

## **Undergraduate dissertation prize for the Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Working Group of the RGS-IBG, 2008**

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The second year of the Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Working Group dissertation prize in 2008 attracted a high quality of undergraduate dissertations, resulting in a very strong competition. The entries were peer-reviewed by academic geographers and we are now pleased to announce the winners.

First prize went to Jessica Mayer, Department of Geography, Lancaster University for her dissertation entitled: “Have they gone bonkers? They’ve banned us playing conkers!”. The changing geographies of the primary school playground’. Her abstract highlights the central aspects of her dissertation.

### **Jessica Mayer, Abstract**

Numerous meanings and structures shape children’s use of their playtime in the primary school playground. The primary school playground is the place in which notions of childhood are controlled and monitored. Recent increases in risk anxiety have led to the emergence of a risk society, and perceptions that the world is becoming more dangerous have tightened the rules and restrictions placed upon children. This study explores the way in which changing notions of childhood and risk have not only shaped each other, but have changed primary school playgrounds and practices in recent generations. The research executed in two UK primary schools is reported upon. Several research methods were triangulated, using participant observation techniques and focus groups with children, as well as interviews with both children and adults, to generate and collect information. While in a small number of respects playtime has remained unchanged, strengthened concerns for child safety, the changing social construction of childhood and the threat of ‘blaming and claiming’ were seen to influence the changing nature of playtime for children. The effects of this on children’s lives, as well as on their future adult lives, are explored.

Second prize went to Tom Rutherford, Department of Geography, University College London for his dissertation entitled: ‘Questioning the country childhood idyll: parenting and children’s safety in three Kentish villages’.

We will soon be looking for entries to the 2009 competition before the closing date of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009. For more details, please contact: Dr. Lorraine van Blerk (l.c.vanblerk@reading.ac.uk) or Dr. Ruth Evans (r.evans@reading.ac.uk), University of Reading.