



Let the GAMES BEGIN

Can games about literature and language
make you a more creative and supple writer?
Pull up a chair and roll the dice.

By
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Whether low- or high-tech, games provide a dynamic pathway for connecting us to people, places and ideas – all of which are important to a writer’s craft. When we gather to play a game, we open doors to having fun with others while also developing imagination, enhancing creativity, flexing problem-solving muscles and nurturing well being.

“For writers who sometimes feel so pressed to create, playing games relaxes us, opens us to a rich set of images and gives imagination permission and freedom to [let go],” says Bernie DeKoven, a fun theorist, game designer and author of *The Well-Played Game*. “When you are playing by yourself or with other people you’re at your best. Engaged and excited, you’re feeling good about yourself and the world.”

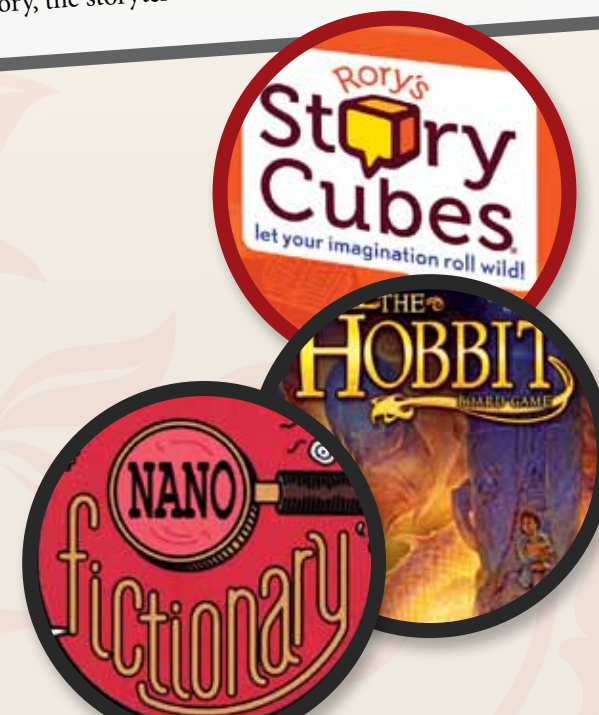
Using the Institute of Play’s rigorously researched framework about how games foster the two essential skills for the writer’s craft, learning and creativity, we’ve organized a selection of “literati” games into inspirational categories. Many have been Games 100 or *Games Magazine* award recipients, but all offer ways to immerse yourself, your colleagues and family in the world of words, language, story

creation and scenes from beloved literary classics and best-selling novels. Use these games to help overcome writer’s block, engage in a lively battle of literary wits or shake up your next book club gathering. Or just sit down with the kids and have fun.

UNLOCK CREATIVITY

As authoring tools, games encourage players to write stories and design new worlds. Storytelling games provide deeper understanding of language, the world we live in and ourselves. They unleash freedom of expression and, frequently, insight into solving seemingly intractable personal or business problems. While you’re playing – creating a story with you kids or writing group – you might just write the next best-seller.

NanoFictionary brings flash fiction to life by requiring players to answer story-creation questions (who, where, what, when, how) and to manipulate cards for settings, characters, problems and resolutions. En route to creating the best short-story, the storyteller is challenged by players who mix up





elements with madcap action cards. For the more competitive storyteller, *Once Upon a Time Storytelling Cards* has players vying to take over the role of the storyteller and guide a plot toward a satisfying end. Similarly, *Rory's Story Cubes* (a board game and app) has inspired innovation and problem solving in family living rooms, classrooms and the boardroom.

INSPIRE NARRATIVES AND ANALYTICAL THOUGHT

Immersing yourself in the otherworlds of role-playing games based on classic literature, such as *The Hobbit* or *The Mystery of the Abbey*, fosters more than just love of the story and its characters. These cooperative strategy games provide players with narrative structure, boundaries, rules and consequences for the choices they make. More than just observing the choices a character makes, role-based games ask you to make decisions *as that character*. In character, players express ideologies and values through visuals, narrative development and game mechanics. These games require

cunning negotiation tactics and analysis of and the ability to manipulate facts, clues or resources in pursuit of a goal. All of this is fodder for a writer's own works-in-progress.

The Hobbit and *The Lord of The Rings* board games surround you with the mystique of Middle Earth. In the former, you aid Tolkien's legendary hobbit Bilbo Baggins on his journey to Lonely Mountain to infiltrate Smaug's lair and capture its vast treasures. In the latter, you may become one of the five famous Hobbits on a quest to destroy the One Ring. Players cooperate to overcome challenges, manipulate resources and make choices to avoid being overtaken by the forces of darkness.

The Mystery of the Abbey is a game of deduction based on Umberto Eco's historical murder mystery, *Name of the Rose*. Each monk (player) has a secret identity. You have to be sharp to earn suspicion points, reveal the identities of other monks and identify the murderer. This game tests ability to analyze and interpret body language and non-verbal cues and clues.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Card Game is played in teams of two who shrewdly communicate with the goal of Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde achieving victory.

Edgar Allan Poe's The Black Cat and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* are dark, immersive apps based on stories from the master of the macabre. Both games involve working through puzzles, deciphering clues, unlocking secret spaces and unveiling hidden objects to solve the crime. *The Hunger Games: District 12* requires players to use their wits to survive by working with or against opponents to acquire supplies (food, clothing, medication) and win the game.

FOSTER EMPATHY FOR POINTS OF VIEW

Technology can deliver a game-playing experience so realistic it blurs the boundaries between reality and the otherworld. *Fable* (Xbox) is a series of action-oriented role-playing video games that confront players with



moral choices as well as battles. Players vicariously experience the life of an archetypal fantasy hero, and, in some respects, decide his or her fate. Choosing a role that is either good or evil, players witness the effects of their actions and choices on the hero's persona. For writers, this kind of game playing fosters self-reflection and understanding of human nature that can feed character development.

EXPLORE SUBJECT MATTER

Games in this group allow lovers of words and literature to discuss favorite novels, poems, stories, language and grammar.

The Art of Literary Conversation is for those who just can't stop talking about books. This game draws on your own experiences, thoughts and reactions to facilitate discussions about the characters, settings and books you've come to love (or hate).

It was *A Dark & Stormy Night* tests how well you think you know your books. Listen to the opening from a novel, story or poem and identify its title or author. If that's not enough for you, take the *Literati Challenge* and see if you can build a story in 90 seconds using five word cards. The word cards aren't common in everyday vocabu-

GOT PLAY?

Here are our top 10 reasons for taking time out to play a game.

- Stimulate** curiosity, creativity and learning.
- Strengthen** relationships with family and friends.
- Enhance** vocabulary.
- Develop** abstract reasoning.
- Teach** cooperation and teamwork.
- Challenge** your comfort zone.
- Reset** the mind's focus.
- Trigger** innovation.
- Increase** energy and prevent burnout.
- Cultivate** laughter and joy.

lary, and to score points, you need to create a story that convinces the other players you know what the words mean.

If you find your writing is lacking sparkling vocabulary and innovative mechanics (or if you're a grammarian at heart), immerse yourself in a few rounds of these games. TriBond presents three seemingly unrelated word clues (e.g., violinist, archer, fancy gift) that challenge your team to identify what the words have in common. *You've Been Sentenced* is a social game that puts one player on trial in front of a jury of other players tasked with making that player justify and defend the grammar, sense and meaning of outrageous sentences.

Pillars of the Earth takes you into Ken Follett's 12th century England, where the fate of Prior Philip's Kingsbridge Cathedral is threatened by all manner of catastrophes and oppositions. Use your resources to erect and wisely deploy assets to prove yourself the greatest builder of them all. Similarly, *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Christmas Carol* immerse you in Victorian times and test your knowledge of character, plot and history. **W**

Karen M. Rider has written for *Book Marketing Magazine* and the *2014 Writer's Market*. She also writes short fiction and is working on her first novel.

Game wisdom for writers

"Play. Fully play. And, play playfully. Then, more than likely the Playful Path is the path you're on. And as long as you stay on the Playful Path, you make even the daily game of writing and editing more fun."

—Bernie DeKoven

