

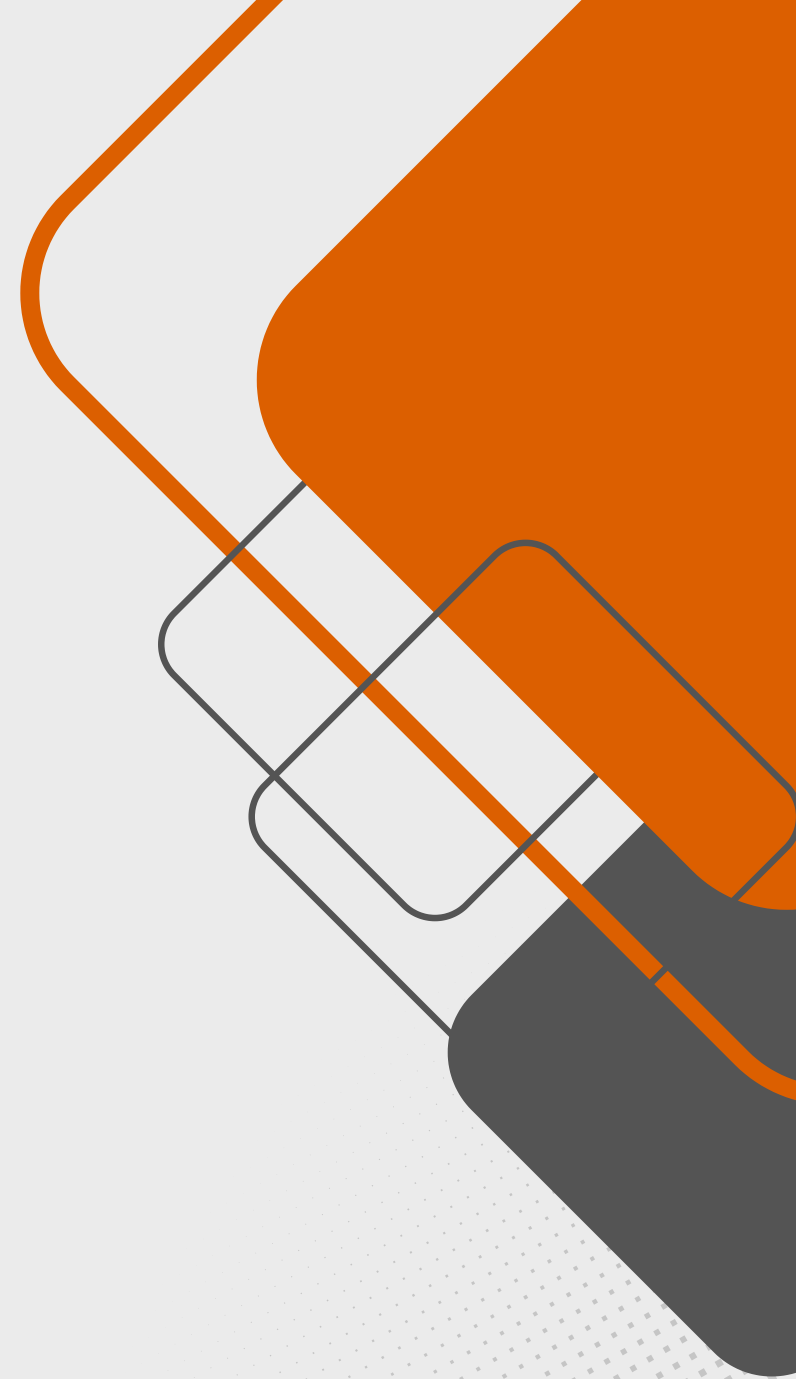


Funded by  
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# THINK, PLAY, CONNECT

BOARD GAMES AS  
LEARNING TOOLS IN  
YOUTH EXCHANGES

BASED ON PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION DURING  
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE  
07.12 - 13.12.2025



## ABOUT US:

We are a dynamic organization dedicated to empowering young people through cultural exchange, non-formal education, and creative learning. Our mission is to inspire youth to explore new ideas, develop essential skills, and foster connections that transcend borders. As part of our commitment to youth development, we actively participate in the Erasmus+ Programme, creating opportunities for growth, learning, and intercultural dialogue.



## FOREWORD:

In today's youth work landscape, creating meaningful engagement is both a challenge and a necessity. Young people are surrounded by constant stimuli, yet genuine interaction, collaboration, and reflection are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve in traditional learning environments. This is where non-formal education plays a crucial role—offering experiential, participatory, and learner-centered approaches that foster real development.

Board games, often perceived as simple recreational tools, hold significant potential within this context. When facilitated intentionally, they become powerful instruments for communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and self-expression. They create safe environments where participants can experiment, make decisions, experience failure, and learn collectively.

This booklet was developed as part of the Think, Play, Connect project, implemented within the Erasmus+ Programme in Momchilgrad - Bulgaria. It is based on direct experience from international youth exchanges, where board games were used not only as activities, but as structured learning methods. Through this process, games became a medium for connection, reflection, and personal growth.

The aim of this resource is to provide support for transforming board games into meaningful learning experiences. It offers practical guidance, tested approaches, and adaptable methods that can be applied in diverse intercultural settings.



# INTRODUCTION:

This booklet explores the role of board games within the context of youth work and non-formal education, with a particular focus on their use in Erasmus+ youth exchanges. It is addressed to youth people, youth workers, facilitators, and educators who are interested in expanding their understanding of how play-based environments can contribute to learning and group processes.

Rather than presenting board games as structured tools with predefined outcomes, this resource approaches them as flexible environments that generate interaction. Each game creates its own dynamics—inviting participants to communicate, interpret, collaborate, compete, and respond to evolving situations. These dynamics form the basis of potential learning experiences.

In intercultural settings, where participants come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, board games offer a shared space that does not rely solely on verbal communication. They can support engagement, reduce barriers, and encourage participation in ways that are often more intuitive than traditional methods. At the same time, they allow different forms of expression and interaction to emerge naturally within the group.

The aim of this booklet is not to define how board games should be used, but to highlight where and how they can be positioned within youth work practice. Through selected examples, it illustrates the types of processes that different games can activate and the kinds of contexts in which they may be relevant.

By presenting board games through this lens, the booklet invites readers to reflect on their own practice and to consider how play can intersect with learning, communication, and group development. The focus is placed on possibilities rather than prescriptions, encouraging a more open and adaptive approach to using games in educational settings.



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET:

How?

This booklet is not designed as a step-by-step facilitation manual, nor does it aim to provide fixed tools or ready-made session plans. Instead, it serves as an exploratory resource that demonstrates how board games can be integrated into different areas of youth work and non-formal education.

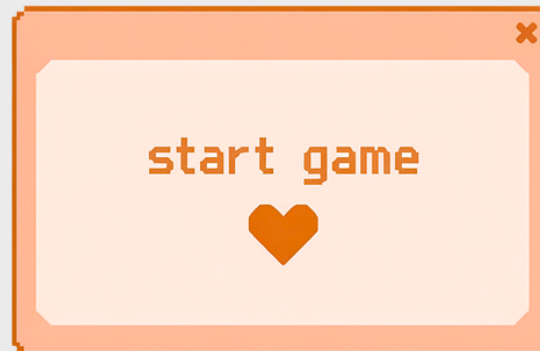
The examples included in this booklet illustrate how commonly used board games can create spaces for interaction, communication, cooperation, and reflection. Rather than prescribing specific methods, the content highlights the potential of these games across various learning contexts.

Each game is presented with a focus on:

- the type of interaction it generates;
- the dynamics it activates within a group;
- the kinds of learning processes it can support.

The intention is to inspire users to reflect on their own practice and to consider how board games might be adapted and used within their specific environments. The booklet encourages experimentation and critical thinking, rather than replication.

In this sense, the resource should be approached as a source of ideas and perspectives, offering insight into how play can intersect with learning in meaningful ways.



# FROM PLAY TO LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL OF BOARD GAMES

Board games are often associated with leisure and entertainment. However, when placed within a youth work context, they can take on a different role—becoming environments where interaction, decision-making, and group dynamics unfold in structured yet flexible ways.

The value of board games does not lie solely in their content, but in the processes they generate. Every game creates a specific set of conditions: players communicate, collaborate, compete, interpret information, and respond to changing situations. These processes closely reflect real-life social interactions.

From this perspective, board games can be understood as micro-environments where participants engage in:

- communication under constraints;
- collective problem-solving;
- negotiation and decision-making;
- expression of ideas and perspectives.

The learning potential emerges through these experiences. Participants are not guided toward predefined conclusions, but rather engage in situations that invite interpretation, reaction, and awareness.

In youth exchanges and intercultural settings, this becomes particularly relevant. Board games can function as neutral and inclusive spaces, where participants interact beyond language barriers and cultural differences. They create shared reference points and allow individuals to explore roles, behaviors, and group dynamics in a natural and often intuitive way.

This booklet does not aim to define a single method of using board games. Instead, it presents them as versatile tools that can be positioned across different areas of youth work—from team building and communication to reflection and creative expression. Their role is not fixed, but shaped by the context, the group, and the intention behind their use.



# WHERE CAN BOARD GAMES BE USED IN YOUTH WORK?

Board games can be integrated into youth work in a variety of ways, depending on the context, group composition, and objectives of the activity. Rather than serving a single purpose, they can support different types of processes and create diverse learning environments.

- Communication and Interaction

Many board games create situations in which participants must exchange information, interpret meaning, and align their understanding with others. These interactions often reveal differences in perception, language use, and communication styles. In this way, games can serve as entry points for exploring how individuals express ideas and how messages are received within a group.

#### Teamwork and Group Dynamics

Cooperative and team-based games provide a natural setting for observing how groups function. Participants take on roles, negotiate decisions, and respond collectively to challenges. Through these processes, patterns related to leadership, participation, trust, and collaboration can emerge in an organic and observable way.

- Reflection and Self-Expression

Certain board games, particularly those based on storytelling, imagery, or interpretation, allow participants to express thoughts and emotions indirectly. This can be especially relevant in intercultural contexts, where language barriers or personal hesitations may limit direct expression. Games can create a more open and flexible space for sharing perspectives.

#### Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Strategic and logic-based games engage participants in analyzing situations, evaluating options, and making decisions under specific conditions. These processes often involve dealing with uncertainty, limited information, or time pressure—elements that reflect real-life challenges and encourage critical thinking.

- Intercultural Learning

In international youth exchanges, board games can function as neutral spaces where participants interact beyond cultural differences. They provide shared experiences that do not rely solely on verbal communication, allowing individuals from different backgrounds to engage on equal terms. Through gameplay, cultural habits, assumptions, and approaches to interaction may become visible.

- Engagement and Participation

Board games naturally encourage involvement. Their structured yet flexible nature allows participants to take part at different levels, depending on their confidence and experience. This makes them accessible tools for engaging diverse groups, including those with fewer opportunities or limited prior exposure to non-formal learning environments.



# CHOOSING THE RIGHT GAME

Selecting the right board game depends not only on the game itself, but on the group, the context, and the type of process you would like to encourage. Different games create different dynamics, and understanding these differences can help youth workers choose experiences that are more relevant to their objectives and participants.

There is no single “best” game. A game that works well with one group may feel unsuitable for another. The key is to consider the type of interaction the game is likely to generate and whether that matches the needs of the moment.

- Group Size

Some games function best in small groups, where every participant can remain actively involved. Others are more suitable for larger teams or can be played in parallel tables. Choosing a game that matches the number of participants helps maintain engagement and flow.

- Energy Level

Games can create very different atmospheres. Some are calm, reflective, and creative, while others are fast-paced, competitive, or highly social. The energy level of the group and the timing within the programme should be considered when selecting a game.

- Language Dependence

In international youth exchanges, language can strongly influence participation. Certain games rely heavily on vocabulary, word association, or discussion, while others are more visual, intuitive, or based on observation. Selecting games with appropriate language demands can support inclusion and equal participation.

- Cooperation or Competition

Some games encourage players to work together toward a shared objective, while others place participants in direct competition. Both approaches can be valuable, depending on the group stage and the intended dynamic. Cooperative games often support trust-building, while competitive games may energise the group and stimulate strategy.

- Complexity and Accessibility

Games with simple rules are often easier to introduce and more accessible for mixed-experience groups. More complex games may offer deeper strategic experiences but can require additional time, explanation, and patience.

- Duration and Flow

Time matters. Short games can be useful energisers or introductory activities, while longer games may allow more developed group processes to emerge. It is important to consider not only the gameplay time, but also explanation, setup, and possible discussion afterwards.

- Reflection Potential

Some games naturally create moments that invite reflection on communication, teamwork, decision-making, or perspective. Others are more focused on entertainment. When learning objectives are central, it can be useful to choose games that generate experiences participants can later connect to real-life situations.

# BOARD GAMES BY TYPE OF EXPERIENCE



The games presented in this booklet offer different forms of interaction and can be relevant in a variety of youth work settings. To make navigation easier, they are grouped below according to the main type of experience they often generate. Many games can fit into more than one category, but this overview highlights their strongest characteristics.



# COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

Games that encourage verbal expression, interpretation, listening, symbolic communication, and shared understanding.

- Codenames
- Decrypto
- Insider
- Concept



# CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSION

Games that invite imagination, symbolism, storytelling, and personal interpretation.

- Dixit
- Story Cubes
- Mandala



# COOPERATION AND TEAMWORK

- The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine
- Hanabi
- Forest Shuffle



# STRATEGY AND PLANNING

- Azul
- Carcassonne
- Scout

# TRUST, ROLES, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

- Avalon
- Werewolf
- Saboteur

# FAST ENGAGEMENT AND LIGHT INTERACTION

- Sushi Go!
- Exploding Kittens



# CODENAMES

Codenames is a team-based word association game in which players attempt to connect ideas through limited clues. One player from each team gives a single-word clue intended to guide teammates toward multiple correct words on the table, while avoiding incorrect choices. The game creates a dynamic environment where language, interpretation, trust, and group decision-making become central to the experience.

Because of its simple structure and high level of interaction, the game can be highly relevant in youth work and international exchange settings. It naturally encourages communication, listening, strategic thinking, and awareness of how different people interpret the same message.

## Main Type of Experience

- Communication and shared understanding
- Team strategy and collective decision-making
- Interpretation and perspective differences
- Fast-paced group engagement



# CODENAMES

Codenames creates situations where participants must communicate with clarity while working under constraints. Since clues are limited to one word, teams are required to think carefully, listen actively, and negotiate meaning together.

This can make the game especially useful in contexts related to:

- communication styles within groups
- intercultural interpretation of language
- teamwork under pressure
- trust between participants
- active participation and engagement

The game often reveals how individuals connect ideas differently, making it a strong starting point for discussions about perception, assumptions, and collaboration.

Relevant Contexts of Use:

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- mixed international groups
- communication-focused sessions
- energising afternoon activities
- team-building moments
- language practice in informal settings
- early programme days after basic introductions

Points to Consider:

As the game is language-based, vocabulary level can influence confidence and participation. In multilingual groups, some participants may feel stronger or weaker depending on their language skills. This can be addressed by selecting an accessible language level, allowing additional thinking time, or encouraging a playful atmosphere rather than a competitive one.

It is also useful to observe dominant voices within teams, as stronger personalities may influence collective decisions more heavily.



# CODENAMES

Reflection Potential:

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How do people understand the same message differently?
- What makes communication clear or unclear?
- How were decisions made inside the team?
- Who spoke most, and who spoke least?
- How did trust influence guessing decisions?

These themes can connect naturally to teamwork and everyday communication in youth exchange environments.

Variation Possibilities:

Codenames can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- using easier vocabulary for lower language levels
- creating custom word cards linked to project themes
- playing in smaller teams
- using cultural or local words for intercultural exchange
- cooperative version with one group solving together



# DIXIT

Dixit is a creative association game built around illustrated cards filled with symbolic, imaginative, and often dreamlike imagery. In each round, one player selects a card from their hand and gives a word, phrase, sentence, or story inspired by it. Other players choose cards from their own hands that could also match the clue, after which everyone tries to identify the original card.

The game creates an environment where interpretation, imagination, emotion, and perspective become central. Because there are rarely fixed right or wrong answers, participants engage through meaning-making rather than pure competition.

This makes the game highly relevant in youth work and intercultural settings, where expression, empathy, and multiple viewpoints are valuable elements of the learning process.

## Main Type of Experience

- Creativity and imagination
- Self-expression and storytelling
- Perspective-taking
- Symbolic communication
- Calm and reflective group interaction



# DIXIT

Dixit creates space for participants to communicate ideas indirectly through images and metaphor. This can be especially useful when individuals find direct verbal expression difficult, or when language levels vary inside an international group.

The game often supports:

- confidence in self-expression
- understanding different perspectives
- emotional literacy
- creativity within groups
- intercultural dialogue through interpretation
- inclusive participation beyond strong language skills

Because every player may see something different in the same image, the game naturally highlights diversity of thought and personal experience.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- reflection sessions
- intercultural evenings or identity themes
- group bonding in calm settings
- creativity-focused workshops
- emotional check-ins
- mid-programme moments when deeper trust has developed



# DIXIT

## Points to Consider:

Some participants may initially feel uncertain about abstract thinking or creative responses, especially if they are used to clear rules and fixed answers. It can help to normalize that there is no “correct” interpretation.

The atmosphere should remain open and non-judgmental. Overly competitive play can reduce the reflective and expressive value of the experience.

The imagery may also trigger different cultural meanings, which can be valuable if approached respectfully.

## Reflection Potential:

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- Why did different people understand the same image differently?
- What influences the meaning we give to symbols?
- Was it easier to express yourself through words or images?
- How do personal experiences shape interpretation?
- What did you learn about others in the group?

These themes connect naturally to empathy, communication, identity, and intercultural understanding.

## Variation Possibilities:

Dixit can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- using cards only for reflection circles
- asking players to describe a learning moment through a card
- thematic rounds (friendship, teamwork, challenge, culture)
- cooperative storytelling with the whole group
- pairing participants to explain cards together





# STORY CUBES

Story Cubes creates opportunities for participants to express ideas in an informal and low-pressure way. The images provide prompts that help players speak, invent, and connect thoughts without needing advanced preparation.

The game often supports:

- confidence in communication
- creative thinking
- group bonding through humour and shared stories
- language practice in informal settings
- active listening
- imagination and perspective-building

Because stories can become personal, funny, symbolic, or unexpected, the game can adapt naturally to different moods and objectives.

Relevant Contexts of Use:

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- icebreakers and first programme days
- speaking confidence activities
- intercultural storytelling sessions
- reflection through metaphor
- energising transitions between sessions
- creative workshops and team-building moments

Points to Consider:

Some participants may feel nervous about speaking in front of others, especially at the beginning of a programme. It can help to allow pair or small-group storytelling before sharing in plenary.

Language level may also affect confidence, so the emphasis should remain on participation and creativity rather than grammar or performance.

It is useful to create a supportive atmosphere where humour, spontaneity, and different styles of storytelling are welcomed.





# THE CREW: THE QUEST FOR PLANET NINE

The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine is a cooperative card game in which players work together to complete missions while communicating under strict limitations. Players cannot freely discuss the cards in their hands, which means success depends on observation, trust, timing, and reading one another's intentions.

Unlike many cooperative games that allow constant discussion, this game creates challenge through restricted communication. Participants must coordinate actions with minimal signals, making teamwork more subtle and intentional.

This makes the game highly relevant in youth work settings where cooperation, patience, trust, and non-verbal group awareness are valuable learning experiences.

## Main Type of Experience

- Cooperation and shared responsibility
- Trust-building
- Non-verbal communication
- Strategic coordination
- Patience and collective focus



# THE CREW: THE QUEST FOR PLANET NINE

The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine places participants in a situation where they must succeed together without relying on constant explanation. This often reveals how groups react when communication is limited and how people adapt to uncertainty.

The game can support:

- teamwork under pressure
- listening and observation skills
- patience during group processes
- trust in others' decisions
- shared responsibility for success and failure
- resilience after unsuccessful attempts



Because players win or lose together, the experience often shifts focus away from individual performance toward collective learning.

Relevant Contexts of Use:

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- teamwork-focused sessions
- established groups ready for deeper cooperation
- trust-building activities
- problem-solving workshops
- mid-programme group development stages
- smaller table-based evening sessions

Points to Consider:

The game may be challenging for participants unfamiliar with trick-taking card games. A short practice round can be helpful before starting missions.

Some groups may feel frustrated during repeated failures. This can be valuable if framed positively, as learning often emerges through adaptation and persistence.

Because concentration is important, the game works best in a quieter environment with limited distractions.



# THE CREW: THE QUEST FOR PLANET NINE

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did the group communicate without words?
- What helped build trust between players?
- How did we respond when things went wrong?
- Did anyone naturally take leadership?
- What does successful cooperation require when information is limited?

These themes connect naturally to teamwork, resilience, communication, and leadership.

## Variation Possibilities

The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- using selected easier missions for beginners
- short reflection after each mission
- rotating who explains the rules
- pairing experienced and new players
- comparing silent teamwork styles between groups
- using missions as trust-building progression tasks



# CONCEPT

Concept is a communication game in which players explain words, objects, people, or ideas without speaking directly. Instead of using verbal descriptions, players place markers on a board filled with universal icons representing categories, actions, qualities, emotions, places, and many other concepts.

The challenge of the game lies in transforming thoughts into symbols and helping others interpret meaning through visual clues. This creates a playful environment where language barriers become less central and communication becomes more creative, strategic, and inclusive.

Because of this, the game is especially valuable in international youth exchange settings where participants may have different language levels but still need to interact and understand one another.

## Main Type of Experience

- Communication beyond words
- Symbolic and visual thinking
- Interpretation and shared understanding
- Creativity in expression
- Inclusive group participation



# CONCEPT

Concept offers an alternative model of communication. Instead of relying on vocabulary or fluency, participants use symbols and associations to express ideas. This can create a more balanced environment in groups where language confidence differs significantly.

The game often supports:

- non-verbal communication skills
- inclusion in multilingual groups
- creative problem-solving
- patience and perspective-taking
- awareness of how meaning is constructed
- confidence for quieter participants

Because players interpret symbols differently, the game often opens interesting moments of misunderstanding, humour, and discovery.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- international and multilingual groups
- communication-focused sessions
- icebreakers after introductions
- energising group activities
- inclusion-oriented settings
- sessions about perception or interpretation

Points to Consider

Some participants may initially search for “correct” answers or feel uncertain when communication becomes indirect. A playful atmosphere helps reduce pressure and encourages experimentation.

Cultural interpretation of symbols may vary, which can become a valuable learning moment when approached openly.

Large groups can remain engaged by playing in teams rather than individually.



# CONCEPT

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How do we communicate when words are limited?
- Why did some symbols seem clear to one person but confusing to another?
- What role does culture play in interpretation?
- Did quieter participants engage differently in this format?
- How can visual communication help diverse groups work together?

These themes connect naturally to inclusion, intercultural learning, teamwork, and communication styles.

## Variation Possibilities

Concept can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- using project-related words or themes
- team competitions for faster pace
- cooperative whole-group guessing
- using emotions or values instead of objects
- intercultural rounds based on traditions or places
- reflection rounds using concepts from the day's learning



# AZUL

Azul is a visually elegant strategy game in which players draft colored tiles and arrange them to complete patterns on their personal boards. Behind its simple rules lies a constant process of planning, adapting, and making decisions based on limited options and the actions of others.

The game combines calm concentration with meaningful choices. Players must think ahead, manage risk, and respond to changing situations while trying to optimize their own results.

Because of its clear structure and accessible rules, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts that explore strategic thinking, patience, decision-making, and individual responsibility within a shared environment.

Main Type of Experience:

- Strategic planning
- Decision-making under constraints
- Patience and concentration
- Adaptability
- Calm competitive interaction



# AZUL

Azul creates an environment where participants make repeated choices with visible consequences. Every turn requires balancing immediate gain with long-term planning, while also reacting to the decisions of other players.

The game often supports:

- analytical thinking
- planning ahead
- managing mistakes and setbacks
- responsible decision-making
- focus and attention to detail
- learning through consequence-based choices

Because interaction is indirect rather than confrontational, the game can also suit participants who prefer lower-pressure competitive settings.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- strategy-focused sessions
- calm indoor programme moments
- small-group evening activities
- concentration and patience themes
- decision-making workshops
- mixed groups seeking balanced competition

Points to Consider

Some participants may initially focus only on colors and aesthetics while underestimating the strategic depth of the game. A short practice round can help players understand the decision-making aspect.

The game is less verbally interactive than communication-based titles, so it may be best complemented by discussion or reflection afterwards.

For larger groups, multiple tables may be needed.



# AZUL

## Reflection Potential:

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

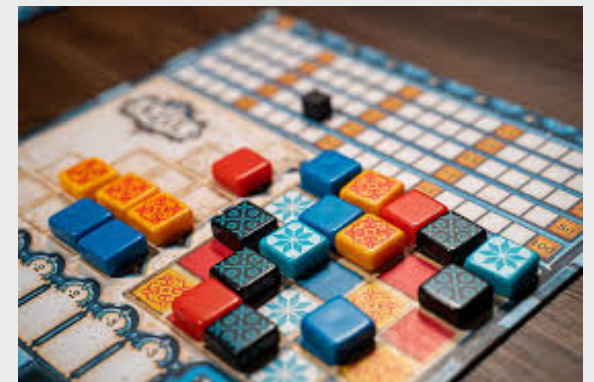
- How did you balance short-term gain and long-term planning?
- How did others' decisions affect your own choices?
- How did you react when a plan failed?
- Was patience more important than speed?
- How do small decisions shape larger outcomes?

These themes connect naturally to planning, responsibility, resilience, and strategic thinking.

## Variation Possibilities:

Azul can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- paired play with shared discussion of decisions
- observation rounds focused on strategy styles
- tournament ladder for longer programmes
- reflection after each round on changing plans
- linking tile patterns to creativity themes
- comparing cautious vs risk-taking approaches



# DECRYPTO

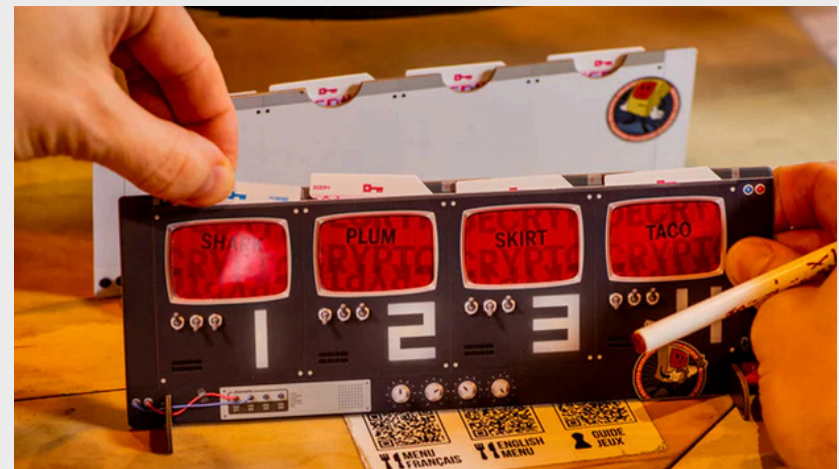
Decrypto is a team-based communication and deduction game in which players give coded clues to help teammates identify secret words, while the opposing team listens carefully and attempts to decode the pattern behind those clues. Success depends not only on clear communication, but also on consistency, memory, and strategic ambiguity.

The game creates a rich environment where players must balance two competing goals: being understandable to their own team while remaining unclear to others. This tension makes communication more deliberate and layered.

Because of this dynamic, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts focused on communication, teamwork, interpretation, and strategic thinking.

## Main Type of Experience

- Communication under constraints
- Team coordination
- Listening and interpretation
- Memory and pattern recognition
- Strategic thinking



# DECRYPTO

Decrypto highlights that communication is not only about speaking clearly, but also about understanding context, building shared references, and adapting messages to an audience.

The game often supports:

- teamwork through internal coordination
- careful listening
- awareness of how messages are interpreted
- collective memory and consistency
- strategic problem-solving
- patience and focused attention

Because both teams observe one another, participants also experience how people learn by watching others communicate.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- communication-focused sessions
- teamwork development
- advanced mixed groups ready for deeper challenge
- evening strategic activities
- analytical and logic-based workshops
- later programme days when trust has developed

Points to Consider

The game can feel more demanding than simpler party games, especially at first. Clear explanation and one practice round are strongly recommended.

Language level may influence confidence, so groups should feel comfortable using simple clues rather than searching for “perfect” answers.

Because the game involves memory and concentration, it works best in a setting with limited distractions.



# DECRYPTO

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- What makes communication understandable only to certain people?
- How did shared experiences help your team?
- How did listening to others improve your own strategy?
- Was it harder to send messages or interpret them?
- How do groups create internal language or codes?

These themes connect naturally to teamwork, culture, communication styles, and group identity.

## Variation Possibilities

Decrypto can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- using easier vocabulary for mixed language levels
- thematic words linked to project topics
- cooperative mode where all players solve together
- reflection pause after each round
- mixed-nationality teams to encourage shared references
- shortened sessions focused on communication styles



# SABOTEUR

Saboteur is a social strategy game in which players work together to build tunnels toward hidden treasure, while some participants secretly take on the role of saboteurs whose goal is to block progress without being discovered. Throughout the game, cooperation and suspicion exist at the same time.

Players must decide whom to trust, how to interpret actions, and when to help or challenge others. Because intentions are not always visible, the game creates a lively environment where communication, group perception, and decision-making become central.

This makes the game especially relevant in youth work contexts that explore trust, teamwork, group roles, and social dynamics.

## Main Type of Experience

- Trust and suspicion
- Teamwork under uncertainty
- Group decision-making
- Social observation
- Strategic interaction



# SABOTEUR

Saboteur places participants in a situation where they must collaborate while dealing with incomplete information. This often reveals how quickly people form assumptions, react to setbacks, and decide whom to trust.

The game can support:

- awareness of group dynamics
- discussion about trust and fairness
- decision-making with limited information
- observation of leadership and influence
- teamwork during uncertainty
- reflection on stereotypes and assumptions

Because hidden roles shape behavior, the game often creates strong moments of discussion and emotional engagement.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- trust-building themes
- social dynamics sessions
- mid-programme group development stages
- evening group activities
- leadership and influence discussions
- energising indoor sessions with interaction

Points to Consider

Some participants may take accusations or suspicion personally, especially in newer groups. It is helpful to frame the experience clearly as playful role-based interaction.

The game can generate strong voices and alliances, so facilitators should remain aware of quieter participants.

Because bluffing and blocking are part of the design, a respectful atmosphere remains important.



# SABOTEUR

Reflection Potential:

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did you decide whom to trust?
- What made you suspicious of certain people?
- How did the group react when progress was blocked?
- Who influenced decisions most strongly?
- How do assumptions affect cooperation in real life?

These themes connect naturally to trust, leadership, perception, and teamwork.

Variation Possibilities:

Saboteur can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- team-based discussions before each round
- shortened rounds for higher energy sessions
- mixed-nationality tables for intercultural interaction
- observation focus on leadership styles
- cooperative debrief after reveals
- linking themes to misinformation or group perception



# AVALON

Avalon is a discussion-based social deduction game in which players belong to opposing hidden teams. One side attempts to complete missions successfully, while the other secretly tries to sabotage them. Because identities are hidden, players must rely on conversation, observation, persuasion, and voting to decide whom to trust.

Unlike many strategy games focused on boards or resources, the central playing field in this game is the group itself. Dialogue, influence, reputation, and reading behaviour become the core mechanics.

This makes the game highly relevant in youth work contexts where trust, leadership, communication, and group dynamics are important themes.

## Main Type of Experience

- Trust and uncertainty
- Persuasion and influence
- Group decision-making
- Observation of behaviour
- Leadership and participation dynamics



# AVALON

Avalon creates a space where participants must make collective decisions without full information. Players form opinions, defend arguments, question intentions, and respond to shifting group perceptions.

The game often supports:

- critical thinking in social situations
- awareness of influence and persuasion
- confidence in speaking and defending ideas
- listening to multiple viewpoints
- reflection on trust and reputation
- observation of group power dynamics

Because every round depends on discussion, participation and communication remain central throughout the experience.

## Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- established groups with growing trust
- communication and debate themes
- leadership-focused sessions
- evening social programme activities
- workshops on decision-making
- group dynamics exploration

## Points to Consider

The game is strongly discussion-based, so quieter participants may need encouragement to engage. Dominant voices can shape outcomes quickly if the atmosphere is not balanced.

Some players may take accusations personally, especially in newer groups. Clear framing is helpful: the roles belong to the game, not to the person.

Because bluffing is part of gameplay, psychological safety and mutual respect remain important.



# AVALON

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did you decide whom to trust?
- What makes someone persuasive in a group?
- Did louder voices have more influence?
- How did uncertainty affect decision-making?
- How do reputation and first impressions shape choices?

These themes connect naturally to leadership, democracy, participation, bias, and communication.

## Variation Possibilities

Avalon can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- beginner rounds with simplified roles
- mixed-nationality teams for intercultural interaction
- observer role focusing on group dynamics
- short pauses for reflection between rounds
- linking themes to misinformation or trust
- rotating moderators for facilitation practice



# WEREWOLF

Werewolf is a group-based social deduction game in which participants take hidden roles as villagers, werewolves, and sometimes additional characters with special abilities. During the night phase, hidden actions take place, while during the day phase the group discusses, debates, and votes to eliminate suspected werewolves.

The game is driven almost entirely by conversation, suspicion, persuasion, and collective decision-making. Players must interpret behaviour, read emotions, defend themselves, and decide whom to trust despite having incomplete information.

Because of its high social energy and strong group interaction, the game can be especially relevant in youth work settings focused on participation, communication, leadership, and group behaviour.

## Main Type of Experience

- Trust and suspicion
- Group discussion and persuasion
- Leadership and influence
- Decision-making under uncertainty
- High-energy social interaction



# WEREWOLF

Werewolf creates a dynamic environment where participants must engage actively with others in order to succeed. The game often reveals how groups respond to pressure, uncertainty, and social influence.

The game can support:

- confidence in speaking publicly
- active listening and observation
- understanding influence within groups
- awareness of majority decisions
- reflection on stereotypes and assumptions
- participation in collective processes

Because decisions are made openly, players often become more aware of how quickly judgments can form inside a group.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- evening programme activities
- established groups with some trust already built
- communication-focused sessions
- leadership and participation themes
- energising large-group settings
- social dynamics exploration

Points to Consider

The game can be emotionally intense for some participants, especially if they are repeatedly accused or eliminated early. It is important to maintain a respectful and playful atmosphere.

Quieter participants may need encouragement, while dominant personalities may strongly influence outcomes.

Because elimination exists in many versions, facilitators may wish to shorten rounds or use variants that keep everyone engaged.



# WEREWOLF

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did the group decide whom to trust?
- Did louder voices influence the vote more strongly?
- How quickly were assumptions formed?
- How did it feel to be suspected or ignored?
- What can this teach us about group decisions in real life?

These themes connect naturally to democracy, participation, leadership, inclusion, and critical thinking.

## Variation Possibilities

Werewolf can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- simplified beginner version with fewer roles
- short fast rounds for energisers
- rotating moderator role for facilitation practice
- observer role focused on group behaviour
- themed versions linked to project topics
- non-elimination variants for inclusive settings



# INSIDER

Insider is a fast-paced social deduction game in which one player secretly knows the answer while pretending to search for it together with the group. Participants ask yes-or-no questions to discover the hidden word, but after the answer is found, the group must identify who the insider was.

The game combines two phases: cooperative problem-solving and social deduction. Players first work together to reach a common goal, then immediately shift into observing behaviour, motives, and subtle influence.

Because of this structure, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts related to communication, leadership, influence, teamwork, and critical thinking.

## Main Type of Experience

- Communication through questioning
- Hidden influence and subtle leadership
- Group observation
- Fast collective decision-making
- High engagement and energy



# INSIDER

Insider highlights how influence can happen quietly inside groups. The insider often guides discussion without appearing obvious, which can reveal how leadership and persuasion are not always direct or formal.

The game often supports:

- asking effective questions
- cooperative problem-solving
- observation of group behaviour
- awareness of subtle influence
- critical thinking under time pressure
- participation in quick group processes

Because rounds are short and energetic, the game allows repeated learning moments with different players taking different roles.

## Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- energisers and transitions
- communication-focused sessions
- leadership and influence themes
- icebreakers after basic introductions
- evening group activities
- shorter time slots within busy programmes

## Points to Consider

The pace can be fast, so quieter participants may need space to contribute. Facilitators can encourage turn-taking during questions.

Some groups may focus only on guessing the word and ignore the second phase of observing behaviour. Both parts of the game are important to the overall experience.

Because bluffing and suspicion are present, the atmosphere should remain playful and respectful.



# INSIDER

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did certain people influence the group without being obvious?
- What makes a question useful or ineffective?
- Did some voices dominate the discussion?
- How do we detect influence inside real groups?
- Was cooperation or suspicion more difficult?

These themes connect naturally to communication, leadership, participation, and critical awareness.

## Variation Possibilities

Insider can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- thematic words linked to project topics
- slower rounds for language-learning groups
- rotating facilitator/timekeeper role
- team-based questioning format
- reflection after each round on influence styles
- intercultural vocabulary rounds



# HANABI

Hanabi is a cooperative card game in which players work together to create a perfect fireworks display. The unique twist is that each player holds their cards facing outward, meaning everyone can see a player's cards except the player holding them. Participants must rely on limited clues from others to understand their own hand and make the right decisions.

The game creates a thoughtful environment where trust, patience, memory, and careful communication become essential. Success depends on how well the group shares information and supports one another.

Because of this structure, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts related to cooperation, empathy, communication, and collective responsibility.

## Main Type of Experience

- Cooperation and shared responsibility
- Trust in others
- Communication through limited information
- Patience and focus
- Collective problem-solving



# HANABI

Hanabi places participants in a situation where they depend on others to understand their own possibilities. This creates a powerful metaphor for teamwork: sometimes individuals need support, feedback, and trust from the group in order to act effectively.

The game often supports:

- active listening
- giving clear and helpful feedback
- patience during group processes
- empathy and perspective-taking
- shared ownership of success and mistakes
- careful decision-making under constraints

Because no one wins alone, the game naturally encourages a cooperative mindset.

## Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- teamwork-focused sessions
- trust-building activities
- communication workshops
- small-group evening sessions
- reflective indoor programme moments
- groups ready for deeper cooperation challenges

## Points to Consider

The game can feel mentally demanding at first, especially for participants unfamiliar with deduction or memory-based games. A practice round is often helpful.

Some players may feel frustrated when clues are misunderstood. This can become a useful reflection point if approached positively.

Because concentration matters, the game works best in a calm environment.



# HANABI

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did it feel to depend on others for information?
- What makes feedback clear and useful?
- How did the group respond to mistakes?
- Was patience more important than speed?
- How does trust influence cooperation in real life?

These themes connect naturally to teamwork, empathy, communication, and resilience.

## Variation Possibilities

Hanabi can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- beginner rounds with open discussion first
- short reflection after each attempt
- rotating who explains strategy
- pairing experienced and new players
- comparing communication styles between tables
- linking gameplay to feedback culture themes



# SUSHI GO

Sushi Go! is a fast and accessible card drafting game in which players choose one card from their hand and pass the remaining cards to the next player. Through several rounds, participants build combinations of sushi dishes that score in different ways.

The game is easy to learn, visually inviting, and quick to play, while still involving meaningful decisions. Players must balance immediate gains with longer-term combinations and pay attention to what others may be collecting.

Because of its simple structure and lively pace, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts focused on participation, quick decision-making, inclusion, and group engagement.

## Main Type of Experience

- Fast decision-making
- Light strategy and planning
- Observation of others
- Accessible competition
- High engagement and energy



# SUSHI GO

Sushi Go! creates a playful environment where everyone participates at the same time. The drafting mechanism keeps players constantly involved and reduces waiting time, which can be especially useful in mixed groups.

The game often supports:

- quick thinking and adaptability
- recognizing patterns and opportunities
- managing simple risks and rewards
- attention to others' choices
- inclusive participation for beginners
- energising group atmosphere

Because rounds are short, the game allows multiple attempts and rapid learning through repetition.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- energisers and transitions
- first programme days
- mixed-experience groups
- indoor breaks or evening sessions
- light strategy introductions
- quick small-group activities

Points to Consider

Some participants may focus only on collecting favorite-looking cards rather than understanding scoring combinations at first. This is normal and often part of the learning process.

Because the pace can be quick, clear explanation of scoring before the first round is helpful.

The game is competitive but generally light-hearted, making it suitable for groups that prefer lower-conflict interaction.



# SUSHI GO

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

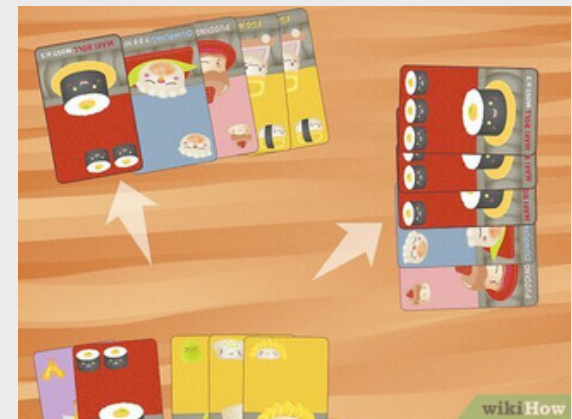
- How did you make decisions quickly with limited time?
- Did you focus on your own plan or react to others?
- How did your strategy change during the game?
- Was it better to plan ahead or stay flexible?
- How do small choices create larger results?

These themes connect naturally to decision-making, adaptability, focus, and planning.

## Variation Possibilities

Sushi Go! can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- team play with shared decisions
- slower first round for beginners
- tournament ladder across multiple sessions
- reflection after each round on changing strategy
- linking themes to resource choices or priorities
- mixed-nationality tables for social interaction



# CARCASSONNE

Carcassonne is a classic tile-placement game in which players gradually build a shared landscape of cities, roads, monasteries, and fields. Each turn, a player places one tile and decides whether to commit one of their followers to claim and score parts of the growing map.

The game combines simple rules with meaningful choices. Participants must plan ahead, adapt to an evolving environment, and respond to the decisions of others while contributing to a common board.

Because of this balance between individual goals and shared space, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts related to planning, coexistence, negotiation, and long-term thinking.

## Main Type of Experience

- Strategic planning
- Shared space and coexistence
- Decision-making over time
- Adaptability
- Calm competitive interaction



# CARCASSONNE

Carcassonne creates a visible environment where individual choices shape a collective landscape. Players pursue personal goals, yet every move affects the common space and influences future possibilities for everyone.

The game often supports:

- long-term thinking
- adapting plans to changing conditions
- awareness of shared resources and space
- balancing cooperation and competition
- patience and concentration
- learning through cumulative decisions

Because the board develops gradually, participants can clearly observe how small actions influence wider systems.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- strategy-focused sessions
- planning and systems-thinking themes
- calm indoor programme moments
- mixed groups preferring moderate competition
- evening table activities
- workshops about shared environments or community space



Points to Consider

New players may initially focus only on placing tiles quickly rather than considering long-term positioning. A practice round or open first turns can help.

The game is less verbally interactive than social games, so reflection afterwards can add extra value.

Larger groups may require multiple tables to keep everyone actively engaged.

# CARCASSONNE

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did your decisions affect the shared map?
- Did you focus more on your goals or on reacting to others?
- How did you adapt when the board changed unexpectedly?
- What happens when many people shape the same space?
- How do small actions influence larger systems?

These themes connect naturally to community life, planning, sustainability, coexistence, and responsibility.

## Variation Possibilities

Carcassonne can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- paired decision-making teams
- cooperative map-building without scoring
- reflection after each round on strategy shifts
- themed discussions on shared public space
- tournament format across several sessions
- mixed-nationality tables for social interaction



# MANDALA

Mandala is a two-player abstract card game centered around color, timing, and thoughtful decision-making. Players place colored cards into shared mandalas while trying to secure valuable colors for future scoring. Every move influences both the current round and later opportunities.

The game is calm, elegant, and strategically deep despite its simple rules. It invites patience, observation, and careful planning rather than speed or confrontation.

Because of this structure, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts focused on focus, one-to-one interaction, decision-making, and reflective competition.

## Main Type of Experience

- Strategic planning
- Patience and concentration
- One-to-one interaction
- Timing and resource management
- Calm reflective competition



# MANDALA

Mandala creates a focused environment where players must think carefully about short-term sacrifice and long-term reward. Every decision can support one objective while limiting another.

The game often supports:

- thoughtful decision-making
- patience and self-control
- reading another person's intentions
- adapting strategy over time
- respectful competition
- focus in quieter settings

Because it is played with two people, the game also creates meaningful space for direct interaction and dialogue between participants.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- pair activities during free time
- calm indoor programme moments
- strategy and planning themes
- one-to-one connection between participants
- reflective evening sessions
- lower-energy programme periods

Points to Consider

As a two-player game, it is less suited to whole-group sessions unless multiple copies are available.

Some participants may initially underestimate the depth of the game because of its minimal design. A full round usually reveals the strategic layers.

Because the atmosphere is quieter and slower, it may not fit high-energy moments.



# MANDALA

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did you balance immediate gain and future value?
- Did patience help more than speed?
- How did you read the intentions of the other player?
- What happens when two people compete respectfully?
- How do simple choices create complex outcomes?

These themes connect naturally to planning, emotional regulation, dialogue, and strategic awareness.

## Variation Possibilities

Mandala can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- rotating pair sessions for social mixing
- reflective paired discussions after each game
- mini tournament ladder
- observation activity on decision-making styles
- linking colors to emotional themes in debrief
- beginner open-hand practice rounds



# SCOUT

Scout is a fast and tactical card game in which players create stronger card combinations to outperform previous plays. A distinctive feature of the game is that players may not rearrange the order of cards in their hand, meaning success depends on adapting to what is already available rather than building a perfect hand. Players must decide when to challenge, when to wait, and when to recruit cards from the table to improve future opportunities. The result is a lively experience built on flexibility, timing, and reading the flow of the group.

Because of this structure, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts focused on adaptability, decision-making, resilience, and strategic thinking.

## Main Type of Experience

- Adaptability under constraints
- Tactical decision-making
- Timing and opportunity recognition
- Resilience and flexibility
- Fast competitive interaction



# SCOUT

Scout places participants in situations where they must work with imperfect conditions. Instead of waiting for ideal resources, players learn to recognize possibilities within limitations and adjust their plans continuously.

The game often supports:

- flexible thinking
- quick strategic decisions
- managing frustration when conditions are imperfect
- recognizing opportunities in changing situations
- confidence in taking calculated risks
- learning through repeated short rounds

Because the hand cannot be freely organized, the game often becomes a useful metaphor for adapting to reality rather than controlling everything.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- adaptability and resilience themes
- energising strategic sessions
- evening table activities
- mixed groups seeking fast interaction
- decision-making workshops
- shorter programme time slots

Points to Consider

New players may initially feel limited by the no-rearranging rule. This is intentional and often becomes the most meaningful part of the experience.

The game moves quickly, so clear explanation of combinations and turn flow is helpful.

Because it is competitive and tactical, some participants may need one practice round before confidence grows.



# SCOUT

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did you adapt when your options seemed weak?
- Did timing matter more than having the best cards?
- How do people respond when they cannot control conditions?
- Was patience or risk-taking more effective?
- How can limitations create creativity?

These themes connect naturally to resilience, entrepreneurship, flexibility, and decision-making.

## Variation Possibilities

Scout can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- team decisions in pairs
- short tournament ladder
- reflection after each round on strategy changes
- observer role focused on risk styles
- mixed-nationality tables for interaction
- linking gameplay to problem-solving themes



# EXPLODING KITTENS

Exploding Kittens is a fast-paced card game built around tension, surprise, and playful interaction. Players draw cards while trying to avoid the “exploding kitten” cards that eliminate them from the round, using action cards to defend themselves, change outcomes, or disrupt others.

The game is light, humorous, and highly accessible. It creates quick emotional shifts between safety, risk, success, and sudden reversal, which keeps energy levels high and engagement constant.

Because of its simplicity and entertaining style, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts focused on energising groups, reducing barriers, and creating informal social connection.

## Main Type of Experience

- Fast engagement and laughter
- Risk and uncertainty
- Emotional reactions and resilience
- Light competitive interaction
- High-energy participation



# EXPLODING KITTENS

Exploding Kittens creates a playful environment where participants react quickly to unexpected events. The game often lowers formality, encourages spontaneous interaction, and helps groups relax together.

The game can support:

- group bonding through humour
- participation from less experienced players
- coping with sudden setbacks playfully
- confidence in informal interaction
- energising tired groups
- building a relaxed atmosphere between sessions

Because rules are simple and rounds are short, participants can join easily without long explanations.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

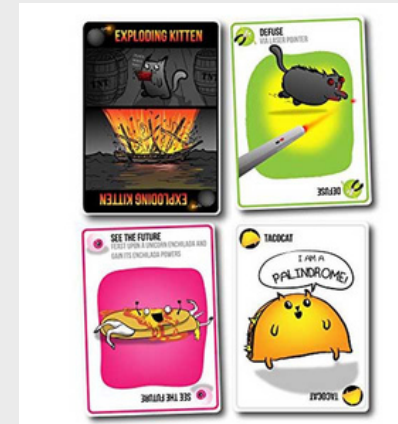
- evening social activities
- energisers during intensive programmes
- first days after introductions
- informal free-time sessions
- mixed groups needing low-pressure interaction
- breaks between demanding workshops

Points to Consider

Player elimination exists in standard versions, so some participants may be out temporarily. Short rounds usually reduce this issue.

The game is intentionally chaotic and luck-driven, which may not suit participants looking for deep strategy.

Its strongest value is atmosphere and connection rather than structured reflection.



# EXPLODING KITTENS

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did you react when plans changed suddenly?
- Did humour help the group connect?
- How do people respond differently to risk?
- Was luck or planning more important?
- How can playful moments improve group energy?

These themes connect naturally to resilience, emotional regulation, spontaneity, and group climate.

## Variation Possibilities

Exploding Kittens can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- team play with shared decisions
- mini tournament across several rounds
- quick energiser between sessions
- mixed-nationality tables for social mixing
- reflection on risk-taking styles
- pairing quieter participants with confident players initially



# FOREST SHUFFLE

Forest Shuffle is a nature-themed card game in which players build a forest ecosystem by placing trees and adding animals, plants, fungi, and insects that interact with one another in different ways. Success depends on creating balanced combinations and recognizing synergies between cards.

The game combines calm strategy with environmental symbolism. Players gradually develop their own forest while responding to changing opportunities, making choices about timing, efficiency, and long-term planning.

Because of its theme and interconnected systems, the game can be highly relevant in youth work contexts related to sustainability, systems thinking, patience, and strategic decision-making.

## Main Type of Experience

- Strategic planning
- Systems thinking
- Environmental awareness
- Resource management
- Calm reflective competition



# FOREST SHUFFLE

Forest Shuffle creates a visible model of interdependence. Different cards gain value when connected to others, showing how elements inside a system influence one another.

The game often supports:

- understanding relationships within systems
- long-term planning
- adapting strategy to changing resources
- awareness of balance and sustainability
- patience and concentration
- learning through gradual development

Because the forest grows step by step, participants can observe how small choices contribute to larger outcomes over time.

Relevant Contexts of Use

This game may be particularly suitable for:

- sustainability or environment themes
- systems-thinking workshops
- calm indoor programme moments
- strategy-focused sessions
- evening table activities
- groups interested in nature-based topics

Points to Consider

The game has more strategic depth than lighter party games, so first-time players may benefit from a guided first round.

Some participants may focus only on collecting strong cards rather than understanding combinations at first. This usually improves with experience.

Because it is less discussion-based during play, reflection afterwards can add strong educational value.



# FOREST SHUFFLE

## Reflection Potential

After gameplay, the experience can open conversations such as:

- How did different elements depend on one another?
- What happens when one part of a system is ignored?
- Did you focus on short-term gain or long-term balance?
- How do small actions shape wider ecosystems?
- What parallels exist between forests and human communities?

These themes connect naturally to sustainability, cooperation, planning, and interconnectedness.

## Variation Possibilities

Forest Shuffle can be adapted in many ways depending on the group:

- paired strategy discussions during play
- linking cards to real environmental topics
- observer role focused on planning styles
- cooperative variant building one shared forest
- tournament ladder for strategy enthusiasts
- debrief comparing ecosystems and communities



# TRADITIONAL GAMES IN INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

Traditional games hold a unique place within international youth exchanges. They are more than forms of entertainment—they reflect cultural memory, social habits, community values, and ways of interacting that have been passed from one generation to another. When shared in intercultural settings, traditional games become living expressions of identity and heritage.

During the Think, Play, Connect project, participants had the opportunity to introduce and experience traditional games from their own countries. These activities created a dynamic space where culture was not only discussed, but actively experienced through play. Instead of learning about another country through presentations alone, participants engaged directly with traditions through movement, strategy, communication, and shared enjoyment.

Games such as Nerd, Domino from Azerbaijan and Mangala from Türkiye introduced strategic thinking traditions rooted in regional history. The Georgian Qalaqobana - word game brought energy through quick thinking and verbal interaction, while Kompot and Lastik from Bulgaria created laughter and spontaneous group connection. The Spanish Flag Game added teamwork, speed, and playful competition to the intercultural experience.

What made these moments especially valuable was the way they encouraged peer learning. Participants became facilitators of their own culture, explaining rules, sharing stories, and guiding others through the experience. This shifted the learning process into a more equal and participatory form, where every national group contributed knowledge and tradition.

Traditional games also helped reduce language barriers. Even when words were limited, rules could be demonstrated through action, and connection emerged naturally through participation. Shared laughter, curiosity, and teamwork often communicated more effectively than formal discussion.

Within youth exchanges, traditional games can therefore play an important role in building mutual understanding, appreciation of diversity, and a sense of belonging within the international group. They remind participants that play is a universal language, while also showing that every culture brings its own unique way of expressing it.



# FINAL REFLECTIONS



Board games are often seen simply as tools for entertainment, but within youth work and non-formal education they can offer much more. Throughout the Think, Play, Connect project, games became spaces where communication, cooperation, creativity, strategy, trust, and intercultural learning emerged naturally through shared experience.

What makes board games valuable is not only their rules or mechanics, but the interactions they create between people. A cooperative game can reveal how trust is built. A strategy game can show how individuals approach decisions and responsibility. A storytelling game can open space for expression and empathy. Traditional games can carry cultural identity and create meaningful connections between participants from different backgrounds.

In international youth exchanges, these experiences become especially powerful. Board games help reduce formal barriers, encourage participation, and create equal opportunities for involvement. They allow participants to meet not only through discussion, but through action, observation, and play. In this way, learning becomes active, personal, and memorable.

At the same time, the educational value of a game does not come automatically. It depends on the context, the group, and the intention behind its use. The role of the facilitator is not simply to introduce a game, but to understand what kind of process the game can support and how reflection can help transform play into learning.

This booklet does not aim to provide fixed formulas or perfect methods. Instead, it offers perspectives, examples, and inspiration for youth workers who wish to explore board games as meaningful environments for connection and development. Every group is different, and every game creates new possibilities depending on how it is approached.

Whether through modern strategy games or traditional cultural games, play remains one of the most natural ways for people to connect. It creates moments of trust, challenge, laughter, and discovery—moments that often become the strongest memories of a youth exchange.

In the end, board games are not only about winning or losing. They are about understanding others, understanding ourselves, and learning how to build stronger groups through shared experience.

# THINK PLAY CONNECT



This publication was created as a result of the international youth exchange “Think, Play, Connect” - № 2025-1-BG01-KA152-YOU-000303010, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Think, Play, Connect was implemented in Momchilgrad, Bulgaria, from 07.12.2025 to 13.12.2025, bringing together 32 participants, including young people, facilitators, and group leaders from Bulgaria, Spain, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Georgia.

The project explored how board games can be used as valuable tools in youth work and non-formal education. Through modern board games, cooperative challenges, storytelling activities, social deduction games, and traditional cultural games, participants experienced how play can support communication, teamwork, creativity, and intercultural learning.

A strong focus was placed on inclusion, active participation, and peer learning. Participants were not only players, but also contributors—sharing traditional games from their own countries, leading activities, and reflecting on how games create spaces for connection and personal development.

By combining play with reflection, the project aimed to strengthen social skills, confidence, empathy, and group cooperation.

Think, Play, Connect showed that games can do more than bring people together—they can help build trust, understanding, and lasting international friendships.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

THIS BOOKLET WAS DESIGNED AND WRITTEN BY THE COORDINATING TEAM OF THE PROJECT, LED BY MR. IBRAHIM KYOSEYUMER, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ALL GROUP LEADERS AND FACILITATORS. SPECIAL THANKS TO THE PARTICIPANTS WHOSE ENERGY, CREATIVITY, AND CULTURAL PRIDE BROUGHT THE PAGES OF THIS BOOKLET TO LIFE.

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Funded by  
the European Union