VGCUSA PRESENTS

1UP EDU
CONNECT. PLAY. GROW.

SEL GAMING TOOLBOX

K-2, 3-5, 6-9, AND 9TH-12TH GRADE



SEL

P21
PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

CASEL ALIGNED

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Thank you for respecting our work and supporting our mission to create impactful educational experiences through gaming and creativity.

A LETTER



Dear Educator,

Welcome to 1UpEDU, where we empower teachers like you to support students who struggle with social skills through the power of gaming and creative learning! We believe every student has the potential to thrive socially and emotionally when given the right tools and opportunities to connect, collaborate, and grow.

We focus on integrating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies into engaging activities that help students develop key skills such as self-awareness, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making. By utilizing games in an educational setting, we can create an environment where students feel safe, supported, and excited to learn real-life skills in a nonthreatening manner.

Thank You,

Josh Bound

1UpEDU Purpose

The purpose of 1UpEDU is to provide educational resources, programs, and tools that use gaming, creativity, and interactive learning to foster personal growth, collaboration, and essential life skills. It focuses on integrating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and STEAM philosophies into engaging activities, helping students and educators alike develop competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence.

Our Thanks

We extend our deepest gratitude to the countless teachers and professional contributors for their invaluable contributions to the development of our 1UpEDU curricula. Your creativity, dedication, and passion have been the driving force behind creating innovative programs that empower students and educators alike. Thank you for your hard work and commitment to making 1UpEDU a success!



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Chapter 1
Connecting With SEL

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a lifelong process of developing social and emotional skills that help us to be successful. In educational contexts, this term is often used to describe how we help students learn and practice these skills in supportive environments.

CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, is a pioneering organization dedicated to enhancing SEL across educational settings. As part of their work, they developed the CASEL 5 framework which categorizes these skills into 5 core skill areas, or competencies, that contribute to overall social and emotional intelligence.

These competencies are:

Self-Awareness	• Recognizing one's emotions • Developing an accurate view of oneself • Adopting a mindset geared towards growth, enhancing self-confidence and self-belief
Self-Management	• Navigating stress effectively • Keeping impulses in check • Modulating one's emotional responses • Establishing and fulfilling personal objectives

Social Awareness	• Understanding and empathizing with others' viewpoints • Acknowledging and valuing diverse cultural and background differences • Grasping the essence of social and behavioral expectations
Relationship Skills	• Engaging in effective communication and attentive listening • Fostering and maintaining interpersonal relationships • Withstanding negative influences • Handling and resolving conflicts • Providing and seeking support when necessary
Responsible Decision-Making	• Making choices that reflect ethical standards, social norms, and considerations of safety • Applying a methodical approach to making decisions across various contexts • Assessing how one's decisions affect others • Reflecting on the outcomes of decisions

Research shows that students who participate in SEL programs better develop these competencies, which results in greater social and emotional intelligence. Greater social and emotional intelligence ultimately contributes to positive lifetime outcomes.

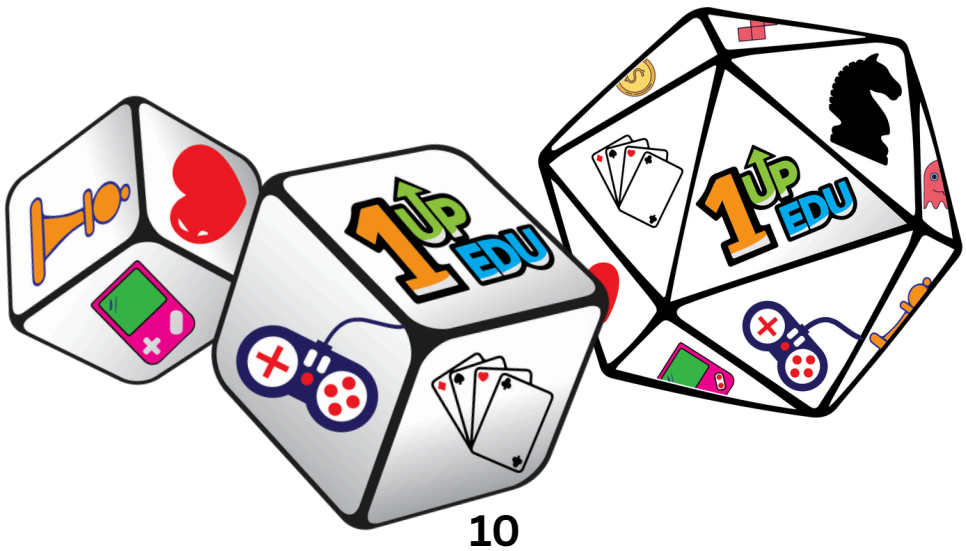
Students who develop social and emotional intelligence demonstrate:

- Increased positivity towards self and others, enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection, commitment to school, and a sense of purpose
- Healthy social behaviors and relationships with peers and adults
- Decreased emotional distress
- Improved test scores, grades, and attendance

In the long-term, greater social and emotional intelligence can increase the likelihood of:

- Emotional and psychological well-being
- Lifelong learning
- Engaged citizenship

At 1UpEDU, we recognize that gaming naturally engages each of the competencies outlined in the CASEL 5 framework. By understanding these competencies and how they are fostered by gameplay, mentors can leverage gaming as a meaningful and effective way to actualize social and emotional learning for all students.



The Pennsylvania Career Ready Skills Continuum Aligned

Domain 1: Self-Awareness & Self-Management

Skills that help students recognize and regulate their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.:

- Identify one's emotions and their influence on behavior.
- Demonstrate control of impulses.
- Set, monitor, adapt, and evaluate goals to achieve success in school and life.
- Demonstrate honesty, integrity, and responsibility.
- Demonstrate ability to adapt to change.
- Identify and use stress-management strategies.
- Show initiative by engaging in and completing tasks.

Domain 2: Establishing & Maintaining Relationships

Skills that support healthy relationships, communication, and collaboration.

- Demonstrate the ability to show respect for the perspective of others.
- Recognize and respond to social cues in different settings.
- Demonstrate effective listening skills.
- Express empathy and compassion for others.
- Seek and provide help when needed.
- Develop positive relationships through cooperation and teamwork.
- Communicate effectively to express needs, wants, and feelings.
- Demonstrate cultural awareness and respect for diversity.

Domain 3: Social Problem Solving

Skills that help students make responsible decisions and navigate social challenges.

- Recognize and evaluate social norms and expectations.
- Identify problems, generate solutions, and make constructive choices.
- Demonstrate personal responsibility for decision-making.
- Resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively.
- Evaluate consequences of decisions for self and others.
- Demonstrate civic responsibility.
- Use communication and negotiation skills to reach positive outcomes.

PA CRS Domains ↔ CASEL Core Competencies

Sel Awareness and Self Management

PA CRS Focus: Recognize and regulate emotions; set and pursue goals; adapt and cope; understand strengths and preferences across grade bands.

CASEL Competencies Included:

Self-Awareness

- Recognizing strengths/needs, labeling emotions, self-advocacy.

Self-Management

- Stress & emotion regulation, impulse control, coping strategies, goal-setting.

Establishing & Maintaining Relationships

A CRS Focus: Communicate and collaborate in diverse contexts; express empathy; build positive relationships.

CASEL Competencies Included:

Social Awareness

- Perspective-taking, empathy, respecting diversity (aligned to PA's empathy and diversity emphasis).

Relationship Skills

- Effective communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, collaboration —all reflected in PA CRS's emphasis on interacting positively and respectfully

Social Problem-Solving

PA CRS Focus: Recognize social norms, anticipate consequences, analyze perspectives, resolve conflict, make respectful choices

CASEL Competency Included:

Responsible Decision-Making

- Identifying problems, evaluating consequences, solving problems ethically—core to both PA CRS and CASEL's responsible decision-making.

Partnership for 21st Century Learning and the Impact of Social Gameplay

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

- **Defining Challenges:** Encourage students to identify real-world challenges reflected in the games they play. For example, they might discuss how a game addresses themes like teamwork, resource management, or problem-solving. By analyzing these themes, students can connect gaming experiences to broader societal issues.
- **Analyzing and Evaluating Evidence:** Students can reflect on their gameplay experiences by analyzing data such as performance stats, player strategies, or feedback from peers. This helps them critically evaluate their actions and decisions, refining their skills and understanding of the game.
- **Systems Thinking:** Many games involve intricate systems that require players to understand how various elements work together. Encourage students to explore how mechanics, rules, and player interactions influence outcomes, developing systems thinking skills that apply beyond gaming.

Creativity and Innovation

- **Idea Generation and Brainstorming:** Encourage creativity by guiding students to brainstorm unique and innovative ways to blend scientific concepts with artistic elements in games. For example, they could explore how to represent the water cycle through interactive gameplay that is both educational and engaging.

Creativity and Innovation Continued

- **Design and Prototype Development:** Guide students through the process of creating prototypes for their games, allowing them to experiment with different designs and mechanics. This iterative process fosters innovation as students learn to refine their ideas and overcome design challenges.
- **Artistic Expression:** Incorporate opportunities for students to express themselves artistically through game design, including character creation, storytelling, and visual aesthetics. This not only enhances creativity but also integrates arts into STEM education, aligning with the STEAM approach.

Communication

- **Articulating Ideas:** Encourage students to clearly express their thoughts and the purpose of the games they enjoy playing. This includes sharing game strategies or storytelling elements with peers during discussions and engaging in conversations that explain why certain games resonate with them. Practicing both written and oral communication builds confidence in articulating ideas.
- **Using Digital Media:** Students can leverage digital tools to communicate and share their gaming experiences. For example, they could create reviews, gameplay tutorials, or highlight reels to share on platforms like YouTube or social media, enhancing their ability to express themselves through modern media.
- **Feedback and Collaboration:** Highlight the value of giving and receiving constructive feedback. Encourage students to share their gaming experiences or insights with peers, listen to others' perspectives, and discuss how these insights could shape their understanding of game mechanics or strategies. This practice fosters a collaborative environment and helps develop communication skills.

Collaboration

- **Teamwork:** Encourage students to collaborate in teams while playing social games, highlighting the importance of working together to achieve shared goals. Each student can take on a specific role, such as strategist, communicator, or problem-solver, to enhance team dynamics and simulate real-world collaboration.
- **Global and Cross-Cultural Collaboration:** Foster opportunities for students to connect with peers from diverse backgrounds or different countries through online gaming communities. These interactions can expand their understanding of different cultures and teach them to work effectively in a global context.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Equip students with strategies to handle conflicts that may arise during team play, such as disagreements over strategy or in-game decisions. By addressing and resolving differences constructively, students build interpersonal skills and learn to maintain positive relationships in team environments.

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- **Digital Literacy:** Help students build their skills in navigating and using digital tools related to gaming. This includes learning to evaluate online resources for accuracy, exploring game-related software, and understanding the basics of coding or game mechanics—essential skills in today's digital world.
- **Media Creation:** Encourage students to create content like game reviews, highlight videos, or gameplay tutorials. These activities not only showcase their technical and creative abilities but also help them understand the intersection of storytelling and technology.
- **Understanding the Impact of Technology:** Engage students in discussions about how gaming and technology shape society. Explore topics such as the ethical considerations of game content, the role of games in education, and how they can influence cultural or public perspectives.

Life and Career Skills

- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Encourage students to adjust their gaming strategies or approaches as they face new challenges or learn from feedback. Developing this skill helps them thrive in dynamic and ever-changing environments.
- **Initiative and Self-Direction:** Motivate students to take charge of their gaming experiences, setting personal goals and actively seeking ways to improve their skills. This fosters independence and a sense of responsibility for their growth.
- **Productivity and Accountability:** Set clear goals and expectations for group gaming activities, teaching students to manage their time effectively and take responsibility for their roles within the team. This helps build strong work habits and collaboration skills.

Integrating the Four Cs in STEAM

- **Critical Thinking:** Encourage students to explore complex topics, such as sustainability or social justice, through gaming. Challenge them to think deeply about these issues and discuss how games can present thoughtful solutions or raise awareness.
- **Creativity:** Give students the freedom to express their creativity in all aspects of gaming, from developing unique storylines to designing visually compelling elements. Emphasize the importance of artistic innovation alongside technical skills.
- **Communication:** Help students build strong communication skills by having them clearly present their ideas. This could include pitching game concepts, drafting engaging narratives, or creating user-friendly interfaces that convey their vision effectively.
- **Collaboration:** Facilitate opportunities for interdisciplinary teamwork, where students combine their knowledge in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics to create inventive and meaningful gaming experiences.

Chapter 2
A Mentor's Impact

Gaming can take many forms in an educational setting. It may happen during a class, a station rotation, an advisory period, a small-group intervention, an after-school program, or a gaming club. Regardless of the setting, the adult facilitating the experience has an important role to play. We use the term "mentor" throughout this chapter to describe that role—not a specific program or setting, but the adult who guides students through meaningful experiences with games.

Educators start their teaching careers with a strong personal passion, a dedication to society, and a visionary outlook. At the core of their work is the desire to improve learning, encourage critical thinking, and spark curiosity in their students. Teaching has the power to change individual lives and contribute to societal progress. Educators aim to inspire, uplift, and guide their students, helping them become knowledgeable, thoughtful, and skilled members of society, ready to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

> "There is a quiet kid in the corner who will thank you for starting a gaming club."
>
> -Josh Bound, Founder VGCUSA



Mentors commit themselves to instilling a lasting love for learning and critical thinking. They foster a culture of inquiry, exploration, and creativity that goes beyond the classroom and enriches all areas of life, personal and professional. They play a crucial role in preparing the next generation to engage with and shape the future, equipping them with essential knowledge, skills, and ethical values.

Your Role as the Mentor

Teachers help bridge societal divides, striving to equip every student with the tools to succeed. They view education as a powerful means for social equity and transformation. The bonds formed between teachers and students are especially rewarding, providing insight into student development and achievement.

Serving as a mentor through gameplay offers a multifaceted role that builds on teacher-student relationships, providing a unique platform for fostering personal and social development among students. Through games, educators can go beyond the traditional classroom setting and tap into the interactive and engaging world of games, promoting growth, learning, and connection.

Building Social Skills and Emotional Intelligence

Gameplay creates natural opportunities for students to develop their social skills through teamwork, communication, and collaboration. As a mentor, a teacher helps guide these interactions, providing support as students navigate social dynamics. They assist students in expressing their thoughts and feelings, resolving conflicts, and learning to empathize with others, thereby improving their emotional intelligence.

Fostering Inclusivity and a Sense of Belonging

Mentors play a crucial role in creating an inclusive atmosphere where every student feels valued and accepted. By carefully selecting games that encourage cooperation and group problem-solving, mentors can ensure that all members, regardless of their background or abilities, find a place where they belong. This sense of community not only supports individual self-esteem but a broader culture of acceptance and understanding within the school.

Encouraging Academic and Cognitive Development

While gameplay naturally creates opportunities for play and engagement, it also offers rich opportunities for academic and cognitive growth. Mentors can introduce games that require strategic thinking, planning, and problem-solving, subtly reinforcing mathematical, literacy, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, discussions about game mechanics and strategies can parallel scientific and logical reasoning, making learning both fun and relevant.

Teaching Responsibility and Ethical Decision-Making

In the world of gaming, choices have consequences. Mentors use these moments to instill a sense of responsibility and ethical decision-making in their students. Whether it's considering the impact of their actions on other players or understanding the fairness of rules, students learn to think beyond immediate gratification to the broader implications of their decisions.

Promoting Perseverance and Resilience

Games inherently come with challenges and setbacks. A mentor uses these experiences as teachable moments, encouraging students to persevere, learn from their failures, and develop resilience. Celebrating achievements and learning from losses in a supportive community helps students develop a growth mindset, an invaluable trait that they can carry into all areas of their lives.

Bridging Learning with Real-World Skills

Finally, mentors have the unique ability to bridge the skills and experiences gained in gaming clubs with real-world applications. They help students see the relevance of teamwork, leadership, strategic planning, and creative thinking in various aspects of life, including future careers. By drawing parallels between in-game achievements and real-world challenges, mentors prepare students for success beyond the classroom.

In essence, acting as a mentor through gameplay allows educators to support their students' development in comprehensive and meaningful ways, leveraging the engaging power of games to teach valuable life lessons. This role not only enriches the students' educational journey but also provides a fulfilling avenue for teachers to make a lasting impact on their students' lives.

As a mentor, you will find countless opportunities to make an impact during gameplay. You may help a shy student find their place in the group, guide a frustrated peer toward creating harmony, or even break down clichés by showing everyone what real sportsmanship looks like.

Gaming will not be solely focused on having fun—it can also become a time and place to teach important life skills. Every session is packed with opportunities to teach how to communicate more effectively, solve problems, and work as part of a team. Whether it's coordinating strategies, sharing victory, or handling defeat, each moment is preparation for interacting with others and handling real-world situations with confidence, integrity, and respect.

Chapter 3
Hacking the Game

A teacher can effectively modify a game to promote Social Emotional Learning (SEL) objectives by carefully identifying in-game triggers and assigning corresponding actions that align with SEL competencies. For instance, a trigger might be a situation in the game where a player faces a setback, such as losing resources or failing a challenge. The teacher can then assign a reflective action, prompting the player to express how they feel about the setback, discuss strategies for managing emotions, or encourage peers with positive reinforcement, thereby addressing SEL competencies like self-awareness and self-management.

Similarly, triggers involving collaborative tasks can be linked to actions that require players to communicate effectively, negotiate roles, or make collective decisions, fostering skills in relationship management and social awareness. By integrating these targeted actions, the game becomes a dynamic tool for SEL, engaging students in meaningful learning experiences that develop emotional intelligence, empathy, and cooperation. This approach not only enhances the educational value of game-based learning but also creates a supportive environment where students can practice and apply essential life skills in a context that is interactive, reflective, and deeply engaging.

> "Life is an ugly, awful place to not have a best friend."
>
> Sarah Dessen, Novelist



Trigger

A "trigger" in a board or video game is an event or condition that activates a particular rule or mechanic. Triggers are the catalysts within the game's framework that prompt a response, action, or change in the game‘s state. They are often predefined within the game's ruleset and can vary widely in complexity and impact. Triggers can be:

Event-based: Something happening within the game, such as the completion of a turn, reaching a certain point on the board, or the play of a specific card, triggering the introduction or implementation of a rule.
Condition-based: A specific set of circumstances being met, like a player having a certain number of resources, cards, or pieces in a particular configuration, can trigger an action or choice.
Player-initiated: Actions taken by players, such as choosing to move a piece in a certain way, attacking an opponent, or activating a card, can serve as triggers for further rules or mechanics to come into play.

Action

An "action" in a board game is the response or activity that is carried out as a result of a trigger. Actions are the core of gameplay, defining what players can do during their turn or in response to certain events. Actions can be mandatory, resulting from a trigger, or they may offer a choice to the player(s) involved. Actions include:

Executing a move: Changing the position of a piece on the board.
Drawing, playing, or discarding cards: Managing cards in a way dictated by the game's rules.
Gaining or losing resources: Altering the state of a player's resources as a direct result of a trigger.
Interacting with other players: Engaging in trade, conflict, or cooperation as dictated by the game's mechanics.
Activating effects: Triggering additional rules or special abilities that affect the game's outcome.

Trigger and Action in Gameplay

The interplay between triggers and actions is what creates the strategic depth and interactive dynamics of a board game. A well-designed game carefully balances these elements to ensure a smooth flow of play, challenges players to make meaningful decisions, and maintains engagement from start to finish. For educational purposes, triggers and actions can be engineered to teach specific concepts, develop skills, or provoke thought and discussion among players.

Understanding and analyzing triggers and actions can also enhance a player's ability to strategize and succeed in a game. By anticipating the triggers present in the game and planning actions accordingly, players can optimize their gameplay, adapt to their opponents' strategies, and improve their overall experience and performance.

10 Actions to Assign to Any Trigger



1. Engage in a Staring Challenge
2. Invent a Distinctive Handshake
3. Deliver a Compliment to Another Player
4. Extend a Sincere Apology
5. Discuss a Personal Favorite
6. Imitate the Sound of a Rooster
7. Narrate a Short Tale
8. Highlight a Day's High or Low Point
9. Perform a Brief Dance Routine
10. Sing "Happy Birthday" or Another Tune to the Group

20 Teachable Moments

Practicing handshakes before and after matches.
Shaking hands shows good sportsmanship, building respect and friendship between competitors. It promotes a sense of goodwill and keeps relationships among players friendly, reminding everyone that camaraderie is more important than winning or losing. A closing handshake is also a way to leave any rivalry or hard feelings behind, supporting a positive vibe and respect for the sport itself.

Introducing oneself by name during handshakes.
Teaching students to say their names before playing, creates a welcoming and open atmosphere. This simple act shows recognition of the other player's presence and role, setting the stage for a positive relationship from the start and building a good connection that will create a foundation for fair play and competition. This kind of personal interaction ensures that everyone feels appreciated and motivated to give their best, upholding the spirit of good sportsmanship.

Encouraging games across different social groups.
Gaming brings different social groups together, bridges cultural and social gaps, and boosts inclusion and diversity. It offers a chance to create new social networks and improve communication skills among players. Gaming together helps break down prejudices by encouraging regular interactions and personal connections, which can challenge stereotypes and promote empathy.

"A day without a friend is like a pot without a single drop of honey left inside."

WINNIE THE POOH



Demonstrating how to gracefully accept victory or defeat without emotional distress.

Being able to win or lose gracefully fosters humility and maturity, regardless of the outcome. Recognizing an opponent's efforts instead of boasting builds community and allows for every player's abilities to be celebrated. This atmosphere cultivates healthy emotional responses and character building. Treating the outcome of a game equally, win or lose, improves day-to-day personal and professional relationships. Being graceful in victory and defeat highlights the value of empathy and respect in all interactions.

Moderating speaking volume during interactions.

Learning to control the volume of your voice shows awareness and consideration towards the comfort and needs of others. When speaking at an appropriate volume, everyone can hear clearly without feeling overwhelmed. As a result, conversations are more effective and enjoyable for everyone involved.

Maintaining eye contact during game play and in general conversations.

Eye contact during conversations shows engagement and imparts confidence, improving communication overall. Practicing regular eye contact helps you find the right balance, ensuring the comfortability of everyone who is a part of the conversation. Learning simple tricks like looking between the eyes or at the tip of the nose, can make a big difference in how social and approachable you seem.

Navigating online communities safely and responsibly.
Staying safe and responsible in online communities means knowing the digital risks, handling your personal information wisely, having polite interactions, and following the rules of different platforms. This skill is crucial to protect yourself and others. Online etiquette is continually evolving, and it’s important to learn what is appropriate.

Responding to negative comments with positivity rather than hostility.
This social skill develops the ability to calm tense situations by keeping conversations open and productive. It requires emotional intelligence to control impulses and develops critical thinking through pausing an initial reaction to think through alternatives and arriving at a more suitable response. By staying positive, a potentially bad situation can transform into a chance for everyone to understand each other and work together to find a solution.

Avoiding behaviors that detract from the group's enjoyment.
To ensure that all members feel heard and valued, it is essential that all players are mindful of their speaking time. Developing awareness of group atmosphere prevents individuals from dominating the conversation and from bringing derogatory or distracting commentary into play. When everyone has a voice, the result is a time of welcoming recreation.

Teaching the values of being a supportive team member.
Developing teamwork, cooperation, and support is crucial for success in gaming and real life. When players guide and reinforce one another, it boosts the whole team’s performance and morale. This kind of support improves communication, spreads responsibility evenly, and builds respect among team members.

Recognizing the need for breaks to prevent burnout.
Taking regular breaks preserves mental and physical health, for students and adults. Breaks help you manage stress, clear your mind, and stay productive by preventing fatigue and overload. This habit makes learning and working more effective because it gives you time to absorb information and to recharge.

Mastering the art of engaging in meaningful conversations.
After a team has established the foundations of effective communication, deepening conversation will strengthen the bond between everyone involved. New ideas will be born, trust will grow, and viewpoints will expand. These skills will increase response time and adaptation, making a stronger team and improving the chances of success. Communication skills are necessary for personal and professional growth, which will also foster increased self-worth.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of in-game purchases.
Teaching students to think carefully about the pros and cons of in-game purchases can help players and teams reach their goals and will lead to wise financial management in the future. It is important for players to evaluate the benefits and potential drawbacks of additional content, so that they achieve a healthy balance. Financial analysis and critical thinking will help students make sound choices so that they have a solid economic awareness and foundation for all that they will face in the future.

Acknowledging the importance of hygiene in relation to gaming.

Keeping gaming setups clean and managing playtime is essential for physical and mental health. It is important to be aware of gaming space, controllers, and keyboards, and to keep them clean in order to avoid germs and dust, which is especially important when sharing gear and equipment. This helps lower the risk of getting sick and reduces issues associated with allergies. To maintain all facets of health, players need to take breaks to avoid eye strain, along with movement to prevent muscle soreness and fatigue. Gaming hygiene helps players to stay healthy, keeps gear and equipment in great shape, and leads to better hygiene in other parts of life.

Balancing gaming with other life activities through thoughtful discussion.

Balancing gaming with other daily activities teaches students how they can do what they love without becoming hyper-focused. Talking about and planning where gaming fits into a daily schedule can help with setting priorities, while being mindful of school, work, and other social commitments. By doing so, students can avoid feeling isolated, becoming inactive, or experiencing disruptive sleep.

Goal-setting in multiple environments.

Setting goals for gaming are just as important as other life goals and will help to stimulate focus, motivation, and personal growth. In gaming, having clear targets will help individuals and their teammates track progress, level up skills, and achieve gaming goals, making the whole experience more rewarding and fulfilling. It also teaches important skills like strategic thinking and persistence.

Reflecting on decisions and their outcomes within game scenarios.
Thinking about choices during gameplay and their results will sharpen critical thinking and strategy skills. When looking back at what worked or didn't, you learn to adjust your game plan, which in turn deepens your understanding of the game. This type of evaluation will also help you make better decisions in real life by increasing your awareness of your actions and possible outcomes.

Understanding that seeking assistance is a strength.
Realizing that it is okay to ask for help shows that you know your limits and that you're open to teamwork. It's about being modest and ready to learn, which is necessary in personal and professional life. When you ask for help, you get new ideas and skills that can lead to better problem solving and spark innovation. A willingness to be open will encourage every team member to do the same, so that everyone will be empowered to share what they know. Asking for help or admitting a weakness is a strength that will cause your team to excel, as everyone continually learns and adapts.

Promoting friendship by integrating gameplay into broader social settings.
Creating opportunities for students to connect through shared gaming experiences can help build a more friendly and inclusive community. Mentors can encourage students to connect beyond individual games through team-building activities, creative challenges, collaborative projects, or other shared experiences. These opportunities allow students from different backgrounds to find common ground, build new friendships, and strengthen their sense of belonging.



Inspiring charitable involvement and leadership among students through social philanthropy.

A mentor can help students recognize that the skills they practice through gameplay—such as teamwork, communication, planning, and problem-solving—can also be used to make a positive impact beyond the game. Give students opportunities to identify ways they can contribute to their classroom, school, or community, whether through service projects, collaborative activities, helping others, or taking on leadership roles. When students work together toward a shared purpose, they develop a greater sense of responsibility, belonging, and connection to their community.

15 Traits of Game Play

Games offer a fun and interactive way to teach a variety of life skills that are applicable both inside and outside the classroom. Here's a list of teachable life skills that can be derived from playing games in an educational setting.

Strategic Thinking: Players must constantly think ahead and strategize about which cards to play or moves to make, teaching planning and foresight.

Flexibility and Adaptability: The game's pace can change quickly, requiring players to adapt their strategies on the fly.

Emotional Regulation: Gaming with other people can evoke strong emotions, from excitement to disappointment. Learning to manage these emotions in the context of the game can teach emotional control and resilience.

Patience and Turn-Taking: Waiting for one's turn and observing the actions of others fosters patience and respect for the process.



Social Interaction: Playing games encourages interaction among players, teaching communication skills and how to engage with others in a social setting.

Rule Following: Understanding and adhering to the game's rules is essential, highlighting the importance of rules in structured activities.

Decision Making: Players make numerous decisions throughout the game, such as when to play certain cards, which can enhance decision-making skills.

Winning and Losing Gracefully: Game play provides opportunities to experience both winning and losing, teaching players how to handle success and setbacks gracefully.

Teamwork and Collaboration: In games where teamwork is involved, players learn to collaborate and work towards a common goal.

Attention and Concentration: The game requires players to pay attention to the cards played and concentrate on their strategy and the game's progression.

Problem-Solving: Players often find themselves in challenging situations (e.g., deciding whether to change the color or match the number) that require problem-solving skills.

Memory Skills: Keeping track of colors, numbers, or movement during the game can enhance memory skills.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking: Observing and predicting the emotions and reactions of other players can foster empathy and the ability to take another's perspective.

Negotiation Skills: In some game variations, players can negotiate alliances or strategies, teaching the basics of negotiation.

Responsibility: Being in charge of shuffling, dealing cards, or keeping score can teach responsibility and the importance of contributing to group activities.



Chapter 4

Learning Through Play

Gaming can take many forms in an educational setting. It may happen during a class, a station rotation, an advisory period, a small-group intervention or an after-school program. The structure may change, but the purpose remains the same: create meaningful opportunities for students to learn, practice, and reflect.

The games in this toolbox are designed to make learning active, social, and engaging. Gameplay naturally creates opportunities for students to communicate, collaborate, solve problems, make decisions, manage emotions, and respond to challenges. The teacher helps turn those moments into meaningful learning experiences by creating an environment where students can practice these skills in a supportive and engaging way.

Choosing the right approach begins with considering the learning goal, the students, the available time, and the level of support they may need. From there, educators can select a structure that fits their classroom and makes the most of the game.

"Play is our brain's favorite way of learning."

Diane Ackerman, Poet



Choosing an Approach

There is no single way to use games in an educational setting. Different classrooms, schedules, and groups of students may require different approaches. The flexibility of gameplay allows educators to select a structure that works for their students while maintaining a clear instructional purpose.

Whole-Class Gameplay

Whole-class gameplay provides an opportunity for the teacher to introduce a game, model expectations, and guide students through the experience together. This approach can be especially useful when students are learning a new game or when the teacher wants to emphasize a particular skill throughout the activity.

Small-Group Gameplay

Small-group gameplay allows educators to provide more individualized support while observing how students communicate, make decisions, and respond to challenges. Groups can be organized strategically based on student needs, game familiarity, independence, or social dynamics.

Station Rotation

Station rotation provides another way to incorporate gameplay into the school day. Students move through purposeful activities while the teacher works directly with a smaller group.

A station rotation model can provide students with opportunities to learn a game with the teacher, practice independently, participate in a collaborative challenge, and reflect on their experience.

Station Rotation

Station rotation gives students multiple ways to engage with learning while allowing the teacher to provide focused support. In the models below, students rotate through four stations: Teacher-Guided Play, Independent Play, Collaborative Challenge, and Reflection. Each station should provide a meaningful opportunity to learn, practice, collaborate, or reflect.

The number of game sets needed will depend on group size and the number of students playing at each station.

Teacher-Guided Play: The teacher plays alongside students, introducing or reinforcing the game while connecting gameplay to the day's learning goal. The teacher can model expectations, ask questions, observe interactions, and use teachable moments to help students practice the targeted skill.

This may include:

- modeling positive interactions
- asking questions
- reinforcing the day's goal
- noticing meaningful moments
- using one of the game's SEL hacks
- encouraging students to explain their thinking
- helping students navigate challenges or disagreements

The teacher does not need to stop gameplay every time a teachable moment occurs. Some groups may benefit from a brief pause, while others may respond more naturally to a question or comment during play.



Independent Play: Students play the game with their peers without direct teacher instruction. Depending on the rotation model, students may enter this station after whole-class instruction or after teacher-guided play. The goal is to give students an opportunity to practice gameplay and the targeted skills with greater independence.

Consider providing students with:

- a printout of SEL hacks for the chosen game
- a focused reflection question to be used either at the mid-point of the station or as the final minute of that station.
    - This question does not have to be the same as the final reflection question.

Collaborative Challenge: Students participate in a short, low-preparation activity that encourages communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, or other transferable skills.

When deciding the order of station rotation for gameplay, we recommend that students are familiar with a game before having them play independently. We also recommend that the reflection exit ticket is completed near the end of the gaming session.

We recognize that these parameters may leave teachers wanting an additional activity to balance the rotation. These challenges provide another way for students to connect, engage, and practice these skills. We provide a list of suggested challenges, but also encourage you to use your own ideas and activities to foster teamwork and community during this station.

Reflection: Students think about their experience and consider what they learned, how they responded, and how they can apply the skills they practiced beyond the game. Reflection may be written, discussed, or completed through a student-facing exit ticket.

Two-Group Rotation

This model works well when a class can be divided into two larger groups and allows for the game to be taught during the teacher-guided station.

Consider dividing each larger group into smaller game groups within the rotation. Be prepared with a copy of the game for each smaller group within a rotation.

Group A	Group B
Teacher-Guided Play	Collaborative Challenge
Independent Play	Teacher-Guided Play
Collaborative Challenge	Independent Play
Reflection	Reflection

Three-Group Rotation

This model requires the game to be introduced and taught prior to stations beginning. The teacher-guided station should focus on guided practice and intentional instruction around the learning goal.

As needed, groups within each station could still be broken into smaller game groups. Be prepared with a copy of the game for each smaller group within a rotation.

Group A	Group B	Group C
Teacher-Guided Play	Collaborative Challenge or Continued Independent Play	Independent Play
Independent Play	Teacher-Guided Play	Collaborative Challenge or Continued Independent Play
Collaborative Challenge or Continued Independent Play	Independent Play	Teacher-Guided Play
Reflection	Reflection	Reflection

Collaborative Challenges

Gameplay creates natural opportunities for students to practice important skills, but games do not have to be the only activity used during a gaming experience.

Collaborative Challenges are short, interactive activities that give students opportunities to work together toward a shared goal. These activities can reinforce communication, cooperation, problem-solving, creativity, and other skills that support success in school, future careers, and everyday life.

The challenges listed below are meant as suggestions. Educators know their own students best, and we encourage you to be creative and include your own activity to be used during this station.

Common Ground Tower: Students work together to identify things they have in common, writing each commonality on an index card. Then, they use the cards to build the tallest tower they can. The group must communicate, share ideas, and decide together how to build their tower.
Materials: index cards, writing utensils

One-Word Story: Students create a story together, with each student contributing one word at a time. The group works around the circle, adding one word to continue the story. Encourage students to listen carefully to what others contribute and build on the ideas that came before them.
For an additional challenge, give the group a theme such as “lost in space,” “a mysterious box,” or “the best day ever.”
Materials: paper (optional)

Paper Bridge: Give each group a limited supply of paper and challenge them to build a bridge that can support a small object, such as a pencil, eraser, or game piece. Students must plan, communicate, test their ideas, and make changes together.
Materials: paper, small object for weight

Draw Together: Give each group a piece of paper and a simple prompt, such as “design a new amusement park,” “create an imaginary planet,” or “draw the world's best playground.” Each student contributes to the same drawing, deciding together what to include and where to place different elements.
Materials: paper, writing utensils

Group Sculpture: Give each group a set of simple materials and a prompt. Direct students to create a specific object or structure, such as a bridge, animal, house, vehicle, or robot. The group must decide how to divide the work and combine everyone's ideas into one creation.
Materials: choice (Play-doh, index cards, paper, craft sticks, cups, foil)

The Perfect Plan: Give the group a simple scenario with several items they must prioritize. Students practice listening to different ideas, explaining their reasoning, compromising, and reaching a shared decision.
Example:

- Your class is going on a camping trip. You can only bring five of these ten items. Which five should you choose?

Give students a predetermined list of 10 items. The group must discuss the options and agree on five.
Materials: prepared scenario and list

Category Countdown: Give the group a category, such as:

- Things you might find at school
- Animals
- Foods
- Things that are blue
- Games
- Things you might take on a trip

The group has to come up with as many answers as possible. Students take turns contributing, but the group must listen carefully so they don't repeat an answer.
Materials: paper, writing materials

Draw From Instructions: Give one student a simple graphic or image. This student must describe it to the group without showing it to anyone else. The other students work individually to draw what they hear. When everyone is finished, reveal the original picture and compare the drawings.
Then try again with a different student giving the directions. Encourage students to notice how clearly they communicated, what questions helped, and how different interpretations affected the final drawings.
Materials: paper, writing utensils

Reflection

Gameplay provides the experience. Reflection helps students make meaning from that experience.

After students have had an opportunity to play, practice, and interact with others, give them a few minutes to think about what happened. Reflection can take many forms: a teacher-led discussion, a student-facing prompt, an exit ticket, or a quick digital check-in.

We provide five reflection forms. Four can be used with any reflection question, while one includes space for a more specific, teacher-selected question. For a more focused reflection, consider asking a specific question based on what you observed during gameplay. The most meaningful questions connect directly to the experience.

Choose the version that best fits your students, or use different versions to differentiate within the same class. You can also create your own version, use a digital tool, or adapt one of these forms to fit your needs.

Reflection questions are included within each game's curriculum page, and common reflection questions are provided below.

Self-Awareness

- How did you feel during the game?
- What was easy or difficult for you?

Self-Management

- How did you respond when something did not go your way?
- What helped you stay focused or keep trying?

Social Awareness

- What did you notice about another player's experience?
- How did someone else approach the game differently than you?

Relationship Skills

- How did your group communicate?
- What helped your group work together?

Responsible Decision-Making

- What choice did you make during the game?
- What happened because of that choice?

Chapter 5
The Games

Every teacher deserves simple, ready-to-use tools that make Social Emotional Learning (SEL) meaningful, engaging, and achievable within a single class period. Chapter 5 introduces single-session SEL Lesson Plans—a collection of classroom-ready activities that transform everyday gameplay into powerful moments of growth. Each plan is aligned with the CASEL 5 Core Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. We offer educators a clear path to help students practice these lifelong skills through laughter, connection, and play.

These lessons are designed for everyday teachers and require no specialized SEL knowledge or additional prep beyond selecting a featured game. Whether your students are flipping cards, shouting "UNO!", or teaming up to help owls fly home, each activity provides built-in "SEL hacks" and reflection prompts that guide emotional intelligence, empathy, teamwork, and resilience.

Please note that although we suggest one hack per round, you may choose to define what a round means for your classroom. It might be setting a timer for a specific duration, one station, or for the whole gameplay period. We encourage you to make it work for you. And if students beg you to do more than one hack per round, feel free to encourage that as you see fit, and compliment your students for their dedication and willingness to make meaningful connections with their peers.

In the spirit of 1UpEDU's mission, this chapter bridges fun and purpose, helping teachers cultivate classroom environments where students feel seen, supported, and socially confident. With these guided gameplay plans, every play session becomes an opportunity to model kindness, celebrate diversity, and build stronger school communities—one round, one reflection, one connection at a time.

"There are no strangers here; Only friends you haven't yet met."

William Butler Yeats



Featured Four at a Glance

King of Tokyo

Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate
Game Mechanics: Dice Rolling; Push Your Luck
Story/Theme: Gigantic monsters battle for control of Tokyo, smashing buildings, healing wounds, and unleashing powerful attacks. Only one monster can emerge as the King of Tokyo.

Love Letter

Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Moderate
Game Mechanics: Hand Management; Social Deduction
Story/Theme: You are trying to get your love letter into the hands of the princess while outsmarting your rivals. Watch your opponents carefully and use the information you gather to figure out who is holding which card.

Sabobatage

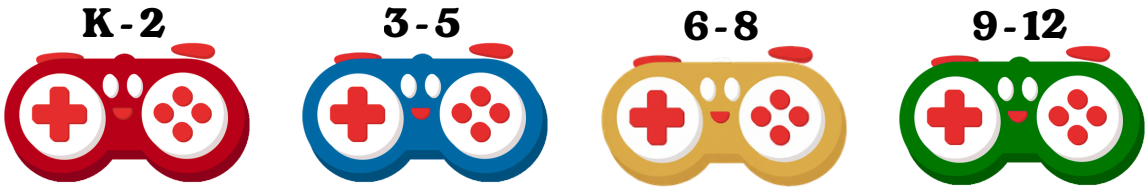
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Hand Management; Set Collection
Story/Theme: Compete to build the ultimate bubble tea shop menu before your rivals do. Assemble delicious drink combinations while actively trying to ruin your opponents' recipes with spilled drinks, tax audits, and health inspections.

Ticket to Ride: First Journey

Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate
Game Mechanics: Set Collection; Route Building
Story/Theme: Compete to build the most impressive railway network by connecting cities across the country. Careful planning and well-timed routes will earn the most points.

Understanding the Controllers

Colored controllers show each game's recommended grade bands. Your featured games were selected for this Toolbox; additional colors show other recommended bands. These are starting points, not limits. Adapt play to your students' interests, strengths, and support needs.



Ready to Explore More?

Browse the 1UpEDU Game Index for additional games recommended for your students. Accompanying lessons are available through our expansion packs.

Gameplay Reminders

Prepare to Play

We provide the basics, but you may need to reference the in-box rules for additional details or specific situations. There are also how-to-play videos online if you prefer to prepare that way!

Make the Hacks Work for You

Use one hack per session, start with one and reveal another every so often, or choose a different hack for each station in a rotation. Make it work for you! If you notice your students need practice with a particular skill, we encourage you to add your own hack. Keep the trigger and action brief, clear, and connected to the game. You know your students best!

Choose Your Reflection

Choose a reflection question ahead of time or decide during the session which question works best for your students. You do not need to ask every question. Use our exit tickets as a final check-in with students at the end of each session.

Allow Time to Learn

We have suggested general play times for each game. The first time you and your students play will likely take a little longer. Anticipate a few more pauses while everyone learns the rules, and allow time for questions, examples, and reflection.

Play Again with a New Purpose

Games are never the same experience twice! We encourage you to replay familiar games with different goals, hacks, or reflection questions. As students become more comfortable with the rules, they can focus more on the skills they are practicing.



GAMES INDEX

This index is intended to help you understand how VGCUSA & 1UpEDU thinks about games. Throughout this guide, you'll see each game categorized by its gameplay, complexity, recommended grade levels, and play time. We hope this framework makes it easier to build your game library, adapt your curriculum, and confidently choose the right games for your students and learning objectives.

GAME MECHANICS

Games can be played in many different ways.
These are commonly called game mechanics and describe how a game is played.
Below are some of the mechanics you'll see used to categorize games throughout this guide.

- **Area Control:** Compete to control spaces on the board to earn points or gain advantages.
- **Auction:** Bid limited resources (like coins) to win properties, cards, or items.
- **Cooperative:** Players work together to beat the game instead of competing against each other.
- **Deck Building:** Improve your deck throughout the game by adding stronger or more useful cards.
- **Dexterity:** Use physical skills like flicking, stacking, balancing, or tossing pieces.
- **Dice Rolling:** Roll dice to get resources or actions, often rerolling to find specific combinations (similar to Yahtzee).
- **Drafting:** Take turns choosing cards or tiles from a shared selection before passing the rest along.
- **Dungeon Crawler:** Explore (typically by flipping a tile to reveal the next room) to battle enemies and complete objectives.
- **Engine Building:** Build abilities over time so each turn becomes stronger than the last.
- **Pattern Recognition:** Find matching patterns, sequences, or visual relationships before everyone else.
- **Push Your Luck:** Decide whether to play it safe or risk everything for a bigger reward.
- **Resource Management:** Collect, spend, and balance resources to achieve your goals.
- **Route Building:** Connect locations on a map with pieces to claim pathways or complete destination objectives.
- **Set Collection:** Gather matching groups of cards or items to score points.
- **Simultaneous Selection:** Everyone chooses an action at the same time before revealing their decisions.
- **Tile Placement:** Place tiles to build a map, pattern, or scoring area.
- **Trick Taking:** Play cards strategically to win individual rounds ("tricks").
- **Worker Placement:** Assign your workers to different actions while competing for limited spaces.

1UPEdu Game Ratings

Every group is different, so game length and complexity may vary depending on the players. These ratings are intended as a quick reference to help you choose games that best fit your students, schedule, and experience level.

Play Time:
- Short (<15 mins)
- Medium (15-45 mins)
- Long (>45 mins)

Complexity:
- Simple
- Moderate
- Complex

Recommended Grades:
- Early Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

GAMES INDEX

How To Use This Index

The games in this index are organized by grade band, with lighter and more accessible games appearing first and more complex games appearing later. Within each grade band, games are listed alphabetically to make them easy to find and reference. Games will appear under their earliest recommended grade band.

Grade bands are recommendations, not limitations. Every group of students is different, and teachers know their students best. Use the index as a guide, but feel free to explore games outside your students' listed grade band. Each grade band is represented by a colored game controller. **When a game is also recommended for another grade band, that grade band's colored controller appears next to the game.**

K - 2

- Candy Land
- Go Fish
- Happy Salmon
- Hoot Owl Hoot!
- LCR: Left Center Right
- Spot It!
- Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza
- Topple
- Trouble
- Uno

3 - 5

- Blokus
- Hedbanz
- Flip 7!
- Mantis
- Pictionary
- Sabobatage
- Spoons
- Sushi Go!
- Trash Pandas

6 - 8

- Can't Stop
- Catan Dice Game
- Fluxx
- For Sale
- Hearts
- King of Tokyo
- Pandemic:Hot Zone
- Scrabble
- Splendor
- Ticket to Ride: First Journey

9 - 12

- Love Letter

GAMES INDEX

Featured Four

Each grade band begins with four featured games we think are especially likely to become quick favorites with students. These games represent some of our strongest recommendations for each grade band and are a great place to start when building your game library or choosing a game to try.

Following the Featured Four, you'll find additional recommended games for each grade band. Games may appear in more than one grade band when they are a strong fit for different ages. **Colored game controllers indicate these cross-grade recommendations.**

K - 2

- Candy Land
- Hoot Owl Hoot!
- Spot It!
- Trouble
- Go Fish
- Happy Salmon
- LCR: Left Center Right
- Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza
- Topple
- Uno

3 - 5

- Blokus
- Flip 7!
- Mantis
- Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza
- Happy Salmon
- Hedbanz
- LCR: Left Center Right
- Pictionary
- Sabobatage
- Spoons
- Sushi Go!
- Topple
- Trash Pandas
- Trouble
- Uno

6 - 8

- Catan Dice Game
- Fluxx
- Sushi Go!
- Trash Pandas
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- Ticket to Ride:First Journey
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- King of Tokyo
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- Fluxx
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- Flip 7!
- Pandemic:Hot Zone
- Pictionary
- Scrabble
- Splendor
- Sushi Go!
- Trash Pandas
- Uno

SEL Gaming Toolbox: K–2

Candy Land

Publisher: Hasbro
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Early Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Roll and Move

Story/Theme: Travel through a colorful candy-filled world on your way to King Kandy's castle. Along the way, you'll encounter sweet treats, friendly characters, and a few surprises.

Gameplay: Players draw cards to determine how far they move along the path. Players continue moving toward the finish, following the spaces and special locations shown on the cards. The first player to reach the end wins.

Notes & Skills:

- color recognition; counting; turn taking; following directions
- beginner-friendly; luck-based; little strategic decision making
- Great for pre-readers

Available From:

- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Go Fish

Classic Card Game
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Early Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Set Collection

Story/Theme: Players search for matching sets by asking one another for specific cards. Remembering who has asked for what can make all the difference.

Gameplay: Players take turns asking opponents for cards of a specific rank to complete matching sets of four. If the opponent doesn't have the requested card, they respond with "Go Fish," and the player draws from the deck. The player with the most completed sets wins.

Notes & Skills:

- memory; communication; matching; probability discussions; turn taking

Available From:

- Bicycle Cards
- Anywhere a standard deck of playing cards is sold.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Happy Salmon

Publisher: Exploding Kittens
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Early Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Simultaneous Selection

Story/Theme: Everyone is frantically trying to find another player to complete silly actions as quickly as possible. The room quickly fills with laughter, movement, and friendly chaos.

Gameplay: Players simultaneously call out the action shown on their top card while searching for another player with the matching action. Once both players complete the action together, they discard their cards and continue. The first player to discard all of their cards wins.

Notes & Skills:

- social interaction; active listening; reaction speed; cooperation
- high energy; excellent icebreaker
- Additional K-2 modifications available on curriculum page

Available From:

- Exploding Kittens
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Hoot Owl Hoot!

Publisher: Peaceable Kingdom
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Early Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Cooperative; Pattern Recognition

Story/Theme: A family of owls is trying to make it safely back to the nest before sunrise. Everyone works together to help each owl reach home before daylight arrives.

Gameplay: Players work together by playing color cards to move owls along the path toward the nest. Sun cards move the sunrise closer, creating a race against time. Everyone wins or loses together.

Notes & Skills:

- cooperation; planning ahead; color recognition; teamwork; communication
- great for pre-readers

Available From:

- MindWare/Oriental Trading
- Amazon, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

LCR: Left Center Right

Publisher: George & Company LLC
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Dice Rolling

Story/Theme: The goal is simple: keep your chips and avoid being the player who ends up with none. Every roll can send your chips to the left, right, or center.

Gameplay: Players roll up to three dice based on how many chips they currently hold. The symbols determine whether chips are passed left, right, or placed into the center pot. The last player who manages to keep any chips takes the pot and wins the game.

Notes & Skills:

- left and right recognition; counting; probability
- fast turns

Available From:

- George & Company LLC
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Spot It!

Publisher: Zygomatic / Asmodee
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Pattern Recognition; Simultaneous Selection

Story/Theme: Test your focus in a fast-paced visual race where speed is everything. Every single card in the deck shares exactly one matching symbol with every other card, waiting to be found.

Gameplay: Players look at two cards and race to find the one symbol they have in common. Depending on the game variation being played, players may collect cards, get rid of cards, or race to complete another objective. The player who completes the goal first wins.

Notes & Skills:

- visual processing; pattern recognition; attention to detail; reaction speed; vocabulary
- great for pre-readers

Available From:

- Asmodee
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza

Publisher: Dolphin Hat Games
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Pattern Recognition

Story/Theme: Players race to be the first to get rid of all their cards while trying to keep up with a fast-paced chant. One wrong move or one slow reaction can send your pile growing again.

Gameplay: Players take turns placing cards while saying "Taco, Cat, Goat, Cheese, Pizza" in order. Whenever the spoken word matches the revealed card, everyone races to slap the pile. The last player to react collects the cards. The first player to empty their hand wins.

Notes & Skills:

- pattern recognition; attention to detail; reaction speed; impulse control
- fast turns; high energy

Available From:

- Taco Cat Games
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Topple

Publisher: Hasbro
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Dexterity; Strategy

Story/Theme: Build the tower higher and higher without being the player who makes it topple. Every piece you add changes the balance of the tower.

Gameplay: Players take turns rolling a die and placing plastic pieces onto corresponding levels of a balancing board. Points are scored for completing rows or building stacks. If a player causes any pieces to slide off or the board to collapse, the round ends and they lose points. The player with the highest total score at the end of the designated rounds wins.

Notes & Skills:

- spatial reasoning; planning ahead; problem solving; patience
- fine motor skills; balance

Available From:

- Amazon, Walmart, and your local game store.

Trouble

Publisher: Hasbro
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Early Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Roll and Move

Story/Theme: Race your four game pieces around the board and try to get them safely home before your opponents. Watch out—other players can send your pieces back to the beginning!

Gameplay: Players press the Pop-O-Matic dice roller and move their pieces according to the number rolled. Landing on another player's piece sends it back to the starting area. The first player to move all four pieces home wins.

Notes & Skills:

- turn taking; following directions; patience
- counting; number recognition

Available From:

- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, and your local game store.

UNO

Publisher: Mattel Inc.
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: All Ages
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Card Shedding

Story/Theme: Race to empty your hand before everyone else while using special action cards to keep your opponents from doing the same. Every Wild, Reverse, and Draw Four can completely change the game in an instant.

Gameplay: Players match cards by color or number while strategically deciding when to use action cards to slow opponents or protect themselves. The first player to play all of their cards wins.

Notes & Skills:

- pattern recognition; strategic decision making; number and color recognition
- *UNO Junior is a standalone variant featuring animal graphics and numbers designed for pre-readers

Available From:

- Mattel Inc.
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

SEL Gaming Toolbox: 3–5

Blokus

Publisher: Mattel Games
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Tile Placement; Area Control

Story/Theme: Every move shapes your territory as you compete to fit as many of your pieces onto the board as possible. Careful placement can open new opportunities or completely block your opponents.

Gameplay: Players take turns placing uniquely shaped geometric pieces onto the grid board. Each new piece must touch at least one of your existing pieces only at the corners while avoiding any edge-to-edge overlap. The player who has the fewest remaining squares at the end scores the highest and wins.

Notes & Skills:

- spatial reasoning; geometry concepts; planning ahead; problem solving; strategic thinking

Available From:

- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Hedbanz

Publisher: Spin Master Games
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Party Game; Deduction

Story/Theme: Everyone knows what your mystery object is, except you! Ask clever yes-or-no questions to figure out what's on your head before anyone else does.

Gameplay: Each player wears a card showing a person, place, animal, or object without looking at it. Players take turns asking yes-or-no questions to narrow down the possibilities until they correctly identify their card.

Notes & Skills:

- deductive reasoning; questioning skills; critical thinking; vocabulary development; verbal communication

Available From:

- Spin Master Games
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Flip 7!

Publisher: The Op Games
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Push Your Luck

Story/Theme: You're testing your luck in a high-stakes game show where every new card could earn you more points or end your round completely. The hardest decision isn't drawing another card—it's knowing when to stop.

Gameplay: Players decide whether to keep revealing cards to increase their score or bank their points before flipping a duplicate number. Special bonus cards add opportunities to help yourself or sabotage your opponents.

Notes & Skills:

- risk vs. reward; probability discussions; decision making

Available From:

- The Op Games
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Mantis

Publisher: Exploding Kittens
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Set Collection; Push Your Luck

Story/Theme: Dive into a cutthroat world of colorful, punchy mantis shrimp competing for rainbows and revenge. Build up your personal aquarium tank while aggressively smashing and stealing from your neighbors.

Gameplay: Players maintain an open, face-up pool of cards in front of them called a tank. On a turn, a player looks at the back of the top deck card—which hints at its true color—and decides whether to try to score it in their own tank or use it to steal matching cards from an opponent. The first player to successfully secure 10 cards in their private score pile wins

Notes & Skills:

- risk vs. reward; probability; prediction; decision making;

Available From:

- Exploding Kittens
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, and your local game store.

Pictionary

Publisher: Mattel Games
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Drawing Game; Party Game

Story/Theme: Teams compete to communicate words and phrases using only drawings. The quicker your teammates can interpret your sketches, the closer you'll be to victory.

Gameplay: One player draws a secret word or phrase without using letters, numbers, or speaking while teammates try to guess it before time runs out. Teams earn points for correct guesses and continue racing around the board.

Notes & Skills:

- creative thinking; communication; visual interpretation; teamwork

Available From:

- Amazon, Walmart, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Sabobatage

Publisher: MOCO Games
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Hand Management; Set Collection

Story/Theme: Compete to build the ultimate bubble tea shop menu before your rivals do. Assemble delicious drink combinations while actively trying to ruin your opponents' recipes with spilled drinks, tax audits, and health inspections.

Gameplay: Players draw cards to gather boba liquids, distinct flavors, and sweet toppings to construct matching drink sets on the table. On your turn, you can play ingredient cards to build your own menu or use action cards to sabotage other players' shops.

Notes & Skills:

- set collection; emotional resilience; hand management; strategic planning

Available From:

- MOCO Games
- Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

Spoons

Classic Card Game

Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Set Collection; Simultaneous Selection

Story/Theme: Everyone is racing to collect four of a kind while secretly watching for the moment when someone grabs a spoon. Once one spoon disappears, the whole table erupts into a scramble!

Gameplay: Players pass cards around the table, trying to collect four cards of the same rank. When a player gets four of a kind, they grab a spoon, triggering everyone else to grab one. The player left without a spoon is eliminated.

Notes & Skills:

- pattern recognition; attention; reaction speed; observation

Available From:

- Bicycle Cards
- Anywhere a standard deck of playing cards is sold.

Sushi Go!

Publisher: Gamewright
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Card Drafting; Set Collection

Story/Theme: Build the best sushi meal you can while the dishes keep moving around the table. Choose carefully—someone else may be reaching for the same favorite dish.

Gameplay: Players simultaneously choose one card from their hand and pass the remaining cards to the next player. Cards score in different ways, so players must decide which combinations to collect while watching what others may be building. After several rounds, the player with the most points wins.

Notes & Skills:

- strategic thinking; decision making; prediction; set collection; probability; simultaneous play
- *Sushi Go! Party is also available, but it introduces variable scoring menus that increase setup time and complexity.

Available From:

- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Trash Pandas

Publisher: Gamewright
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Upper Elementary+
Game Mechanics: Push Your Luck; Set Collection; Dice Rolling

Story/Theme: You're a clever raccoon rummaging through trash cans for valuable treasures. Keep pushing your luck to collect more goodies—but get too greedy and you could lose everything from the round.

Gameplay: Players roll dice to determine which actions they can take, such as stealing, stashing, or drawing more cards. Players may continue rolling to collect more cards, but rolling too many of the same symbol can cause them to lose their turn. The player with the most points at the end wins.

Notes & Skills:

- risk vs. reward; probability; decision making; delayed gratification; strategic thinking

Available From:

- Amazon, Walmart, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.

SEL Gaming Toolbox: 6–8

Can't Stop

Publisher: Eagle-Gryphon Games
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Dice Rolling; Push Your Luck

Story/Theme: You're climbing mountain trails, trying to reach the top before your opponents. Every roll gives you another chance to climb higher—but push too far and you could lose your progress.

Gameplay: Players roll four dice and divide them into two pairs, choosing which mountain paths to advance. Players can continue rolling to make more progress, but if they cannot make a legal move, they lose all progress from that turn. The first player to reach the top of three mountain paths wins.

Notes & Skills:

- risk vs. reward; probability; decision making; strategic thinking; delayed gratification

Available From:

- Eagle-Gryphon Games
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Catan Dice Game

Publisher: Catan Studio
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Dice Rolling; Resource Management; Push Your Luck

Story/Theme: Build roads, settlements, cities, and knights as you develop your island. Each roll gives you new resources and new choices about how to grow your civilization.

Gameplay: Players roll dice to collect resources and use them to build roads, settlements, cities, and knights directly on their score sheets. Players can reroll dice up to three times to improve their resources, balancing the chance of a better result against the risk of losing what they have. The player with the most points at the end of fifteen rounds wins.

Notes & Skills:

- probability; resource management; risk vs. reward; strategic thinking; decision making
- Yahtzee-style dice rolling mechanics

Available From:

- Catan Studio
- Amazon, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store
- Standard Catan available on Board Game Arena (online play) (longer playtime)

Fluxx

Publisher: Looney Labs
Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Simple **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Hand Management; Set Collection

Story/Theme: The rules are constantly changing, so players must adapt as the game unfolds. Just when you think you know how to win, someone may change the goal entirely.

Gameplay: Players draw and play cards according to the current rules, which can change throughout the game. Goal cards determine how to win, while other cards can add new rules, actions, or ways to affect opponents. The first player to meet the current winning condition wins.

Notes & Skills:

- flexible thinking; adapting to change; strategic decision making; attention to changing rules

Available From:

- Looney Labs
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

For Sale

Publisher: Eagle-Gryphon Games
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Card Game; Auction; Simultaneous Selection

Story/Theme: Buy and sell properties around the world as you try to turn your investments into the most money. The trick is knowing when a property is worth paying for—and when to walk away.

Gameplay: In the first phase, players use a limited pile of coins to bid on quirky real estate properties, ranging from cardboard boxes to skyscrapers. In the second phase, players simultaneously lay down their acquired properties to compete for high-value bank checks. The player who amasses the most total cash at the end of the game wins.

Notes & Skills:

- risk assessment; strategic thinking; decision making; value comparison; simple budgeting

Available From:

- Eagle-Gryphon Games
- Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Hearts

Classic Card Game
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Trick Taking; Hand Management

Story/Theme: A classic card game where every card you play can help you—or give your opponents points. The goal is to take the right tricks while avoiding the cards you don't want.

Gameplay: Players take turns playing one card into each trick, following the suit led whenever possible. The highest card of the suit led wins the trick, but players generally want to avoid collecting hearts and the Queen of Spades. After several rounds, the player with the lowest score wins.

Notes & Skills:

- strategic thinking; probability; memory; decision making; planning ahead

Available From:

- Bicycle Cards
- Anywhere a standard deck of playing cards is sold.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

King of Tokyo

Publisher: IELLO

Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+

Game Mechanics: Dice Rolling; Push Your Luck

Story/Theme: Gigantic monsters battle for control of Tokyo, smashing buildings, healing wounds, and unleashing powerful attacks. Only one monster can emerge as the King of Tokyo.

Gameplay: Players roll dice up to three times each turn, choosing which results to keep as they attack opponents, heal damage, earn victory points, and collect energy to purchase special power cards. The first player to reach the victory point goal or the last monster standing wins.

Notes & Skills:

- probability; risk assessment; strategic decision making; resource management
- Yahtzee-style dice rolling mechanics

Available From:

- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Pandemic: Hot Zone*

Publisher: Z-Man Games / Asmodee

Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+

Game Mechanics: Cooperative; Hand Management; Set Collection

Story/Theme: A sudden disease outbreak threatens the continent, and an elite team of medical specialists must work together to control it. Coordinate unique skills to treat infected regions and find life-saving cures before time runs out.

Gameplay: Players work as a team to move between major cities, treat infected populations to prevent outbreaks, and trade cards to discover cures. The entire group wins by curing three distinct diseases together, or loses if the infections spread too far.

Notes & Skills:

- cooperation; communication; strategic planning; problem solving; shared decision making
- *Pandemic: Hot Zone provides a faster, streamlined alternative to the classic Pandemic. It delivers the same strategic gameplay loop within a shorter play time.

Available From:

- Asmodee
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Standard Pandemic available on Board Game Arena (online play) (longer playtime)

Scrabble

Publisher: Hasbro
Play Time: Medium+ **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Word Game; Tile Placement

Story/Theme: Build words and compete to create the highest-scoring crossword-style board. Every letter has value, and every placement can change the possibilities for your next turn.

Gameplay: Players use letter tiles to build connected words on the board, earning points based on the letters used and bonus spaces covered. Players draw new tiles after each turn and continue building from the words already on the board. The player with the highest score at the end wins.

Notes & Skills:

- strategic thinking; planning ahead; word recognition
- vocabulary; spelling; mental math

Available From:

- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, and your local game store.

Splendor

Publisher: Space Cowboys / Asmodee
Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+
Game Mechanics: Engine Building; Set Collection; Resource Management

Story/Theme: Step into the shoes of a wealthy Renaissance merchant mining precious gemstones and securing trade routes. Use your growing fortune to catch the attention of powerful nobles and cement your prestige.

Gameplay: Players collect gem tokens and use them to purchase development cards. Purchased cards provide permanent bonuses that make future purchases easier and more valuable. Players race to earn enough prestige points to win the game.

Notes & Skills:

- resource management; long-term planning; strategic thinking; decision making

Available From:

- Asmodee
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

Ticket to Ride: First Journey*

Publisher: Days of Wonder

Play Time: Medium **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: Middle School+

Game Mechanics: Set Collection; Route Building

Story/Theme: Compete to build the most impressive railway network by connecting cities across the country. Careful planning and well-timed routes will earn the most points.

Gameplay: Players collect colored train cards to claim railway tracks between major cities mapped across the board. Fulfilling specific destination tickets awards victory points, creating a race to see who can successfully route their trains across the continent first.

Notes & Skills:

- long-term planning; resource management; strategic thinking; map reading; flexible decision making
- *Ticket to Ride: First Journey provides a faster, streamlined alternative to the classic Ticket to Ride. It delivers the same strategic gameplay loop within a shorter play time.

Available From:

- Days of Wonder
- Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games and your local game store.
- Standard Ticket to Ride available on Board Game Arena (online play) (longer playtime)

SEL Gaming Toolbox: 9–12

Love Letter

Publisher: Z-Man Games / Asmodee

Play Time: Short **Complexity:** Moderate **Recommended Grades**: High School

Game Mechanics: Hand Management; Social Deduction

Story/Theme: You are trying to get your love letter into the hands of the princess while outsmarting your rivals. Watch your opponents carefully and use the information you gather to figure out who is holding which card.

Gameplay: Players begin with only one card in hand. On a turn, you draw one card and play one card face-up, using its unique ability to gather hidden information, protect yourself, or eliminate a rival player from the round. The last player remaining, or the player holding the highest-value card when the deck runs out, wins the round.

Notes & Skills:

- deductive reasoning; memory; probability; strategic thinking; reading social cues; decision making

Available From:

- Asmodee
- Amazon, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, Noble Knight Games, and your local game store.
- Board Game Arena (online play)

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