



Starting a game club at your school doesn't take a lot of money and doesn't take any special knowledge. It does take a little patience, a love of games, and a willingness to play to make the experience fun.

It's All Fun and Games in the Library

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and

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TERRI—I've always loved games. For as long as I can remember, board games, card games, guessing games, and trivia have been a part of my life. On long trips from Michigan to Kentucky my family played I-Spy, the license plate game, and card games. Monopoly, Scrabble, and Chinese checkers kept us busy on snowy Michigan days. So when a student asked me to start a game club at my school, I jumped at the chance.

It was easy to get started. We collected \$3.00 dues, and I went to Big Lots and Walmart and got as many board games as I could. I asked the faculty to donate games their families no longer played. The Game Club was put on the monthly club rotation and forty to fifty students attend each month. Some of the favorite games are Jenga, Uno, Clue, Twister, chess, checkers, and Monopoly. The club period lasts about thirty minutes so many games are not actually finished during the time. Winning, I've realized as I reflected for this column, is not the "big deal" for most students that it is for me. I am a terrible winner—I whoop and cheer and have even been known to do "the Winner's Boogie dance" after a particularly close game. I am a better loser because I have the attitude that I'll get the win the next time. It pleases me that the students in Game Club like to play games for the fun of it.

Some people think that Game Club is not a learning club. I have to disagree. As I said, students have learned that playing is almost as much fun as winning. They learn to share, be nice, take turns, and pick up after themselves. Sure, teenagers should already know this, and most of them do. The nice thing about Game Club is that, for those thirty minutes each month, it is cool to be a kid again. The only rule we have is that everyone has to play. Occasionally, I'll bring my Guitar Hero or Wii. I do this a few times a year and set it up so that students coming down the hall can see the game. This is the advertisement we use for Cybernight.

Once or twice each year, Game Club sponsors Cybernight. The officers of Game Club turn the library into a game paradise. The tables and chairs are moved out, and game consoles are moved in. Projectors and whiteboards are brought in. Each member can come for free, and we all chip in for pizza. Nonmembers can buy a ticket for \$5.00, and we play for ten hours! (We start about noon, and we leave at 10:00 p.m.)

At Cybernight, we play video games. I am a Guitar Hero fan and will play for hours. Students love

it and are truly shocked to see me rocking out on the game. During this time, I do allow some war games that (mostly) boys like. It is a great day. The kids set it all up and clean it all up. They really appreciate my willingness to host this event in the school library and end up seeing the school library in a whole new way. It isn't just the place to get great books, but it is also a place to relax and have fun.

Starting a game club at your school doesn't take a lot of money and doesn't take any special knowledge. It does take a little patience, a love of games, and a willingness to play to make the experience fun. I could talk about the educational value of play, but to me the most important part of a game program is just the play.



Terri Kirk is a school librarian at Reidland High School in Kentucky and has been a gamer since age 6! She is currently serving as ALA Chapter Councilor for Kentucky, as well as Game Club sponsor

at Reidland. Terri served as school librarian for 20 years in McCracken County, and is currently Past President of the Kentucky Library Association and the Kentucky School Media Association. She is also a past member of ALA Executive Board.



Visit www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest for links to gaming resources, as well as a co-editor podcast on the importance of educational gaming for school librarians.



CHRIS—I will talk about the educational value of games. For the School Library System of the Genesee Valley Educational Partnership, the creation of a game library was an amazing educational breakthrough (see <http://sls.gvboces.org/gaming>).

The modern board games in our collection are fully aligned to both the *AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and our state curriculum standards. By using real games that bring real fun to classroom instruction, we have shown the value of play as an integral part of learning. Now principals and superintendents call our office to ask why their teachers and school librarians aren't using games.

The reasons for the popularity and educational value of playing games are simple. Play is an instinctual form of learning—for a clear demonstration of this instinctive educational play, just watch kittens learning to hunt and pounce using their mother's tail. And we are no different; there is a good reason why armies hold war games, for example.

Recently, this value of playful learning has regained attention thanks to the creation of "gamification" as a new way to describe what school and public librarians have been doing with summer reading programs for years. Thanks to its buzzword status in businesses, many new cases of gamification are sloppy attempts to hide meaningless and repetitive tasks behind a shiny veneer of points, badges, and levels. Like so-called educational games in which students flick a spinner and complete the worksheet that the pointer lands on, gamified tasks are not real fun.

As Terri notes, the real value of games are the episodes of authentic play that unite groups and build communities—and school librarians can easily encourage that play. And if, while engaging in authentic play, students also happen to be using 21st-century learning skills like inquiry, evaluation, and synthesis, that isn't a bad thing.



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of twenty-two small, rural districts in western New York. In addition to his writing on *Infomancy*, he is a regular technology columnist for *School Library Journal* talking about "The Next Big Thing."