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Board Games: The Next Generation

Generations ago, families and bunches of kids would mill together on a summer day or evening to play board games that would challenge mind and spirit. Games such as Scrabble, Monopoly, Parcheesi and Risk could test memory, verbal skill and probability while increasing someone's knowledge in a fun and entertaining way.

With those games gathering dust in the closet, and the ushering in of new generations' preference to video games, one could imagine that board games are troglodytes of a bygone era. Not so fast!

There are thousands of new board "gamers" who are quick to point out that board games have met a resurgence. Nathan Matz, a public relations professional and technical writer, is an example of a modern-day player who never outgrew his love for games.

"I've never stopped enjoying board games," he flatly states. "My idea of a good time is to have friends over, sip a few beers, and play a board game. The culture I subscribe to is to find games where I can use my brain to solve questions."

The same place where you might expect board games to be replaced by some higher form of entertainment is the place where gamers meet, explore new ideas, and form clubs to compete against one another. That's right, the Internet.

Today's games are much more detailed and sophisticated than the days of Candyland and Clue. You can find a board game that suits practically every interest, though, as in the most popular video games, the market proliferates with war games and military battles.

Matz explains that there are thousands of games, some

public and sold in places such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, and others classified as "indie" and are given thumbs up and down by fans on-line.

"You can invent and create your own games if you have a few thousand dollars," Matz says, "or you can even gain entry through crowd-funding sources such as 'Kickstarter' if you think you have a good idea."

Many of the newer games are called "larps," an acronym for live-action, role-playing games. They gained a foothold about 10 years ago with the popular "Settlers of Catan" series.

"The games I like to play have equal luck and skill," says Matz, who claims to have 20 board games on hand with varying subjects. Among his top five favorites are "Pandemic," which is a cooperative game where you are trying to save the world from disease; "Agricola," where farmers are challenged to accomplish tasks using workers and resources; and "Dead of Winter," a zombie game where the goal is to flush out a betrayer among the players.

What really is getting Nathan and thousands of fans excited is Gen Con, a gaming convention that will convene this week in Indianapolis over four days that ends on Sunday, Aug. 2. Wil Wheaton, popular actor of Star Trek: The Next Generation, is one of the featured speakers. He has a YouTube show that features a table top game of the week.

"I'm going with some buddies and I think there will be 60,000 fans," states Matz. "It'll be a great opportunity to play games that you've just heard about." Board games may be taking on a different scope than their ancestors 50 years ago, but they are alive and thriving. ■

EXERCISING OUR BREATH

When we think of exercising, our thoughts turn to running, jumping, lifting, biking, pushing, pulling, stretching and bending. But do we ever think of exercising our breath?

Breathing is not something we normally think of doing. It comes naturally, right? But, it too, can be improved to maximize energy and decrease stress.

"Breathing well, in my view, is using your lungs to their best capacity to bring in oxygen most efficiently," says Dr. Sumita Khatri, pulmonary physician and co-director of the Asthma Center at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.

"When you need more (oxygen) you do more deep breathing rather than shallow," she explains. "It's also a matter of you getting rid of carbon dioxide. Oxygen comes in to create energy, and you're creating waste carbon dioxide. Breathing deeply allows that carbon dioxide to be eliminated.

"You don't have to breathe deeply all the time. (But) it's more efficient slow and deep than fast and shallow."

The American Lung Association explains the process of breathing. Air enters the body through the nose or mouth. The throat, or pharynx,

passes the air to the trachea, which branches into two passageways that lead to your two lungs.

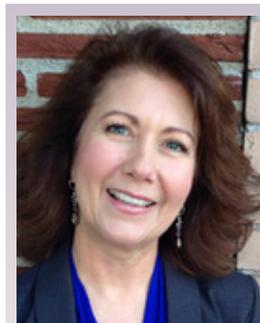
Below the lungs is a wall of muscles, the diaphragm. By moving downward, it allows air to enter the lungs. When it moves upwards, air is expelled.

Mechanics aside, Khatri says that most of us use only 75% of our capacity. "One of the things we don't realize is our lungs have a great deal of reserve. We may get short of breath, but our lungs are not limiting our capacity.

She says that when we do the right things and pay attention to our environment, the lungs can do even more. Aerobic exercise and swimming can help increase capacity. So, too, can yoga and breath control. "You learn strengthening of the shoulder and chest muscles."

Yoga instructors will tell you that good posture and focus on deep, controlled breathing will improve posture, sooth nerves and begin to train your body to breath better.

It's an exercise that can be done at anytime, anywhere and can improve your health. ■



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SUMMERTIME READING

It's the middle of summer and vacation plans are made. After the "to-dos" are tucked away it's time to relax and enjoy a good book, right? Well, to get you started, here's the current New York Times Bestseller List of no. 1 books in their categories:

Best Fiction: "Go Set a Watchman" by Harper Lee

This is the most anticipated release of the year as the famous author of "To Kill a Mockingbird" follows protagonist Scout Finch in a sequel.

Best Nonfiction: "Between the World & Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Best Trade Fiction: "Grey" by E. L. James

Best Paperback Nonfiction: "The Boys in the Boat" by Daniel James Brown

Best Advice, How-to, Etc: "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" by Marie Kondo

Best Children's Picture Book: "The Day the Crayons Quit" by Drew Daywalt

Illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

Best Young Adult Book: "Paper Towns" by John Green

Now, go get reading! ■

