

Teaching with Games

**By John De Gree
The Classical Historian™**

Copyright © 2016 by The Classical Historian™ All Rights Reserved.
Published by The Classical Historian™
Printed in the United States of America.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of a brief quotation embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Graphic Artist: Patty Roberts

Edited by Jane M. Elder.

More Information: john@classicalhistorian.com, 714-623-6104.

www.classicalhistorian.com

I. The Gift of Teaching with Games

Teaching with games is one of the most effective and positive approaches to teaching young children, youth, and young adults. Not only are games effective in teaching academic subjects, games teach us the characteristics of our children and our students, while providing great enjoyment in learning. At the beginning of the school year, games allow for an easy ice breaker. When teaching a group of students, games can be used as a way for students to feel comfortable in the classroom, or to get accustomed to participating in a group of people. During games, students forget their inhibitions, and will more freely cooperate with others. In families, games bring children and parents together on a common project, offering opportunities for parents and kids to relax and enjoy each other's company. We all need moments that encourage good relationships.

Games also teach virtues, including discipline, honor, fairness, justice, love, patience and good manners. A game that works to teach an academic subject or instill a virtue is invaluable.

Humans are naturally competitive. Adults can use games to teach how to correctly harness competitive energies for good. Games are a gift of God that can be used in many ways.

Since 2011, I have presented a seminar entitled "Teaching (History) with Games." At the end of each talk, attendees invariably ask, "Do you have a book or DVD that goes into greater detail what you have explained?" This book and a DVD answer that question.

II. Games Teach Virtues

Games do teach academics, but the real value of games lies in teaching virtues. These virtues will help a student achieve throughout life, and they are easier for someone to learn and practice as a child than as an adult.

All definitions below are from Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

Discipline – control that is gained by requiring that rules or orders be obeyed and punishing bad behavior; a way of behaving that shows a willingness to obey rules or orders; behavior that is judged by how well it follows a set of rules or orders.

Playing games develops discipline in children. When a child plays with others, he has to wait his turn to play, be courteous to the other players, and, if losing, treat others with respect, even if he does not feel like doing so. As a consequence of playing games, the child naturally develops self-discipline, a characteristic which will help him greatly in life. In my family, all of my children exhibited self-discipline at a very young age. They all could listen to an adult give instructions, process these instructions, and follow immediately. I attribute part of this discipline to playing games at a young age.

Honor – respect that is given to someone who is admired; good reputation; good quality or character as judged by other people; high moral standards of behavior.

Playing games develops honor. When playing games fairly, children develop a sense of honor that is not related to winning. Playing a game the correct way brings forth a feeling of doing the right thing whether or not the person wins. To gain honor, and have the desire to gain honor, is one of the most important lessons we can give children.

Fairness – marked by impartiality and honesty; free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism.

Playing games develops fairness. The older teachers or parents have all heard, “That’s not fair!” It may be one of the most common complaints of a young person. Young people have a

strong sense of fairness when they think that something is not fair for them. Playing games encourages and rewards fair play.

Justice – the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments.

Young people have a feeling of what justice is, but in order for them to understand and make it part of their own lives, youth need to experience justice. When the adult sets up a game and monitors it to make sure all the rules are being followed, he is giving a sense of justice to the children playing the game. The adult has to make sure he is not partial to one player over the others, or everyone will learn a false sense of justice. How fortunate I was to grow up in a family where Mom and Dad sought justice in everything they were in charge of.

Love/charity – a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person; strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.

One of my best childhood memories is of playing Checkers and Othello with my Dad. I still remember the realization that at a certain point, I could beat my Dad without him giving me the game. I also remember when I realized that many times, he played games with me just to be with me, not because he loved playing games. While not necessary for nurturing love, playing games with your children is an outstanding way of building better relationships with your children.

Patience – the habit or skills of being patient; patient—able to remain calm and not become annoyed when waiting for a long time or when dealing with problems or difficult people; done in a careful way over a long period of time without hurrying.

Every game has a set of unique rules to follow. It takes time to learn these rules, and time to play with others who are learning

the rules for the first time as well. Playing games requires patience. Patience is a virtue that benefits a person in almost every endeavor, especially in learning. One of the hardest things to do as a teacher of older kids is to teach someone who does not have the virtue of patience. Without patience, almost nothing can be learned well.

Manners and Social Skills – the way that something is done or happens; the way that a person should behave especially while with other people; behavior while with others.

Good manners are sorely missed today. Good manners start with how we treat others at all times, but they also extend to how students treat academic subjects and how individuals form their opinions. Good manners require that a person sees first to those most needy that are nearest to him, such as family members. Good manners also require that the more physically capable help the less physically capable. When playing games, good manners require speaking to others with a pleasant voice and a pleasant smile. Who will disagree with this statement: Americans need good manners!

Games Teach the Importance of Structure

Every game has a structure to follow, and it is easier to teach structure to children than to those who are older. This understanding of structure helps kids when they later learn that each academic subject has structure. When students learn English, they will assume there is a structure that needs to be followed in order to master it. This structure is grammar. When students learn history, they need to know that there are fundamental aspects of history that need to be learned first before they can understand causal relationships. Playing games prepares the mind to learn academic subjects.

Games Encourage Healthy Competition

Humans are competitive, as seen throughout history. In many places, people competed with each other for survival. In ancient times through the Middle Ages and into the modern age, there are numerous examples of humans competing in government, business, and sports. So whether innate or taught, competition has been part of being human at all times in all cultures.

Healthy competition brings the best out of us due to the challenge of competition. For example, a basketball team will tend to “play up” to its competition, meaning that when a team plays a more skilled group of players, the team plays better. The same can be said for academics. When top students play each other in academic competition, they will play their best. The games listed below bring out the best of competitive play and guide it to teach kids academic subjects and virtues.

III. Game Playing Tips for the Teacher

Social Skills and Sportsmanship

All kinds of play, including games, develop social skills and sportsmanship. The importance of these two areas cannot be overemphasized during play, and the teacher should specifically speak about them. If students are playing with other children they do not know, then before the game each person should introduce each other. One person holds his hand out and shakes the hand of another person, while saying, “Hi. I’m John.”

“Hi. I’m Veronica.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you.”

Then, during the game, before a person asks another a question, he should call out the name of the person, for example, “John, what is the code?” Students need to learn these simple rules of behaving appropriately so that they can get comfortable with them during play.

Teachers also need to teach the correct way to lose, because all students will lose at some time in life. Losers should congratulate winners. Likewise, winners need to be taught the importance of winning gracefully.

In our age of professional athletes staging choreographed dances on the football field, it is necessary to teach kids that that kind of behavior is not appropriate when playing against other students they do not really know.

Team Strategies for Groups That Meet Over Extended Periods

For classes that will meet over an extended period of time, the leader can split the students into teams and keep an overall score. The team allows them to get to know each other well, and it will help in building excitement over the days the class does not meet. The teacher has to be careful that one team does not dominate the others, though, and because of this, we advise teachers to never announce that the teams will remain the same throughout the entire course.

Tournament Play and Playing in a Classroom of up to 40 Students

When playing in a larger setting of more than five students, the teacher can create great excitement among students by staging tournaments. In a tournament, students play games and the winners advance to the next round, finishing with the championship round. Players that lose can play each other at the same time as the winners play the championship rounds.

In tournament play with a class of 40 students, split the students into 10 groups of four. Each group plays each other, and the top two students, or the top student, advance to the next round. It is a single elimination tournament. The students who lost then play other kids who lost. Play continues until there is only one

champion remaining. Depending on the size of the class, the teacher will have to organize how the tournament will work.

Games The following pages contains the games.