Cover Notes

Get Your Red-Hot Games Here

by GWEN M. GREGORY

**Libraries Got Game:
Aligned Learning Through
Modern Board Games
by Brian Mayer and
Christopher Harris
Chicago: American
Library Association, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-8389-1009-2
134 pages; $45, softcover**

When I think of gaming in school libraries, video games definitely come to mind. Do *Guitar Hero* and *Halo* have a place in the library? Maybe, but that's not what this book is about. Instead, authors Brian Mayer and Christopher Harris take us to the world of modern board games, also known as designer games, and you'll be surprised at how they can help students.

Gwen M. Gregory

The authors are board game enthusiasts. Both work for Genesee Valley BOCES, an educational services agency supporting the libraries of 22 rural school districts in western New York. Mayer's expertise is in modern board games. He has worked on aligning games with national and state school standards and is the author of the blog Library Gamer. Harris, an avid gamer who is also an expert in school library technology, shares his knowledge on the blog Infomancy.

Not Your Average Childhood Games

The key to the gaming concept is understanding how these modern games work. They are a far cry from the Candy Land or Clue I remember from my childhood. According to the authors, modern games are based much less on luck (rolling the dice) and more on information and strategy. There is usually some element of chance, but much more depends on analyzing information and planning.

Complex decision making that requires the evaluation of several factors is also an important feature of these games. These qualities make games much more useful for educational purposes. Many designer games allow players to compete until the end, rather than eliminating them along the way. In a school setting, this solves the problem of what to do with students once they are eliminated from the game. Many designer games share mechanics or concepts used in the way the game is played. This can make learning a new game easier once you know the basics.

The authors stress that learning can be fun. It is perfectly OK for students to enjoy themselves; that doesn't mean they aren't learning. Many people feel that having fun playing games cannot also be a good learning experience. However, games can serve as ways to enrich the curriculum in many areas, just as "fiction is used as a way to explore the English language or to provide a context for historical studies," point out the authors in the book. Many games that focus on historical times and places can enrich coursework in those areas. Games promote social skills such as cooperation, engage students in coursework by bringing the familiar (game playing) to school, and encourage critical thinking.
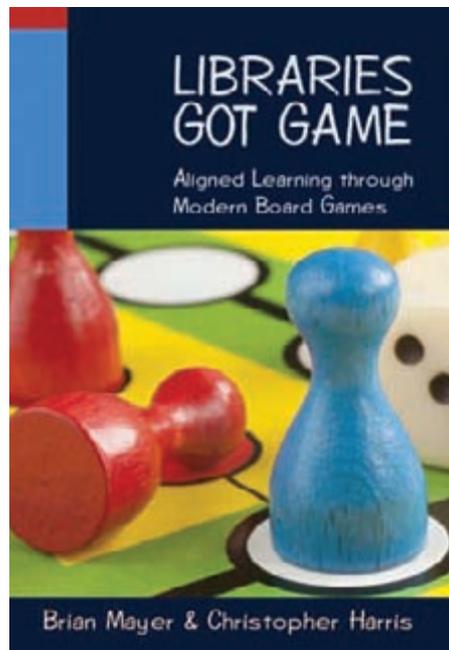
Meeting Critical Standards

The authors match the skills needed to play particular games to the skills of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, a scheme used by schools to plan and evaluate learning. These days, all parts of the curriculum must be analyzed and justified to be sure they are effective and that they align to state and national standards. This is where the authors' expertise lies and what they share with us in the book: It's not just about how to have games in your school library but how to make them work as part of the curriculum.

As librarians, the authors especially focus on how games build information skills. Designer games are rich with information and require that the players are able to process and use this information, starting with the preschool age group. One example is the game Ticket to Ride, where players complete train routes on a map of the U.S. This game requires analysis of the routes available as well as the flexibility to change as other players take over routes.

Focusing on Collaboration

These games also build social skills, such as collaboration, because they require players to interact and work together. A full chapter concentrates on aligning games with standards (see http://sls.gv boces.org/gaming). Here the authors name specific games and how they are aligned; these qualities can also be used to select other similar games. For example, in the area of science, Arthur Saves the Planet helps younger students work together to see how actions can affect the environment. For older students, Power Grid focuses on providing electrical power to cities. Players try to maximize their profits and power potential, leading to discussions of economic and environmental effects.

In the last several chapters, the authors present practical information about implementing a games program. First, they share details about their program at Genesee Valley BOCES. They get down to the nitty-gritty of how they handle missing game pieces (game publishers are willing to work with libraries on this), getting support at all levels (librarians through superintendents), and providing training for librarians on managing and playing the games. It's always good to hear the specifics of how someone is implementing a program.

Evaluating the Criteria

The authors also share tips about starting your own games collection in a school library. They stress that games should be treated the same way as other learning resources, with specific criteria for evaluation. The games should be fun and authentic, and they should also be aligned to school curriculum. Logistical elements such as time needed to teach and to use a game may be a factor. Librarians can buy games from online sources, but local game stores may be eager to cooperate with the library, may give you a better price, and may work with you to meet your special needs.

The final 40-plus pages cover specific games, and the authors list their "top recommended games" for elementary, middle, and high school here. Each entry includes several paragraphs of description and suggested curricular areas. They finish up with a glossary of board game terminology and a list of game publishers with contact information.

For school librarians or teachers interested in using games in the classroom, this book is a gold mine of information. You will find everything needed to start circulating games through your libraries. For others, it's an interesting glimpse into one aspect of libraries most of us don't think about much.

Gwen M. Gregory is the associate director for technical services at the Biro Law Library at Chicago's John Marshall Law School. Her email address is 8gregory@ jmls.edu. Send your comments about this article to itletters@infotoday.com.

Words at Work

Take your pick of any of these choice terms destined to be a big hit around the water cooler.

baked in: Corporate-speak for "included." "The shipping costs are already baked in to the list price."

capsizing: Downsizing gone awry. It's the process of a company repeatedly reducing head count, but not the work, until it goes under.

fauxtography: The staging, tampering, directing, Photoshopping, etc., of news photographs. They may look like news, but they're not. Several major news organizations have been burned lately by war zone photographers eager to make a name for themselves—or at least a few bucks.

HiPo list: A group of generally younger employees thought to have High Potential (HiPo) and possessing the right stuff to become future corporate execs—after appropriate brainwashing, er, training, of course.

Source: BuzzWhack (www.buzzwhack.com)