Ditch That Textbook's Guide to Gamification

Ideas and activities to infuse gameplay into your classroom
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The best features of game shows can be used to review and teach in the classroom. Kahoot!, Quizizz, Quizlet Live, and Gimkit can help. See their pros, cons and what makes them different.

As a child, I remember one specific thing I always looked forward to on days when I stayed home sick from school — The Price Is Right.

Even aching, sick to my stomach or feverish as I laid on the couch, I made sure the TV was tuned to that game show around lunch time.

I loved the unique games. (Playing Plinko was a dream of mine!) I always guessed right along with the contestants during the Showcase Showdown at the end of the game. Bob Barker was the consummate host and kept things moving.

Now, teachers can bring that experience into the classroom when students aren’t home sick.
Several digital tools created for the classroom bring those exciting experiences to students with learning as the focus.

These “gameshow classroom” websites do a number of things ...

- Create an electric atmosphere for answering questions.
- Provide fun, interesting repetitions.
- Make in-the-moment feedback possible.

We have a growing number of “gameshow classroom” options. Here are some of the ones I’ve found that I think are the best:

**Kahoot! (kahoot.com)**

**Summary**

Kahoot! is the granddaddy of the game show review games, launched in August of 2013. In a standard Kahoot! game, questions are displayed to students on a projector or display. Students respond on their own devices.

**Pros**

- **It’s a shared experience.** Everyone responds at the same time. That also means we can provide feedback to everyone at the same time.
- There are **millions of publicly created Kahoot! games** you can use (or duplicate for yourself and change).
- **Students are likely very familiar with it,** meaning it can be plugged into a lesson with little time to learn a new app.
Ditch That Textbook’s Guide to Gamification

Cons

- **The speed of a traditional Kahoot! game** can make some students feel like they’re left in the dust.
- It’s easy for students to see each other’s responses and copy. (Just look at all of the screens the student in the foreground of the photo can see from his desk.)

Source: Screenshot from getkahoot.com
Unique features

- **Ghost mode.** Kahoot! remembers how each student scored on each question. When you play the game again in ghost mode, it displays former attempts as “ghosts”. Students can compare their current attempt to previous attempts to see how they’ve progressed. (If your students have played Mario Kart or another racing video game and have raced against their personal best, they’re familiar with racing against a ghost.)

- **The mobile app.** This versatile app lets you create Kahoot! games on the fly, add pictures from your camera roll, and even host a Kahoot! game from your mobile device. Students can participate in Kahoot! challenges against classmates on their own devices.

- **The friendly nickname generator.** Have you ever battled naughty nicknames in a Kahoot! game? The generator will let students spin to choose from three appropriate nickname options.

Alternative ways to play

**The Blind Kahoot! game.**

It’s a way to teach with Kahoot! instead of just reviewing. Throw students a tricky question at the beginning. Then use images, videos, class discussion and questions to teach it. It’s scaffolding — teach a little, ask a question, repeat, repeat, repeat.

Learn all about the Blind Kahoot! game in this blog post!
Quizizz (quizizz.com)

Summary
Quizizz takes the excitement of a gameshow-style review game and puts the whole experience in the students’ hands. With a traditional Kahoot! game, everyone sees the question and possible answers on the projector and answer simultaneously. Quizizz is different because the questions and possible answers are displayed individually on student devices.

Pros

- **It’s student-paced.** No one gets upset because their device didn’t load the game fast enough to compete.
- **Teachers can display a student progress dashboard** on the projector to see progress of each student and instantly see how many questions the class answered right/wrong.

Source: Screenshot from Quizizz.com
Cons

- When everyone is answering different questions at different times, you lose a bit of the excitement.
- With Kahoot!, when my class answers one question all together, it isolates that piece of content so we can all talk about it. When a Quizizz game is over, you can review all the questions all at once, and you lose that isolation.

Unique features

- Memes. These pictures with fun/funny messages are a treat. They’re displayed after a question is answered to show whether it’s right or wrong. Quizizz even lets you create your own (see image at right). You can use their pre-loaded images or upload your own.
- Homework mode. Students don’t have to complete a game live in-person. You can use homework mode to assign it to be completed by a deadline. As someone who believes in ditching homework, I prefer homework mode to be used in rotation stations, centers and as part of choice boards instead.
- Add audio, images and math equations. When creating a new question, use the icons next to the question you're writing. The "math" button loads a keyboard of math symbols. The "media" button lets you upload audio or image.
- Power ups. Correct questions get students these powers, like immunity (second chance after incorrect answer), power play (everyone gets 50% more points for 20 seconds), and x2 (double points for one question).
Alternative ways to play

- **The Fast and the Curious eduprotocol.** By using Quizizz in this way, you reduce (or eliminate) your need for worksheet-based homework. Play a quick Quizizz game and look at the results. Do a quick re-teach or mini-lesson about students’ struggles. Replay the game immediately. Repeat this on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. On Thursday, if students average a 90 percent or higher, give everyone an A and move on. Jon Corippo, co-author of The EduProtocol Field Guide, describes The Fast and the Curious eduprotocol on this episode of The 10 Minute Teacher podcast.

- **Student-created Quizizz games.** Students can submit questions to be asked in a Quizizz game using Google Forms survey. Import the data from the spreadsheet connected to the survey into a Quizizz game instantly and play the game. It’s low-prep, student-driven review fun! See how in this tutorial video by California educator Joe Marquez. And, hear Quizizz founder Deepak Joy Cheenath describe it in this episode of the Ditch That Textbook podcast. (Note: Spreadsheet import is now an option for Kahoot! too.)
Quizlet Live (quizlet.com/live)

Summary
Quizlet’s foray into the game show-style review is the best collaborative game. Instead of students answering individual questions on their individual devices, Quizlet puts students in groups. All possible answers are divided amongst the devices of all students participating. Think of three students with 12 possible answers ... they're divided up with four on each devices, so the answer may or may not be on your device. Teams race to get all answers correct in a row to win.

Need to know how to set up and run a Quizlet Live game? How to start a Quizlet Live game in 60 seconds + tips and tricks

Pros
Teamwork and communication.

With traditional flashcards, students may study them in isolation quietly. This brings students together in a game where they must depend on each other.

Source: Screenshot from Quizlet.com
• **Play games with Quizlet flashcard sets.** Quizlet Live runs from Quizlet flashcard sets. That means you don’t have to create anything new if you use Quizlet and already have flashcards OR if you can find a Quizlet flashcard set you like.

• **A new game every time.** Each new Quizlet Live game is different. When a game pulls a dozen cards from a Quizlet flashcard set, there are tons of combinations — especially when there are LOTS of flashcards. Start a new game and Quizlet mixes up the cards for a new combination.

**Cons**

• You need **at least six students** to play a game (at least two teams of three students) and at least six cards in a flashcard set.

• If you’re looking for something **more individual to play as a group**, Quizlet Live may not be your game.

**Unique features**

• **True team play.** This is the best collaborative experience of the “gameshow classroom” options. One student can dominate in a team game on Kahoot! or Quizizz. When each student has only a handful of correct responses, everyone has more opportunity to participate.

• **Built-in movement.** Students are put into small groups and are encouraged to move next to their partners. This mixes up their environment and encourages physical movement, which boosts cognitive function.
**Alternative ways to play**

**Quizlet Quarterback.**

This game further ensures that one dominant student doesn’t hijack the game. In a group of three, set all three student devices next to each other on desks. Two students sit and one student stands behind them. When a question appears, the standing student reads it and finds the answer. He/she taps the shoulder of the student closest to the question and that student answers the question on the screen.

This is one of several alternative Quizlet Live games suggested by New York educator Patrick McMillan in this post.

**Click for full-size image (with more legible text!).**

**Relay.** In this game, line up all student devices in a row. Students take turns answering questions. This is another alternative Quizlet Live game suggested by New York educator Patrick McMillan in this post.
Gimkit (gimkit.com)

Summary

Gimkit (gimkit.com) is like Quizizz with power-ups. In Quizizz, students collect points cumulatively throughout the game. In Gimkit, students use their points to buy power-ups in the store. Power-ups let students earn more points per question, get additional points when they hit a streak, and even lose less points when incorrect.

"We don't do tests." Learn how teacher Omoyemwen Ngei uses Gimkit to create assessments her students love.
Pros

**New game mechanics.**

The upgrades put a new spin on reviewing. They’re used to buying upgrades in games. Now they can add that new dynamic to digital review games.

Source: Gimkit (gimkit.com) screenshot.

- **Its backstory.** Gimkit was created by students in Seattle, Washington, and it’s still maintained by them. They made the game they wanted to play and then shared it with the world.
- **Quizlet integration.** You can import a Quizlet flashcard set into a Gimkit game if you have the paid version of Gimkit.
Cons

- **Pricing structure.** You only get to create five games with the free plan ... and you have a finite amount of modifications you can make to them. Then it’s $59.88 per year or the $7.99 monthly plan. A robust free version is an essential piece of many edtech tools, and Gimkit’s free version is lacking ... not enough to hook a teacher and help him/her realize he/she needs the full paid version.

- **Limited searchable gallery.** With the above options, you can tap into thousands (or millions) of teacher–created games. Unless you have the paid version and import Quizlet sets, the gallery is really lacking.

Unique features

- **Purchase upgrades.** Students can spend points from correct answers in the store to buy upgrades to earn points faster. They include insurance (less points for a wrong answer) and money per question (more points per right answer).

- **Live view with class progress.** The screen projected to the class as students answer questions is unique. It shows how everyone’s points as a class add up together. This encourages class vs. class competition.

- **KitCollab.** This feature lets students create a Gimkit game together. Each student suggests a question. The teacher approves questions to be used in the game.
Digital escape rooms bring the excitement of hunting for clues and the joy of solving puzzles right to your student’s devices. Here are over 30 digital escape rooms to try plus resources for creating them yourself!

Digital escape rooms, also referred to as digital breakouts, are a great way to bring gameplay and problem solving to any lesson or unit. They can be an exciting and engaging activity for the whole class or as an option for early finishers.
In a spin on the popular Escape Room challenge, a digital version combines a virtual “room” (often a Google site) filled with clues that must be figured out in order to unlock a form (usually a Google form). They can be created around any theme and the locks can be easy or extremely difficult depending on the intended audience.

So how can we get started using digital escape rooms with our students? Where can we find pre-made games to share with our class? And what are the best tips and tools for creating them ourselves?

Below you will find ideas for using escape rooms in your classroom, over 30 links to digital escape rooms you can use tomorrow!

Want to try one out before you dive into using them with your students? Check out this Ditch that Textbook themed digital escape room created by Mandi and Karly and see if you can break free from Ditch That Textbook headquarters!

There is a special badge waiting for you at the end. Share it with us on Twitter using the #Ditchbook hashtag.
Get the book on this subject!

Get the tools, the practical ideas, and the inspiration to transform the way you use technology in the classroom!

Tech Like A Pirate is NOW available!

- Lesson ideas and downloadable templates
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6 ideas for using digital escape rooms in your classroom

- vocabulary review
- holiday activities
- frontloading activities
- teaching digital citizenship
- reviewing content
- reinforcing logic and reasoning skills

40+ digital escape rooms to try with your class

The #ditchbook community also shared their favorite digital escape rooms and we curated them all for you! Click here or scan the QR code below for over 30 digital escape rooms already created and ready to use with your class.
How to create a digital escape room for your class or PD

How to create a digital escape room for your class or PD is written by Mandi Tolen a math teacher from Missouri. You can connect with her on Twitter @MandiTolenEDU and check out her blog infinitelyteaching.com

Escape rooms are a fun adventure where you solve puzzles to escape from the room. To add to the adventure, you usually have a time limit. I love creating physical escape rooms in my classroom. They are fun and they get the students up and moving in the classroom.

However, there are a few drawbacks to physical escape rooms.

I have large classes, so usually I need two sets running at the same time. Even with two escape room sets, not everyone will solve every clue.
My solution, digital escape rooms.

Even in a class of 30, students can work individually or in pairs and they have the opportunity to solve every problem in the escape room. This makes them great for introductions to units or a review at the end.

*Before you move on try this Tech or Treat Digital Escape Room first. After you escape, take a look at how I created it to help you learn how to create your own!*

At first glance, digital escape rooms (also called digital breakouts or digital breakouts) look daunting to create. Hopefully, this post will show you that in just a few steps, you can create your own digital escape room!

We have also created a planning template for you (or even your students) to use to make a digital escape room!

**Click here to make a copy of this FREE digital escape room planning template.**

Now you’re ready to get started.
Check out these step by step instructions to make your own digital escape room!

1. Write your prompt
   A great Escape Room will have a fun backstory that will hook the reader.

2. Create your clues
   Decide what you want your “locks” to be then write your clues.

3. Create your images
   Images have two purposes in an Escape Room. They can add to the hook element of the story and they can contain a clue.

4. Create the locks
   Using Google Forms, create “locks” with response validation so they know if they need to keep trying.

5. Create your site
   Put all your information (clues, images, story, etc.) into a Google Site.
1. Write your prompt

You need a good story to hook the audience. When you go to a physical escape room, they set up the situation with a story or information at the beginning. The purpose of this Halloween themed digital escape room was to share some tech ideas with my staff in a fun way.

So I wrote an introduction to tell my audience what was happening:

“Double, double, toil and trouble. I’ve dropped the keys to my broom in the bubbles. If I don’t find them, the keys will dissolve, but you can help me with riddles to solve. Click around, don’t be scared. I won’t turn you into a frog, but maybe a bear.”

2. Create your clues

Determine how many and what kind (number, word, etc.) of clues you want. Since I created a technology breakout, I knew my clues should lead people to (hopefully) new technology ideas. So I started brainstorming.

During this step, I also created all of my clues. Some are in Google Slides, Docs, Jigsaw Planet, etc. I keep all of these in a folder in my Google Drive so everything is together.
Here are the clues I used for my Halloween themed digital escape room:

- **To introduce Wakelet** – a link will take teachers to my public Wakelet profile so they can see the boards I have created and share. CLUE: WAKELET
- **To show Google Translate in a Doc** – a link will take teachers to a doc in another language but with an animation that shows them how to translate the doc. The translation will give them the clue. CLUE: SWEET
- **To introduce genia.ly** – a link will take teachers to a created Genial.ly presentation. The clue will be included in the presentation. CLUE: 1031
- **To show a fun Google Search Atari Breakout** – Create a puzzle at jigsawplanet.com and when put together, it has instructions on how to search Atari Breakout. CLUE: ATARI
- **To introduce “hidden word” in slides** – a link will go to a slide where you move the magnifying glass to see the clue. It will also go to a blog post on how to create your own. CLUE: MAG10
- **Distraction/fake clue** – one link will go to a fake iPhone message talking about Slidesmania
- **Distraction/fake clue** – one link will go to an animated gif of a bubbling cauldron

Here is a Wakelet collection with even more clue making resources.

3. Create your image(s)

I almost always have an interactive image that I create in Google Drawing. We plan to put all of this in a Google Site at the end, and you can easily import a Google Drawing and keep the “hotspots” active this way.

Open a new Google Drawing and start creating your scene. It can be as easy as a single image (the reindeer in this Reindeer Games digital escape room), or as fancy as a full scene (like the image below).
Once your image is created, you need to link your clues to each object. I have 5 clues, so I linked it to the window, broom, cat, book, cauldron, and one of the flasks.

You can make anything you added to your image clickable as a link! To do that: First, click on the object you want to link (in the example, I clicked on the window), then click on the link button and paste the link to the clue. Continue this process until you link to all of your clues.

*Some breakouts may have more than one image. In my trianglesonly.com breakout game, I had multiple pages on the side, so I repeated the process for each image I created.*
4. Create your locks

This step uses Google Forms. Create a new Google Form (I keep everything for each escape room in one folder). You want to use response validation (check out this video for a walkthrough on how to add it) so they have to type in the correct clue. You also want to make the question required.

For number locks, I use the number is equal to setting then type in the number you want. You can also type in a custom response if they get it wrong. For a number, I usually just use “try again”.

For letter locks, you will select text contains. Forms are case sensitive so my clue usually directs them to capital or lowercase letters.
Continue this process until you have all of your clues entered.

I like to include a special message or image once the person “escapes”. To do this, create a new section in your Google Form.

On this new page, you can post a message or an image congratulating them on escaping.
5. Create your Google site

In my opinion, this is the most exciting part of the process. This is when everything you have created comes together as an escape room.

Go to sites.google.com and click the plus sign in the bottom right corner.

You will get this page to start with. Title your site so you can come back to it later. You can change your theme, colors, and fonts on the right side. Play with it until you have exactly what you want.

I inserted a text box and added the introduction that I wrote earlier.

Next, I inserted the Google Drawing using the insert from Drive button.
You can use the corners and drag your image to be as large as you want. I do the same for the Google Form. Sometimes I position them side-by-side, other times I position them with the Form below the image. Use whatever works for you and the image(s) you have created.

When you are ready, hit the publish button. Don’t forget to go through the Escape Room yourself and make sure everything works as you want. You can click the link button at the top right on the toolbar and get a code that you can share. When I create these for students, I post that link in Google Classroom.

That’s it! Now you’re ready to get started creating your very own digital escape room. Please share any games you create with us using the #Ditchbook hashtag.
BONUS: Digital Escape Room Teacher Pack with ANSWERS!

In this Digital Escape Room Teacher Pack you will find links to each escape room along with the locks, answers and explanations. Tip: If you and your students are new to digital escape rooms it might be fun to try one out as a class so that you can experience it together. After that, you can assign these escape rooms to your students in groups or individually by giving them the direct link to the digital escape room (they don’t need a special copy).

Still have questions? Take a look at our digital escape rooms FAQ page for answers to our most common questions or sign up for our digital escape rooms mini course!

Looking for MORE ways to bring the fun and excitement of digital escape rooms to your class? Check out our mini course at a mini price!

For just $19 you’ll get:
- Video tutorials to show you what you need to do
- PDF guides to help you plan
- LOTS of example escape rooms you can use as inspiration
- 22 digital escape rooms with lock combinations and companion resources in a downloadable PDF
- A step-by-step companion website with templates to help you and your students create your own escape rooms
- Plus TONS of BONUS resources

Sign Up for the Online Mini Course!
Games are fun. We love playing them, watching them and even creating them. But how can we bring elements of gameplay into our classroom in meaningful ways? Here are 20 ways to gamify your class.

A quick way to start a conversation is by asking someone about their favorite game. Whether it’s the latest video game craze (Fornite takes the cake there), a beloved childhood board game or the local sports team they never miss watching, games are an engaging topic.

As adults we love games. And so do our students.

Adding elements of gameplay in the classroom increases engagement. Throw in opportunities for students to level up, earn badges and points using teamwork in a friendly competition and watch their motivation skyrocket.
Gamification can be as simple as adding a Kahoot to the end of a unit or as complex as #QRBreakIn, an exciting game-based approach to centers.

Below you will find 20 ways to gamify your class. Educators shared ideas along with links to resources so that you can begin using gamification in your classroom right away! Be sure to click on ALL of the blue links for quick access to all of the tools and templates!

Check out this Wakelet to see the whole discussion along with this Padlet full of gamification resources crowdsourced by the #Ditchbook community.

1. Turn a boring sit and get PD or class about learning a new tool into an exciting experience through gamification.

A3: I think of this template by @historysandoval when wanting to gamify...
#ditchbook

— Amy De Friese, M.Ed. #artsmatter @MsDeFriese Feb 20

2. Use Wakelet to create a scavenger hunt.

A3: Slides/Drawings and even Jamboard are great for remixing games, but you can even make templates out of @wakelet for scavenger hunts & other types of gamification! Like this scavenger hunt for my Save the Immune gamified unit! #DitchBook

— Laura Steinbrink #RockNTheBoat @SteinbrinkLaura Feb 20
3. Turn a spreadsheet into a game of BINGO, Hangman and more with the templates provided in **Flippity**.

A3: Flippity is a great resource that has numerous template options. Many choices that are game-like! @flippitynet #ditchbook

— Greg Jung @edtech_workshop · Feb 20

4. Bring board games like **Scrabble** into the classroom digitally.

Can’t remember where I first saw this idea. So apologies to the original creator, but here is a Scrabble board/tile template in GDraw you can use to make your own titles, signs, etc. #edtech #gsuiteedu #GoogleEDU

— Ryan O'Donnell @creativeedtech · Jun 16, 2019

5. Use Slides, PowerPoint or Adobe Spark to pull in elements of your favorite games. **SlidesMania** has TONS of great templates you can work with!

A3: We can remix all sorts of games in Slides/Drawings/PowerPoint/Spark. Pull in design elements from the games. Make the template what you need it to be. Then share with students! #ditchbook https://t.co/xhNUUXWPpp

— Matt Miller @ #NCTIES2020 3/4-5 (@jmattmiller) February 21, 2020
6. Use Google forms for students to solve a mystery with task-cards.

A3- Google Forms
Ss can solve a mystery while solving task cards #DitchBook

— Stephanie Howell @mrshowell24 · Sep 27, 2018

7. Utilize online apps and tools like Class Craft, Quizlet, Kahoot, Class Dojo to add gamification to your lessons.

A3: High tech and low tech, there is no wrong way. @classcraftgame @quizlet @GetKahoot @ClassDojo @breakoutEDU digital with Badges #DitchBook

— Jenna Ervin @EverythingErvin · Sep 27, 2018

8. Google Sheets can be a fantastic tool for adding elements like points, badges and leveling up. Check out Alice Keeler’s post and template.

A3: Check it @alicekeeler’s gamification templates using Google Sheets! #ditchbook ("The answer is ALWAYS a spreadsheet.")

— Matt Miller @jmattmiller · Sep 27, 2018
9. Create missions for students using a fun theme with QR codes.

A3: There are lots of ways/tools for this, but it depends some on your theme. I am doing a Marvel’s Agents of Shield theme, so side missions for agents will be in the form of QR codes all over campus. Sneaky ways to get learning in outside of class time. 😊 #DitchBook

— LAURA STEINBRINK #RockNTheBoat (@SteinbrinkLaura) September 28, 2018

10. Google Forms have many, many uses in the classroom. Try using them for a digital addition to BreakoutEDU.

A3- using Google Forms for @breakoutEDU https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Bkt8VIW3Q8xTcuiiddHOTjEOMLqeoclzZx-cMboYCFn8 #DitchBook

— Stephanie Howell @mrshowell24 · Sep 27, 2018

11. A simple but effective way to add a little competition into Google Classroom is to let them reply to one another and choose their favorite response.

Q3: I’ve even used Google Classroom “Question” assignments and had Ss reply to their favorite peer responses with “Winner Winner Chicken Dinner”. Student with the highest votes wins #ditchbook

— Jenna Ervin (@EverythingErvin) September 28, 2018
12. Old classics like “The Price Is Right” can make a comeback in the modern classroom using G Suite tools!

A3: OMG. Love love me some Price Is Right...so much I modeled a metric estimation game after it! Here’s a link to it! #Ditchbook

— Jen Walter @JWalterTeach · Feb 20

13. Using AR and VR can take your games to a whole new level and completely change the way the players interact with each other and the game itself.

A3: @Kahoot & @quizlet ! I have heard of @classcraftgame but have never tried. @cospaces_edu is an awesome and unique VR/AR format that is compatible with @MergeVR as well as @oculus and offers coding, physics engines, etc. #ditchbook

— Kim Pond @YodaPond · Sep 27, 2018

14. Story Cubes add the element of storytelling to a game-based activity. Pair them with an online tool like Flipgrid to create a challenge for your students.

A3. @storycubes @gimkit @breakoutEDU @quizizz @Flipgrid and @LEGO_Group are staples of my #gamified #studentcentered classroom. LIGHT YEARS beyond Scantron and so thankful to be in Catholic Education away from Big State Standardized Exams! #Ditchbook

— John Meehan @MeehanEDU · Sep 27, 2018
15. The Iron Chef Eduprotocol is a class favorite for adding a bit of friendly competition to any subject area.

A3- Iron Chef (jigsaw activity) #DitchBook

— Stephanie Howell @mrshowell24 · Sep 27, 2018

16. Why keep scavenger hunts confined to school grounds? With Google Earth or Nearpod, students can literally explore the entire globe!

A3: You can also use @googleearth for scavenger hunts or @nearpod to great effect since it is a versatile platform! So many awesome possibilities! #ditchbook

— Kim Pond @YodaPond · Sep 27, 2018

17. Your students are extremely creative. Get them in on the gamification by challenging them to make badges for their accomplishments. Alice Keeler has some great templates to get you and your students started.

Q4: I had students last year who wanted to make their own badges for tasks they completed, to encourage higher-performance and competition with the other classes #ditchbook

— Jenna Ervin (@EverythingErvin) September 28, 2018
18. There’s a reason that online multiplayer games like Clash of Clans are so popular. When we leverage that engagement in the class, serious learning can come out of play.

A4: Here’s a post about how Clash of Clans changed my class. #ditchbook

— SMatt Miller @jmattmiller · Sep 27, 2018

19. Start the year off with a gamified syllabus! Elementary level teachers can use this idea for the beginning of the year or even for Back to School Night!

A4. @alicekeeler was likewise nice enough to give me a guest spot on her blog a few weeks back! If you’re looking for a gamified approach to a course syllabus, give it a look! #Ditchbook

— John Meehan @MeehanEDU · Sep 27, 2018

20. Level up your gamification and challenge your class to create their own game!

A3- I created a CYOA template as well as an Amazing Race template on #forms. #ditchbook

— Matt Meyer @54Mr_Meyer · Feb 20
As children, we play Chutes and Ladders and Memory.

When we get older, we play Monopoly and Settlers of Catan.

On our phones, we play Candy Crush and Pokemon Go.

We're even playing games when we collect Starbucks stars and airline rewards miles.

Games are a huge part of our lives. They help us pass the time. We get in a flow state when we're deep in a strategy game. And we laugh when we draw pictures or act silly with friends.
Even the smallest game element can transform a dull learning activity into an experience. The trick? Finding the right way to connect the games and the learning together.

Thankfully, we have LOTS of examples to draw upon. By looking at popular games, we can learn what successful game elements -- or hooks -- they use. Ideas can come from the following. Borrow from the best!

- Board games
- Video game consoles (like Xbox and Playstation)
- Mobile app games
- Retail rewards programs
- Playground games
- Role playing games

**Here are 10 game hooks you can use to add small game elements -- or total gamification -- to your class!**
1. Collecting badges for accomplishments

Examples: Fortnite

Completing an accomplishment in a game is good. But it's more fun when your friends know you accomplished it! Earning badges is spreading all over, from the board room to the classroom to a variety of mobile apps.

**How to use it in class:** Identify an accomplishment to reward. Create a badge. They can be digital badges, paper badges, stickers ... even badges within a game portal like Classcraft. Based on the level of motivation, badges can be enough -- or they can be accompanied by another reward.

2. Collect points to buy things

Examples: Starbucks Stars, hotel and airline rewards programs

This game type is similar to the first in our list: the accomplishment badges. The difference? Instead of compiling a collection of badges, the players can use what they earn to buy things. Points become a currency. The strategy is in whether to spend or save, and what to spend on. This may be one of the easier game hooks to implement.

**How to use it in class:** Identify the actions students must perform to earn points. It could be academic tasks. It could be demonstration of skills. It could even be character traits noticed by the teacher or other students. Then, identify what students can spend points on. Don't worry about buying lots of rewards! Simple privileges can work, like seating choice, assignment choice, special attention, etc. Food and drink can be an inexpensive way to reward if you want something more tangible.
3. Solving a puzzle/problem solving

Examples: Clue

A puzzle to solve is like an unfinished story. We want to see the loop closed. Incomplete puzzles leave us unfulfilled! All sorts of puzzle games exist, from number puzzles like 2048 to "find the solution" puzzles like Happy Glass to a "whodunit?" game like Clue.

**How to use it in class:** Student solve puzzles in class all the time. We just call them "questions" or "problems." Sometimes, it's as simple as reframing them to puzzles. (A word of caution, though. Using carrot/stick rewards (do this and I'll give you that) is not the ideal motivator for creative, conceptual tasks, according to Drive by Daniel Pink. The inherent draw of those challenges usually motivates better. Carrot/stick rewards are better for what Pink calls "routine, algorithmic tasks."

4. Amass the best collection

Examples: Monopoly, Pokemon Go

"Wait. You have one of those?" "Wow, I wish I had all of those like you!" In games where collections are key, it's all about curating the best set of assets. In games like Monopoly, the collection serves a greater purpose -- charging rent and growing wealth. In games like Pokemon Go, it's two-fold. The better beasts win more battles. But the bragging rights of an impressive Pokemon collection can be equally motivating.
How to use it in class: Start a set of items that students can collect. They can be characters, actual physical objects, power-ups, etc. Having them may give students certain privileges. Students draw an item after completing a certain task. Drawing cards out of a basket or something similar replicates encountering a random Pokemon to catch. Creating some rarer finds and lots of common finds can make getting the rarer ones more exciting! (Note: telling students how many of each item there are makes identifying common/rare items easier.)

5. Role-playing games

Examples: Dungeons and Dragons, Final Fantasy, World of Warcraft, Magic: The Gathering

One of the big draws of a role-playing game is the character you play. Character types often have strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes, they have certain tools, weapons, and spells available to them that other characters don't. In Dungeons and Dragons, you can choose among barbarians, druids, clerics, wizards and more. In these games, developing a character and his/her persona is half the fun.

How to use it in class: Identify a class game theme (i.e. medieval times, Star Wars, fantasy, sports). Then, identify the types of characters and what their attributes are. Each character has higher or lower ratings in a given attribute. Determine how each attribute connects to class and how students can add (or possibly decrease) their ratings in each attribute. When students complete a task or demonstrate a skill in class, they can earn power-ups for their attributes.
6. **Develop a skill**

Examples: Operation, Ballz, sports simulation games

Practice makes perfect, right? We love the control of being able to improve our skills to a point where they give us an advantage in a game. Great shooters can't be ignored in basketball. Someone with a steady hand is the favorite when playing the classic Operation board game. And seeing an impressive high score in the mobile app Ballz shows how much the player has practiced.

**How to use it in class:** The skill can be academic in nature. By objectively showing how adept you are at a certain skill, you can climb the leaderboard. The skill can be part of a game that's fueled by academics. For instance, my students played "trashketball" where they shot a ball in an empty trash basket for points. The farther away, the more points they earned. Students practiced to hone their trashketball skills in my class. But they only got to shoot when they answered questions correctly, rooting the game in learning.

7. **Sandbox games (build an empire piece by piece)**

Examples: Clash of Clans, Settlers of Catan, Minecraft, Sim City

Sandbox games give their players something that students crave: freedom. Go anywhere on the map. When you get there, do anything you choose. Interact with what you find there and see what happens. Sometimes, there are storylines to be followed or challenges to try. But sometimes, the world is just out there to explore.
**How to use it in class:** Freedom of choice is a wild, untamed, powerful–yet-scary realm of education. To tap into the hook in these types of games, it requires a bit of letting go. For instance, in Minecraft, players are given a plot of land and the freedom to do whatever they'd like in it. In your classroom, students can explore a broad topic however they like as long as it's in the confines of that topic. Choices could be as narrow as selecting between two or three narrow topics.

On another side of the sandbox games realm, students can present their findings in a Clash of Clans/Catan/Minecraft/Sim City style -- or even within some of those platforms!

### 8. Fact and information recall

Examples: Trivial Pursuit, Scrabble, Boggle, Trivia Crack, Jeopardy!

These games are a mixture of trivia games and word games. They play upon the existing information you already have in your head. They quantify what you're able to conjure from your mind in different ways. In Scrabble, letters get point values. In Trivial Pursuit, correct answers let you move forward a certain number of spaces. In the end, there is some correlation between the quality and quantity of information you can recall and your performance.

**How to use it in class:** These types of games are high on fact recall, which is low on critical thinking skills. However, recall and repetition are key to remembering facts long–term. When you assign point values to certain kinds of remembering, it adds a game element to the activity. Assigning less points to "easier" questions and more points to "harder" questions helps the player see how well he/she is playing the game. This is why classroom versions of Jeopardy! have been so popular. A leaderboard helps teams and individuals see how they're competing against the group.
9. Creative communication

Examples: Scattergories, Win, Lose or Draw, Pictionary, Charades, Mad Gab

There's an element of improv in these games. Participants are given a topic. Then, they're expected to communicate it in a way that others are able to guess it. Often, the more creatively and outside-the-box the participant thinks, the better his/her chances are of winning. But if the participant's thinking varies too wildly from the group, it causes a communication breakdown.

**How to use it in class:** Play with creative ways of communicating in class. Judging how well those communications are sent and received inserts an element of gameplay in the activity. In the examples, drawing, acting, speaking and verbal description are all mediums of communicating. By playing with these mediums of communication -- and inserting an element of competition with them -- you can create a game scenario that engages your students much like the example games above.

10. Playing the odds

Examples: Yahtzee, Rock Paper Scissors, many traditional playing card games

There's an element of luck in each of these games. When playing cards, you can only play with the cards you're dealt. In Yahtzee, you can only work with the numbers you've rolled on your dice. And in Rock Paper Scissors, you have only three choices. However, in each of these, there's an element of strategy as well. Search for Rock Paper Scissors strategies and you'll find that it's deeper than 1:3 odds.
How to use it in class: There are all sorts of connections to lessons in math class here. But there is also psychology. Data can be gathered from these games to be analyzed later.

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