

Games: How they can be used for language development

Headbandz: Teaches basic vocabulary and the cards can be used for simple categorization of food, animals, and furniture. Great for teaching kids to ask and answer questions, to get creative with their questioning and also teaches simple gaming strategy. This is an easy to play fun question game of; “What am I?” Or “Yes/no” questions. Before the timer runs out figure out if the cartoon card on your headbandz is an animal, food or object. Playing Headbandz, will help children develop their; knowledge of categories, descriptive language and deductive reasoning skills. The playing cards in my set are nicely illustrated and contain pictures of familiar everyday items and so I sometimes use them as a simple vocabulary teaching or category sorting task. It is easy to use them to sort into their intended 3 categories of food, animals and household items but you can also drill down further into each category and have your students pick out the zoo animals separate from the farm animals. You can have them find you “food that grows on trees” or “items we keep in the garage”.



Ned's head: What's In Ned's Head is an icky game that will make children giggle while grossing them out! Ned is a big plush head filled with various items that include an old gym sock, stinky cheese, an icky tooth, Ned's lab rat and much more. This game is designed that you take a card and feel for the item that matches. It can be used in many more ways



Categories and descriptions: Get your children to remove an item from Ned's head, what category is it? Describe the item, players have to guess the item described. Whoever guesses the item wins it and at the end whoever has the most items wins.

Prepositions and following instructions: you can hide an item using Ned's head and see if your child can find it, for example “the sock is under Ned's head and the worm is behind his ear” or let your child give you instructions for finding items.

Memory: Using the Kim's Game method, or by putting all the items in Ned's head, letting your child peep through the nose/ear holes for 30 secs. Remove one item and children have to guess which item is missing.

Cranium: Teaches vocabulary, creativity, reading and questioning. Excellent for enhancing kids overall language skills as they interact with other players. The Cranium Game includes 600 mind (and body) challenges. Players team up and complete hilarious activities from 4 categories.

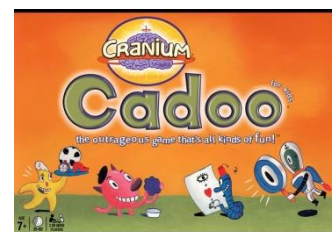


Language Development Cranium addresses children's various learning styles and multiple-intelligences, which make it a great educational game for school aged children. The Cranium game motivates kids to spell, read and sound out the words and sentences they see on the cards. They are also encouraged to physically act out what they just read. This kind of activity stimulates the whole brain, involves and connects the left and right brain hemispheres, a process which helps to better retain newly learned information.

Cranium lets players show off their individual talents. Star performer: for those with a flair for dramatics, charades, celebrity impersonations or humming a tune. The Creative Cat category is for the artists- sketch, sculpt, and draw stick-figure masterpieces. The Data Head category is for players who know all sorts of facts. Last but not least, wordsmiths can show their stuff with the Word Worm questions. Pick a category, complete a challenge, and win!

Several groups have noted that Cranium is a terrific tool for autistic children. Notably, they cite board games that teach social skills and language in a collective context. With an emphasis on team building and "shining moments" for all players regardless of who "wins," Cranium could be a good fit for older children who need a little help with socialization, following rules and competition.

Cranium Cadoo is a version of Cranium for younger kids, suggested for ages 6-12, and the variety of age-appropriate and thoughtful activities makes it a great learning tool. **Cranium Cariboo** is a game designed for even younger kids to help them learn numbers, shapes and letters.



Taboo/ Articulate/ Articulate Junior



Describe an item without saying the word. These are all Description games. With most relevance to children is Articulate Junior, which has over two thousand new topics compiled by an educational specialist to be suitable for kids aged 6-12. In Articulate you will need to be as descriptive as you've ever been in order to win. With the question cards featuring the same six categories as in the original, you can easily integrate

Articulate for Kids into the grown-up version. So kids can proudly step up to the mark and compete alongside the whole family.

Scrabble: Some children who struggle with speech and communication issues can be overwhelmed by regular versions of Scrabble, but Scrabble Jr. adds pictures to the board. These pictures and the pre-determined spelling words they accompany can help kids develop spelling skills, but also reinforce visual cues. Scrabble can help build on vocabulary; you can talk about the words you have made and make semantic links to help the child build on their existing vocab. When playing it with my family we always play the three things rule: Tell me three things about the word you've made. When your child moves beyond the letter matching of scrabble junior the board can be turn over and children can create their own words.



Boggle: Shares the same characteristics as Scrabble in that it is a word game that inspires and prompts player to put letters together to form words. However, it also has core differences from Scrabble that make it unique as a word game and as a learning tool.



The greatest difference between the two word games is that Scrabble is a slow game in comparison to Boggle. Boggle has a three minute timer that pressures players to generate as many words as possible in a short window of time.

Boggle is an effective tool for generating language skills and word learning skills in children quickly and easily. Children have the opportunity to learn spelling and vocabulary skills. In a typical game, which can be completed in a 20 min session, a player can discover and write down twenty to forty words. An added feature of Boggle is that players learn to spell words by identifying common spelling patterns and also learn to recognize spelling patterns that are *not* correct.

Boggle also helps develop thinking skills and Visio-spatial skills as players sift through a pile of jumbled letters to form words.

Guess who: *Guess Who?* is one of my favourite speech therapy games. The game lends itself well to developing deductive reasoning skills, as the winner is the player who most effectively uses the process of elimination to determine which character is on the opponent's card. Younger children may need extra support to play successfully.



Guess Who? Can be used for a wide range of speech and language development goals, including:

Articulation. For children who are capable of producing accurate /s, z/ and/or /r/ sounds when consciously practicing, but misarticulate them in more spontaneous speaking situations when they are not paying attention to their articulation, *Guess Who* can be a great exercise in learning to self-monitor. When using *Guess Who* for this purpose, I require the child to ask all questions using one of two forms:

- *Is your person _____?*
- *Does your person have _____?*

Both of these forms contain one /z/ sound, one /s/ sound.

I require them to answer using a full sentence, not a simple yes or no. There are four typical forms for an answer:

- *Yes, my person has _____.*
- *No, my person doesn't have _____.*
- *Yes my person is _____.*
- *No, my person is not _____.*

All four forms have at least one /s/, one /z/, and one post-vocalic /r/; the yes responses have an extra /s/. Depending on the features the asker chooses, there may be additional occurrences of the target sounds (glasses, moustache, red hair, brown eyes, etc.).

Comprehension- Responding to questions. Playing the game as designed is a natural exercise in listening comprehension, as well as logical and deductive reasoning. For the game to work, both players must understand each other's questions and respond accurately and truthfully. In addition, each player must understand how to determine which faces get turned down and which remain up. However, the game can be modified in a number of ways to suit a variety of goals.

With younger children and those who have never played *Guess Who?* before, it's a good idea to bring in a second adult, and play as a "team" with your child against that person. That way, you can talk through your decisions and strategies, e.g.: *She says her person doesn't have red hair. I want to leave her person standing up, so I'm going to leave the people who don't have red hair standing up. I'll put down all the people with red hair, because I know her person isn't one of them.*

As you play a few games this way, you can "fade" your support gradually and allow the child to do some of the decision-making.

Describing salient features; subjective vs. objective. If you have a child who often communicates by pointing or uses a lot of non-specific vocabulary like *that*, *this*, or *thing*, playing *Guess Who?* can contribute to using more specific descriptions. Since players sit facing each other, your child will not be able to communicate with you by pointing at the pictures on his or her board. If this is a difficult thing for your child, it is a good idea to look at the cards together beforehand and warm up by discussing the characters' distinguishing features. For example, you can sort the cards according to hair colour, then talk about how they are similar: "Look, these all have brown hair, and these ones have black hair; tell me about these ones," and point to the people with red hair. Then you can re-shuffle the cards and sort them according to another feature like eye colour, baldness, gender, facial hair, glasses, hats, etc. This offers an opportunity to distinguish between objective descriptions (hair colour, eye colour, gender, presence/absence of glasses, beard, moustache, etc.) as opposed to more subjective descriptions, such as pretty, scary, cool, happy.

A variation I often use with children who are working on descriptive vocabulary is to draw pairs of cards from the deck and take turns describing ways they are the same or different. From the child's perspective, this tends to feel less like a game and more like a drill, so I usually combine it with another game or activity to help the children forget that they are learning.

Jenga – Initially I always used Jenga as a reward game, but over time I got creative.

Prepositions: Ask your child to paint all the blocks (pick 6-8 colours). This is just the prep work but it can be fun nonetheless. If you play with coloured Jenga pieces that look different, it makes it easier to talk about location words such as in/on/under. If your child is working on expressive prepositions, then you can have them tell you which block is wiggly ('the one *under* the blue block', or 'the piece *between* the red and the green'). If they're working on receptive prepositions, you can

use that cube as a story starter to get them to use the new word in a sentence straight away.

Narrative development – Roll the dice and help your child to build a story from the pictures they see. You may need to get them started by choosing the first cube and scripting “Once upon a time there was a huge lightning storm...” and then let them build the rest of the tale. But only do this if you need to as that does limit their ability to use their own ideas.

Imaginative language – The story doesn’t always have to be sensible. Let your child develop their ability to use language to describe things by being open to anything, however whimsical. So what if you don’t find an abacus in the desert! Let them use Rory’s Story Cubes for Speech Therapy to tell a tall tale and they will be working on their imaginative language. Great for kids who tend to live a little too much in the here and now and be rigid in their thinking, as this helps them think beyond their usual limits.

Grammar and sentence structure – Don’t be too quick to bring this one in or the game will get stale too quickly but once your child can really spin a yarn, you can start to correct certain aspects of their grammar as they go. This works best if you agree on targets with them in advance like “We are working on past tense so I’m going to help you out if I hear you struggling with that, OK?” Keep it simple and limit your corrections or you will spoil the magic of the story.

Structured Storytelling – Lots of kids with language needs struggle to get to the point when they retell events. If this is an area of difficulty for your child then use just 3 cubes, instead of the full set of 9, and work on basic retelling – reinforcing the concept of beginning, middle, and end. You can preselect the cubes in the beginning to give maximum support to those that need a lot of work in this area.

Listening skills and Asking Questions – Have your kids ask questions after the story is finished to get more details (not necessarily provided by the cubes). The range of story possibilities will mean they can ask a range of question types “Who, why, where, when, how?”

What’s in the box?

Language development, inferencing, articulation and social skills can all be



targeted in this game. Challenge is to guess what's in the box.

An item is placed in the box and players have 10 seconds to feel and guess what the item is. The player that hid the item can give clues.

Concepts: Find items which describe basic concepts. Hard, soft, cold, top, bottom, up, down, big, long short, full, empty, large, small, wet, dry. Categorise the item, describe the item. Describe the item's uses or properties.

Following instructions: If playing with more than one child you can ask one child to guess and give instructions to put items in the box.

Categorise: You can have a child retrieve an item and start category piles.

Articulation: Use the game to place items with names that target articulation errors.

Social Skills: Children will be eager to take turns and get their hands in the box or to place an item in the box. Encourage them by praising good waiting.



- **5 second rule:** Targets semantic links, word finding and turn taking. Player has to name three items in a category in 5 seconds. In therapy I made some modifications; Increase the timeframe for your child anywhere from 10-20 seconds. I use the stopwatch function on my phone instead of the game timer if a child needs additional time. Turning the game timer over multiple times during a client's turn can be distracting and draw attention to the fact the client is struggling to complete the task. If the client requires longer than 20 seconds to respond, remove the time element altogether. If no one has been able to name three items in a category, stop and generate possible examples as a group. If necessary, use a search engine to look up more examples.