

ASHLEY WRIGHT

GAMESCHOOLING ON A BUDGET

↗ **LEARNING THROUGH GAMES** ↖
WITHOUT SPENDING A FORTUNE



Gameschooling on a Budget

Learning Through Games Without Spending a Fortune

Ashley Wright

Gameschooling on a Budget is dedicated primarily to my children, without whom I would have never even conceived of the idea. My amazing husband also deserves recognition, as I couldn't do any of this without his unquestioning support.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Education Within Games

Acquiring Games for Cheap

Thrift Stores

Ebay

Gifting Occasions

Other Avenues

Supplies

Card Games

Golf

Spoons

War

Crazy Eights

I Doubt It (Bullshit)

Booger (Presidents and Assholes)

Poker

Five Card Draw

Texas Hold 'Em

Seven Card Stud

Blackjack

Go Fish

Dice Games

Math Dice

Qwixx

Yahtzee

Tabletop Role Playing Games

Dungeons and Dragons

Pathfinder

Cortex System Games

Print-and-Play Games

Pencil-and-Paper Games

Dots and Boxes

Grow a Flower (Hangman)

Tic Tac Toe

Iago

Imagination or Voice-Only Games

The Alphabet Game

We're Going on a Picnic...

We're Going on a Picnic

The Minister's Cat

Twenty Questions

I Spy

Simon Says

Easy to DIY

Card Holder

Mancala

Shut the Box

Hopscotch

Ring Toss

Cat's Cradle

Jump Rope

Battleship

Math Scrabble

Conclusion

About the Author

Introduction

Gameschooling is, quite simply, learning through games. And while there are many amazing games on the market, they can be quite expensive, and the costs add up when you are building up your collection. However, don't despair, for there are many ways to gameschool on a budget!

I began gameschooling my kids in 2019 when my kids were 3 and 5. I started my blog, [Gypsy Gameschooler](#), in 2022, so that I could share my family's experiences with different games with more people. We have a lot of fun playing games together, but I quickly realized just how expensive this could get. I had to figure out ways to have this much fun without spending a small fortune on new games.

Cue *Gameschooling on a Budget*. I enjoy exploring ways to gameschool without breaking the bank. Thrift stores, DIY games, and print-and-plays all help. There are so many games that you can play with just a deck of cards and a handful of dice, too. I hope you'll also join me on my blog and Youtube channel (where my family posts [play-throughs of many games](#) to help you decide if they're a good fit for your family) for even more gameschooling fun. Here's to a fun-filled school year!

Education Within Games

Some games are obviously educational. Math Dice, for example; you're obviously practicing arithmetic. Many more games are not obviously educational. However, they are still chock-full of learning.

Soft skills are skills like working memory, leadership, cooperation, executive functioning, and social skills. Many games help people develop several soft skills.

Throughout this book, I have included a section under each game on what skills the game targets. However, these are only the skills that I could think of, and many more are likely covered. As you play these games with your children, you may notice other benefits.

Overall, I find it best and most helpful to not fuss about what exactly my kids are learning. Kids are always learning. Instead of focusing on playing educational games, we play games we enjoy and the learning happens naturally. (Don't get me wrong; we also play specifically educational games to support different subjects.)

Have fun playing games and enjoy improvements in academics and everyday life!

Acquiring Games for Cheap

When I first started gameschooling, I paid full price on Amazon. While I don't regret the games I purchased this way, as they opened our eyes to how amazing gameschooling can be, it did get expensive. Luckily, it wasn't too long before I discovered many ways to purchase games cheaper.

Thrift Stores

One of my most consistent ways has been by shopping the thrift stores. Most areas have at least one or two. While you never know what you're going to get, that can be a big part of the magic of thrift shopping! We have found so many games that we never would have found otherwise: out-of-print games, small runs, and older games. We've also found popular, well-known games. Then of course, it's often easy to find the classics like Monopoly and Scrabble, so it can be a great way to try these games for cheap.

Ebay

Ebay can sometimes have really great prices. I've seen games on there that are very expensive, but I've also gotten some great deals, so it's worth it to check eBay occasionally, especially if you're looking for a particular game.

Gifting Occasions

Asking for games from grandparents and other family members can be a great way to add some games to your collection slowly. We use Christmas and birthdays as an excuse to find games specific to our kids' interests.

Other Avenues

Sometimes, you can find a really great sale. Not too far into our gameschooling adventure, I heard of a sale that [Miniature Market](#) was having. I got so many games for just a dollar! These were mostly not well-known games, but they've mostly been great, anyway.

We've also had good luck with Facebook Marketplace, garage sales, and other families and homeschoolers. You can also try Craigslist. One of the most exciting places we've found new-to-us games is our local Buy Nothing group!

If you're unfamiliar with Buy Nothing, it's a gift-giving network, and no sales are allowed. Which means you can try a new game for free.

The most important thing when sourcing new-to-you games is flexibility and patience. You might not be able to find that particular game you've been wanting (and we still buy new occasionally, when we really want a certain game), but you will find tons of awesome games!

Supplies

For the most part, you're going to be able to play most of the games in this book with just a few supplies:

- Deck of regulation poker cards
- A handful of dice, preferably multi-sided
- Pencil
- Paper

If you want to try [print-and-play games](#), a printer that prints color is really nice to have, as is a laminator. However, if you need to, you can get away with printing black and white, using your library for printing, or not laminating. If you're really motivated, you can even just hand-draw the games! I still remember when I printed out the score sheets for [Qwixx](#), and we only had black ink. I hand-colored the squares. (Qwixx is one game where you do need color, but obviously, it doesn't have to come from your printer!)

Card Games

There are so many games you can play with just a regulation deck of poker cards. We enjoy fancier decks with interesting factoids on them, but they're not necessary. If you look these games up online or in other books, you'll see several different variations on the rules. These are the ways I was taught to play.

Many of these card games do involve a lot of cards physically held in the hand. If you have young children (or anyone) that struggle to hold more than a few cards successfully, various cardholders can be used. [They can even be DIYed!](#)

Golf

Targeted skills: Working memory, strategy, social skills/bluffing, basic addition with negative numbers, and probability.

Golf is an excellent game for memory, without being another annoying matching game. Each player is dealt four cards. At the beginning of the game, each player can look at two of their cards—once. Growing up, we laid all four cards out in one line and only looked at the outside cards (see figure 2). However, I've also seen it where the cards are laid out in a 2x2 grid, and you just look at the two cards closest to you. It doesn't really matter either way, so long as everyone gets four cards and looks at two of them.

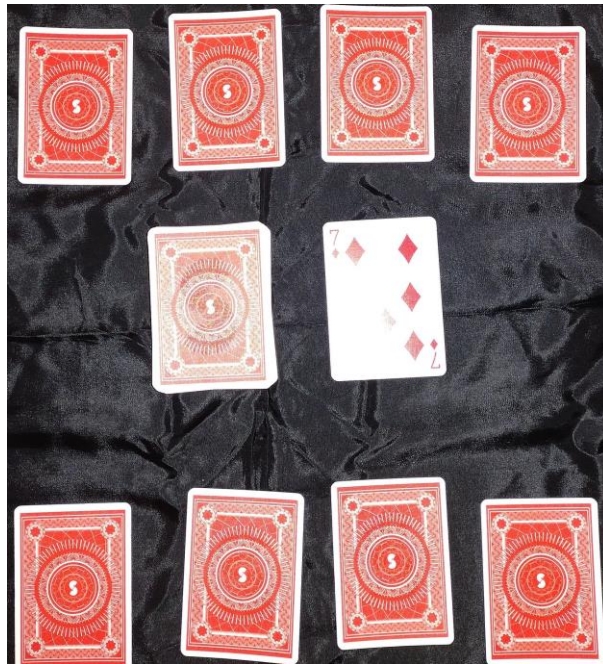


Figure 1: Setup for a 2-player game of Golf (as many players as you have can play at once).

The rest of the cards are in a stack in the center, face down. One card is drawn off the top of the stack, and placed face-up next to it, forming the discard pile, as you can see in Figure 1.

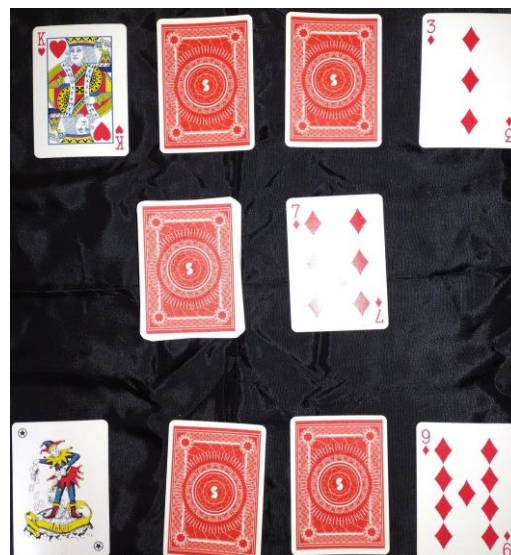


Figure 2: Looking at the two outside cards. Note that the cards aren't actually turned face-up (no one else gets to see them); this was just for taking the picture so you could see what each player saw.

On your turn, draw a card. You can choose to draw either the face-up card or an unknown card from the draw pile (see Figure 3). Look at the card and decide if you want it. If you do, you then get to decide which of your face-down cards it will replace, without looking at any of your face-down cards. Make the exchange, and discard the card you no longer want face-up into the discard pile (see Figure 4). If your memory (and sometimes luck!) is good, you will discard a worse card than you drew.

The object of the game is to get the lowest score, but scoring can be a little confusing:

- Number cards are worth their number (i.e., 4 is worth 4 points).
- Aces are worth 1 point.
- Kings are worth 0 points.
- Jacks and Queens are worth 13 points.
- I think Jokers aren't supposed to be used, but we always had them worth -1 point.

When you think you have the lowest score (remember, your cards remain face-down the entire game, and you never see anyone else's cards), knock the table at the end of your turn and say "Golf." Everyone else gets one more turn before all the cards are turned over and points tallied up.

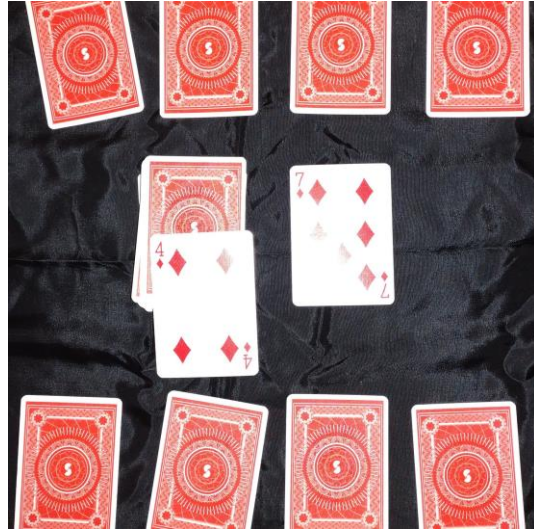


Figure 3: The initial discard card (7) wasn't very good, so the player on the bottom chose to look at the top card from the draw deck. Again, they don't show it to anyone else, just look at it themselves. They can choose to either keep it and discard one of their cards, or just discard this card.

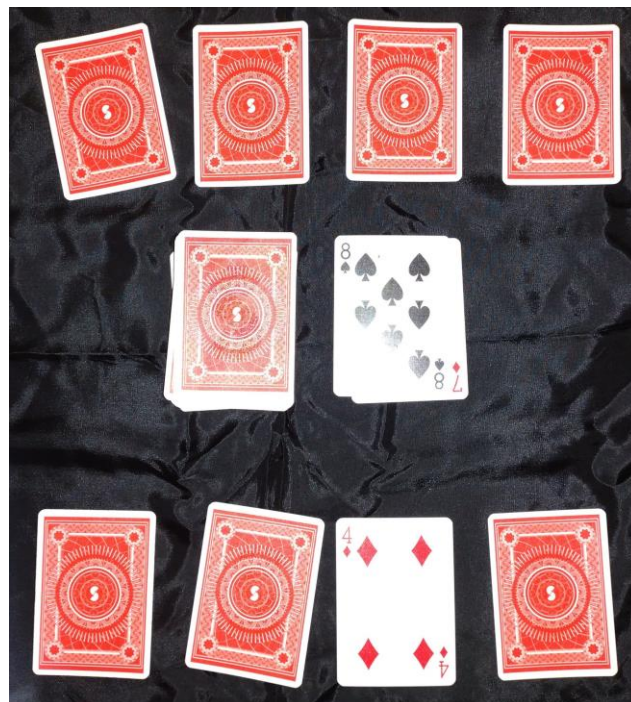


Figure 4: In this case, a 4 is a decent card, so they chose to replace one of their unknown cards. They discarded the 8 that had been here and kept the 4. Again, note

that this 4 card would never be face-up; the other player doesn't know what this card is.

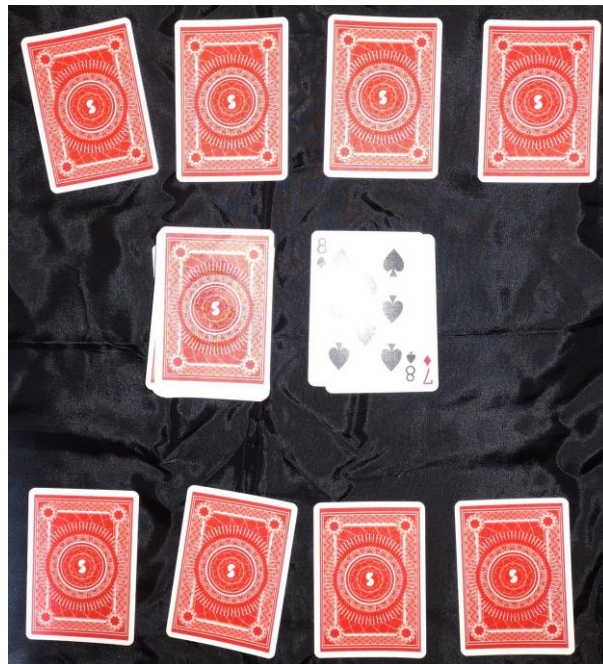


Figure 5: This is how the table will look after that exchange is made.

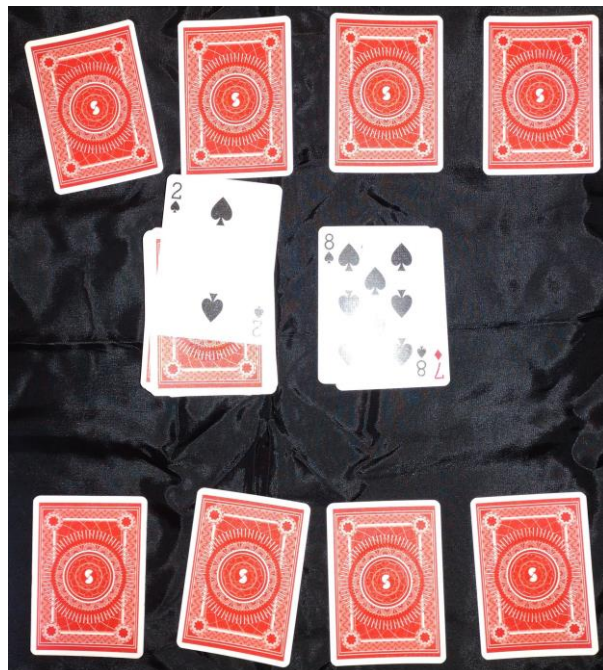


Figure 6: An 8 is an even worse card than a 7, so the player on the top chooses to look at the top card of the draw pile. A 2 is pretty good, so they're choosing to replace one of their unknown cards with this 2.



Figure 7: Oh, no! They ended up discarding an Ace, which is better than a 2! This can happen and often does. After all, you have no way of knowing what those two center cards are until you replace them.

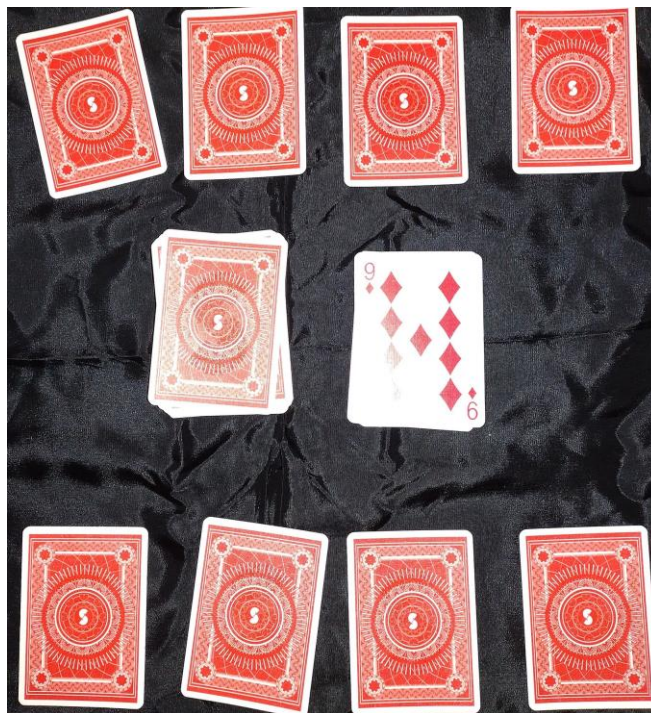


Figure 8: The player on the bottom snatches up the discarded Ace and replaces their 9 with it (remember it; it was the card on the right).

Either player can choose to end the game at any time. Some choose to work tirelessly for the absolute lowest score; others work on ending the game quickly before others have a chance to get a really low score. What will be your strategy?

Spoons

Targeted skills: Working memory, dexterity, decision-making, probability, social skills/bluffing, sleight of hand, observation/visual acuity, and speed.

Spoons also requires spoons. One less than the number of people playing, arranged in the center, equidistant between the players.

Dexterity, sleight of hand, and speed! To play, everyone is dealt four cards, and they look at them the entire game. The rest of the cards are placed face-down in a stack to the right of the starting player (see Figure 9). The starting player picks up one card, looks at it, and decides if they want to keep it. They discard one card, face-down, in a stack to their left (see Figure 11).



Figure 9: Setup for a 4-player game of Spoons. Obviously, the spoons will never be entirely fairly placed; just do the best you can. The stack in the bottom right is the draw pile.



Figure 10: This is what each player is seeing. These cards are only face-up for the picture; keep your cards hidden from your opponents!



Figure 11: The first player is starting the game. Jokers are useless in creating 4 of a kind and could be removed from the deck entirely, but it's easier for us to just discard them when we're dealt them.

The second player then picks up this discarded card from the first player, looks at it, decides if they want it, and discards a card to their left. While this is going on, the first player is looking at their second card and discarding it to their left (see Figure 12). Play continues this way, each player always taking a card from the stack on their right, deciding whether they want it, then discarding a card to their left.



Figure 12: The first player now draws and considers a 5, while the second player is looking at the Joker.

When the first player runs out of cards from their draw pile, they simply begin drawing cards from the discard pile from the player to their right. Shuffling isn't necessary.

This entire time, each player is trying to get four of a kind. The first person to get four of a kind then casually takes a spoon and continues pretending to play (see Figure 16). As soon as one spoon is claimed, all other players rush to take a spoon—some more subtly than others (see Figure 17).



Figure 13: Skipping ahead in the game a bit, you can see how the Joker has made it through and been discarded on the other side, and actually, the last player has

discarded their Joker, too. At this point, the first player has a pair of 3s and a pair of Kings, the third player has a pair of 4s, and the last player has a pair of 6s.



Figure 14: This is a bit farther along in the game. The 5 of spades has made it from being considered for the first player's hand to being considered for the fourth player's hand. It's worth noting, too, that it doesn't matter how long each player takes in consideration. It's okay to let some cards build up. It is least frustrating to have the fastest player first, but most fair to rotate who starts.



Figure 15: A bit farther along in the game. The third player now has three 4s, and see that last 4 in the lower left corner? We know the third player is soon to win, but no one else knows that. Remember, cards are kept secret. No one else can see what is coming to them, or see each other's cards. Besides, the game tends to move too quickly

to pay attention to that anyway. It's hard enough to keep track of the cards in your hand and the spoons!



Figure 16: The third player now has all four 4s, they've discarded their 9, and taken a spoon.



Figure 17: Notice how, even though the third player already has their spoon, they keep playing? The first and second players noticed, however, and grabbed their spoons, while the fourth player is focusing on getting their fourth 6 and misses that a spoon has been taken.

Players must keep track of their cards, continue pulling a new card, making a decision, and discarding a card, all while keeping track of the spoons in the

center so they don't miss their chance to get a spoon! This game is excellent for working on executive functioning and working memory skills.

War

Targeted skills: Comparing numbers, sportsmanship, and potentially arithmetic.

War may be the most well-known card game, but it is excellent for practicing less than and greater than. You can modify the game to work on addition, multiplication, subtraction, or division!

If you don't know how to play, it's quite simple. After shuffling, all the cards are dealt out, face-down, and organized into a stack (don't look at your cards). All players draw the top card on their stack and lay it down face-up (see Figure 18). Whoever pulled out the highest card takes all the cards. (You'll want to decide in advance whether Aces are high or low. I've always played with them high, but you can choose otherwise.)



Figure 18: You can see here that the Queen is the highest card, so the player on the right gets all four cards and adds them to the bottom of their stack.

If two or more players are tied for the highest card (see Figures 19 and 20), then each player puts three cards face-down, then one more face-up. Sometimes, another round of face-down and face-up cards will be required for determining who gets to keep all the cards!

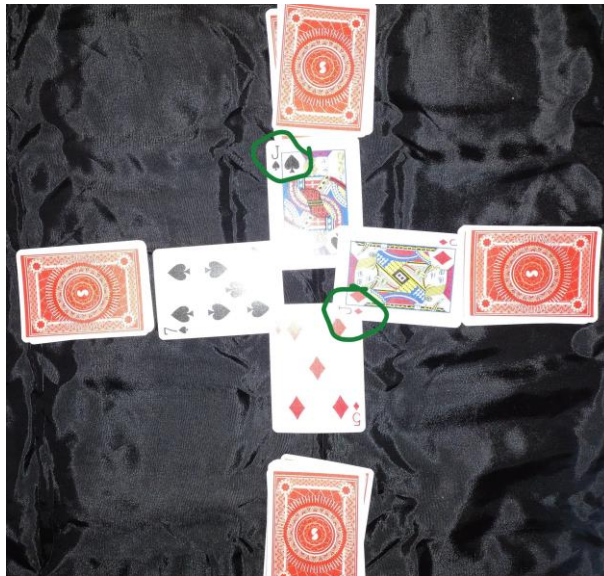


Figure 19: The players on the right and the top are tied for the highest card, both having put out Jacks. They are the only ones who will need to put out extra cards.

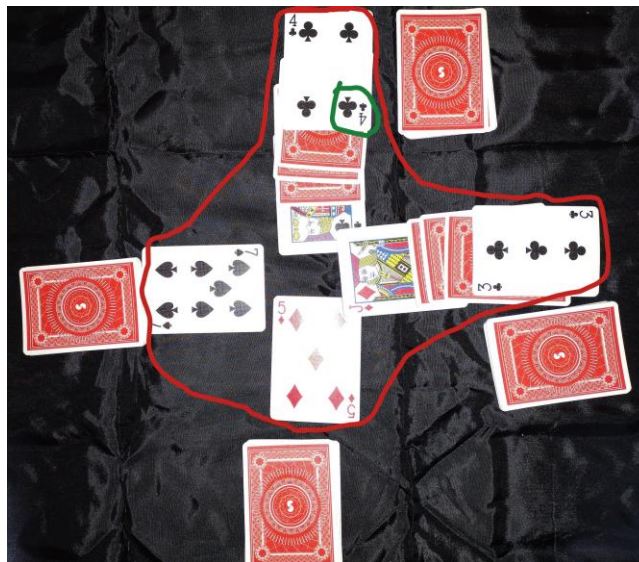


Figure 20: You can see the three cards placed face-down, and then one card placed face-up, for both the players that initially played a Jack. The player on the top put down a higher card than the player on the right for the final card, so they get to keep everything (circled in red). Even though both a 7 and a 5 are obviously higher than a 4, those cards have already been won by the Jacks. The player on the top will make sure all these cards are face-down, and place them at the bottom of their stack.

I've always played that Aces are high, and Jokers beat even Aces. However, it's good to establish that rule in advance, because there's always that one person who will argue that Aces are low to try to avoid their King being taken.

To modify to incorporate even more math, just have every player pull out two cards at once. Decide in advance what operation will be used on the cards. Face cards can either be counted up in points (i.e., Jacks=11 points, Queens=12 points, and Kings=13 points), or they can all be 10 points; just decide in advance.

Of course, the winner is the one who ends up with all the cards.

Crazy Eights

Targeted skills: Matching, strategy, social skills/bluffing, and sportsmanship.

Crazy 8s is very similar to Uno, but it lacks the specialty cards of reversing or drawing extra cards. Also, Uno clearly states in its rules that if you can't play a card, you only draw one card. Crazy 8s doesn't have clearly defined, consistent rules.

To begin, each player is dealt 7 cards face-down, but they can look at them. The rest of the cards are placed face down in a stack in the center for a draw pile. The top card of the draw pile is turned face-up to make the playing pile.



Figure 21: Notice how each of these hands has been organized. First by suit, then by number. This is much easier than organizing by number. Also, note how the 8 (circled in green) is not with the other heart, but off by itself. Always keep your 8s separated so you know when you have one. Nothing is worse than drawing half the deck, only to realize you already had an 8!

The player to the left of the dealer begins. They need to match either the suit or the number of the top card of the playing pile. Eights are wild and can be any suit or number. If you can't play a card, you draw from the draw pile until you can play a card. Make sure you pay attention and don't miss an 8!



Figure 22: The player on the right begins by playing their 2 of diamonds. The suit matches, so they can play that card.



Figure 23: The player on the left plays another diamond—an Ace.



Figure 24: The player on the right has neither an Ace nor a diamond, so they are forced to play their 8. They can choose any suit for their 8. They choose clubs.



Figure 25: The player on the left has a club, so plays their 6 of clubs.



Figure 26: The player on the right plays their 5 of clubs.



Figure 27: The player on the left, knowing that their opponent chose clubs, figures they probably have a lot of clubs. But rather than play another diamond, the player on the right had played their 8, indicating they were out of diamonds. So the player on the left, even though they have another club, chooses to play their 5 of diamonds. Since the numbers match, this is okay to play.



Figure 28: The player on the right is forced to draw several cards from the draw pile (circled in red) before finally drawing another 8 (circled in green).



Figure 29: Now you can see how the player on the right has reorganized their cards, incorporating their new ones.

Of course, the player who runs out of cards first is the winner.

We have had games that last only a couple of minutes as all the cards line up and someone doesn't need to draw at all. We've also had games that last hours. If you run out of cards in the draw pile, simply shuffle the discard pile well, and that becomes your new draw pile.

While playing Crazy 8s, players are having to keep track of their cards. They need to keep them organized so they always know if they can play a card, and sometimes they'll have a LOT of cards in their hand. ([Check out how to make card holders for those who struggle with this.](#)) I organize my cards first by suit (and I alternate black and red suits, so I never confuse hearts with diamonds or clubs with spades), and second by value. I try to keep 8s separate.

I Doubt It (Bullshit)

Targeted skills: Social skills/bluffing, strategy, and sportsmanship.

I began playing I Doubt It with my sisters when I was maybe 7, so we (understandably) did not use the usual name of Bullshit. The name I learned the game with stuck with me, and it's what I've used with my kids.

To begin, all cards are dealt out. Keep your cards a secret from the other players, but do look at and organize them. You'll want to organize them by number (see Figure 30).



Figure 30: Dealt out, organized, and ready to begin playing. The player on the left dealt, so the player on the right begins. It just so happens they have three 2s, so they'll play those. If they didn't have any, they'd have to start out the game by lying.

The person to the left of the dealer begins by playing their 2s. They place however many cards they want to call all their 2s face down. The other players will check their cards; if the person says they are putting down four 2s, but another player has a 2, they know the original player was lying. Depending on the age of the players, the second player will shout out either, "Bullshit!" or, "I doubt it!" The cards are then turned face up. If the original player (the one who put down the cards) was telling the truth, the doubter takes the pile. But if the original player was lying, they take the pile.

Also, pay attention to how many cards someone is playing. They don't have to tell the truth, so they might say "three 2s," but then put down four cards.

Play proceeds with the next player putting down 3s. If they don't have any 3s, they have to lie and put down a different card(s). As the play progresses and someone finds themselves with much of the deck, it can get very difficult to lie about cards you don't have but need to play.



Figure 31: The second player doesn't have any 3s, so they need to play a different card. They choose this 4, as they're more likely to get away with the fib by playing only one card.



Figure 32: Remember, all these cards would be face-down, so you'll never know what someone else is actually playing, or what cards are in their hand.



Figure 33: The player on the left is next, and they choose their two 4s to play for 4. If the player on the bottom were to yell “I doubt it!” at this point, when the player on the left is not lying, then the player on the bottom would have to collect the cards in the center.



Figure 34: The next three plays would be the player on the right playing their 5 (it’s hidden, but I circled it in green anyway), the player on the bottom playing their 6, and finally, the player on the left needs to lie. They don’t have a 7, so must choose another card to act as a 7. They choose a 6 that I circled in yellow.



Figure 35: Here, I am showing the 6 that the player on the left played instead of a 7 (again, make sure you play your cards face-down!). Circled in green is the 9 that the player on the right plans to play instead of an 8. However, notice the four 8s I circled in blue that the player on the bottom has in their hand. Since they're paying attention and they know that there are only four of each kind of card, they will call out "I doubt it!" when their friend plays their "8."



Figure 36: These are all the cards the player on the right has to pick up and add to their hand! However, it is fun to see where your friends have lied previously.



Figure 37: After the player on the right has incorporated their new cards (and organized them), play continues with the player on the bottom playing their 9.

The object is to get rid of your cards first. To this end, it can be tempting to lie and sneak in a few extra cards to get rid of them. However, the more you lie, the more likely someone will catch you in a lie and you'll be stuck with the entire pile of played cards! However, it can be very interesting, going through that stack and figuring out where your fellow players have lied.

When you get up to the Aces, just continue on to 2s.

While playing I Doubt It, you'll be working on keeping cards organized (sometimes a very large hand!), paying attention to what others have played, and keeping track of what cards you have (and so what is possible for another player to have). Additionally, you're working on people skills. Can you lie without blushing or giggling? Does your parent have a tell? As they said in *How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, "It's all about reading people."

Booger (Presidents and Assholes)

Targeted skills: Strategy, social skills/bluffing, and sportsmanship.

As a child, my family loved playing a game that was introduced to me as "Booger." My mother never would tell my sisters and me the actual name. However, I think it is more commonly known as "Presidents and Assholes." I will continue referring to it as Booger, as this also makes a child-friendly name.

After shuffling the cards, deal them all out, face down. Look at your cards and organize them, but don't show them to anyone else. Start by organizing them by numerical order; put all your 2s, 3s, 4s, etc together (see Figure 38). Then put all your singles first, doubles, triples, quadruplets, and Jokers last (see Figure 39).



Figure 38: Organize your cards in numerical order first. This makes it easier to see how many of each card you have.



Figure 39: The singles are circled in green, the doubles, in blue, and the triples in red. If you get quads, put them after your triples. Jokers always go last, as they trump all.

Decide who will go first; it can be whoever has a single 2 or whoever is left of the dealer. The goal is to get rid of your cards first. There are no requirements that you have to play a card; you can choose to play higher cards or to pass. However, you must always play a higher card.



Figure 40: All players have sorted their cards and are ready to go. They've decided that whoever has a single 2 will start, so I've circled it in green.

If the first player plays a single 2, the second player may play any of their cards other than a single 2. They may play a single 3, 4, 5, etc, or any doubles, triples, or quads. Let's say the second player plays a 4 (see Figure 41). Player three may play any card higher. Let's say player three plays an 8. Player four may play any card that is higher than an 8; let's say they play a 10 (see Figure 42).



Figure 41: The player on the top can play their single 4, but not their single 2 (that they mis-organized).



Figure 42: After the 2 and 4 are played, the player on the right plays an 8 (circled in green), the player on the bottom plays a 10 (circled in blue), the player on the left plays a King (circled in red), and the player on the top plays an Ace (circled in yellow). Each of these players could play a higher card, but not a lower one (from the cards available in their hands).

Now play moves back around to player 1. (Any number of players can join in, but Booger works best with 3-5 players. Too many more, just use an additional deck.) Player 1 can play anything higher than a 10 (see Figure 42). After the Ace is played above in Figure 42 (circled in yellow), singles can not be played. Doubles, triples, and quads can all be played, but no singles.



Figure 43: After the Ace is played, the player on the right plays the double 7s (circled in green). The player on the bottom could play their triple 9s, but decide not to. Instead, they “Pass,” and the player on the left plays their double Queens (circled in blue).



Figure 44: After the double Queens are played, the player on the top could choose to play their quadruple 6s or their Joker, but elect not to. Play passes to the player on the right, who plays double Aces (circled in green). The player on the bottom decides it's time to play their triple 9s (circled in blue), and the player on the left wraps things up with a Joker (circled in red).



Figure 45: After playing the Joker, the player on the left gets to start fresh. They can choose any of their cards, but go with their lowest, the single 7 (circled in green). The center cards will be discarded and not used for the rest of the game.



Figure 46: The discarded cards are in the upper left-hand corner (circled in red). It's hidden, but the player on the top plays their 8 (circled in green), the player on the right plays their Queen (circled in blue), the player on the bottom plays their King (circled in yellow), and the player on the left plays their Ace (circled in brown).



Figure 47: After the Ace is played, no one can play any singles. The player on the top continues with their double 10s (circled in green), and the player on the right decides it's time for their triple 4s (circled in blue). No one else can play anything higher until play gets back around to the player on the top. They play their quadruple 6s (circled in red).



Figure 48: No one can play anything higher than quadruple 6s, so everyone passes, and the cards are cleared out of the playing area. The player on the top, since they played the quadruple 6s, gets to start of this round. They start with their single two (circled in green). The player on the right continues with their King (circled in blue), which means the player on the bottom has to work on their doubles. They play their double 2s (circled in red), and the player on the left plays their double 5s (circled in yellow). The player on the top can't play any numbers higher than double 5s, so

decide it's a good time to play their Joker (circled in brown), which automatically stops all play.



Figure 49: After the cards are cleared away, the player on the top again gets to start (because they played the Joker). They play their 9 (circled in green), and the player on the right plays their triple Jacks (circled in blue). No one else can play anything higher than this; there aren't even any Jokers left.



Figure 50: Playing the triple Jacks meant the player on the right was the first to go out, so they're President. Everyone else passes, and the President no longer has any cards to play, so play passes to the player on the bottom. They start with their single 3 (circled in green). The player on the left plays their 8 next (circled in blue), and the player on the top plays their Queen (circled in red). The player on the bottom has no higher singles, so if they want to play this turn, they have to play their double 5s

(circled in yellow). Finally, the player on the left plays their triple 3s (circled in brown).



Figure 51: No one can play anything higher than triple 3s, so the cards are cleared away and the player on the left gets to start this time. They play their last card—a single 10, and go out as Vice-President. The player on the top plays their last card, a single King, and go out as Vice-Booger. This leaves the player on the bottom as Booger.



Figure 52: This hand ends with the player on the bottom (with their two remaining cards) as Booger, the player on the left as Vice-President, the player on the top as Vice-Booger, and the player on the right as President.

When a player does not have a higher card that they can play, they have to pass (see Figure 43). Jokers trump all, so when they are played, the cards are moved aside (they don't get added to anyone's hand at all; they are out of the game). Cards are also moved aside and out of the game if all players pass after a play is made, even if a Joker isn't involved (see Figures 45 and 46).

Whoever played the card(s) that no one else could top now gets to start off the next round. They can choose to play their lowest single card, but sometimes, it's beneficial to start with the highest. This is a gamble, though; if someone can play a higher card, it won't work to your advantage. However, if you have the highest thing to play, and no one else can play anything, then you get to keep clearing the playing area and starting the next round. Make sure no one else still has a Joker that they'll be using, though!

Play continues on in this way until every player is out of cards. The person who is out first is the President. Whoever is out last is the Booger (or Asshole). If you have 4 or more players, then the player who is out second is the Vice-President, and the player out second to last is the Vice-Booger. Any middle players (in the case of 3, 5, or more players) are the Middle Men.

Now that roles are assigned, reshuffle the cards and deal them all out again for the second hand. Organize your cards as before. However, before you begin playing, it's time to exchange cards (see Figures 53 and 54)! Middle men do not need to exchange cards with anyone.



Figure 53: These are relatively easy decisions to make. The President gives their two worst cards to the Booger—in this case, their two lowest singles, a 5 and 2. The Vice-President gives their lowest single to the Vice-Booger, a Queen. The Vice-Booger has a Joker to give to the Vice-President—that’s an obvious decision. The Booger has no Jokers, so they give their highest pair to the President.



Figure 54: These are less-obvious decisions to make. For the Booger and the Vice-Booger, the decisions are still relatively straightforward; they always give the best card(s), but it’s not always fun. Both the Booger and the Vice-Booger are having to split up doubles in order to give the correct cards.

The President and Vice-President have a bit of leeway, though. The President could choose to split up their double 2s to give the Booger a 2 and a 6. If I were this player, though, I’d rather get rid of my double 2s. In my experience, double 2s can be almost as problematic to get rid of as a single 2, or even more so. The Vice-President has a truly difficult decision to make—do they break up their double 2s to give a single 2 to the Vice-Booger, or do they break up their triple Jacks? I’m honestly not certain what I would do, and I would probably make a different decision each game.

All exchanges are done before seeing what you are getting from the other person. The President chooses their two worst cards to give to the Booger. These are generally singles; only give double 2s if you have no singles at all.

Never give Jokers. Don't break up your doubles, triples, or quads. (Do you see how the situation in Figure 54 makes you violate one of these rules? Just keep in mind that the President always acts in their own best interest.)

The Booger chooses their two best cards to give to the President. If necessary, they need to break up doubles or triplets. If they have one Joker, they should give a Joker and an Ace (Aces are high) or a King. If they are dealt no Jokers, then they should give their highest double (breaking up triplets or quads if necessary).

The Vice-President gives their worst card to the Vice-Booger. Just their lowest single; don't break up any doubles unless you don't have any singles. Don't give a Joker. The Vice-Booger gives their best card to the Vice-President. Ideally, a Joker, but otherwise it should be an Ace or a King. Break up multiples if you have to.

After exchanges are made and new cards are incorporated into hands, begin the next hand. The Booger gets to start, generally with their lowest single. Play proceeds clockwise as before, with each player playing a higher card than the player before.

The game of Booger teaches a lot about strategy, but also about life. My sisters and I may have groaned when my mother would start in on how Booger reflects life, but she wasn't wrong. In our society, those with an advantage get to keep taking advantage of those without that advantage. However, in Booger, it's a lot easier to rise quickly. I've seen Boogers dealt hands that, even with the disadvantages of being Booger, they couldn't help but end up President with. And I've seen Presidents dealt a hand of singles that gave them no hope of keeping their position.

Poker

Targeted skills: Social skills/bluffing, strategy, money, and arithmetic.

There are many different kinds of poker. I started by teaching my kids [5 Card Draw](#), but we have done a few different games. Seven Card Draw, [Blackjack](#), various wild cards, etc. The key is to use real money (hurray for teaching kids how to count money!).

When we play poker, I give each of my kids (and myself) the same number of coins from our coin jar. Usually a dollar or two; nothing huge. We play a few rounds, and when we're done, my kids get to keep whatever they're left with. They're always excited to gamble with Mom's money!

Five Card Draw

To play 5 Card Draw, after shuffling the cards, deal 5 cards to each player, face down. Players can look at their cards but don't show them to others. After cards are dealt, begin a round of betting. Everyone needs to either meet or beat the bet before. We usually mostly bet pennies and nickels, but occasionally a dime gets thrown in.

After the first round of betting, it's time to exchange cards. You can exchange up to 4. Place the cards you want to exchange face down and say how many new cards you want (for a total of 5).

Your new cards are dealt (face down) from the remaining deck. After everyone has been able to exchange one set of cards, it's time for one last round of betting.

Can I make a confession? I had to print off a guide for determining in what order hands rank. [Here's the one that I found and used](#). I laminated it, and it's served us well—much better than looking it up each time we want to play poker!

Similar steps are taken when playing 7 Card Draw. You still only have 5 cards in a hand. [There are several other poker games](#). I think my favorite is Texas Hold 'Em.

Texas Hold 'Em

I have many fond memories of playing poker with my extended family, but especially my favorite uncle. There'd be cards up and down, wild cards galore, and whoever had a certain card would split the pot—usually an Ace “in the hole,” but sometimes it was the one-eyed Jack or the suicide King.

The deal starts with every player being dealt two cards face down. These are “the hold.” Next, the dealer deals three cards into the center, face up. These are known as “the flop.” Another card is dealt into the center (“the turn” or “fourth street”), and then the last card (“the river” or “fifth street”). All total,

every player has seven cards to work with; two hold cards and five community cards (see Figure 55).

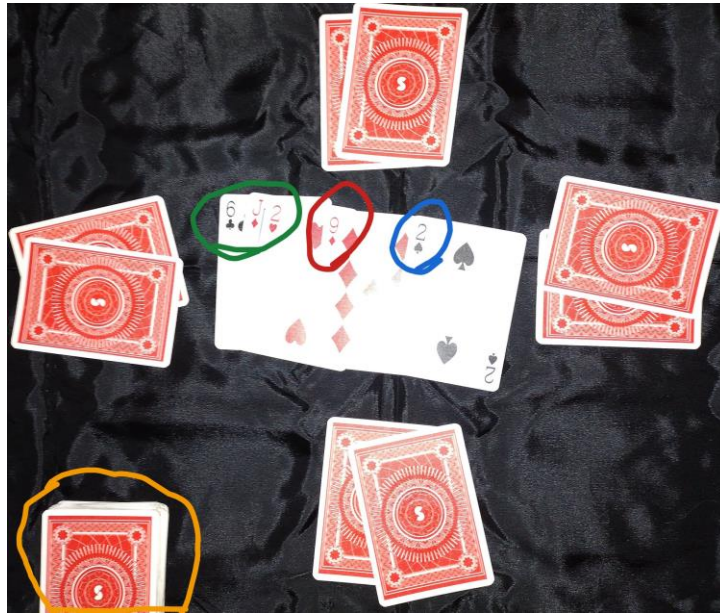


Figure 55: The deck is circled in yellow. The Flop is circled in green, Fourth Street in red, and Fifth Street in blue. The other face-down cards are each player's hold.

Just like in five- or seven-card draw, the goal is to get the best five-card hand. Remember to consult the print-out for the order of hands. However, if you have wild cards, five-of-a-kind is possible and the best hand.

Betting takes place periodically throughout the hand. Players begin by anti-ing up before the dealer starts. After all hold cards are dealt, the first round of betting is held. After the flop is the second round. Two more betting rounds can be held, after each of the last community cards.

Seven Card Stud

Seven Card Stud also deals seven cards to create a five-card hand. Cards are dealt two face down, four face up, and a final card face down (see Figure 56). Betting intervals occur after each round of cards, starting with the first face-up card. Depending on the players, various cards may be wild.



Figure 56: A 4-player game of 7-card stud. Two cards face-down, four cards face-up, and a final card face-down. All players get their own cards. Use five cards to create the best hand you can.

Blackjack

Blackjack, also called 21, is fantastic for basic addition up to 21. It's one of the simpler card games. We've used 21 to teach not just addition and coin value, though, but also the dangers and risks of gambling.

Something else that we've used to teach our kids about gambling is arcades. We stayed for a bit next to a hotel that had an arcade in it, and our kids were so excited to take their money there, only to end up disappointed and frustrated when they lost all their money. That was a great, low-consequence way for them to learn about gambling. All forms of gambling, whether poker, arcades, or the ponies, favor the house.

Anyway, back to Blackjack. After shuffling and placing initial bets, the dealer deals out one card face up to each player, then a card face down to themselves. Then another card is dealt; this time everyone is face up (see Figure 57).



Figure 57: At this point, we don't know what the dealer has, but the player on the left, with a total of 20, is staying put. The player on the right, with a total of 11, needs another card.

Additional bets can be placed after each round of cards. It's important to note that each player is playing, and betting, individually against the house (dealer). There is no interaction between players, except that they are all being dealt from the same deck of cards. The dealer is also not making any bets.

All number cards are worth their face value. Face cards are worth 10 points, and Aces can be either 1 or 11, depending on which will work better for the hand.

After the initial two cards are dealt out to all players and the dealer, and any bets are made, each player chooses whether they want another card.



Figure 58: After one more card, the player on the right is only up to 13 points, so they ask for another card. Unfortunately, this last one puts them over 21, so they lose their bet.

A player's goal is simple. Get closer to 21 than the dealer without going over 21. The dealer doesn't get to choose whether or not they get another card; if they're not yet at 17, they have to deal themselves another card. However, the dealer doesn't deal their extra card(s) until all players are done getting more cards.



Figure 59: With a total of 15, the dealer has to give themselves another card. If they get higher than the player on the left (in this case, if they give themselves a 6 and get a total of 21), the player on the left will lose their bet.

Players win by getting exactly 21 or by the dealer going over 21. They lose by going over 21 or the dealer getting a higher total than them.



Figure 60: The dealer now has a total of 25, so the player on the left wins their bet. If they bet a total of 50¢, they would get that 50¢ back plus another 50¢.

While playing 21, your kids can work on probability, too, as they try to decide whether they should ask for another card.

If a player wins the round, their bet is doubled. If they lose, they lose their bet to the house (dealer). As I said, the dealer is not betting. Just like when we play poker, I give my kids coins from our coin jar to bet with.

Go Fish

Targeted skills: Matching and working memory.

I think nearly everyone is familiar with Go Fish, but it's still worth mentioning. Go Fish is an excellent game to help kids pay attention to what's going on around them, and it's also a better memory game than a simple matching game.

To play, every player is dealt seven cards face down. They can pick up their cards and organize them but don't show them to anyone else.

To play, the first player takes a look at their cards and asks for another “of a kind.” The object is to get either two or four cards that all have the same number or face on them (Jacks, Queens, or Kings). I have played games where we were only going for pairs, but usually, you’re trying to get four of a kind. So if you already have a three, you can ask fellow players if they have a three.

If a player has one or more cards that you ask for, they must give them all to you. You then get to ask another player for the same or another card. When someone does not have a card that you ask them for, they say, “Go Fish.” You draw a card from the draw pile. Some people play that if you draw the card you were asking for, that counts as getting the card you were asking for, so you get to ask again. I don’t prefer this rule, and would rather have it only count if a player actually gives you the card you ask for.

Dice Games

With just a handful of dice, it's possible to play several different games. Not only can this be a very cost-effective way to game, but it's also great for those who are traveling or living in a small space! One small bag of dice can help you play several different games.

Math Dice

Targeted skills: Arithmetic, numeracy, and mental flexibility.

I love Math Dice to show how much fun it can be to play with different numbers. How many different ways can you combine them? Can you use all the dice in the game?

First up, decide what operations you want to focus on. If you just want to focus on addition, use one target die. If you want to focus on multiplication, use two target dice. Either way, you want them to be distinctive from the other dice.

You can also use what target dice you're using to decide how big of numbers you want to work with. If your kids are still working on adding up to 10, use a d10 (ten-sided die) as your target die. If they're working on their multiplication tables up to 12x12, use two d12s. If your kids are working on counting and identifying their numerals, use a mix of dice with pips (the dots) and numerals (numbers).

To play, roll the target die or dice, then roll the rest of the dice. It doesn't really matter how many other dice you use, but somewhere around five usually works well. After rolling all the dice, find your target number. If you're using more than one die to find your target number, choose an operation to use, but that will usually be multiplication.

Once you know your target number, you can start playing with the numbers on the rest of your dice to try to get to your target number. With young kids, this might be as simple as having a die with a roll equal to that of your target number (i.e., 6=6). With older kids, though, we try to use as many of the dice as possible. We allow any operation, and sometimes will even use exponents!

After each turn, I enjoy finding different ways to use the same numbers to get to the same target number. Often, we can find at least two or three ways. I feel that this shows my kids how fun it can be to play with numbers, and how many different ways there can be to reach the same results.

Qwixx

Targeted skills: Strategy, arithmetic, and observation skills.

Qwixx is played with six regular six-sided dice. Two white dice, and one each of red, blue, green, and yellow. You can use different colors, but you'll need to make notes on the color-coded score sheets.

The [score sheets](#) and [instructions](#) are readily available for free download. If you don't have access to a color printer or don't want to use colored ink, just color the score sheets by hand. I laminated our score sheets so I would never have to print any more out. Considering how many things we use our laminator for, it's been a good investment that's well worth the low price.

One of my favorite parts of Qwixx is that every player gets to do something every turn. Yes, there is an active player who is the one doing the rolling and they get to mark off two numbers on their turn, but every other player still gets to mark off one number.

When it is your turn to be the active player, roll the dice and add up the numbers on the white dice. All players can mark that number off once on their score sheet. The active player then adds one of the white dice to one of the colored dice and marks that number off on the corresponding row. (If they use a blue die, they have to mark the number on the blue row.)

Red and yellow rows proceed from two through twelve, while blue and green rows are from twelve to two. Numbers must be marked off from left to right, so if you mark off a red ten early in the game, you'll miss a lot of numbers in the red row.

The goal is to mark off as many numbers as possible. After someone has marked off at least five numbers in one row, they can mark off the last number in that row, locking the row for all players. Once two rows have been marked off, the game is over.

Not only is Qwixx great for working on addition ([someone even created score sheets for multiplication!](#)), but it's also a fantastic strategy game. Do you focus on getting every number in a row, or do you quickly lock rows off to prevent others from getting as many numbers marked off? Do you focus on one row at a time, or do you spread your efforts out? Qwixx is an excellent mix of luck and strategy.

Yahtzee

Targeted skills: Arithmetic, probability, strategy, risk assessment, and resource management.

Yahtzee needs just five regular d6s (six-sided dice). If you have the dice for Qwixx, you have enough for Yahtzee, too. It's easy to find the [score sheets online](#).

To play, roll all five dice. On each turn, you're trying to get just one of the thirteen options. There are thirteen rounds per game, so you'll need to get each one once. There is an upper and a lower section; it doesn't matter which section you use each turn.

The upper section has 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, and 6s. The lower section has three-of-a-kind, four-of-a-kind, Yahtzee (five-of-a-kind), full house, small straight (four dice), large straight (five dice), and chance (just add up all your dice because you can't use this turn for anything else).

Each turn, you have three rolls to get your best score for that turn. So, if you initially roll two 3s, a 4, and two 5s, you might choose to re-roll your 4 in an effort to get either a 3 or a 5 and get a full house. If you're not able to, though, you can still get six points under 3s.

I've heard tales of people getting multiple Yahtzees in a game. There are boxes on the score sheet to put check marks for multiple Yahtzees, so it must be possible. My family has never been so lucky. In fact, we're lucky if more than one of us gets just one Yahtzee in a game.

Yahtzee is great for addition and skip counting. There is some strategy, but it also seems to be a lot of luck. That said, it's still an excellent game to have in your arsenal.

Tabletop Role Playing Games

Targeted skills: Storytelling, writing, reading, arithmetic, social skills, strategy, creative thinking, and empathy.

Tabletop Role Playing Games (TTRPGs) are fantastic games for storytelling, writing, and math. There are many different options for kids of all ages. Hero Kids, Tales of Equestria, and No Thank You, Evil are three for kids that I've heard good things about. My family has and loves both Storm Hollow and Castles and Cats. However, Dungeons and Dragons is certainly the most famous and might be the original RPG.

There are many, many more than what I list here. The benefit of TTRPGs is that often, you can find rulebooks in PDF format. Even if they're not free to download, they're going to be cheaper than buying the physical book and cheaper than many physical games.

[Dungeons and Dragons](#)

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D or DnD) consists of a Dungeon Master (DM) and players. The DM is the main storyteller, but all players contribute to the story. Think of it as the DM setting the scene and laying the groundwork, while the players' choices determine the story's direction.

In order to play, the group needs at least one [Player's Handbook](#) (PHB) and the DM needs at least a [Dungeon Master's Guide](#). Preferably, almost every player should have access to a PHB, and the DM should also have a [Monster Guide](#). Don't have the funds for the physical copies? No problem; find one of the many copies available online.

Before you begin acquiring books, you and your party need to decide what edition you want to use. I prefer 3.5 because I love all the math, but many prefer the fifth edition (5e), which is has simplified math.

To begin, every player needs to create a character. Players each choose a race and a class. Possible races include human, elf, halfling, half-orc, half-elf, dwarf, and gnome. There are a lot more possibilities, but these are the main ones. Classes include wizard, rogue, bard, cleric, fighter, barbarian, paladin, druid, monk, sorcerer, and ranger.

When creating characters, players need to think about the party as a whole. A well-balanced party can make all the difference in having enjoyable play sessions. Every party needs a melee and a ranged fighter and a healer. Supporting classes are excellent to have if your party is large enough. If your party is very large, you'll want more fighters and more healers.

Barbarians, fighters, paladins, and monks make excellent fighters (what are fondly referred to as "meat shields"). Clerics can be, and so can rangers. It's good to have at least one fighter or one barbarian. Clerics are the primary healers. Paladins, druids, bards, and rangers all make good secondary healers. Wizards, rogues, bards, druids, and sorcerers are all supportive classes with unique abilities.

I've heard D&D described as the DM trying to kill off their party, and the party trying to survive. However, when playing with kids, you really want to focus on making sure everyone can have fun. The DM will also create various non-player characters (NPCs) and monsters in addition to the setting.

Creating your character's backstory is an excellent time to work on those writing skills. I've even seen DMs award really excellent backstories with extra experience points (XP). In filling out their character sheet (available in the back of the PHB), players will work on handwriting, arithmetic, and more.

If you're looking for a great story-telling game to play with friends or family, DnD is definitely one to check out. It's been played for decades for a reason.

Pathfinder

Pathfinder is the open-source version of D&D. It seems to be based on 3.5, but there have obviously been some tweaks. They also came out with a second edition in 2019 that further refined the rules. If you're having trouble acquiring the books for DnD, maybe look into Pathfinder, and see if that would be a good option for you.

Cortex System Games

The Cortex system was originally developed for the Serenity game, but there are many TV shows that have RPG games based on them, using the Cortex system. These include Battlestar Galactica, Supernatural, Smallville, Marvel, and Leverage.

Print-and-Play Games

The world of print-and-play games is vast and plentiful! There are many that are obviously educational, but also some that are genuinely fun. Thanks to COVID, Asmodee released many of their games for free print-and-play. Look on their website to find Ticket to Ride, Dixit, Story Cubes, Love Letter, and more. On my blog, I have [over 75 links to free printable games](#), organized by subject. Armed with a printer, laminator, internet access, and just a few basic supplies (like game pawns and dice), you can create a varied game library for only the cost of those supplies.

Pencil-and-Paper Games

These were the games that I enjoyed as a child whenever we had long waits at restaurants or on long airplane rides. The very simple supply list means that you can play them nearly anywhere, even if you need to use a paper napkin to write on!

Dots and Boxes

Targeted skills: Strategy, counting, and fine motor control.

All you need to do to start is draw a bunch of dots in a grid. You can play a shorter game with fewer dots, or a longer game with more. Once the dots are drawn, connect two dots with a line.

On each turn, you just make one more line. However, if you make the last line to enclose a box, you get to write your initial in the box. Whoever claims the most boxes wins! Super simple, but a lot of strategy.

Grow a Flower (Hangman)

Targeted skills: Spelling, counting, drawing, vowels versus consonants, and common letters of the alphabet.

Everyone knows Hangman, though it's probably not considered politically correct anymore. Instead, here are instructions for Grow a Flower. To play, one person decides on a word. Make as many dashes as there are letters. Then, draw the growing platform (see Figure 61).



Figure 61: The basic layout for starting a game of Grow a Flower. Draw the same number of lines on the bottom as there are letters in the word.

The other player guesses a letter. If it's in the word, the first person places it in all the correct locations. If it's not, they write it down to the side and draw one part of the flower.

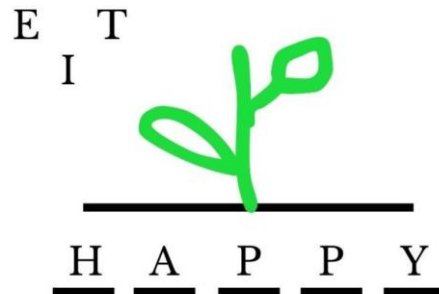


Figure 62: The word was HAPPY, and was correctly guessed after just three wrong letter guesses!

As long as you guess the word before the flower is fully drawn, you win (see Figure 62). Words can be long or short. Similarly, you can draw as much detail in your flower as you want. You can add more leaves, veins to leaves, and more flower petals. Personally, I'd rather draw more flower parts and let my kids get to where they can guess the word.

Tic Tac Toe

Targeted skills: Strategy and fine motor control.

Tic Tac Toe is another excellent game playable with only a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Make two parallel vertical lines, and two parallel horizontal lines (perpendicular to the first two lines), as shown in Figure 63.

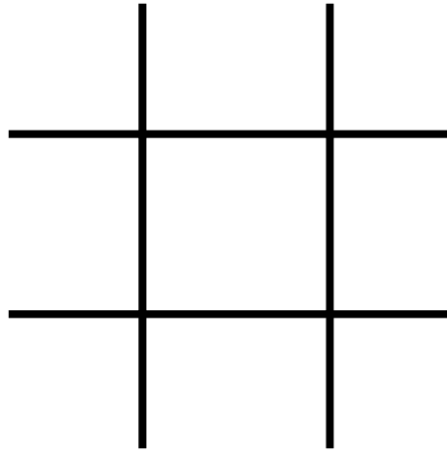


Figure 63: Tic-Tac-Toe grid.

Players take turns marking either Xs or Os, trying to get three in a row. In the example in Figure 64, X started and managed a win. If neither player wins, it's called a “cat's game.”

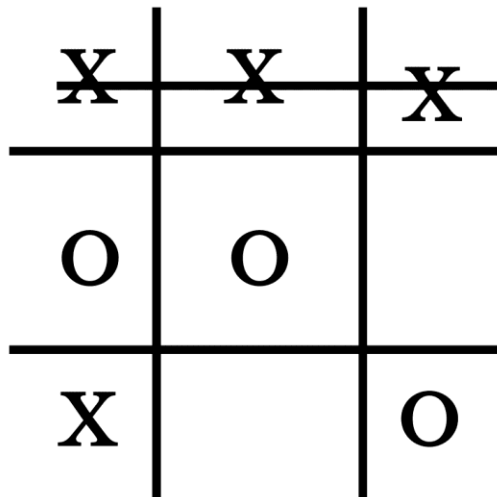


Figure 64: X was able to get three in a row, so they win!

Iago

Targeted skills: Numeracy, strategy, and arithmetic.

Iago is a simple line game shared in [Beast Academy](#). Start by drawing a straight, horizontal line. Draw 10 hash marks, equally spaced, and then number the hash marks. You can do 1-10, 1-100 (by 10's), 10-20, or any other number of 10 sequential digits.

Each player gets 10 markers. One player could use pennies, and the other could use dimes. Or one can use orange legos, and the other can use green legos. Use whatever you have around the house. (If you laminate your Iago game, you could use two different colors of dry-erase markers.)

Player 1 places one of their markers on any hash mark. Player 2 places one of their markers on any unclaimed hash mark. From now on, players are still able to place their markers on any unclaimed hash mark, but they're also trying to capture the other player's pieces.

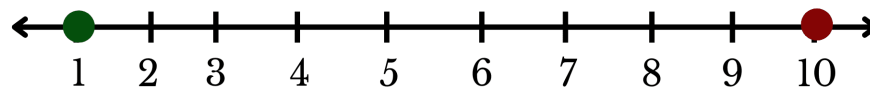


Figure 65: Green places their marker on 1 and Red places their marker on 10.

So, let's use Figure 65 to start the game. Starting on the very edge is a good idea; this way, no one can flank that one piece.

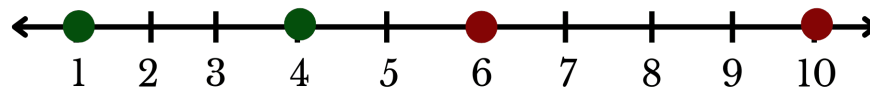


Figure 66: Green chooses 4, and Red chooses 6.

On each player's second turn, they're trying to place their markers in such a way that the other player can't capture their marker. To capture a marker, you need to place one of your markers so that your opponent's marker is halfway between two of yours. So these spots in Figure 66 are good places, as red would need a spot at -1 (off the game line) to capture green's marker at 4. However, while red did make sure their next marker (at 6) couldn't be captured using green's marker at 1 (they would need to pair that with a

marker at 11 to be successful), they didn't think about green's new marker at 4.

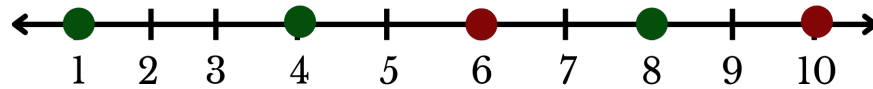


Figure 67: Green places their next marker at 8...

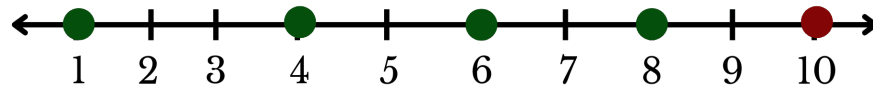


Figure 68: ...capturing the red marker at 6 and turning it green.

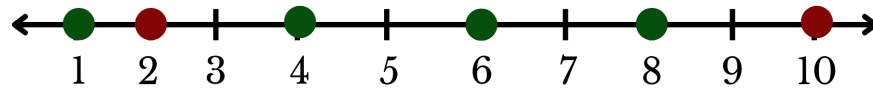


Figure 69: Red next places a marker at 2...



Figure 70: ...turning 6 back to red, as 6 is halfway between 2 and 10.

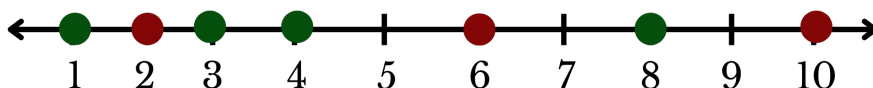


Figure 71: Green places their next marker at 3...

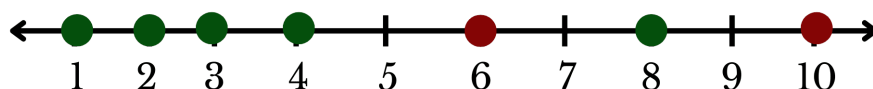


Figure 72: ...capturing the red marker at 2 and turning it green.

Play continues until all hashtags have been filled with markers, and whoever has the most markers on the line wins.

Imagination or Voice-Only Games

It doesn't get much simpler, cheaper, or easier to play than these games! They have no material requirements; instead relying on voice, eyesight, and imagination.

The Alphabet Game

Targeted skills: The alphabet, spelling, reading, and visual acuity.

When taking long trips in the car, but we're in between audiobooks or otherwise unable to listen to one, we enjoy The Alphabet Game. Each player is doing their best to race through the alphabet from A to Z.

This game definitely promotes knowing your alphabet. It also encourages paying attention to what's going on outside the car, as sources from within the car are not allowed. However, signs, license plates, and billboards are all viable sources of letters.

A source can not be used more than once. Not only does this mean that multiple people can't use the same "Exit" sign to get their "X," another person can't use that "Exit" sign to get their "T" after someone has already used it for their "X."

There are some downsides to the game. Anyone with hampered vision is going to be at a disadvantage. (Even though I wear glasses, I swear my eyesight with them is still not as good as my husband's.) Kids sitting in a back seat are not going to be able to see signs as quickly as their parent sitting in the front seat. Finally, I won't play if I'm driving, as I need to concentrate on the road.

All of that said, this is a good game for the car that requires no materials, no costs, and doesn't even require reading! (We usually say the letter with what word it's in, but kids that aren't yet reading could just say the letter "in that sign.")

We're Going on a Picnic...

Targeted skills: Working memory, the alphabet, spelling, and creative thinking.

And I'm bringing Apples.

We're going on a picnic and I'm bringing Blueberries, Susan is bringing Apples.

We're going on a picnic and I'm bringing Cake, Tom is bringing Blueberries, and Susan is bringing Apples.

We're going on a picnic and I'm bringing donuts, Stacy is bringing Cake, Tom is bringing Blueberries, and Susan is bringing Apples.

There are several different versions of this game, but they're all memory games that work in alphabetical order. Another version is "I went to the shops today and bought..." You can make the game easier by excluding the players' names, and just saying the items.

We're Going on a Picnic

Targeted skills: Logic, creative thinking, and discernment.

A totally different game by the same name is a rule-guessing game, not an alphabet game. In this game, one person thinks of a rule for what can go on a picnic. It can be something simple, like a color, or more complicated, like it starts with the first letter of your name.

So, let's say our fictitious Stacy from the previous game is thinking of the rule this game. She decides that everything needs to be a food. "We're going on a picnic and I'm bringing sandwiches, and I can go."

Tom thinks maybe things have to start with the same letter his name starts with, and says, "We're going on a picnic, and I'm bringing tomatoes?" Tomatoes are a food, so Stacy nods, saying, "You can go."

Susan guesses the same thing as Tom, so says, "We're going on a picnic, and I'm bringing stationery?" Stationery isn't a food, so Stacy shakes her head, saying, "You can't go."

The last fictitious person in the previous game, Carl, guesses that the rule might be that it needs to be a food. “We’re going on a picnic, and I’m bringing a fruit salad?” Stacy nods, saying, “You can go.”

The game continues this way until a player guesses the rule of the round. Stacy will usually bring something that will allow her on the picnic, but might occasionally bring something that won’t allow her to go.

When the rule is guessed correctly, the round ends, and a new person chooses the rule.

The Minister’s Cat

Targeted skills: The alphabet, spelling, vocabulary, and parts of speech.

In the Minister’s Cat, players take turns choosing an adjective. They start with words that begin with the letter A, until they run out, then they move on to B. For example, “The Minister’s Cat is an Anxious cat.” “The Minister’s Cat is an Antsy cat.” “The Minister’s Cat is an Apologetic cat.” When the next player can not think of an adjective beginning with A, they move on to B, and so on, through the alphabet.

The Minister’s Cat is a great game to play, requires only minimal spelling skills (and great for beginners), no sight (or can be played using ASL instead), and of course, no materials.

Twenty Questions

Targeted skills: Logic and strategy.

To play 20 Questions, one player thinks of something. The other players have just 20 yes or no questions to guess what it is. It’s very similar to the game of Animal, Vegetable, Mineral. In both games, you want to start by asking questions that can eliminate large swaths of possibilities. For example, “Is it alive?” Another good question is in relation to size, whether it’s an animal (if it was previously determined that it is alive), or if it is corporeal (has physical form). As more information is gathered, questions get more specific until someone can ask if the thing is ____ (a cat, for example).

Twenty Questions requires no reading, materials, or sight, so it is an excellent game for when you’re in the car, at a restaurant, or waiting in line.

I Spy

Targeted skills: Colors, shapes, and visual acuity.

“I spy with my little eye, something red.” Nearly everyone knows I Spy. After the first player’s opening phrase, everyone else tries to guess what that red item is. (Or whatever color the initial player calls for.)

When playing I Spy in the car, you have to use items that everyone is capable of seeing, and not something that has whizzed by the window. A major drawback of the way I was taught to play I Spy is that it relies on all players being able to differentiate colors.

However, there are other ways to play. You could use shapes (“I spy with my little eye, something round”), or even sizes. According to some rules, you can start by asking yes or no questions to narrow things down (like in [20 Questions](#)), but this usually is not allowed.

Simon Says

Targeted skills: Awareness, instruction-following, body parts, and physical movement.

Simon Says is a great voice-only game that gets a bit of physical movement in, too! Probably not the best game for a child to be “Simon” if you’re in a car or waiting in a restaurant, but certainly a parent should be able to lead the game.

One person is designated as “Simon,” or the leader. They get to tell the others what to do. If, however, they don’t start their instructions with “Simon says,” the other players are not supposed to do the thing.

“Simon says, put your hand on your head.” Players put their hands on their heads.

“Simon says, stand on one foot.” Players stand on one foot.

“Hop up and down.” Players are not supposed to hop, since “Simon says” was not said. If they do hop up and down, they’re out.

Simon Says is a popular game to play before asking kids to sit still and listen. It allows them to move around a bit and hopefully get some wiggles out, but

also gets them listening. It might be worth trying before your next family meeting, before sit-down formal schoolwork time (if you have any), or before your next board game.

Easy to DIY

When looking for games that you can DIY, an excellent place to look is history. Older games, or games from periods of time that would have required people to make their own games, are often simple. [Dice games](#), [pencil-and-paper games](#), and [print-and-plays](#) would also fall into this category.

Card Holder

There are numerous options to buy cardholders, but they're also easy to make! Here's one my son made with LEGO bricks:



Figure 73: I could probably fit one more card in each row, but this comfortably fits 14 cards.



Figure 74: Here's a top view without the cards.

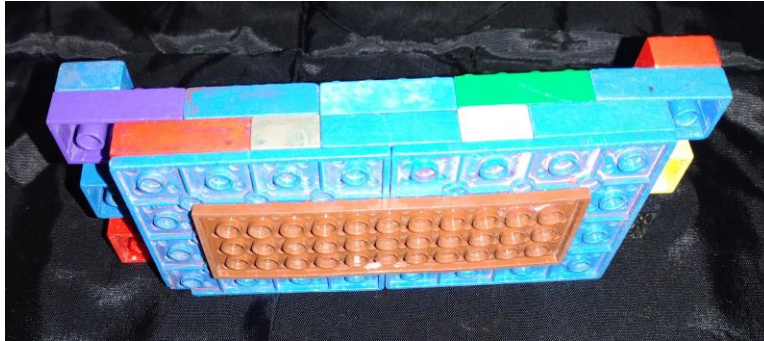


Figure 75: And a side/bottom view.

Here's one made from an egg carton:



Figure 76: Simply cut off the top of the egg carton, turn it over, and cut slits in the bottom of each egg cup, and voila! You have a cardholder. Do you need to hold and organize more cards? Just use a larger egg carton. My daughter tried the one I made for this picture and declared it a success.

Mancala

Targeted skills: Logic, strategy, and counting.

Mancala is a favorite game in our house. It is an ancient game, first played more than 3400 years ago. There are many versions; we found our rules from [Endless Games](#).

To make your copy, all you need is an empty egg carton that holds one dozen eggs and 48 small items. In Figure 77, I used LEGO bricks, but you could also use dried beans, rocks, or a variety of other readily-available items.



Figure 77: Our home-made Mancala game, all set up for play.

The egg carton is perfect for Mancala because it has twelve small pockets in two even lines, and you can use the egg carton lid to create the larger pockets on either side. Begin with four items in each of the small pockets.

Orient your Mancala game as shown in Figure 77 above, so that one long line of pockets is closest to you, and the other closest to the other player. Mancala is a two-person game. On your turn, pick up all the items from one of your pockets and move your hand counter-clockwise around the game, dropping an item in each pocket as you go.



Figure 78

Figure 78 is taken after the first player's turn. They started by picking up the items in the pocket that is third from the left (circled in red). They dropped one item in the three small pockets to the right, then the last one in the large pocket, or "store."

According to the instructions we use, when you finish your turn by dropping an item in your store, you get to go again. So the first player now took all the items from the small pocket directly next to their store (circled in green). They dropped one item in their store, then continued around counter-clockwise, dropping one item in the first four small pockets on their opponent's side.



Figure 79

Now the second player has gone (see Figure 79). They, too, wanted a second turn, so took the items from the pocket circled in red, moving counter-clockwise and dropping an item in each pocket in turn. They finish by dropping their last item in their store, so they get to go again.

Player two now takes all their items from the pocket circled in green (see Figure 79), and moves counter-clockwise, dropping an item in each pocket.



Figure 80

Now we see two more turns have been taken (see Figure 80). First, Player One takes all the items from their pocket circled in red. Since there were only four items, they don't make it to the empty pocket all the way on the right.

Next, Player Two takes their items from the pocket circled in green, and moves counter-clockwise. There were seven items in that pocket, so they make it past their own store and continue dropping one item in each of their opponent's pockets until the last is dropped in the pocket that has just one blue and one orange LEGO in Figure 80.

There are a few more rules. If you're able to make it all the way around, past your store, and past all your opponent's pockets, skip your opponent's store. Only put items in your own store.

If you drop your last item in one of your pockets that was previously empty, you get to take both that item, plus all the items in the opposite pocket (your opponent's pocket), and place them in your store.



Figure 81: Player One takes the items from their pocket circled in red, dropping one item in each pocket as they go counter-clockwise. Player Two then takes all their items from the pocket circled in green, again going counter-clockwise.

You can see that Player Two is attempting to set this up by emptying the pocket circled in green (see Figure 81). Player One notices what they're doing, though, and quickly empties that pocket in Figure 82.



Figure 82

The game is over when one of the players has no more items in their pockets and cannot make a move. Move any remaining items from your pockets to your store, and count all the items in your store. Whoever has the most items in their store wins the game.

Shut the Box

Targeted skills: Arithmetic and strategy.

We found Shut the Box at the thrift store, and enjoy having the physical game to play with. However, it does take up a lot of space, so we might transition

to a paper version. Shut the Box can be a single-player game, or can have as many players as you want. You'll just need a pair of dice.

Start with a line drawn on a piece of paper, and 10 hash-marks. These are usually labeled 1-10, but you could choose to use other numbers (see Figure 83).

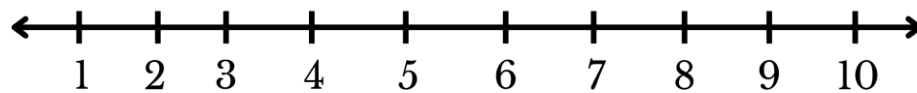


Figure 83: Draw a basic number line for Shut the Box.

Roll two dice. Our instructions said to use addition to mark off one number, but we allow any operation. In addition, we allow any operation to be used on the game side, too.

For example, if you roll a 5 and a 6, you could say: $5 \times 6 = 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 - 6 + 5 - 4 + 3 - 2 \times 1$

I like to challenge my kids to see how many they can mark off in just one turn.

Hopscotch

Targeted skills: Gross motor skills and counting.

All hopscotch requires is some chalk, a flat bit of pavement (or maybe just lines drawn in sand or dirt with a stick!), and something small like a rock or small stick.

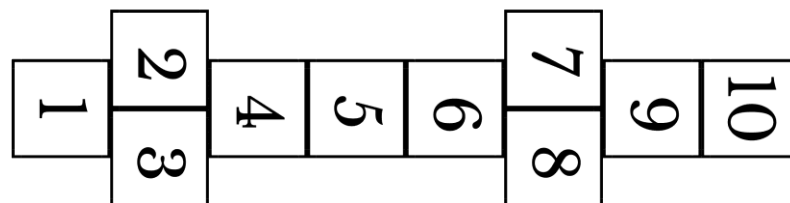


Figure 84: A basic setup for Hopscotch.

Boxes are drawn on the ground. Those of us raised in the '80s and '90s probably remember Hopscotch boxes being painted on the pavement in our

schoolyards. The game doesn't seem as popular anymore, but can still be a lot of fun.

The first player gently tosses the small item into one of the squares. Then they hop or jump up to it. If there are two boxes side by side, they land on two feet, one in each square. Usually, though, there should only be one box, and they land on just one foot. They can not alternate feet (which would just be walking).

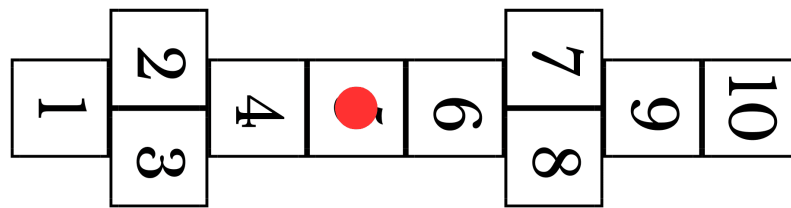


Figure 85: Skip over the item you toss on your way out, and pick it up on your way back.

When they get to the item, they hop over the square the item landed in and continue on to the end of the boxes (see Figure 85). Then they turn around and make their way back. This time, when they get to the item, they first lean down to pick it up, before again hopping over the square and hopping back to the start. Play then passes to the next person in line.

I don't remember Hopscotch being about winning or losing. More, it was a fun way to practice different ways of moving your body. Hopping, jumping, bending down, and throwing are all basic activities that kids need to learn. Even drawing the boxes can help develop those large muscles.

Ring Toss

Targeted skills: Gross motor skills.

This is a game that pioneer children played. All it needs is one ring, roughly 8-16" in diameter, and two sticks per person. The ring may be made out of a flexible stick, soaked reeds, grasses, or other natural material. Making the ring can be a good activity, in and of itself.

Each player holds a smooth stick in each hand, and they take turns using the sticks to toss the ring. The goal is to not drop the ring on the ground, and never grab it directly with your hand.

Cat's Cradle

Targeted skills: Fine motor control and cooperation.

I think, in our modern consumerist society, we tend to hyper-focus on what we can buy while ignoring many simple pleasures. All Cat's Cradle needs is a string, about 60-62" long (though I've seen various instructions, so feel free to experiment), tied in a circle. I did have a kit as a child, that came with a book and a string. I kept it through my childhood and passed it on to my children, but never did it enough that I could do it without the book of instructions.

Cat's Cradle is a two-person string game, but there are also single-player string games. I won't include all the specific instructions here, but there are many websites with instructions:

- <https://www.alysion.org/figures/introkids.htm>
- [String Figures Instructable](#)
- [String Games, by Arvind Gupta and illustrated by Avinash Deshpande](#)
- [Mom's Minivan String Games](#)
- [Kidspot](#)
- [Australian Museum](#)

String games are excellent for in the car, waiting in lines, waiting at a restaurant, and more! Since all you need is a piece of string, it can store easily in a pocket and be put away at a moment's notice.

Playing string games will help your children develop fine motor control and the ability to follow instructions. Furthermore, since string games have been played around the world for thousands of years, you can explore different cultures through string games.

Jump Rope

Targeted skills: Gross motor skills, rhythm, and rhymes.

Jumping rope used to be the ultimate playground activity. Kids either used a shorter rope to jump on their own (measure from one armpit to the other, stepping on the rope as it goes to the ground), or a much longer one (or two!) to jump in groups.

Not only is this a great way to get rid of extra energy, but it is also marvelous at helping develop gross (large) motor skills. Before children can begin writing, they need to develop their fine motor skills. Before they can develop their fine motor skills, they need to develop their gross motor skills. Running, jumping, climbing, and throwing are all great ways to develop gross motor skills.

When jumping rope in groups, it was customary for kids to chant rhymes. This helps improve memory, rhythm, and the phonemic (sound) awareness needed for reading.

Battleship

Targeted skills: Coordinate planes, logic, and strategy.

I have a few links to versions of Battleship on my [free print-and-plays post](#), but it's worth mentioning here, too. You can use ordinary Battleship to teach coordinate planes, or use specialized versions to work on the Table of Elements or the multiplication table.

Just like with the other [printable games](#), printer access is very helpful, but not required. We also like to laminate our games; if you do, all you need is a dry-erase marker to mark where ships have been hit or sunk (or failed to).

Before beginning play, decide how many ships of what size each player needs to place. If you use two Manila file folders, it's easy to arrange the grids so that each player can see their own and not their opponent's. Battleship is another two-player game, and each player needs two grids. One for their own ships, and one to show where they've aimed missiles at their opponent's ships. They need to mark an H for Hit and an M for Miss.

When all squares of a ship have been hit, it sinks. If you sink all your opponent's ships before they sink all of yours, you win!

Math Scrabble

Targeted skills: Arithmetic and strategy.

Did you know you can take your old, dust-covered Scrabble game that's been sitting in your parent's attic for the past three decades, and turn it into a new game? That's right, and this one is for math!

There are versions of this game that you can purchase, but they tend to be on the expensive side. However, by writing with Sharpie on the back of the wood tiles, you can have another game for no more cost. If you don't happen to have an old Scrabble game collecting dust, they're cheap and easy to pick up from the thrift store.

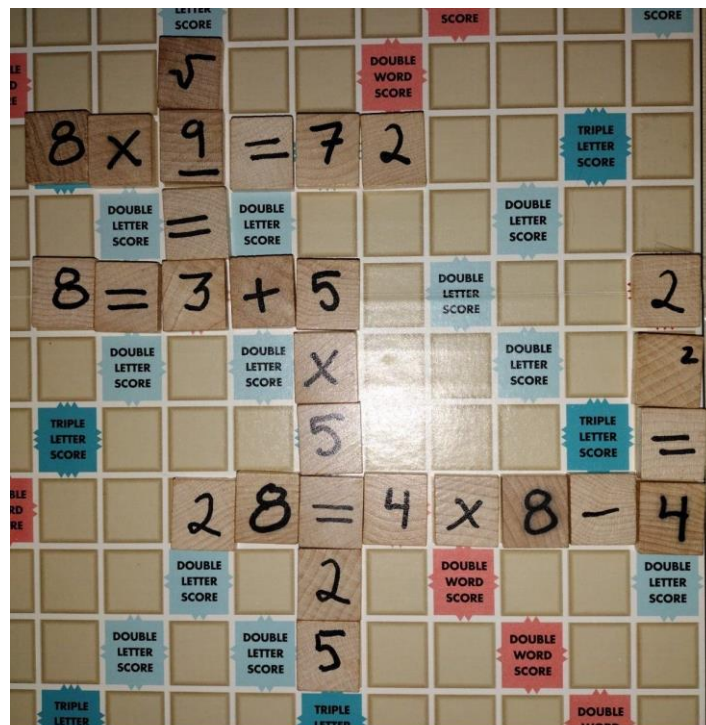


Figure 86: A sample game of Math Scrabble. We repurposed our Scrabble game so now we have two games in one!

To play, just like in Scrabble, you're creating a crossword-like puzzle, only, instead of words, you're creating mathematical equations (see Figure 86). [This Instructable](#) has detailed instructions on how to turn your old Scrabble game into Math Scrabble, and also how to play.

My family hasn't yet tried to keep score, and we always play cooperatively. But it still provides plenty of arithmetic practice and is a lot of fun.

Conclusion

I hope that this book has inspired you to introduce more games into your student's education. No matter the size of your budget, there are games that you can play! Whether you stick to games found at your thrift store or games you can make, or if you have some from every category, fun and learning are sure to collide.

I'm so glad you've read *Gameschooling on a Budget*, and I hope you found it helpful! I would really appreciate it if you would [leave a review on Amazon](#). Book reviews make a huge difference in whether an author gets their book in front of their audience.

Don't forget to check out [my blog](#) and [Youtube channel](#) for many more ideas of games you can play. Remember, gameschooling is about finding the learning within the games, not forcing education into games. Play the games, have fun, and enjoy the journey. I wish you many fun-filled years ahead!

About the Author

Ashley Wright is the owner of the Gypsy Gameschooler blog and YouTube channel, where she reviews board, card, and dice games to help others choose the best games for their family. Her family helps her with the YouTube channel, recording play-throughs of games.

Ashley homeschools her two kids, who were born in 2013 and 2015. They were going to delay formal education, but when her oldest became obsessed with letters as a toddler, she realized that wasn't really going to be much of a possibility.

They started gameschooling in 2019 after being burnt out on Khan Academy and formal academics. They were instantly hooked! They were having so much fun, learning so much, and it took less time to play a math game than to drag her kids through their lessons on Khan Academy. They've since added many games to their repertoire, and haven't looked back.

This whole time, however, Ashley's family made the decision to be a one-income household so Ashley could focus on raising their kids. This made things difficult financially, though, so Ashley has become an expert on doing more with less.

Ashley Wright has been featured in the Homeschool Quest's ezine and blog, where she wrote an article on how to save money while homeschooling on the road. She also wrote an article on the benefits of gameschooling for Wonders of Curiosity.

Ashley's time working on her master of arts in education from Michigan State University has helped to reinforce her obsession with play-based learning. When she's not playing games with her family, they enjoy exploring museums, zoos, and parks all over the United States, as they are traveling full time.

Ashley Wright can be reached at her blog, GypsyGameschooler.com, on YouTube at [YouTube.com/@GypsyGameschooler](https://www.youtube.com/@GypsyGameschooler), and on Pinterest at [Pinterest.com/GypsyGameschooler](https://www.pinterest.com/GypsyGameschooler).