

canada.com News



Sunday » December 14 » 2003

Oh, the games families can play

Volunteers offer to test new board games just in time for holiday gift-giving

Renee Blackstone

The Province

Sunday, December 14, 2003

Is there a new Trivial Pursuit out there right now? That game took the world by storm when it was launched 20 years ago, and every year, game inventors hope theirs will catch the public imagination in the same way.

We took a stack of new board games, most of them created by Canadians, to three Surrey and Delta families, with children from ages seven to 17 and asked them to play and tell us what they thought of the games.

The bad news: There is no new game that sizzles like Trivial Pursuit did. The good news: There are a number of good family games. Some are variations on favourite old standards and some have obvious educational intent but the kids didn't seem to mind. They liked playing even as they were learning, and the bonus was that the whole family could join in the fun.

We asked our testers to score the games based on "playability" and fun factors, with 1 being the least interesting and 5 being absolutely awesome.

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Captain Hook's Shipwreck (RP Games, \$29.95): for ages 4-8. Watch the popularity of this game soar when the new Peter Pan movie comes out on Christmas Day. The object of the game is to move around a "real" pirate ship to find the treasure and not fall off. Our 7- and 10-year-old testers had no problem setting up the ship. "It's cute for younger kids but older ones would be bored," said one mom. "I liked the falling off the best," our seven-year-old reported.

Overall Score: 3+

Professor Noggin's Ancient Civilizations (Outset Media, \$14.99): for ages 5 to 10. This award-winning, kid-friendly card game series released four new titles this year: Wonders of Science, Famous Inventions, Ancient Civilizations, and First Peoples of North America. Each game comes with two levels of difficulty and is perfect for travel or home-schooling. "Great fun! Lots of laughter," said one mom. "Children will learn to pay attention and remember." Best for families with younger children. Check www.outsetmedia.com for retail outlets.

Overall Score: 2+

FOR EVERYONE 8 AND OLDER:

Buzzword (RP Toys, \$29.99): for ages 10 and up. This Canadian word association and trivia game is played with cards where a key word such as "apple" incites players to guess 10 other words or phrases that use it. Our testers gave it high praise. "Very enjoyable," said one mom, adding: "Trivia knowledge



Colin Maki, 7, Chris Maki, Fraser Maki, 10 and family friend Casey Knight, 11 (left to right) beat out Casey's Mom, Colleen Kennaird (right) who was the last to slap her hand on a played card while trying out the new card game Swap.

CREDIT: Ric Ernst, The Province

and intelligence are an asset but everyone gets some of the answers." Available at Toys R Us, WalMart and Zellers.

Overall Score: 4+

Telepaths (Outset Media, \$39.99): for ages 8 and up. Another Canadian-bred word-association game played with cards and in teams, this has great appeal for the whole family, say our testers. It's a game where you need to know how other people think as you try to figure out what your teammates will associate with certain pictures or words. "It's for all ages, skill and intelligence levels," said one mom. "It's very fast . . . you don't have to think too hard," said one teen. "Lots of fun . . . I would play it many more times," said another. Check at www.outsetmedia.com for retail outlets.

Overall Score: 4

Swap (RP Toys, \$7.99): for ages 7 and up. This is a fast-paced, easy-to-understand game where the object is to get rid of all 10 cards you're given at the beginning. It's anybody's game, right up to the end. "It was really fun because it was both luck and chance . . . and you don't need all day to play it," said our 12-year-old player. Available at WalMart, Zellers and

Toys R Us.

Overall Score: 4

Things, Humour in a Box (Quinn & Sherry, \$39.99), for ages 8 and up. Mixed response to this Canadian-made game, where players must complete statements read from a card, such as: "What does the goalie think about when play is at the other end?" Players must then guess who said what. "Very much fun," our 17-year-old tester said. "Need a very good memory to play this. Luck does not help at all," said one of the dads. But one mom found it "Just OK; a subdued game." Check www.thingsthegame.com for buying info.

Overall Score: 3+

Cat-in-the-Hat-Opoly and Canadopoly (Outset Media, \$29.99 each): for ages 8 and up. Instead of Boardwalk or Park Place, two coveted properties in traditional Monopoly, you can own your favourite national landmarks, including the CN Tower, Calgary Stampede or Niagara Falls. Each property card contains fascinating facts, offering an educational element to a game with a distinct Canadian feel. And every youngster who's seen The Cat in the Hat, of course, will have this game on their wish list. "Kids must be able to read to play," one mom cautioned. "It was fun until Uncle George bankrupted everybody," said her 10-year-old about Cat-in-the-Hat-Opoly. Check www.outsetmedia.com for retail outlets.

Overall score: Cat, 4; Canada, 3+

FOR TEENS AND ADULTS

Hoopla, Cranium, (\$24.95). A team game for teens and adults, Hoopla follows the huge success of the first and subsequent Cranium games. In this one, players must sketch, act or craft clues to help teammates guess the people, places and things pictured on their cards, kind of like Pictionary meets Charades. "Challenging . . . It made you think," said one mom. "It was fun (and) made me laugh," said our 17-year-old tester. All the adults liked it, but our 15-year-old said he wouldn't buy it for himself. Available at Starbucks.

Overall Score: 4

Don't Quote Me, (Wiggles 3D, \$44.95): for ages 14 and up. Well, that's what the box said, but our testers insisted the average age of players should be "closer to 40." Well-read, well-informed adults might enjoy this Canadian-produced game, but our teens did not. "Not fun!" said one of them. "Not a good game for families," a mom added. Available at Chapters.