feedback and positive reinforcement.
- Reflection Questions aligned to social-emotional learning (SEL): teamwork, problem solving, and communication.
- Vocabulary and rules summaries for each game.
- Teacher Reflection prompts to capture what worked and what to adjust next time.

Instructional Media

- Sample 15-day unit map (3 weeks)—can be resized to 10–20 lessons.
- Printable station signs and score sheets for Invitational rotations.
- Skill cards and task cards for throwing, catching, striking, placement, and tactics.
- Leveled assessment choices (emerging, developing, proficient) with suggestions to individualize.
- Limited Equipment & Large Class ideas and setup diagrams.

Core Equipment by Game

Game	Standard Equipment	Low-Cost/DIY Substitutions
Cornhole	2 boards, 8 bean bags, tape for foul lines	Cardboard targets + taped holes; small fabric bags; poly s
Kan Jam	2 goals, 1 flying disc	Buckets or tall bins + frisbees; cones for a deflect zone
Bocce Ball	8 bocce balls, 1 pallino, boundary markings	Playground balls + tennis ball; chalk/tape lanes
Paddle Ball	Paddles, foam balls, net/lines	Hula hoops or cones for service boxes; paddles made from
Roundnet	Roundnet set + 1–2 balls	Hula hoop target or small rebounder + playground balls

How to Use It

Teach for readiness, then celebrate with the Backyard Games Invitational. Differentiate by space, equipment, and rules, and use short, frequent checks for understanding.

Suggested 15-Day Sequence

- Days 1–3: Fundamentals—throwing, catching, striking, placement, communication; safety and management routines.
- Days 4–6: Skill stations—target accuracy (Cornhole), throw/catch/deflect (Kan Jam), roll/placement (Bocce), control & rally (Paddle Ball), soft strike & positioning (Roundnet).
- Days 7–9: Small-sided games—short rounds with tactical mini-lessons (aim, force, angle, shot selection).
- Days 10–12: Event prep—roles, station practice, score sheets, rotations, fair-play agreements.
- Day 13–15: Backyard Games Invitational—run stations, record results, celebrate, reflect, and set personal goals.

Daily Flow (Prep → Set → Teach)

- Prep: Inspect space/equipment; post station signs and learning targets; model safety signals.
- Set: Quick warm-up (ASAP); demonstrate one or two key cues; assign roles (player, coach, recorder).

- Teach: Practice in short bouts (2–4 min) with progressions; use peer coaching cards and instant feedback; close with reflection or exit slip.

Assessment & Evidence of Learning

- Observation checklists aligned to learning targets (emerging → developing → proficient).
- Student self-check (confidence + next step).
- Peer coaching notes (cues used, one piece of feedback).
- Mini knowledge check on rules/tactics before Invitational.
- Performance rubrics during Invitational; students rotate roles to demonstrate skill and strategy.

Backyard Games Invitational – Implementation

- Create 5 stations (one per game). Each station has clear directions, safety reminders, and scoring.
- Organize teams of 3–5. Use a rotation schedule (e.g., 6–8 minutes per station + 1-minute travel).
- Roles: two players, one coach/recorder, one official (rotate each round).
- Scoring: use accuracy or rally points; emphasize sportsmanship and positive communication.
- Closure: class debrief using reflection questions; celebrate progress (personal bests, teamwork).

Safety

- Check that playing areas are smooth, dry, and free of hazards; use cones/tape to mark lanes and zones.
- Teach and rehearse equipment retrieval signals; students wait for the signal before collecting objects.
- Establish throwing/striking only toward targets; never across traffic; define safe deflect zones for Kan Jam.
- Practice spatial awareness: grid or lane systems; parallel lines for movement; communicate before moving.
- Stop/Freeze signals and clear start/stop routines for transitions.
- Use soft or foam objects when introducing skills; scale distance and target size to ability.

Limited Equipment / Large Class Ideas

Use stations with short time windows, score by attempts or accuracy, and substitute common items to keep all students active.

- Cornhole: Tape targets on walls/fences; draw concentric floor targets; share boards by creating multiple throwing lanes.

- Kan Jam: Replace goals with tall bins or hoops; use foam discs; add deflect zones marked with poly spots.
- Bocce: Use playground balls and a tennis ball pallino; play in taped lanes; score by proximity within a safe boundary.
- Paddle Ball: Rally with foam balls; mark service boxes with spots; play wall-paddle or 1v1 mini-courts.
- Roundnet: Use a hula hoop target and bounce off a low rebounder or mat; 3-touch rule with soft strike emphasis.
- Grid Management: Divide class into equal grids; students stay in their grids; rotate clockwise on signal.

Reflection Questions

- Which cue helped you improve accuracy or control today?
- How did your team communicate and solve problems at stations?
- What is one adjustment you will try at the next station/event round?

Appendix A: Invitational Rotation & Score Template

Use this layout to post at each station or print for teams.

Station	Round	Team	Score	Notes (cue used / fair-play)
	1			
	2			
	3			
	4			
	5			
	6			
	7			

Appendix B: Equipment Checklist

- Boards/targets, bean bags (Cornhole)
- Goals/buckets, discs (Kan Jam)
- Balls, pallino, lane markers (Bocce)
- Paddles, foam balls, service box markers (Paddle Ball)
- Roundnet set or substitutes, soft balls (Roundnet)
- Cones/tape, station signs, score sheets, pencils, sanitizing wipes