HOW TO SET UP A BOARD GAME CLUB IN YOUR SCHOOL

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at The Dark Imp

THE DARK IMP

WHY YOU NEED BOARD GAMES IN YOUR SCHOOL?

- Board gaming is inclusive. Anyone can play. All ages can play together. Many disabilities can also be catered for. Learners can compete on a level playing field with staff. With the right games, strength, age, physical ability and prior knowledge will give you no discernible advantage. The structure and rules of games appeal to many who find more free-flowing activities challenging, helping them interact and develop friendships in a comfortable, safe environment.

- Playing games improves memory formation and cognitive skills, increases processing speed, develops logic and reasoning skills, improves critical thinking, boosts spatial reasoning, improves verbal and communication skills, increases attention and concentration, teaches problem solving, develops confidence and improves decision-making.

- The bar to entry is very low. Board games don't rely on any special skills or expertise and you don't need to have played a hundred different games to be able to teach someone how to play one.

- There is a huge amount of variety within board gaming. The types of experience you have while playing games, the differences in mechanics, themes, artwork, characters and components are truly mind-boggling. Different games require different skills and knowledge for success. There are games to suit everyone.

- Board games are portable, easy to store and quick to set up. Grab a game from the cupboard and get playing in minutes. There is no long-term commitment, so it doesn't matter if the group changes each time it meets. Each play of each game is a complete experience in itself. Board games fit easily around the school day. Select a game by player count and time available.

- Board games can be played over and over again - an unlimited resource. This replayability gives a really good return on investment. Tabletop gaming is not weather-dependent. A good board game library provides excellent indoor play options on stormy days.

- Board games increase interaction and boost relationships. When playing games, players focus on one another, but within the safety and structure of the game. To be successful, they learn to communicate effectively in order to accomplish their objectives.

- Playing games can increase awareness of others. Players learn to truly listen to obtain information about other players. The timbre, pitch, tone and volume of the voice gives indications of how they are feeling about their moves.

- Playing games teaches competitiveness within a limited domain. Everyone gets used to experiencing defeat; games involve failure on a manageable scale.

- Playing games can increase our consideration of and respect for others. With the fast pace of turn-by-turn action in board games, learners can quickly see the impact of their actions on others and feel the potential repercussions.

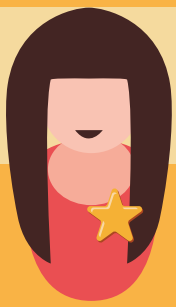
- Board games provide learners with a challenge. Performance in games is improved by experimentation. Mistakes are remembered and learned from. Players learn that the time taken on refining their strategy and game-play will reap benefits in the future.

- Playing games has proven health benefits as it increases laughter and reduces stress, which boosts the immune system and lowers blood pressure, and puts young people in a good frame of mind for learning.

HOW DOES A BOARD GAMES CLUB WORK?

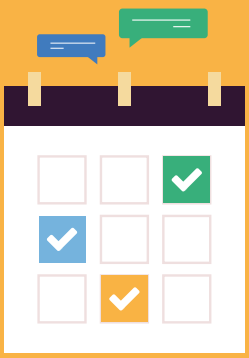
Your board game club can be created to suit your school. All you really need is a pile of good games and somewhere to play, ideally with large tables. Your club could run at lunchtimes, after school or even over breakfast. Choose a time that fits well into the school day and will give as many learners as possible a chance to participate. If possible, aim to find a regular 45 - 60 minute slot. This will give learners enough time one longer game, or several shorter ones. If time is limited and you can only squeeze in 30 minute slots, make sure your board game library is well stocked with shorter 'filler' games.

Find enthusiastic staff to get involved and play games with the learners, but train up student gamesmasters to teach games. Board game club offers opportunities for student leadership and responsibility. As your club grows, your team of student gamesmasters should also grow.



Reward gamesmasters for welcoming and helping new members to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

Plan club meetings properly - avoid having a pile of games that learners fight over. If you want a free-flowing games club, implement a system where you or a responsible gamesmaster acts as 'librarian'. Club members can decide what they want to play, then collect the game - 'check it out' and the librarian can share any specific instructions related to the care of that game. Alternatively, plan the games that you'll play in each session. If you have several copies of a game (e.g. card games), teach the game to the whole group, before spitting into smaller groups to play. Alternatively pick a theme for that session and set up games on each table. Pre-assign student gamesmasters to each table to lead the games.



Also look for opportunities to take games outside the scheduled club to really become a board game school. Find a way to open up your board games collection so that more learners can access it. Run a 'pick up and play' break-time board game library staffed by student gamesmasters. Look for opportunities for your club to host special events such as game nights with parents, game corners at school fairs and drop in sessions during parents evenings. Place light games strategically around the school to increase opportunities for learners, staff and visitors to play during the day.

BUILDING YOUR GAMES LIBRARY

Board games are so much better than they used to be, so abandon your preconceptions. The choice and quality available is astonishing. The rise of crowdfunding has had a huge impact on tabletop games, sparking a surge in innovation and allowing hobby game designers to get their creations out into the world. In the same way that social media has driven a shake-up of traditional journalism, so has crowdfunding forced the big game publishers to get creative.

This isn't a renaissance of board gaming; it has *never* been this good. Inventive mechanics, clever interactions, interesting themes and beautiful components will draw you in and get you hungry for more. Several thousand new games are published every year. Sadly, most people don't realise this because we still see the same sad old titles in major shops. Suppress the urge to only acquire mainstream games - Monopoly isn't going to excite anyone, and you won't fit it into the school day!

Grab a copy of *The Board Game Family* by Ellie Dix and browse the appendix of suggested games, or search for recommendations on Board Game Geek, the online forum for hobby game players. Avoid flooding your games library with tatty donations and the contents of the local charity shop. While you may get lucky once in a while, you'll reduce the draw of the club if the games are shoddy. Downloadable 'Print and Play' (PnP) games provide excellent options for schools on tight budgets.

Time indications on boxes can be really helpful, but be aware that most of these have been based on adults playing. Some young people make decisions more quickly, so games may not take as long, but if there are distractions in the room, games could take a lot longer! Take age guidelines with a pinch of salt. Check whether the age is restricted due to content or complexity. Publishers often underestimate children's ability and may also inflate age guidelines in order to attract adult gamers.

As the club grows, get regular feedback from members about which board games they love and why. This will help you to develop your games library to suit your group.

HOW TO TEACH GAMES

Learn how to play a new game when you're on your own. It is almost impossible to read and understand a rule book when under pressure from a table of expectant players. And for players, there is nothing more frustrating than watching someone read the rules for 20 minutes before you can get started. YouTube 'How to Play' videos provide a useful resource alongside rule books.

Plan how you are going to teach the game. The slicker the teaching of the game, the better. It is usually a good idea to start with the aim of the game and the victory conditions. You may also need to give a quick thematic overview – explaining the context and setting. Explain turn structure and some of the basic actions, but it is absolutely fine to start playing a game without all the information being given upfront.

Try to limit your initial introduction to ten minutes. Within ten minutes you should be playing, either having launched into the game proper, or playing a few practice rounds to see the game in action.

Unless the rules are *very* simple, playing a game for the first time can be hard and tempers can get frayed. Don't take it personally. There may be multiple ways to play and even multiple ways to win. As a player, you're forced to make decisions from the first turn, without understanding their full impact.

Consider having practice rounds or no scoring on the first game as this will take the pressure off new players.

There is no need to teach strategy. Part of the fun of playing new games is working out new strategies for yourself, forming your own connections, making your own discoveries and testing your own ideas. Making strategic decisions is rewarding and interesting. Most players would prefer to lose on their own than win with someone else's ideas. Whether you win or lose, you remember the tactical decisions you made and use these as a basis to work from the next time you play.

GAMES & MORE FROM THE DARK IMP

Coaster Games

Six cardboard coasters each containing a game for 2 or more players. To play each game, all you need is one coaster for the whole group plus pen & paper.

Travel Tin Games

Two games, each in a travel tin. These games come in a small package, but have a big table presence. Gather the most valuable flock of poultry or build the most impressive cake stack.

Placemat Games

Two games on one A3 placemat. Placemats come in pads of fifty sheets for multiple plays. Any number of players can play these desert island themed games.

Big Box Games

Two big games, each in a box full of beautiful components. Create a garden packed with features and animals or snatch as many juicy doughnuts as you can.

Cracker Games

Six games in a giant Christmas cracker, each using the same, high quality components. Innovative, reusable and entirely plastic-free. This is the cracker that keeps on giving.

BuzzleBoxes

Each BuzzleBox contains a selection of games and puzzles all based around a theme: Gardens & Chickens or Doughnuts & Cake. An irresistible box of delights.

The Board Game Family: A book by Ellie Dix

Ellie Dix offers a roadmap to integrating board gaming into family life and presents inspiring ways to engage even the trickiest of teenagers and manage game nights with flair. Ellie shares a wealth of top tips and stealthy strategies so that parents are equipped to navigate the unfolding drama of competition, thwart the common causes of arguments and bind together a happier, more socially cohesive family unit.

FIVE TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Create, teach and relentlessly reinforce a routine for packing away games that minimises component loss and prolongs the life of your games.

2. Give players regular time-checks to avoid games having to finish unexpectedly. But, if time runs out, despite your best efforts, take a picture of the game so that you can reset and continue next time.

3. Establish the expectation that a game will be finished, if it has been started. One or two players wanting to quit a game can be disruptive and frustrating for others.

4. Build in review time. Create a process for players to review each game they play - verbally, in writing or on an online form.

5. Recognise and praise outstanding sportsmanship. Use the mantra, "Play to win, but don't *need* to win". Encourage players to be nice when they win and nice when they don't.

IT'S TIME FOR SOME SERIOUS PLAY

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