



Making Learning Fun

Supplement homeschool education with these great games.
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According to the most recent report by the National Center for Education Statistics, there are at least 1.1 million home-schooled children in the United States, and the homeschool movement continues to grow year after year. What could be more natural for homeschoolers than to incorporate tabletop gaming as an integral part of their schooling experience?

Many choose to homeschool because they want to provide alternative learning methods from traditional education. For these, gaming offers an excellent, hands-on strategy for teaching. Others homeschool because of a desire for more content in the educational process, and they find many games that contain a surprisingly high amount of educational substance. Some choose homeschooling in

order to impart a strong sense of values, many of which can be caught during the family's associations at the gaming table. Tabletop games play especially to the strengths of a home education: They require only a small number of players, they promote constant interaction and they're an inexpensive way to make learning fun.

I have been a homeschooling dad for the past three years and a gamer since high school, so making the connection between the two was a logical step for me. I suspect many gamers have similar experiences. I recently played a game at Origins Game Fair with two children and their dad, who confessed that his wife frequently wondered if the real reason he wanted kids was to get more players at the gaming table.

Board and card games are an excellent way to supplement a homeschool curriculum. An important factor to consider is playability across a diverse age range. Games that parents and children can enjoy equally will bring the most satisfaction, but even single-child families will want games that retain their playability beyond a year or two.

A second factor is enjoyment. There is no excuse for selecting boring games simply because they claim to be "educational." Most games, including those that do not seem on the surface to have educational value, promote communication and interaction skills and most require at least some level of logic or critical-thinking skills. Many Euro games, for instance, require players to build strong negotiation and persuasion skills. A fun game with lower content is almost always better than a boring game designed to help educate. Fortunately, there are so many stimulating games with high content on the market that parents can easily have both.

The designers of *GO mental* (HL Games, \$29.99), for instance, were not content until the game solicited a "Wow, cool!" response from at least one person at every play-test. In the game, players are given a list of four items (e.g., lute, flute, mandolin, balalaika) and receive a point if they can correctly identify which of the four does not fit (flute, in this case). They are awarded three points if they can tell what the other three have in common (they are stringed instruments). *GO mental* is geared toward a junior high/



senior high/adult level, but **FUNDamental** allows grade-school children to play, with additional options that make it possible for even younger players to join in. Because both games use the same mechanics, the entire family can play at the same time without older players having an advantage. What makes the game so fun is its mixture of obscure facts and pop-culture icons like *Lord of the Rings* or *SpongeBob Squarepants*. Since each card explains why the three items are similar, players naturally learn all sorts of facts even when they guess the wrong answer. [Article continues.]