

# Take the **GA**ME Train!

*34 games to play while stuck in transit with bored unplugged kids.*

or

*How I learned to put my friggin' device away and engage with my screaming spawn.*

*Draft*

NYC

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## Introduction:

Even before our son came into our lives, my husband and I never left home without reading material. We believe reading material to be a fundamental necessity of any commute, especially if you live in Queens or Brooklyn, where a thirty-minute commute can easily take an additional 45 minutes due to “*train traffic ahead*,” “*signal malfunction*” or “*sick passenger at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street*.” My worst MTA experience, ever, happened over ten years ago. Thank god there was a book in my bag.

### **That Was Then...**

I was visiting a friend at Yale, taking the Metro-North New Haven line to the last stop. I had my iPod loaded with songs, my bag full of magazines and summer reading. Everything was going hunky-dory until we passed, I think Stamford. Then the train just stopped. No announcements were made for about 15 minutes. Just stalled somewhere between where I lived and where I wanted to go. I looked at the glistening Long Island Sound and listened to Patsy Cline (it was that kind of summer). Then over the voice of Patsy singing “Crazy” I heard the announcement. *THE DREADED ANNOUNCEMENT*. Something to the tune of “Ladies and gentlemen, we are so very sorry. There seems to be engine trouble, that’s right, the engine, the motor that makes things GO... We will be waiting right here, and not move an inch, until a rescue train from someplace very very very far away can reach us to swap out the dead engine for the new one.” I looked at my watch. So far I was already one-and-a-half hours into my two-hour train ride that would end up being eight hours long. But the unbelievable length of the ride was not what made it a nightmare; I would have happily sat reading my book without interruption. No, it was the young flamboyant guy sitting next to me who had just landed an ensemble part in the Broadway musical *Mamma Mia!* I didn’t realize until my iPod batteries died, that Mr. Abba had been calling every single friend and relative to sing them his parts. Can you imagine what it’s like when you are in an “I Fall to Pieces” mood, and you are stuck listening to “Dancing Queen” for five hours straight? Fortunately I had Katherine Dunn’s macabre and tragic *Geek Love* to get lost in.

### **This Is Now...**

Fast forward to when our son is a 6-month-old wearable accessory. My reading material usually consists of a crinkled *New Yorker* magazine that can be shoved into the Ergo carrier,

between the boy and myself. As he grew older, but before he was able to walk independently, I joined the annoying stroller squadron taking up excessive space on subway steps, landings, platforms, and in train cars themselves. Using a stroller though meant I could carry more stuff with me, which meant more reading material. Often you would find me propelling the strapped-down child at high speeds in our sleek-black City Mini stroller, heavy with the usual baggage: hand sanitizer, diapers, wet wipes, bottles, face wipes, food, butt wipes, and random soon-to-be-lost toys. Five or six hardbound picture books also invariably knocked about in the under-butt sling basket.

But a new mother, who hasn't seen the inside of a gym in over a year, cannot carry such a load up and down endless flights of stairs. After months of Sisyphean backbreaking work, I had to stop. You would think when the child was potty trained I would have less to carry. But the inverse happened. As the child became more self-sufficient and mobile, I realized I had to master the art of distraction, and found myself replacing the 6 lb. diaper bag with 10 lbs. of books.

### **And the Experts Say...**

All parenting books tell you to talk to your child. There are studies that have counted the number of words a child should hear by age four in order to grow up to be a successful adult. That number is a dizzying **30 million**. Yup that's right, that is a 3 with 7 zeros behind it. Is that even possible? Do I know 30 million words? Does that mean 30 million words total, or 30 million unique words? I'd have to speak nonstop to the drooling, frequently incoherent human who makes poo faces all day long. I became a blithering new parent narrating my daily life as though it were a screenplay. Alas, a screenplay for the most boring movie ever made. *"Oh look, sweetie, the light has turned green, we'll walk across the street now. There's a bump coming up, here it comes, oops the stroller wheel has gotten stuck. Oh dear! The city needs to fix that pothole in the middle of the street. Maybe we should call 311. That's what the Mayor tells us to do."* You can now cross 56 words off the list. 47 unique ones. Twenty nine million, nine hundred and ninety nine thousand, nine hundred and forty four more words to go. I found it helped to think up word games so not all of those 30 million words had to come from my boring non-stimulating life script. Plus I was done with hauling around all those damn board books. Thus began the creation of games based on books that are free, easy, weightless and no time to set up or clean up.

### **I'm So Old School...**

I have no qualms about reading eBooks on Kindles, Nooks or iPads. I am not a paper purist; I have hundreds of books, games and podcasts on various electronic devices. It's just that if you try to read a book on anything made of plastic that lights up, the kid will assume you are playing video games and try to take your device away from you. I am not such a tactile book snob that I restrict my kid from "reading" books on my iPad<sup>\*</sup>, but I've also found that 98% of the time, his hands are disgusting and my voice goes hoarse from constantly yelling "don't push that button," or "don't swipe the page yet!" There's far too much neglected housework on a list magneted to the fridge to add wiping peanut butter, jelly, and other mysterious goo off the iPad to my chores. Plus one less thing to carry means one less stress on my aching spine.

### **Sneaking in the Educational Spiel...**

I am only going to make one pedagogical point and say one word about education, and that is **READ**. I am not going to lecture you on the importance of reading to your child. Or insist on letting them see you read to set good examples and high standards for them to follow. Or insist you read to them every day, no matter the length of the book, no matter how tired you are. Hell, if you can't bear to read *Brown Bear Brown Bear* or *Little Bear* one more time, read a newspaper article to them. If you are not a reader, let them SEE you carrying books. Next time you are on the couch dozing off in the middle of a Saturday afternoon, at least put a book on your face to shield the sunlight.

Let them read whatever they want, no matter how like totally annoying, like, you know, it may be gang (*Scooby Doo* books) or inconceivably inane like those puffy-covered books with flecking sparkles from the 99 cent store (who the hell prints those)? I am not going to devote pages here to explain how to get a smarter child. I am not going to divulge the secrets behind getting higher scores on Citywide G&T assessment when your child is only 3 years old and can't even tie his shoelaces or wash his hands properly with soap. I will not do those things here because you will be bombarded with volumes of this information from your fellow parental units, the Department of Education, and every teacher, sub, and aide you meet from pre-Kindergarten through middle school.

To get your child to read, you will not need a lot of money to buy books, because our city has an over abundance of readers and authors who weed out their shelves periodically and set cardboard boxes of almost new books on stoops. **For Free!** We are a city blessed not only with one but three library systems. Find the closest branch and go there often, make friends with the librarians, and consider it your air-conditioned home in the summer and a cozy shelter from the

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<sup>\*</sup> Let's be real, they're not really reading but just swiping at pictures, or looking for game apps.

blizzards come winter. Get comfortable there because most likely, the library will become your afterschool childcare fallback when your angel starts terrorizing the neighborhood in packs beginning fourth grade.

### **The Games...**

The time it takes to play the word games in this book is intentionally variable, from 30 seconds to the hour or so it takes to ride the entire 31.8-mile long A train. All of the games are meant for 2-4 players.<sup>†</sup> Most of these games can be tailored to a wide range of age groups, depending on the knowledge base and vocabulary of the players. For example the Guessing Game called “I Went on a Picnic” (pg. ) can involve a simple list of “random white things” for the average 3-year-old or something more complex like large, white, outdoor, circular things for a 5-year-old. Over time your kid will try to stump you by finding impossible groupings such as “things that he ate at someone’s birthday party a month ago that weren’t sweet.” Still more complexities can be thought up for older schoolchildren, like “what do Ron Weasley, Jack from the Magic Tree House books, Alvin Ho, and Beezus have in common?”<sup>‡</sup>

### **And So...**

There are many different ways to enjoy words, pictures and books even if your child cannot actually read. Mimicking conversations, creating nonsense words, making up silly rhymes and just being able to recognize letters is a great introduction to reading. Most of the games my son and I created together stem from picture books. You do not have to be knowledgeable about those books to play the games, though it will be more fun if you have jointly read them. When specific books are mentioned, I have listed the library call number in the bibliography. These games are meant to entertain while on stalled trains, divert tantrums, extend the life of your iPad by keeping it from your sticky drool-coated child, and also just to be fun. Do not think of them as educational, though there is a lot of that academic and scholarly stuff disguised within. So grab your kid, a Metrocard and get on the Game Train!

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<sup>†</sup> But if you have more than 3 kids in the mix, you may spend more time breaking up arguments.

<sup>‡</sup> They all have little sisters.

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### Things every parent should have in their bag:

Wet wipes

Pencil

Eraser

Tape

Sharpie marker

Pick up a free newspaper

Subway/bus map- which are free in NYC and can be used as the basis for many creative games.

## Guessing Games

A kid's life is filled with questions that demand answers. When I don't have the answers, I admit it and we spend a lot of time guessing.

The first two questions that strangers invariably ask about your kid are:

1. How old is your child? 2. What's his/her name?

It doesn't matter how old they are, or how garbled their speech; I believe the child should be empowered to answer those two questions about themselves. Since a kid's life is filled asking questions, they should know how to answer some of them.

Here are the first two responses for them to practice:

1. I am \_\_\_ years old. 2. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

So in the future when a stranger asks you these questions, refer them to your child. This will build their communication skills and independence as well. Even if not right away.

I know why we are taught from a very early age not to speak to strangers. The world is a scary place with a lot of stranger danger! I've taught my kid that it is ok to speak to strangers if we are together, but only if the strangers seem sane, not pestering you to buy their bootlegged DVDs or peeing off the platform onto the tracks.<sup>§</sup> As a parent or caregiver, you will find yourself in tricky situations when complete strangers force candy or mysterious food into your child's grubby little hands without your knowledge. 99% of time they are giving your toddler a choking hazard. For Christ's sake, the kid only has two front teeth, they don't need gumballs! These little old ladies, (and they're always little old ladies who roam the streets, pockets bulging with candy taken from their doctor's receptionist's counter), mean no harm. They do it because they think your kid is soooooo cute. Be prepared for this scenario by adding, "no thank you, I might be allergic to that" to your child's repertoire of answers. Because after all, you don't want your kid to be rude.

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<sup>§</sup> When you live in the city, you will spend a lot of time in public. We want to teach our kids observation skills. Awareness of their surroundings should come second nature to them, even nonchalantly. This built-up skill of keen examination will help them in life, especially when trying to gage if a person is a friendly stranger or crazy foe. Such friendly strangers put up all of the drywall in our house. Our ex-cop/contractor friend was using his professional observation skills on the 6 train one day, when he noticed two physically fit guys covered with white dust, carrying a well-maintained tool bag and drywall stilts. He approached them, and long story short... they did an AMAZING job. You should see our walls. You never know who you'll encounter on the train.

And so a child will realize that questions go hand in hand with answers. And answering questions is synonymous with guessing. They realize there is more than a 50% chance that their answers will be wrong. Apart from the three standard statements you have taught them above, they don't know many other irrefutable answers. They also don't realize that a rhetorical question is not an actual question.

Adult: *looking at a broken plate on floor then pointing to another plate still in the child's hand.*

“Don't you know that if you drop that plate, it will break?!?”

Child: *hmmmm are they asking me a question? It sounds like a question. Do I know the answer to that one? I've got two choices here....Well is it... “Yes?”*

Adult: “That was not a question. I was telling you not to drop that plate in your hand!”

Child: *my mom's nuts!*

With all the answers children must give for unanswerable questions, life can be a guessing game to them. Maybe that's why classic games such as “20 Questions” still help us endure the never ending bus rides and snaking lines at Shake Shack. But how many times can one play “I Spy” before one goes out of one's mind? And by the way I learned there are only so many things one can spy out of a moving cross-town bus.

The following guessing games derive from hours and hours spent riding public transportation with my child. Some of them may be familiar to you because they're similar to games you played as a child, with a bit of an urban twist. I've tried to tailor them to be as short (or long) as a commute. They are easy to learn and easy to play at a moment's notice.

## **The New Yorker Cartoon Captions**

Sometimes *The New Yorker* magazine is the only reading material I carry in my bag. Once after a long day, on our evening commute, the kid asked me to read him something. This always tends to happen, of course when I have no picture books in my bag. I was just too exhausted to think up a good story so I handed him *The New Yorker* to look through. As with all the weekly issues that stack up around the house, this issue was filled with provocative, lengthy articles, bearing little resemblance to *Highlights* or *National Geographic Kids*.

In a *New Yorker*, the kids will only be interested in cartoons by Roz Chast or Charles Barsotti, and maybe also the scattered *Spots*.\*\* A three or four-year-old will not understand most of these cartoons; in fact some are so esoteric adults don't even get them. Every so often when the kid points to a cartoon by Edward Steed, tells you that he doesn't get it and asks you to explain it, you have to think quickly. Like the time we were clearly looking at three wonderfully ugly women (as only Steed can create) dressed in unappealing black lingerie and bondage garb, lounging in the perimeter of a dog run. An assortment of leashes hangs on the fence. But instead of puppies frolicking about, their husbands are in the dog run wearing nothing but tight underpants and dog collars, enjoying themselves untethered. You think it's funny but don't want to explain the intricacies of S&M to a four year old, so you tell your curious child the cartoon is silly because the grown-ups are pretending to be dogs.

Every issue of *The New Yorker* has a caption contest, which consistently offers us a good five minutes or so of entertainment. On the back page of each week's magazine there are three different cartoons. The first cartoon is called This Week's Contest - it consists of an illustration without a caption and readers are invited to submit a caption. The second cartoon, The Finalists, shows the previous week's illustration with the editors' choice of the three best captions submitted. The third cartoon shows the illustration with the The Winning Caption, as selected by readers. The winner of the contest gets the pleasure of seeing their caption published as well as a print of the complete cartoon, autographed by the illustrator.

You can begin killing time on your commute by turning to the last page of *The New Yorker* and looking at The Winning Caption to see if you and your child get it at all, and discuss

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\*\* Each week's series of small caption-less images that follow a theme or tell a story throughout the magazine.

why it's funny- or not. The next activity is to look at The Finalists image and describe it,<sup>††</sup> vote on your favorite caption, and talk about why you think it should be the winner.

The final activity from the back page, is to study This Weeks Contest, fill-in your own caption, and make your argument for why it should win. When I first started asking my kid for captions, his suggestions were really simple. They were straightforward and at times almost Dada in their nonsensicalness. Such as Frank Cotham's illustration of a flat screen TV talking to a book. My kid suggested that the TV said, "Why are you at my house?" to the book.<sup>‡‡</sup> Finally, three weeks after you enter the caption contest, you can explain why the actual winning entry<sup>§§</sup> is funnier than what you submitted. \*\*\*

This game can be played even if you don't have an actual *New Yorker* magazine, by using posters and ads on the trains or buses and creating new captions for them.

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<sup>††</sup> This is really important especially if it's a racy image so you can explain carefully in your own words why there are naked people in bed with a squid, for example.

<sup>‡‡</sup> If you can get on the MTAs Wi-Fi, you can enter your child's deadpan caption straight onto *The New Yorker* website to kill more time.

<sup>§§</sup> Sent in by Bruce Cheery -"It's time I told you...you were adapted."

\*\*\* And if your kid happens to win the contest, kudos on for living in a house filled with James Thurber books and teaching your kid irony, satire, puns, and non sequiturs.

### The Game:

**Player 1:** looks for a photograph or illustration from a subway or bus ad. Do not point to it, (because it is impolite to point in public). Describe the image carefully so the other person can try to find it. Choose one character (person, animal or inanimate object in the ad) that is supposedly thinking or speaking and make up three choices of captions.

**Player 2:** picks the one they think is the best choice.

### Example:

**Player 1** Description: “There is a balding man wearing a white dress shirt, red tie and a white lab coat. He is standing in front of the NYC night skyline with the Empire State Building behind his right shoulder. In the middle of the picture there are two photos of faces. One is an angry looking lady and the other who may or may not be the same lady with a really white face and fuzzy hair.”

**Player 2** Is it the Dr. Zizmor advertisement?

**Player 1** Yup. Ok here are the Three Captions and Dr. Zizmor is speaking:

1. I wonder where my two long lost sisters are?
2. Boy the Empire State Building is really heavy on my shoulder.
3. Which picture of my mother looks better, the before or the after?

There are no right or wrong answers. You know its really working when other people sitting near you eavesdrop and join in. You can take a vote among several people to determine which caption should be the winner.

**Note:** The MTA has a great program that commissions artists to make posters for display in the trains and busses<sup>†††</sup>. One of my favorite images is by Sophie Blackall, a whimsical illustration of a motley crew of riders interacting with one another. Because it has many many characters with distinct personalities, it’s a great image to use for playing *The New Yorker* Caption game.

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<sup>†††</sup> Which you can purchase at the MTA Transit Museum store.

## I Went On a Picnic

This is a guessing game in which you “bring stuff” in categories. My son and I have played this at least 2000 times since we thought up our first category on the uptown 6 train. Of course back then, when he was three years old the categories were simple like “red things” or “cold things”, but as he ages, the categories continue to become more complicated and convoluted.

What’s great about this game is that it can be played mindlessly when the adult is exhausted and doesn’t have enough brainpower to last through the evening rush hour. It’s also great to play on a train ride home, following an afternoon spent drinking at a Beer garden when it’s a bit difficult to focus on any one thing for long. (Wait, did I just say that? Never mind!<sup>†††</sup>) This game can go on indefinitely without the need for a winner or a correct answer. Most people with kids find a large percentage of their brains can run on autopilot<sup>§§§</sup>. Use that part of your grey matter to name a bunch of random stuff you see around you to bring to your picnic. The kid will take a while to catch on that you are not really paying attention, which can be all the time you need to keep them occupied.

### The Game

**Player 1** thinks of a category then begins by saying one thing from that category to bring to the picnic. **Player 2** has guesses what the category is by asking to bring random things on said picnic. They take turns until **Player 2** guesses the category. The structure of the game repeats this sentence back and forth: “I went on a picnic and I brought \_\_\_\_\_” to one another.

<sup>†††</sup> Actually it’s ok, trust me, it’s not taboo anymore to bring kids to beer gardens, as witnessed by the rise in such family friendly establishments. No really, you can spend all day drinking beer without dirty looks. Why else would beer halls offer children’s activities and menus?

<sup>§§§</sup> Unfortunately, this is the part of the brain responsible for saying dumb things you’ll regret later, even though you don’t remember saying them. Things like “sure you can have ice cream for dinner” or “yes we can go to LEGOLAND<sup>®</sup>” (in your mind, you are *thinking* about maybe going to LEGOLAND<sup>®</sup>. A child with no concept of time will think you are a liar if you don’t go TODAY!. Such auto pilot comments will come back to bite you in the ass about an hour later. At which point your kid will start to have a melt down and scream “Liar!!!” or “You said!” Turn to the game “The Velcro Doesn’t Stick To That Metaphor” p.\_\_\_\_ to help in these situations.

<i>Example:</i>	
Category created by Player 1 is- “Things that are white”	
<b>Player 1:</b>	I went on a picnic and I brought a cloud.
<b>Player 2:</b>	I went on a picnic and I brought some water.
<b>Player 1:</b>	Nope can't come. I went on a picnic and I brought a snowball.
<b>Player 2:</b>	I went on a picnic and I brought a polar bear.
<b>Player 1:</b>	Yup can come.

Continue volleying back and forth until Player 2 figures out the category. Then switch positions from guesser to guessee.

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## **Through the Green Glass Door**

This game is an offshoot of “I Went On a Picnic” that can be played by older kids with a command of simple word structures, but unlike the previous game it takes a bit more thought and vocabulary.

I took a storytelling class at Pratt Institute Library School during the summer of 2012 with Judy Freeman, a wonderful writer, speaker, and storyteller. Though it was fifteen weeks of content condensed into one month, it felt more like an occasion to read and play than a rigorous summer course. In one session, we discussed stories and word games that have been passed down orally through generations. One classmate shared “Through the Green Glass Door”, a game she played with her grandmother.

The title Green Glass Door is made up of three words, all which have double letters: EE, SS and OO. This is the secret category for the game, and technically can only be played once after figuring out that secret. Since we want to take up a considerable amount of time while stuck on the M5 bus on a rainy day, you can invent categories beyond just double letters, adding word categories with different letter blends such as BR, CH, TH, etc...

### **The Game:**

**Player 1** starts out with the following sentence:

“I went through the green glass door and I brought a \_\_\_\_\_ but not a \_\_\_\_\_.”

Add a word with their chosen category in the first blank, then a word that doesn't fit their category in the second blank.

**Player 2** has to guess what the word category is by filling in the blanks with items that may fit into Player 1's category.

<i><u>Example:</u></i>	
<i>Player 1 chooses a double letter category.</i>	
<b>Player 1</b>	I went through the green glass door and I brought a p <u>OO</u> dle but not a <u>dog</u> .
<b>Player 2</b>	I went through the green glass door and brought a cat?
<b>Player 1</b>	Nope can't come I went through the green glass door and I brought the m <u>OO</u> n but not the <u>stars</u> .
<b>Player 2</b>	I went through the green glass door and brought a cake?
<b>Player 1</b>	Nope can't come.
<b>Player 2</b>	I went through the green glass door and brought <u>JeLL-O</u> ?
<b>Player 1</b>	Yup can come!

Or

<i><u>Example:</u></i>	
<i>player 1 chooses category with words that have CH.</i>	
<b>Player 1</b>	I went through the green glass door and brought some <u>CH</u> eese but not yogurt.
<b>Player 2</b>	I went through the green glass door and I bought <u>CH</u> icken but not <u>turkey</u> .
<b>Player 1</b>	yup can come.
<i>Continue back and forth until Player 2 figures out the category. Then switch positions from guesser to guessee.</i>	

**Note:** Everyone usually focuses on the meaning of the actual objects and tries to figure out what category they fit into, but the trick is in the physical make-up of the words themselves.

### Variations

For more advanced players, think up two word objects found in a home such as: bathtub, stepladder, coat hook, etc.

Example:

*Player 1 chooses compound words only found in the home.*

**Player 1** I went through the green glass door and brought a bathtub but not a toilet.

**Player 2** I went through the green glass door and brought a sink?

**Player 1** Nope, can't come.

I went through the green glass door and brought a coat hook but not a coat.

**Player 2** I went through the green glass door and brought a stepladder?

**Player 1** yup, can come.

Another Variation:

Think up categories with words made of two syllables that come from the zoo such as: hippo, tiger, panda, etc...

Basically the more specific the category, the more difficult you can make the game.

## Ame Ame

From age two to three, our son went to a Japanese daycare in the East Village called *NYC Nihongo de Asobo*- a name which translates to “Let’s play in Japanese!” It was his first structured classroom setting. Aside from the first day at drop off, when he cried for two hours non-stop, he loved being there. I loved the school because it really did as advertised, and provided the “ultimate immersion into Japanese, where the children start each day with a Japanese breakfast and enjoy activities such as: interactive storytelling, daily trips to the playground, music, movement, singing, games, arts & crafts, hiragana lessons, yoga and traditional karate!” My non-Japanese-speaking husband loved it because of Take-san. He was a hardcore punk-rocking, mosh-pit loving male sensei; a rarity in a daycare setting. Another perk of this school was its location in a neighborhood we hadn’t visited since our young bar-hopping days. Our daily commutes reopened the East Village as a new child friendly world of restaurants and cute little shops to explore.

One afternoon, I found myself with an anomaly in a parent’s life; a half an hour to myself before pick-up time. I happened upon a shop called Ame Ame on 9<sup>th</sup> Street<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>. The word *Ame* means “candy”, and also “rain” in Japanese, and appropriately the store was stocked with rain gear and iridescent gummies and candies. I didn’t fall for the precious sweets but spent way too much money on a clear child’s umbrella, even though I was sure he’d lose it in the near future<sup>†††</sup> I couldn’t help myself. Ame Ame was so darn cute.

### The Game:

Player 1 thinks of two (or more) words that are homonyms<sup>††††</sup>, homophones<sup>§§§§</sup>, homographs<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> heteronyms<sup>†††††</sup>, or and tells Player 2 what two things (or more) that store sells. Player 2 guesses what the store is called. Continue switching positions from guesser to guessee until you run out

\*\*\*\* They have since relocated to West 29<sup>th</sup> Street.

†††† As expected, the umbrella was forgotten on a park bench a year later, never to be seen again.

†††† Homonym: two words spelled the same but with different meaning. Example: punch: to hit & punch: a drink.

§§§§ Homophone: words that are pronounced the same but different meaning that may or may not be spelled the same. Example: Aisle: a walkway & Isle: small land in the sea.

\*\*\*\*\* Homograph: words spelled the same but pronounced differently with different meanings. Example: Minute- a unit of time & minute- a small tiny bit.

††††† Heteronym: words written identically but has different pronunciation and meaning. They are homographs but not homophones. Example: Bass: a fish & Bass: a large string instrument.

of ideas.

*Examples:*

Variation with use of a homonym

**Player 1** My store sells oars and ways to line things up

**Player 2** Is your store called Row Row?

*Variation with use of a homophone:*

**Player 1** My store sells a naked person and a furry animal that's friends with Tigger.

**Player 2** Your store is called Bare Bear?

*Variation for older kids using Heteronyms:*

**Player 1** My store sells fans and watches

**Player 2** Is it called Wind Wind?

## **Sponge Bob Square Pants**

Who lives in a pineapple under the sea

"SpongeBob Squarepants"

Absorbent and yellow and porous is he

"SpongeBob Squarepants"

It is a rare occasion that our kid can watch television programs in our house. We are THOSE people who don't watch TV. It's not because we think we're better than you, or don't have time to watch TV because we're going to cultural events and reading Proust, but because we're too cheap to spring for cable. It's a rarer occasion that our kid gets to watch SpongeBob on YouTube. Still, somehow the theme song is so catchy that the tune can be heard hummed on many days. Years ago my husband actually took the time to memorize the whole song to sing with his nine-year-old nephew. Thus father and son have the ability to annoy me in harmony.

### **The Game:**

Player 1 thinks of a person or thing you both know. Using descriptive adjectives for the person or thing, sing a parody to the tune of Sponge Bob theme song.

Player 2 has to guess who or what it is by singing the answer in the second verse.

### **Example:**

**Player 1** Who lives in an apartment overlooking the park

*hum hum* Squarepants

Sings and Japanese and Old is she

**Player 2** Obaachan<sup>§§§§§§</sup> Squarepants.

Or

---

§§§§§§ Grandma in Japanese

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1</b>	What sits in the fridge on the shelf <i>hum hum</i> Squarepants Delicious and red and seeded are they,
<b>Player 2</b>	<u>Watermelon</u> Squarepants.

**Note:** No matter what the lyrics are, you have to say Squarepants at the end of every verse; this is what makes it silly. Though the original song is in rhyme, it can be too difficult to follow through with rhyming, so forget about it. But if you can make it rhyme, well goody goody-two-shoes for you, smarty pants!

draft

## What's My Face?

There are certain stock facial expressions infants make. I've seen these looks on my baby's face, and on other new born faces no matter the race or nationality. The three faces that first come to mind off the top of my head are:

1. The I-Am-Taking-a-Big-Poop-Right-Now-Face:  
Seriously concentrating scrunched up features accompanied by grunts and then turning red.  
Meaning: don't watch me because this is a very complex maneuver that's hard to do if you're watching me.
2. The-Cute-Face:  
Head tilted to one side so their ear is touching their shoulder and make a fake toothy (if there are teeth) not quite sincere grin.  
Meaning: I'm well aware of my adorableness or I'm trying to get away with something.
3. And the one I can only describe as the The-Russell-Crowe-Face:  
Furrowed forehead, triangulated eyes and have a slightly open mouthed pouty look of dumb wonder.  
Meaning: I'm trying really hard to figure things out, or trying to see as far as I can with my limited brand new vision.

There are also a wide variety of annoying faces that my kid constantly makes: We call one the Hummmmmph Face: he whips his neck to one side, faces the sky and peer down his nose, while folding his arms in front of his chest. This one began at age three when he didn't want to be bothered or disliked something. Thank goodness that phase only lasted two years. He's now moved on to making the ugliest faces possible when anyone points a camera at him. We have not had a decent family photo in years where I haven't resorted to using Photoshop to save our holiday cards from his assortment of irritating faces.

This game arose from the random faces we all make. If you let your kid be Player 1, you won't need to think much at all.

### The Game

Player 1 makes a face, any face. They must be able to hold it for about 15 seconds. Then they make up 3 choices for what they were thinking when they made the face. Just as with the guessing games where there are random choices, there are technically no right or wrong answers. After all this is not math. The person who made up the face must choose one answer and remember which it is.

Player 2 guesses which face it is.

### Example:

**Player 1:** *makes a random face*

OK what does my face mean?

1. I want to go to LEGLAND<sup>®</sup>.
2. I'm hungry for some ice cream
3. I'm thinking about what I'm going to do when I get home.

**Player 2:** just guess any answer.

### Variation 1:

You can also take a photo of your kids face and show it to them as they ponder what three choices they can think of. Be aware of the dangers of this variation. You may have to fight to get your phone back. And if you have two or more kids playing, don't even bother with this variation because, in fighting to get the phone, they will ignore the game all together.

### Variation 2:

You can play this game and use your fellow commuters. Pick someone, preferably someone who is not on the phone jabbering away, describe them (without pointing) in the most inside of inside voice you can muster. Make up three choices for what they are thinking by using their facial expression as indicators. If the person you chose to make up scenarios for is asleep, you can think up what they might be dreaming about. **WARNING:** Never Ever Ever combine Variation 1 with Variation 2.

**Note:** this game also works better if you speak another language, to not let on that you are talking about the people around you. Pointing of course is a definite no-no. Also only describe

people factually, do not give out personal opinions when describing someone, such as, “that guy with the ugly tie”, or the “lady with a pretty face”. Instead describe them as “that guy with the green and orange striped tie” or “the lady wearing pink lipstick with gold dangly earrings”. Giving factual descriptions gives you journalistic cred, which is much better than being considered a gossip or bad mouthing people. Because after all we do not want to be rude.

draft

## Games Based on Books:

As first time parents who read just about every parenting book published, we knew what to expect while expecting our world to turn into chaos. We started by trying to be high achieving parents raising a high achieving child by reading and playing music to my five-month round belly. Out of exhaustion we renounced this ridiculous Baby Einstein goal pretty early on. After the child was born, we only occasionally referred to the parenting books to gauge our own child against countless studies of eating, sleeping and eliminating. “Wow, that Dr. Sears was right, the baby does sleep more if they go to sleep earlier. Let’s see what happens if he stays up till 11pm. Huh? Interesting...” With the use of such guides, our parenting experiments were learning experiences.

We tried everything we read about and did what all the experts told us to do. We put our baby to sleep on his back, did the breastfeeding thing for a year (pumping and feeding breast milk out of a bottle counts right?), wore him like a papoose, covered up all the electrical outlets, kept him in the rear-facing car seat longer than recommended, put up gates around the house until it resembled a petting zoo. Most importantly, we read to him every single day without fail. We learned that if you can get kids to like books being read to them, they will quiet down no matter what mood they’re in. Books turned our son into Pavlov’s dog.

So it’s no surprise that most of the games we invented came from the books we read. Most of the books mentioned here are early readers, intended for Kindergarten and up. These books will be a bit too advanced for a toddler to look at alone but are great as read-a-louds since they are beautifully and generously illustrated.

## The Miniature World of Marvin and James

When I immigrated to this country, I became obsessed at first with Playskool Little People<sup>®</sup>. There were many differences between the highly stylized Japanese Licca-chan dolls with huge painted on anime eyes I used to play with and my new little figures. The old-school Little People<sup>®</sup> were limbless, wooden cylindrical bodies with spherical heads and minimal facial features. I'm not sure why I was so enamored by them since they were, after all just two pieces of wood glued together, but my best friend at the time, Katie Palmer, with whom I spent seemingly every waking hour, and I, created mini worlds in which these little dolls came alive.

Everything in our world existed at that miniature scale. When Katie's mother became my piano teacher, I remember her telling me to arch my wrists on the keyboard so they resembled small bridges for the Little People<sup>®</sup> to walk across to get to the blocks of ice (which were the ivory keys). Changing the scale of mundane objects gave them exciting promise. A piece of trash such as a torn up box could become a building, a tunnel or a car. There were endless possibilities. A weird kitchen utensil like a melon-baller could be strung up to become an amusement park ride for a brave Little Person. Even in today's age of electronic gadgets, most kids bum out their parents as they play with the cardboard box more than the \$100 toy it once enclosed. With empty boxes, a child can become the master builder of their own domain. Small fingers can act as the hand of god.

*The Miniature World of Marvin and James*, by Elise Broach and illustrated by Kelly Murphy exists in a similar stepped-down scale. This early reader for ages 6-9, is a companion to the novel titled *Masterpiece*, which is intended for 9-12 year olds. *The Miniature World of Marvin and James* uses the same characters as the earlier book but is written from Marvin the Beetle's point of view rather than from the human child James's perspective. Beetles are busy creatures. When James, who is Marvin's best friend, goes away on vacation, Marvin and his beetle cousin Elaine, set off on an adventure into human territory. The scene that most captivated my kid was when Marvin enters a black hole and finds himself trampolining onto a pile of fluffy brown material mixed with black soot. We, as human-scale readers, know that Marvin is trapped inside a pencil sharpener, but from the beetle's point of view, the black hole is a mystery the beetles must solve.

The Game:

**Player 1** Describes the inside of something a bug might be stuck in.

**Player 2** has to guess what it is.

Example:

**Player 1** Marvin is inside a dark pool filled with water with a long tube coming out of the ceiling. There are small icebergs floating in the water.

**Player 2** Is he in a thermos water bottle?

Or

**Player 1** Marvin is smashed between a rubbery floor and a soft, hot, rough, really heavy blanket. The thing he is trapped in moves and every time it moves, he gets a little bit more crushed. And it's really smelly where he is.

**Player 2** Is he inside your smelly shoe under your foot?

## **Fortunately, the Milk**

I was coming out of the 3-month postpartum all-nighters with my newborn when the animated film *Coraline* was released, so I didn't see it, or even aware of the hype surrounding it. A couple of years later after checking out *The Dangerous Alphabet* from the library, I became enamored of Neal Gaiman. So of course when I started looking for chapter books, I looked under G for Gaiman, and found *Fortunately, the Milk*.

This fantasy story for elementary readers starts off with a simple enough premise. One morning, a young boy and his little sister run out of milk for their cereal. Their father goes to the store to buy some. But since this is a story told by Newberry Medalist Neil Gaiman, nothing is ever as it should be. The father is gone for quite a long time and when he returns, he explains his lengthy absence with a bizarre story of being abducted by aliens and time travel with a talking dinosaur inventor named Professor Steg.

The structure of the hilarious narrative is similar to the children's word game, "Good News, Bad News" which explains the odd title. In Gaiman's tale, a series of unfortunate events occur but fortunately, each time something surreal and wonderful happens to rescue the dad, and fortunately, the milk he has gone to buy rescues him from tight spots again and again. The non-linear sequencing of chapters may confuse younger children. This may require second and third readings, which is never a bad thing. The story is accompanied by fantastic pen-and-ink drawings on almost every page by Scottie Young, who has worked with Marvel Comics. His illustrations accompany the text, and work seamlessly to tell the fantastic story. This is a fun story for young readers. Parents who like the author's adult works will enjoy reading it to their children as well.

My son and I were drawn to the playful way Professor Steg (a Stegosaurus) names everyday common objects like Mr. P. in Oliver Sack's book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat*, who can no longer see things as a whole because he has a brain disorder. For example, Mr. P. sees a rose as "A convoluted red form with a linear green attachment, about six inches long." But I digress. In Gaiman's book, a hot air balloon is called "Professor Steg's Floaty-Ball-Person-Carrier." And coconuts are "Hard-hairy-wet-white-crunchers." Ok? Get it? Go!

**The Game:**

**Player 1** Thinks of an ordinary everyday object and rename it with lots of descriptive adjectives.

**Player 2** has to guess what it is.

**For example:**

**Player 1** Summer Boy's ventilated, smelly foot coverer.

**Player 2** Is it...Sandals?

Or

**Player 1** Frozen, white, decorated, striped, fire topped lickables.

**Player 2** Is it...Ice cream birthday cake?

**Note:** When making up the descriptions, the majority of the words will be adjectives but you have to have at least one noun, no matter how silly or even made up the word is, or it won't work.

## Hot Day on Abbott Avenue

I saw Spike Lee’s film “Do The Right Thing” at a BAM Film Festival a few years after it was first released. I sat inside an air-conditioned theater in Brooklyn watching the actors on screen exuding hate and perspiring profusely in the sweltering heat of the hottest day summer. This was the same Brooklyn I moved into. It was the good old days when guys behind pizzeria counters looked like Danny Aiello, and lawsuits between Original Rays, Famous Ray’s, Ray Bari or Famous Original Ray’s Pizza were common headline news.

When I discovered the book *Hot Day on Abbott Avenue* by Karen English it nostalgically evoked Spike Lee’s Brooklyn summer, without all the violence. Ms. English’s book also takes place on the hottest day of the year, where the heat and a blue popsicle create much tension between two best friends, and they decide that it’s a “best-friend-break-up-day”. The girls talk trash at one another by answering this question. “What kind of day is it going to be?” It’s going to be a “No working together on a never speak to her again even if she was the last person on earth day.” And what kind of day is it now that the ice cream man is around? It’s going to be a “Trying to lick the blue ice cream off her elbow day.” The text is urban and evocative of a fun childhood playing double-dutch on asphalt playgrounds. Illustrator Javaka Steptoe’s textural paper collages fill the scenes with the languid movement of lethargic summer days. Spoiler alert: as the two girls finally make up.

### The Game:

**Player 1** thinks of a day in recent memory or in the near future and describes what type of day it is/was/will be depending on what happened or how player 1 felt that day.

**Player 2** has to guess what day it was.

### Example:

**Player 1:** What kind of day was it today? A hot dog eating, s’mores making running in the mud wearing your wet swimsuit day.

**Player 2:** When we went camping in the Adirondacks.

**Player 1:** What kind of night is it going to be? Begging and pleading to run across the street to the deli to get a popsicle so I can have a blue tongue night.

**Player 2:** Tonight!

**Variation:**

Both players take turns making up what type of day it was on their ride home from an excursion.

<i><b><u>Example:</u></b></i>	
<i>While riding home on the hour long bus from the Rockaways:</i>	
<b>Player 1:</b>	A sand between your toes, cold salty water kinda day.
<b>Player 2:</b>	A seagull bothering, ice cream melting down your elbow, day.
<b>Player 1:</b>	Too much sun screen, making my hot dog taste like zinc day.
<b>Player 2:</b>	Taco truck, watching really great surfers fall in the water kinda day.
<i>Keep going back and fourth until you cant think of anything else that happened that day.</i>	

Or

<i><b><u>Example:</u></b></i>	
<i>While riding home on the Express Bus from a field trip to the Bronx Zoo.</i>	
<b>Player 1:</b>	I got to see the cutest prairie dogs rolling around in the dirt day.
<b>Player 2:</b>	My mom wouldn't give me 51 cents to let me get a mashed penny kinda day!
<b>Player 1:</b>	Who knew anteaters were so goofy looking, but I saw the sloth move slowly day.
<i>Keep going back and fourth until you cant think of anything else that happened that day.</i>	

## **The Hungry Thing**

Sometimes a book that becomes a children's classic in our home is introduced by our childhood friend's parents. Books that I'm talking about are out of print for so long they never made it onto our radar. This was the case with *The Hungry Thing*.

On a trip to my hometown of St. Louis, Missouri we stayed in my childhood friend's parent's home. Of course my friend and all her siblings had left the house after going off to college so there was plenty of room. When you live in places like St. Louis, you actually have enough space in your home so you don't have to redecorate and repurpose your child's room as your home office or painting studio the second they move out. My friend's rooms are kept as reliquaries of their childhoods, permanently trapped in the 1980s. Other extra rooms in these spacious suburban homes can be designated for grandkids who visit only once in a while. My kid loves the grandkid room because it's got other kids toys that only get played with once in a while. Other people's toys are always, always, always better than your own toys.

This child's room has a bookshelf filled with the usual classics. *Good Night Moon*, *Cat in the Hat* and *Curious George*. Some treasures have been handed down from slightly older cousins, some from great grandparents. One favorite we unearthed is by poet Carl Sandberg, with one of the best titles for a children's book ever, *The Wedding Procession of the Ragdoll and the Broom Handle and Who Was In It*.

Another 1960s title we discovered in the grandkid's room was *The Hungry Thing* by Jan Slepian. In this wildly creative book originally published in 1967, a reptilian monster called the Hungry Thing comes to town with a sign around his neck reading, "Feed Me". No one can understand him when he asks for foods such as *Schmancakes* or *Tickles*. The townsfolk have no idea what to do until a clever young boy figures out that *Schmancakes* sounds like pancakes and *Tickles* must be pickles. Some of the miss-mashed names of foods are really funny and will have you and your kid laughing out loud. The colorful cartoonish illustrations by Richard E. Martin will also delight your young rhymers as they try to guess what the Hungry Thing really wants to eat.

### The Game:

**Player 1** starts with the phrase “The Hungry Thing came to town and asked for...”

Fill in the blank with any food, changing the first syllable.

**Player 2** has to guess what the food item is.

Continue back and switching positions from guesser to guessee.

### Example:

**Player 1:** “The Hungry Thing came to town and asked for some brawlberries”

**Player 2:** Strawberries

Or

**Player 1:** “The Hungry Thing came to town and asked for some tralifornia rolls.”

**Player 2:** California Rolls.

**Note:** The new words can be completely nonsensical made-up words.

### Variation for older kids:

To make the game a bit more challenging, come up with words that are comprised of real objects such as “belly bowls” for “jelly rolls”. Do not change more than the sound of the first letter or you will never guess what it is.

## BFG

At this moment as I write, the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington DC, is putting up a sign telling visitors that the works on view owned by Camille and Bill Cosby are: "fundamentally about the artworks and the artists who created them, not about Mr. Cosby," If you are one of those people that can't separate Bill Cosby from his amazing art collection or cannot and will not watch another Woody Allen movie because of the controversy surrounding him then stop now and cut directly to the game. But if you're one of those people who can separate the actions of the creator from the greatness of the works, keep reading about the writer of the book BFG.

My husband, still holds *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, to be his favorite book of all time. He recently learned that Roald Dahl was an anti-Semite. My husband is Jewish but we look the other way and still have every book Roald Dahl ever published on our shelves.

That unfortunate mark on his character aside, Roald Dahl is still not the typical educational role model. His stories depict poverty, loneliness, really mean characters, and hints at racism, sexism and chauvinism. Truth be told, I'm not at all a fan of Roald Dahl's writing. I never could finish Charlie and his adventures in the glass elevator or chocolate factory. But who can resist Gene Wilder, or Jonny Depp in the title role of Willy Wonka?, so I haven't totally abandoned him.

When my son begged me to read *The BFG* one night, I finally caved. First of all, I had no idea BFG was even a children's book. I always assumed that BFG stood for Badass F\*cking Germans, because Roald Dahl was writing about his experiences in WWII as a Royal Air Force pilot. I was pleasantly surprised that it was about a Big Friendly Giant instead. I now rank this as my all time favorite Roald Dahl book. The book is great for so many reasons, so if there is only one book you will read that's mentioned in this book, pick this one. And if you ever come across the animated film version, do not watch it, because it will ruin the images you have created in your mind's eye.

The story is about a British orphan girl named Sophie, who is abducted by the BFG, the non meat-eating runt of the Giant family. His bigger brothers Childchewer and Fleshlumpeater, roam the earth, eating children. As the younger, gentler, friendliest giant, the BFG is a vegetarian and only eats things called *snozzcumpers* and drinks *froboscottle*. Sophie and the BFG become fast friends and it's up to them to save endangered children from becoming the next meal for Childchewer and Fleshlumpeater. What's so delightful about the story, and what makes

this a fabulous read out loud, is the way the giant speaks. Since he hasn't gone to school, he says things like: "I is a nice and jumbly Giant!" or "Now that is whizzpopping for you!" (when he lets out a big fart). And every child will be able to empathize with the BFG when Sophie constantly corrects his speech.

The BFG game is simple. Basically you try to figure out what the letters stand for in an acronym. Apparently the United States had an acronym craze in the late 1960's early 70's when evidently every company or social program tried to make up catchy acronyms for their name like: KEEP- Kindergarten Educational Enrichment Program; and REACH- Raising Educational Aspirations of Culturally Handicapped. In New York City, we still navigate through acres of acronyms, and real estate agents and museum directors are the masters of creating them. On any given Saturday, you can go to open houses in SoHo, Nolita, Tribeca, NoMad, and Dumbo, and afterwards go to AMMI, MoMA or the MAD. Quiz your child on these and other acronyms you know in your neighborhood.

**The Game:**

First start by asking what the BFG could stand for, and then take turns creating new acronyms to guess.

***Example:***

**Player 1:** BFG could stand for: Brainy Fluffy Grandma

**Player 2:** or Bristly Frosted Grapes

**Player 1:** Bad Frog Gym.

*Take turns going back and fourth making up new terms for BFG.*

**Variation:**

Look around you on the train or bus and think up acronyms for things you see. Have the other person guess what it is.

*Example:*

**Player 1:** What's an ODS

**Player 2:** (*looking around*) is it the orange dirty seat.

Or

**Player 2:** What's YSM

**Player 1:** (*looking around*) Is it the Yellow Shoed Man?

Variation with paper:

One person draws a picture of something the BFG can stand for and the other person has to guess what it is. Can you draw a Bad Frog Gym?

**Note:** start with 3 letter acronyms for younger kids. Work up to 5 or more letters as the kids get older.

Harder Variation:

For really advanced players, make up an actual word that the acronym spells.

*Example:*

**Player 1:** What's a HAT

**Player 2:** Is it a Hair Atop Toupee?

## Flora and Ulysses

A lot of animals populate a child's world. Especially around 18 months, every adult they encounter will quiz them on animal sounds. "What noises do sheep make? What's that across the street, a dog? woof woof? How about that cute cat in the window, what does it say?"

Aside from mama or dada, Old MacDonald will be the first important figure in their lives. Then one day you will realize that a large community of much reviled city creatures populate the books you are reading to your little darlings: *mice*. You will encounter hoards of them; three blind ones with no tails, seven blind ones climbing elephants, country ones, city ones, ones who are dentists outsmarting foxes, ones with short attention spans eating cookies, ones carrying purple plastic purses, ones riding motorcycles, ones named after blue cheese, and my favorite the French mouse, Anatol. With all these adorable and clever characters your child will cry when they discover the poison and traps you've left out for mice in your home. ††††††

My love of mice being such, I moved onto outdoor tree-climbing rodents when choosing bedtime stories, neatly avoiding the tears when your child realizes that grownups, are trying to exterminate an entire bookshelf of characters. "Look honey! You are going to love *Scaredy Squirrel!*" Did you know there are whole genres of squirrel and hamster lit? *Squirrel Nutkin* anyone?

Now is the time for *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* by Kate DiCamillo. The main character is a ten-year-old girl named Flora, who bounces back and fourth between her separated parents. She witnesses a squirrel getting sucked up by a vacuum cleaner and survives to become a superhero with new powers, such as flying and being able to type out poetry. Though this 240-page, 68 chapter book is targeted for third through sixth grade, it is part novel and part comic book and is very enjoyable for an adult to read with a toddler. Your child may not understand a Rainer Maria Rilke poem, or the concept of divorce or some of the tougher vocabulary words but they get the idea of a squirrel superhero, and understand the fight between good and evil. The characters are not the stock figures you'd find in fairy tales but eccentrics who possess good and bad traits that can be discussed with your child. For example, in the book, Flora's mother chain-smokes: you can explain the habit is bad but the character is not evil.

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†††††† You may be thinking, "we run a clean home. We don't have mice!" Sorry to break it to you but according to every exterminator we've met, there are only two kinds of houses. Ones with mice and ones which will soon have mice.

Comic-style graphic illustrations by K.G. Campbell accompany great dialogue that makes this book a wonderful read aloud, for any age. The illustrations also provide children with a great segue from picture books to graphic novels.

There are two superheroes in Flora’s life. First there is a lowly janitor named Alfred T. Slipper, the main character in her father’s favorite comic book titled: *The Illuminated Adventures of the Amazing Incandesto!* This unassuming quiet man falls into a vat of cleaning fluid and becomes the defender of the universe. The second of course is Ulysses, Flora’s new amazing squirrel sidekick. Both Incandesto and Ulysses are described as unassuming characters who undergo a bizarre transformation and soon acquire super powers to conquer villains. This game involves creating your own superhero, akin to Ulysses and Incandesto.

### The Game:

Basically the players take turns adding character traits to a person they know to create a superhero.

**Player 1** starts by reciting the lines from DiCamillo’s book: “He/she is an unassuming...”

**Player 2** fills in who or what the superhero started off as then make-up how he/she became a hero. Both players take turns to add what type of powers the character has.

Any player can end the creation of the character with another quote from the book: “He/she will become known to the world as \_\_\_\_\_” with a made up superhero name.

### Example:

**Player 1:** “She is an unassuming\_\_\_\_\_”

**Player 2:** Pre-K teacher.

**Player 1:** She tripped on a circle time carpet square and fell on a Green Crayon.

**Player 2:** She has the power to give us all a three-hour recess every day!

**Player 1:** She can blow milk out of her nose.

**Player 2:** She can read anybody’s handwriting no matter how bad.

**Player 1:** She has unlimited amount of snacks in her pockets.

**Player 2:** She will become known to the world as PS150 Crayolagirl!

## Alphabet games based on books

My husband is a collector. You can find him in the Guinness Book of Worlds records for one of his collections. I am not a collector at all, and perhaps that's why we can coexist. Otherwise our house might resemble the interior of the Collyer brother's brownstone, before they were crushed to death by their accumulations. But my husband will tell you that I'm lying. He will tell you that I'm a collector, a collector of books; mainly I amass pop-ups and Alphabet books.

Doing a keyword search in the NYPL for alphabet books will result in 570 items. Not a bad collecting goal. I've always been drawn to these books because it's such a nice, simple, elegant way to organize the world. The 26-item list can be totally random, yet there is a sense of order no matter how disparate the objects in the group. It's the first foray into reading for every child and adult who is learning the English language. The ABC song is one of the earliest songs you will teach your child.

The handful of Alphabet books chosen in this chapter goes beyond just a bunch of random things in A to Z order. They have a humorous twist or an artful trick to the structure of the alphabet. This made it easy for us to create new games.

## Ellsworth's Extraordinary Electric Ears and Other Amazing Anecdotes

### The Alphabet From A to Y With Bonus Letter Z!

These are two titles on our shelf that use amusing alliterations. Both books brilliantly balance brainy banter bereft bias. Well, not sure about that, but they are both clever and funny. In *Ellsworth's Extraordinary Electric Ears...*, Valorie Fisher photographs miniature dioramas using children's toys and colorful constructed backgrounds. There is a story within each of the 26 photographs, told with one alliterative sentence, such as "Dot dreamed of driving a delightfully dainty dump truck." You and your child can easily spend 15 minutes on each page looking for all the things that start with the chosen letter. On the D page alone, you can spot Dot the duck, a daisy, dice, dinosaurs, dirt, dog, dove, driver, duck, and a dump truck.

Ms. Fisher is a photographer with works in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, London's V&A Museum and the Bibliotheque National in Paris. Her impressive resume is reflected in the high quality art works in this fun children's book.

How about an Alphabet book created by an unusual pair; the ingenious New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast and the "wild and crazy" banjo playing, comedian/actor, musician, writer, and producer, Steve Martin? They are responsible for this hilarious book titled, *The Alphabet from A to Y with Bonus Letter Z!*, which sits next to *Ellsworth's Electric Ears* on our library shelf. Just as Fisher's alphabet uses alliteration to structure her anecdotes, Martin's sense of humor permeates the 26 alliterative couplets. Together with Chast's quirky illustrations you'll find yourself laughing out loud with your child.

The illustrations which tap into the same sense of humor that Chast creates for *The New Yorker* is what makes this alphabet book so appealing for adults. For example, the letter G page has Martin's text saying:

"While Granny in Greenland had gravlax for three,  
Her gallant son Gary grew green gracefully."

Funny right? Then the illustration accompanying this poem shows four characters, one of who is Gary turning green, hinted at having eaten a gallon of green gumdrop goo. They all cheer granny on, as she gobbles and gulps down a mound of cured salmon while also watching the Golden Girls on television. Hilarious?!

#### The Game:

The object of this game is to be able to construct the longest sentence you can, taking turns using one letter of the alphabet.

#### Example:

<b>Player 1:</b>	Lets start with the letter T...The
<b>Player 2:</b>	Train
<b>Player 1:</b>	Turned
<b>Player 2:</b>	Toward
<b>Player 1:</b>	the
<b>Player 2:</b>	Tunnel.

**Note:** you can use short filler words such as; a, as, to, for, etc... to make it easier for the younger players.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1:</b>	Lets start with the letter F...Frogs
<b>Player 2:</b>	are Free
<b>Player 1:</b>	From
<b>Player 2:</b>	Frozen
<b>Player 1:</b>	Freezers
<b>Player 2:</b>	in February.

**Note:** once you get the hang of it, you can try to make the next sentence longer than the previous one.

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## **Achoo! Bang! Crash! The Noisy Alphabet**

A cacophony of noises fill this delightful alphabet book by Ross MacDonald. There are no usual things like Apples and Baseball bats here. Instead a man A...CHOOs! out of his clothes and a child screams BOO!, scarring another man to BANG! BING! BUMP! BASH! and BOP! down a flight of stairs made from the sound effects. In every scene, the text making up loud sound effects are fused with the illustrations to tell a rambunctious story.

After a Martian goes ZIP! ZAP! ZING! and a ZOOM...when you think the book is at the end, you find an explanation on how the book was made. All the words in *Achoo! Bang! Crash!*, were set in 19<sup>th</sup>-century wood type, similar to the print used to make early American circus posters, "Wanted: dead or alive" signs, and theater playbills. There are photographs of the author arranging the backward type, inking the layout, and running the plate through a printing press. How cool is that! In the age of Adobe illustrator and laser printers, seeing the old meticulous techniques and craftsmanship really makes this book special

This game evokes snippets of conversations you have on a daily basis, using requisite sound effects. If overheard by any parent, it will sound like a typical whiny conversation. The alphabet is used as a structural means to create an improvised exchange between adult and child...Otherwise known as the Annoying Bratty Conversation. And it's best to make the sound affects loud, as any annoying bratty conversation should be.

### **The Game:**

**Player 1** begins by making a statement or asking a question starting with the letter A.

**Player 2** answers the question with a statement or another question starting with the letter B. You take turns advancing the conversation making sure to start with the appropriate letter.

### **Example starting with child:**

**Player 1** (child)     Awwwwww, mom, do I have to???

**Player 2** (adult)     But you won't get dessert until you eat that broccoli!

**Player 1** (child)     Caaaaaaaan't!

**Player 2** (adult)     Deeeeeeelishious!!!

**Player 1** (child)     Ewwwwwww!

**Player 2** (adult)     Fine! Fine! Have it your way. No Dessert!!!!

**Player 1** (child)     Give it back!

Or

<i>Example starting with adult:</i>	
<b>Player 1</b> (adult)	<u>A</u> re you going to put your shoes on?!
<b>Player 2</b> (child)	<u>B</u> t daaaaaaaaaaad!!!!.
<b>Player 1</b> (adult)	<u>C</u> ome on! Come on come on!
<b>Player 2</b> (child)	<u>D</u> o I have to?????
<b>Player 1</b> (adult)	<u>E</u> nough stalling!!!
<b>Player 2</b> (child)	<u>F</u> or Pete sakes!
<b>Player 1</b> (adult)	<u>G</u> reat! Now we're late!!!
...you get the idea.	

**Note:** The adult and child rolls can be switched so that in one round, the child plays the parent and vice versa. This will (hopefully) build empathy for the countless amount of times you've had to say things like "stop wiping your nose on your sleeve!" or "sit still!"

<i>Example with child as adult and vice versa:</i>	
<b>Player 1</b> (child as adult)	<u>A</u> nts are not ok to kill
<b>Player 2</b> (adult as child)	<u>B</u> t you can eat them if its made into gummy candy
<b>Player 1</b> (child as adult)	<u>C</u> andy can be eaten before breakfast on special days.
<b>Player 2</b> (adult as child)	<u>D</u> on't think I would ever say that!
Etc...etc...etc...	

## Word Games:

I was born in a land of exceedingly efficient and insanely complex public transportation. I was taught my first word game in Japan, and still play it to this day. Japanese people of all ages know and play the game *Shiri tori asobi*, which translates literally to “butt taking play”. I think there is an English equivalent called *Word Chain or The Last Letter Game*, where you have to take the last letter of a word to make a new word starting with the same letter. You can only use one word at a time. My son and I possess small Japanese vocabularies and run through the list of nouns we know quickly. Thus, to the disapproval of his obaachan<sup>#####</sup>, we use whole sentences as well as English words pronounced with a Japanese accent.

Regular Word Chain game:

A: Apple

E: Egg

G: Green

N: Night

Etc...

The way I play *Shiri tori asobi* with my son:

A: *Ahiru* (duck)

Ru: *Ru-lah wo kashite* (lend me your (ru-lah) ruler)

Te: *Tebukuro ga hoshii* (I want gloves)

Ii: *imbaarasu shinaide* (don't (imubarasu) embarrass me)

De: *Denbaa (Denver) ni ikunowa fuyu*. (go to Denver in the Winter)

Yu: *yu getsu da pikuchaa*... (you get the picture).

There are over 70 letters in the Japanese alphabet, it's basically a bunch of phonetic sounds. The last letter is *ん*<sup>#####</sup>. In Japanese, words can end with this sound, but cannot start with this letter. If a person uses a word that ends with the *ん* sound, they automatically lose. There is no English

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##### Japanese for Grandmother.

##### This can sound like the English N. Sometimes it's a little softer and nasalized, like the nasalized N in French. When it precedes an M, B or P sound, it sounds like M (because the mouth is about to be closed in those letters)

equivalent to this letter. If you play the game in English, you can go on forever or until you are able to cover the 30 million words that the parenting books say your child should hear, in order to raise a successful person.

Word games have been around for as long as people have had to wait in long lines or trick their children into learning a language I suppose. The games in this chapter need nothing but an agile mind. If you happen to have some paper, you could keep score, but winning is not the goal, so pencil and paper are not necessary to play any of the following games.

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## The Polite Train Conductor

When our son was just a baby, we were lucky to be able to ride the trains at off-peak hours, but when he began going to school, we joined commuters packed like sardines. On the 7 train there used to be a conductor who liked to yell into the intercom, “Step Lively People! Step Lively!!!” She always made me think of the Little Golden Book, *The Lively Little Rabbit*. To pass the time I envisioned each of the disgruntled riders as cute little furry animals.

The quality of the announcements has improved immensely from the days of the lengthy mush-mouthed Charlie Brown’s parents voice. We can actually understand that we will be delayed because of train traffic ahead. Some mornings we get a really grumpy conductor who is just plain rude. I’m sure the hordes of people continuously refusing to step away from the doors to let people on or off the trains, would test anyone’s patience, but as a parent of a toddler who’s daily mantra is- “say Please”, or “say Thank You”, it’s hard to explain why some people are so rude. And on a public speaker system to boot! So I invented this game “The Polite Train Conductor”

### **The Game:**

Both players listen very carefully to what the conductor is saying. **Player 1** repeats the rude announcement. (Or think up a rude saying a conductor has said in the past<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>). **Player 2** turns the rude sentence into a polite sentence. Take turns making the phrase more polite than the previous one.

### **Example:**

<b>Player 1</b>	Announcement: Stand clear of the closing doors!
<b>Player 2:</b>	Hello hard working commuters, please move out of the doorway when it is closing so the doors do not hurt you.
<b>Player 1:</b>	My, what a wonderful morning to you, and you look so lovely going to work this morning. Please be ever so careful of the doors so your beautiful dress does not get stuck in it.

Or

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\*\*\*\*\* Basically any sentence that doesn’t have the word PLEASE or THANK YOU, can be construed as rude to a four year old.

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*Example:*

**Player 1:** Announcement: A crowded train is no excuse for an improper touch.\*\*\*\*\*

**Player 2:** Please do not push and shove one another even though the train is really crowded.  
Thank you.

**Note:** Take turns one-upping each another to be more and more and more polite until you can't stand it anymore and both are laughing hysterically. Use a British accent to sound more polite, you know, so you sound like either Harry Potter or Peppa Pig or the Fat Controller\*\*\*\*\* from Thomas the Tank Engine's Isle of Sodor.

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\*\*\*\*\* This announcement is tricky since it really deals with sexual harassment but you can deal with it as shoving and pushing.

\*\*\*\*\* I'm not being crass, I swear that's what they call Sir Topham Hatt. I guess it's ok to call fat people FAT in England?

## **Po-tah-tos and Tom-ah-tos**

Late one night I was reading a bedtime story. The word vase was in it. I pronounced it “veys”. So our son immediately asks, “What’s a ‘veys’?” “What? you don’t know what a vase is? You know what it is, it’s that thing, you put flowers in.”

“Oh mama, you mean a vahz?!” And there, I’m thinking about my smart-ass four-year-old...Well lah dee dah to you too you snob!

Once upon a time I used to be one of those people you found at parties past midnight. Smoking cigarettes that cost more than \$10 per pack. Drinking pink cocktails with a twist out of martini glasses. You could find me in a room full of people where the average age was 24, having conversations that had nothing to do with nap schedules or the best way to pulverize a steak for those who only have four little baby teeth, or how is it possible for one person to poop more than five times a day.

This tale of mispronunciation was told to me at one of these historical parties:

At a friend of a friend’s apartment, I met a young pianist and his short-story-writing sister. They came from a fascinating family of creative geniuses, the type where everyone is very clever and has abundant creative talent. The sister introduced herself by giving me her elegantly letterpressed card (how quaint) and on it was her name, and under that, in a beautiful script, the word “Protagonist” (how clever). If you don’t buy into the charm, these types immediately come across as pretentious.

Anyway, the pianist told me that he used to play piano at auditions to earn extra money, since composing wasn’t paying his rent. One day a young girl walked into an audition for the Gershwin show “Shall We Dance?” and handed our protagonist the sheet music for “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off”. After a dramatic clearing of her throat, she began to sing with a beautiful voice. But...she sang the song so both “to-may-toes” and “to-mah-toes” were pronounced the same. She had memorized perfectly, had perfect pitch but apparently she had never heard the song performed so instead of /po tay toes/and /po tah toes/, it all sounded the same, and there was nothing to call off since both words were agreeable. Needless to say, the poor girl never got the part. It was just as well that the audition was cut short, as our pianist couldn’t continue because he was about to pee in his pants from laughter.

So in honor of our pianist, this game was created. Its best to play this game when having to walk down one of those interminable underground passageways between the 1 train to the A or transferring from the 7 to the F at 42<sup>nd</sup> street. Such long vaulted corridors will echo and add extra drama to your voice, turning you into a Broadway diva. And any uninhibited child who picks his boogers in public can belt out a song off key without shame.

The Game:

**Player 1**, to the tune of “let’s call the whole thing off” makes up random words that **Player 2** can fill in with slaughtered goofy made-up words. You both sing the refrain together

*Example:*

**Player 1:** I say dog and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Daaawg.

**Player 1:** I say cat and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Cwaat.

*Sing together refrain:*

Dog, Daaawg, Cat, Cwaat,  
Let’s call the whole thing off.

**Player 1:** I say kitchen...and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Klasbin.

**Player 1:** I say stool and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Sterrello.

*Sing together refrain:*

Kitchen, Klasbin, Stool, Sterrello,  
Let’s call the whole thing off.  
But oh if we call the whole thing of then we must part  
And oh, if we ever part, then that might break my heart

**Player 1:** I say shoes and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Schwooze.

**Player 1:** I say violin and you say \_\_\_\_\_?

**Player 2:** Valigalin.

*Sing together refrain:*

So if I wear Shoes and you go for Schwooze,  
So all right no contest we'll wear Schwooze,  
For we know we need each other so we  
Better call the calling off off,  
Let's call the whole thing off.  
So I play violin and you play Valigalin  
I'll give up violin and instead play Valigalin  
For we know we need each other so we  
Better call the calling off off,  
Let's call the whole thing off.

Variation:

For older kids, you can find Homographs (see Ame Ame) I say Wind...(like the **wind** howled)  
... and you say Wind (like **wind** your watch.)

## What's My Function?

The Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum was undergoing renovations and closed for the first half of our son's life. When it finally reopened, I couldn't wait to see the upgrades. When I used to go sans-kid, and roamed the turn-of-the-century Carnegie mansion, I'd contemplate the finely carved Victorian miniature staircase models, and study room after room of 16<sup>th</sup> Century extreme textile and silk embroidery so intricate it could only be made by girls going blind. When the doors reopened last spring, I didn't know what to expect.

Our son has been going to museums since the pediatrician gave the OK to ride public transportation. During my short maternity leave, one of the best places to nurse our baby was the rarely trafficked dark corners of the medieval wing at the Met. When the kid was learning to walk, we'd get out of the house on cold wet days and go to the Met's first level where a vast carpeted meeting room for school groups awaited my wobbly toddler's fumbling first steps. In all my years of going to the Met I hadn't known about the great children's library there until I discovered that carpeted room.

When our son was about two, our cultural excursions divided neatly in two: Touch Museums (Children's museums, outdoor sculpture parks and science centers) and No Touch Museums (MoMA, Guggenheim, most Chelsea galleries, and older relatives homes). I was hoping the Cooper Hewitt had morphed into the second type of museum since I was not in the mood to play don't-touch surveillance cop.

When we visited during the first weeks of Cooper Hewitt's reopening, I had my son plus Sophia, his friend from school. I was excited to see what the curators and architects had done with the place, and more so when I spotted the sign for us to "Play Designer in the Process Lab". This was going to be a hands-on experience for the kids, and less policing on my part. Plus, touching is always better for learning.

The graphics all around the Process Lab are fabulous of course, since it is after all the national design museum. There's a lot to read and decipher and little stations set up with instructions on how to play designer by participating in "design thinking". People in the creative field know that ingenious ideas are witnessed daily in kindergarten so, fittingly the room looked like a very expensive private nursery school. Yet instead of four or five-year-olds, there were adults (wearing all black clothes and iconic Corbusieresque eyewear) playing with lighting gels, paper clips, toilet paper tubes and the like. I must confess, I had a bit of an *uh-oh* moment -- when I saw that there was a lot of interactive technology. This usually translates to cool stuff

that's broken, but I needn't have worried, the kids mostly busied themselves with the trashier detritus and hands-on stuff.

A kid's focus on random junk can span maybe ten minutes, 30 tops, no matter how well designed your environment is. So I found myself in a familiar scenario, herding two energetic kids running around trying to touch stuff they weren't supposed to. As I plopped back down after corralling unruly behavior at one of the creation stations for the umpteenth time, I noticed some of the everyday objects on the table: comb, binder clips, and plastic cups. The instructions on another table loaded with paper and pencil told me to take any two objects from my bag or pocket, and by "pocket brainstorming", fuse them together and create a new product. You then were supposed to draw the new invention, label its function, and share your sketch on a large magnetic inspiration wall. I looked into my bag for two items and spied Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, and had an aha! moment. I knew just how to kill the next 30 minutes before Sophia's mom was scheduled to pick her up at the museum Café.

In Gladwell's best-selling book about the unexpected stories of successful people, there is a chapter titled The Trouble With Geniuses. It's not enough just to have through-the-roof IQ but creativity is also required for success<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. So instead of an IQ test, he suggests taking a "divergence test" which was developed in the 1950s by psychologist J.P. Guilford, to measure creativity by looking for factors such as the ability to quickly come up with a large number of ideas or solutions to a problem, to be able to see problems from different perspectives, to think up original solutions and to be able to carry out those ideas step by step. Divergent thinking is completely opposite from convergent thinking, i.e. the dreaded multiple-choice tests. Gilford asked subjects to come up with as many different uses for a brick as possible. Most convergent thinkers will tell you bricks are used to build houses or chimneys. (the most obvious and correct multiple choice answer.) But I need to kill at least 30 minutes, not just answer one lousy question on a standardized test.

So I grabbed paper and pencils from the "Pocket Brainstorm" station, the closest object from the "Design it Better" station, (which just happened to be a ping pong paddle), round up the two kids, and told them that who ever can write down the most uses for that object (neither of them have played ping pong and don't know what a paddle is) wins a chocolate croissant from the café.

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\*\*\*\*\* A bit of timing and luck doesn't hurt either.

### The Game:

**Player 1** looks for a specific object near them or in their view. They describe it so both players know what the object is. (Again, if you chose something you can't hold in a crowded train or bus, just describe it, don't point at it! After all we do not want to be rude.).

After the description, **Player 1** names the obvious function of the object.

**Player 2** next offers up another use for that item.

Go back and forth until you can't think of anything else.

**Note:** make sure that you both can see the item, not a random thing you think up. You need to see the object so you can describe it. Describing it in minute detail will also help you look at the object in new ways. You would be amazed at the number of different ping-pong paddles there are in the world with minute differences for example. Describing these unique qualities is one way of making the game longer. And most important, the sillier the ideas the better.

### *Example for Ping-Pong paddle:*

**Player 1** adult : It's a thing you hold in your hand with a cylindrical<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> wooden handle, made of different pieces of wood glued together<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. There is a flat circular<sup>††††††††</sup> part stuck to the handle also made of wood but covered with a red rubbery bumpy cover on both sides. It can stand on the table by itself. It says Prince<sup>††††††††</sup> on the handle with green painted letters.

It's a Ping-Pong paddle.

**Player 2:** It's a target for punching

**Player 1:** It's a thing to hold over one eye to read the eye chart.

**Player 2:** It's a thing to put raw cookie dough on to make bumpy patterns

**Player 1:** It's a thing that a prince holds during parades so people far away can see him waving.

§§§§§§§§ OK, most kids won't say cylindrical...what they will say is "stick like" or looks like a Barbie doll tree...in which case, the descriptive vocabulary is already giving you two different functions.

\*\*\*\*\* Again, the kid won't actually know how a ping pong paddle is glued or laminated together, but they will likely say it has two different colors of brown... or different kinds of wood.

†††††††† round

†††††††† tell your kid who doesn't know how to read that it says P-r-i-n-c-e, and point out the letters.

Variation with paper and pencil:

If your child knows how to write, you can both write down the list of functions separately. Compare the answers to see if any of them overlap and cross them out, then count how many unique ideas to determine the winner.

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## **Kill the Peanut.**

One of the earliest poems our son learned by heart was this lil' ditty.

A peanut sat on a railroad track,  
Its heart was all a-flutter.  
Along came a train, the nine-fifteen--  
Toot toot! Peanut butter!

This is one of 98 verses from the old folksong titled "Aint Gonna Rain No Mo", first recorded in 1923 by a singer named Wendell Woods Hall. If you have ever gone to sleep away camp, most likely you've heard several verses such as this one featuring Mary and her little lamb:

Mary had a little lamb,  
You've heard that tale before,  
But have you heard she passed her plate  
And had a little more.

Funny right?

And the famous title chorus goes like this:

It ain't gonna' rain no mo no mo  
It ain't gonna' rain no mo  
How in the heck can I wash my neck?  
If it aint' gonna rain no mo?

Anyway, back to the peanut. As a parent who has gotten my fill of what we call the "Nasty No Nut Note" from our son's various schools, (NO! Really? There are peanuts in that waffle???? So sorry!) This poem feels a bit subversive, but such a visual visceral rhyme is easy to understand and hard not to love.

**The Game:**

After you memorize the poem, change the peanut to another object, that when it gets run over by trains, it becomes something else. Take turns making up versus.

**Example:**

An **ice cube** sat on a railroad track,  
Its heart was all a-flutter.  
Along came a train, the nine-fifteen—  
Toot Toot! **Slush!**

Or

A **cow** sat on the railroad track,  
Her heart was all a-flutter.  
Along came a train, the nine-fifteen---  
Toot Toot! **hamburger!**

**Variation:**

To make it a bit more challenging for older kids, and for the young aspiring rapper, change the adjective- aflutter to a word that will rhyme with the final changed object.

**Example:**

A human sat on a railroad track  
It was feeling a bit like **gelatin.**  
Along came a train, the nine-fifteen,  
Toot Toot! **Skeleton!**

Variation:

This game can also become a guessing game by having **Player 1** give the first 3 lines then **Player 2** guessing what the object has turned into by using the rhyming clue of the last word in the second line.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1</b>	An avocado sat on a railroad track, Its heart was feeling <b>holy</b> . Along came a train, the nine-fifteen,
<b>Player 2</b>	Toot Toot! <b>Guacamole!</b>

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## The Velcro Doesn't Stick to That Metaphor

One day a huge package arrived in a white and blue Zappos box. I often order 5 pairs of shoes knowing I will return most of them. (I know, I know, bad for the environment- those fuel guzzling trucks, all that packaging not being reused, carbon imprint, etc...but what is a parent of a big wide-footed-toddler-that-has-to-try-on-the-shoes-for-an-hour-before-we-are-sure-they-fit to do?).

Anyway, one pair of sandals in this particular shipment was especially great, in his opinion, or so we thought. After wearing them for an hour indoors, the Velcro kept coming undone. I am not going to pay \$60 for a pair of sandals that the kid will only wear for 3 months, no matter how colorful or cool its light-up features are, if the Velcro doesn't stick. So buckets of tears, and countless "These are the best shoes I've ever worn mommy!" and "I hate you!"s", I made him take the defective shoes off. I stuffed the tissue paper cone back into the crevices and returned them to the box to be brought to UPS. Through screaming tears the kid vowed to never ever speak to me again.

I remembered that somewhere inside my stacks of parenting how-to-books, (or was it a relationship self-help book?) there's a great piece of advice on what to do when someone is having a crappy day or is pissed off at you. It explained what you should say to the wronged person so the situation does not escalate into the next World War. What you are supposed to do is agree with them. Be empathetic to their situation. Hear their pain. Agree with the injustice of the world and how unfair life is. Just having someone understand their heartache will help the agony of the moment go away, whether it's losing your job, not being able to stay up late, or not being able to keep the coolest pair of sandals you've ever laid eyes on.

### The Game:

This is not so much a game, as it is a tantrum defusing tactic.

The game/scene is automatically set up when **Player 1** (the kid), is about to freak out and they are whining or screaming about something.

**Player 2** (that's you, the adult) thinks of a reason for the injustice, some (factual) flaw then thinks of a metaphor explaining a logic similar to it explaining the sucky thing that just happened. Go back and forth with the metaphors making them sillier and sillier until the turbulent moment (hopefully) passes.

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**Note:** **Player 2** is always the adult, and might have to ask **Player 1** to restate the problem or the injustice being done to them since it's totally unclear why **Player 1** is crying.

**Player 2** **MUST** use the words "I'm Sorry" and "TOO", with an empathetic voice in their reply.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player1</b> (child):	Don't return my cool shoes!
<b>Player 2</b> (adult):	<b>I'm sorry</b> but the Velcro doesn't stick. I love those shoes <b>TOO</b> but... It's like a delicious looking ice cream cake but the sugar was replaced with salt.
<b>Player1</b> (child):	It's like the coolest, greatest looking car ever, but the engine doesn't work.
<b>Player 2</b> (adult):	It's like a glittery frilly beautiful pink dress but it's really itchy.
<b>Player1</b> (child):	It's like the best Lego set you could possibly imagine but it fell into toxic waste.
<i>Go back and fourth with the metaphors of something you really need to have or want to do but...</i>	

**Note:** This game is best used as a diversion for a tantrum that's about to start. For example, your kid is squirming more and more trying to get out of his stroller and trying to unbuckle the straps. You know in a few seconds, your kid will erupt into a hysterical crying mess. This is when you empathize: "I know, I hate your stroller too BUT..."

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player1</b> (child):	I want to get out of this stroller!
<b>Player 2</b> (adult):	I know, I'm sorry, I hate your stroller <b>TOO</b> but it's crowded and I don't want you to get lost. ... It's like being on a great big ship on the Arctic Sea and you want to pet the penguins because they are so cute, but you don't have mittens and your hands will freeze off, which would be bad for eating cookies. §§§§§§§§§§
<b>Player 1</b> (child):	It's like you want to go to LEGOLAND but they found that the red Legos were made of dog poop.

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§§§§§§§§§§ You can make this first one really long, and maybe turns into a story that your kid will get lost in.

## Math Games:

I teach in an art school. Two actually. As an Adjunct. Those who teach in NYC know what this is about...but anyway... a high percentage of my students hate math. That's why they are in art school, where SAT scores do not determine their futures. I teach them how to make stuff. I teach them how to make stuff stand up and sometimes hold not only it's own weight, but an external weight. This is frightening to a student who hates math because deep down inside, when they have to make something that is constructed out of a rectangular cube or a truss system out of equilateral triangles, they know math is somehow involved.

I'm good at math, and could have gone all the way if I hadn't been a slacker. All the way in math meant AP Calculus, but as a slacker I made it through Geometry with a C+. I understood the concepts hiding in the Pythagorean triangles, but try telling a rebellious teenager to prove what is obviously a triangle to *be* a triangle. I found that class asinine. Now that I teach structural principles in my courses, I repurpose that knowledge to disguise it in art and design projects. Plus I think my students relate better to someone who got a C+ in Geometry than a math whiz.

What I've learned in all these years of teaching is that being good at math is more than knowing equations and memorizing tables. It's more important to comprehend the world spatially, to be able to recognize patterns. If you play music, you intrinsically understand fractions. If you can read a map, you understand coordinates. If you wait tables, you understand the value of money and calculating percentages. This is what math is. These games will hopefully be fun to play as you navigate around the city with your child.

## **Jonah's Routes**

Our son has been taking Suzuki violin lessons for 3 years. He has individual lessons on Sunday mornings and group classes on Thursdays after school. Before the group class, there is Dalcroze, another group music class that this particular school incorporates into its program. None of the parents know exactly what their kids do in Dalcroze for half an hour barefooted in a dance studio, but it's supposed to help enhance their whole musical experience.

We usually arrive early and sit on the carpeted floor outside the studio, eating snacks and doing homework with the rest of the group waiting for class to begin. One of the kids we often wait with is a boy named Jonah. Hiro and Jonah are the same age and regularly strike up boy conversations. One of the earlier obsessions they shared was an interest in trains. Like every four-year-old boy, our son was into Thomas the Tank Engine. Jonah however, was obsessed with real trains, the New York City subway system. This kid's knowledge of the MTA was amazing!!! You could name any start and end point in the whole system and without looking at a map, Jonah could tell you what trains to take, transfers and all.

Sometimes I would attempt to throw him off his game and ask "OK Jonah, on weekends, the 7 train stops running at Queensboro Plaza, so how do we get to Lincoln Center from 46<sup>th</sup> Street/Bliss Station in Queens?" Jonah was probably 4-1/2 at the time he gave me this answer:

"Oh that's easy. You take the 7 backwards two stops and get on the Long Island Rail Road at 61<sup>st</sup> street. That will take you to Penn Station. From there, take the C to 59<sup>th</sup> Street."

And by the way, Jonah lives on the UWS, not the outer boroughs. The kid is a true public transportation savant.

### **The Game:**

**Player 1** picks any two points in the city and asks Player 2 how to get there. Which train to use, what stop to get on and off, etc. Player 2 has to figure out the route.

**Note:** For beginners, pick actual subway stops for your beginning and end points and refer to the map. You can tailor the difficulty of the question by the amount of transfers or going between different boroughs.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1 (adult):</b>	<i>(easy) How do you get from the West 4<sup>th</sup> Street stop to the 34<sup>th</sup> Street stop?</i>
<b>Player 2 (child):</b>	<i>Take the F train uptown.</i>
<b>Player 1 (adult):</b>	<i>(medium difficulty) How do you get from Times Square 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to Atlantic Avenue/Barclay Center?</i>
<b>Player 2 (child):</b>	<i>Take the 2 train (or the Q) toward Brooklyn and get off at Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn.</i>
<b>Player 1 (adult):</b>	<i>(very difficult) How do you get from the Franklin Street station in Manhattan to the Greenpoint Avenue stop in Brooklyn?</i>
<b>Player 2 (child):</b>	<i>Take the 1 train uptown and transfer at 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Get on the L train toward Brooklyn and get off at Lorimer Street. Walk through the underground passage way to the G train/ Metropolitan Avenue stop. Take the G train toward Queens and get off at Greenpoint Ave.</i>

### Variation I

When you get really good at navigating the Subway system, you can take turns finding alternate routes for the same two points. See if you can get from point A to point B using as many trains as possible. In reality, you would never travel the following route but children will rise to such challenges.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1:</b>	<i>What is the longest route from the Museum of Natural History to Columbus Circle?(the easiest route is the B or C train downtown two stops.)</i>
<b>Player 2:</b>	<i>From the Museum of Natural History, take the C train uptown to 168<sup>th</sup> Street. Transfer to the downtown 1 train. Get off at 96<sup>th</sup> Street. Transfer to the uptown 2 train. Get off in the Bronx at East 180<sup>th</sup> Street. Transfer to the downtown 5 train. Get off at 59<sup>th</sup> street/Lexington Ave. Transfer for the downtown N train. Get off at Time Square/42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Transfer to the uptown 1 train. Get off at your destination: Columbus Circle/59<sup>th</sup> Street. Six Trains...beat that!</i>
<b>Player 1:</b>	<i>Oh yeah? How about.....(insert another crazy endless route here)</i>

### Variation II:

For more advanced players, pick random places in NYC that you have been to like a friend's house or restaurant and see if the child can remember what train they rode, without looking at the map.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1</b> (adult)	<i>How do you get to The Transit Museum in Brooklyn from Two Boots Pizza in the East Village?</i>
<b>Player 2</b> (child)	Take the F train toward Brooklyn at 2 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue (and Houston). Get off at Jay Street/Metro Tech station.

### Variation III:

Pick any train line at any point and try and name all the stops going either uptown or downtown from that point. The person who can correctly name the most stations is the winner.

<i>Example:</i>	
<b>Player 1:</b>	Beginning at Time Square 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street 1 train going uptown name all the stations:
<b>Player 2:</b>	Time Square, 50 <sup>th</sup> , 59 <sup>th</sup> /Columbus Circle, 66 Lincoln Center, 72 <sup>nd</sup> , 79 <sup>th</sup> ...

To make it more complex, begin tallying points- one point for each station, 1 extra point for naming the whole name of the station. Thus the above example would earn seven points. After ten rounds, add up the points to see who is the winner.

**Note:** Unless your kid is as obsessed as Jonah is, they won't have the whole MTA map etched into their memory, so if possible, sit near a map on the train to double check your answers. Or if you are neurotic like my husband, you can always carry a subway map and bus maps of all five boroughs. They may be difficult to open up on a crowded train, but they are free and can later be used for all kinds of games, and even scrap paper for tic tac toe or Exquisite Corpse (see pg\_\_\_)

### Variation for the annoying child:

There will be a time when your child will not want to play any games. They will be hungry and whining for a snack even though they have already had a banana, a granola bar, a bag of chips, an apple and a box of raisins on the current trip alone. They will keep asking you, “Now what? Now what?? Now what???” And you still have five or 6 more stops to go. It’s time to step up your game. It’s time to let go of Helicopter Parenting. It’s time for some serious business. This is the time for Variation for the Annoying Child. The ultimate subway game.

You tell your child that they will be in charge of getting you both to your destination. They have to pay attention to every stop, and listen to every announcement. You will not help them. I repeat, Do Not Help Them! You tell them that if you miss the destination stop, they will have to assess the situation and fix it, explain that they will have to figure out which stop will enable you to go in reverse without leaving the station. If you see that your kid is goofing off or not paying attention, you can casually ask, “where are we?” or “shouldn’t our stop coming up soon?”

For this game to really work you cannot be in a hurry, and you definitely cannot play this game on the way to a doctor’s appointment, or when the kid has to pee. You must obey the one rule, the rule of letting the kid take total control. The first time you play “The Variation for the Annoying Child”, will gauge how it is played in the future. If you cave in during the first game, and tell him that your stop is coming up, he will not pay attention next time. In other words, you have to be willing to let the kid screw up so he can begin to understand the annoying consequences of such mistakes. If the child does make a mistake however, do not blame him or get mad. Just say, “oops” and help him figure out the solution by looking at the map. And if you really want them get a taste of what annoying is, pester them every so often when they are trying to listen to an announcement. Think of this as training for the future, when you want to take a quick nap and need your child to play alarm clock to get you off at the right stop.



## The Game

When you hear that announcement you get your kid to begin timing the train for accuracy.

At the beginning, the kid will need to know a few facts about time. Such as you can't just count really fast, but that you have to count in Mississippi's or Alligators<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. Or that there are 60 seconds in a minute, and if they can't count to 300, than just count to 60 five times over. And that you will probably have to use your fingers to tally the minutes.

Surprisingly, you will realize that the announcements are fairly accurate.

## Variation:

Some stations have announcements as well as a digital readout sign indicating when the next train will arrive. These are less accurate but still worth counting to see how off they are.

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\*\*\*\*\*I grew up in St. Louis, where the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers meet, so counting One Mississippi, Two Mississippi, Three Mississippi was second nature. Then one day I found my kid counting this way: "One Alligator, two alligator, three alligator..." Since then, I've done a little research, (ie Googled counting out loud) and came up with other ways people count:

- One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand...
- One elephant, two elephant, three elephant...
- One cat and dog, two cat and dog, three cat and dog...
- One sugarplum fairy, two sugarplum fairy, three-sugarplum fairy...
- Won-derful, two-derful, three-derful.....

## Everyday Math

I moved to this country at age 6 from Japan. I fit the stereotype. Brainy, bespectacled, crooked teeth, pigtailed and ahead in math by at least 3 grades. This was back in the day when you could excel with numbers even if you didn't know how to speak, read or write in English. Recently, I asked one of my Chinese students who had come to this country as an exchange student if she was ahead in math when she entered high school here. She said she wasn't. I realized then that the new math is not the same math I grew up with. Now Math is a whole new monster that has to be mastered *through* the English language. Math is not about memorizing numbers, tables or equations. Math is dependent on how well you can read. And reading apparently puts math in the context of the everyday world.

### The Game:

Look for the MTA informational posters on the trains that have numbers in them and make up math questions:



The poster features the MTA logo in the top right corner. On the left, there is an illustration of a red figure and a green figure standing on a platform edge. The main text reads: "Don't Become a Statistic", "146 people were struck by trains in 2011.", "47 were killed.", "Standing at the platform edge is dangerous!", and "Be Safe. Be Smart. Stand Back." Below this, there are four columns of text in different languages: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Russian, each providing the same statistics and safety message.

**MTA**  
.info

**Don't Become a Statistic**  
**146 people were struck by trains in 2011.**  
**47 were killed.**  
Standing at the platform edge is dangerous!  
**Be Safe. Be Smart. Stand Back.**

**No se convierta en una estadística**  
En el año 2011, 146 personas fueron atropelladas por trenes.  
**47 murieron.**  
¡Es peligroso pararse cerca de los bordes del andén!  
Cuidese. Sea inteligente. Mantenga distancia.

**請勿成為下一個受害者**  
2011 年有 146 人遭到列車撞擊。  
**47 人死亡。**  
站在月臺邊緣十分危險！  
請保安全，保持距離，靠後站。

**통계안에 포함되지 마세요**  
2011년에 146명이 기차에 부딪혔습니다.  
**47명이 사망했습니다.**  
통역통의 가장자리에 서있는 것은 위험합니다!  
안전하게, 지체롭게, 뒤에 서주세요.

**Не становитесь СТАТИСТИКОЙ**  
В 2011 году 146 человек попали под поезд.  
**47 из них погибли.**  
Стоять на краю платформы опасно!  
Будьте осторожны. Будьте благодарны. Отойдите от края платформы.

<i>Example:</i>	
Don't Become a Statistic 146 people were struck by trains in 2011 47 were killed	
<u>Questions:</u>	<u>Answers</u>
Easy: How many people are on the poster?	3 people
Easy: How many people are green?	2 people
Medium: How many different languages are on the poster?	5 languages
Medium: Are there more or less people than languages on the poster?	More languages
Hard: If 146 people were hit by trains and 47 were killed, how many people didn't die from train accidents but were probably really hurt?	99 people
Hard: How many years ago was 2011 if it is 2015 now?	3 years ago

Variation:

There are very few MTA service message posters with numbers so just look for any and make up equations for your kid to answer.



**Keep Your Stuff To Yourself**

Be a space saver. The less space your things take up, the more room for everyone.

<u>Questions:</u>		<u>Answers</u>
Easy:	What shape are the heads?	circles
Easy	How many people are there?	3 people
Medium:	How many legs do you see?	6 legs
Hard:	if everyone has two arms and two legs, how many limbs are missing on the picture?	4 arms

draft

## Can You See The Song?

Some days the train is so crowded that when we get on, we are squished together like, like ...businessmen during rush hour on the Tokyo subway. Hiro's pizza-sauce-stained nose invariably ends up crushed against some unfortunate person's white linen clad stomach. On other days, if it's not too crowded there might be available seats... but not next to each other. After long tiring days we both want to sit down, so I will sit across the aisle. If the train makes an express stop where a lot of people get on, it's unnerving to be sitting away from your parent, but sometimes I'm just too tired to stand and am carrying too much stuff for the kid to sit on my lap. "Can You See The Song?" is for these tired days when no one will get up from their seat so you can sit next to your toddler. \*\*\*\*\*

### The Game:

**Player 1** taps out a tune you both know, with their feet or claps the beat with their hands.

**Player 2** guesses what song it is. Make sure your child can see your feet if you will be tapping your shoes, (or hands if you will be clapping a beat). The train is ultra crowded, so you may need to keep switching positions so your kid can see whatever body part is important. Most people have their headphones in their ears so it doesn't matter that one of you is yelling out, "Is it- Mary had a little lamb?" Or "I can't see you anymore!" or "I think that was twinkle, but do it again!" After a minute of screaming across the aisle from one another, the person sitting next to your kid just might offer to trade seats with you.

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\*\*\*\*\* Once, my son ran into the train car as soon as the door opened, wove his way through the crowd and found an empty seat on a jam packed train and sat down. Then he quickly looked to the hipster dude sitting next to him and asked, "Can you please get up so I can sit next to my mama?" And the dude got up! I kid you not. So it just goes to show you, my therapist and every grant writing manual is correct. No one will give you anything until you ask for it. Let that be a lesson for us all.



## The Math Curse

Our New Common Core Math, as parents of public school children have come to know, is ridiculously worded. Common Core has joined real estate and restaurants as one of the top subjects of party conversation. Everybody, from Lewis C.K. to right wing Republicans, is up in arms about it. If parents don't want to go insane helping their kids with kindergarten math homework, they just have to laugh about it. Learn to explain to your child that, "Yes, if you really think about it, that question doesn't make any sense," or "That equation can have multiple answers, not just one that they want you to pick". And don't get upset if they miss a lot of questions on the math test because it may not be their fault entirely.

No matter what grade your child is in you will have to do a lot of ridiculous word problems in a workbook called Go Math or something similar. This is where Common Core really enters your world. The week my son brought home the Go Math workbook was the same week we discovered Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's book *The Math Curse*.

From the same wacky pair who created *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *The Math Curse* uses humor to tackle the serious subject of math and entice children to focus on the trickiest of equations. The book's fictional narrative begins when Mrs. Fibonacci (the Math teacher) tells a young boy that "almost everything can be thought of as a math problem". Thus, begins the "math curse." Mathematical questions are disguised in History, Art, P.E. and even how to divide Birthday cupcakes. Smith's masterpiece of layout and design enhances Scieszka's story. It uses surreal, collage-like illustrations combined with a dizzying variety of fonts to create diagrams, charts and multiple-choice quizzes with the answers as silly as the questions. This is for every child who dreads math, and every parent frustrated by Common Core. This fabulous smart and entertaining book will lighten your anxiety.

### The Game:

**Player 1** makes up ridiculous math questions with multiple-choice answers. **Player 2** picks any choice.

*Example:*

**Player 1:** Zara has 6 cupcakes. She will be 6 in November. If she invites 30 kids to her party, how many more cupcakes will she need to get.

- a. 30 cupcakes because the 6 she has now will be stale in 8 months
- b. None- because her mother will get Kathy's mother to make one.
- c. 29 because Ryan is allergic to milk
- d. 24 cupcakes

**Player 2:** Pick any choice.

**Note:** If you want your child to actually think about math, give a correct answer as one of the multiple choices, but for the game to be fun, this is not necessary. In fact, the more outlandish the answers, the longer the game goes on.

## Games with Paper

Drawing is the most seemingly simple hassle-free activity a child loves to do. One of the first non-toy present a child receives is an art kit. It's fun! It's easy! You don't need any batteries! There are no complicated instructions on how to put anything together! It doesn't require lengthy instructions on how to play with it. The crayons and coloring pages are simple ways for restaurants to keep kids (and parents) happy before the meal. Drawing can inform us of what the child is thinking and can be therapeutic. "Can you draw your family?" or "Can you draw how you are feeling?" And most of all drawing and mark making is the first steps in practicing fine motor skills. Just the act of holding a writing utensil and drawing simple stick figures improves their chubby handed dexterity. Only when they become proficient in scribbling, will they be able to write their name. Just as it is important for children to see you reading, it is also important for them to see you writing. They need to see how useful recording stuff on paper is. Writing letters (ok most people just text now but still you should handwrite some letters, so you can get your kid to write thank you cards to their relatives after their birthday) and jotting down notes.

I am a list maker. I like to feel the accomplishment of seeing a piece of paper with items crossed off at the end of the day. Some days, if I haven't been as productive I should have been, I'll cheat by adding things to my list just to cross off. For this reason, along with reading material, I always carry something to write on and something to write with\*\*\*\*\*.

The activities in this section require paper and a writing utensil and can be played in crowded spaces. Most of them were invented on or used the free newspapers that were handed to us on street corners. I always carry a Sharpie permanent marker (to label the forgotten extra change of clothes in the kid's school bag). This marker comes in handy when you want to draw over the newspaper itself. The end results of this method may resemble crude Cubist Still Life pictures by Picasso and Braque. If you wanted to carry a hardbound drawing notebook or sketchbook, it might make it easier to write more legibly but it is not required, and will weigh you down.

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\*\*\*\*\* I am a paper purist on this front. I still make my students take notes on paper with pencil or pen much to their objections. I meet them half way by telling them that at the end of the day, they can take a picture of the white board. But taking notes is mandatory in my class.

## The Dictator

Frequently you are just too tired to think of games to play, so you turn it over to your kid to entertain you. This is the right time to ask your kid, “Tell me a story” and tell him you will take dictations.

The first time you do this, it’s magical. Your kid is thinking to himself, “what? You’re going to be my secretary? You’re going to actually waste paper by writing down everything I say?” This will make them feel that their story is important. This is the first step into becoming an author, you tell them. It’s really interesting to see inside your kid’s brain to understand how they hear language, what they’ve picked up in their everyday world, and their story will tell you a lot about how their brains work. You are probably thinking that this sounds like a lot of work, and it is if you are exhausted. But trust me, it’s totally worth it. You will look back on this piece of paper in the future and laugh until you cry.

If your kid can’t think of a story, start out by using a story he already knows, and change the main character into a different animal or object. Like Winnie the Dog Poo.\*\*\*\*\* Or Bat in the Hat.

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\*\*\*\*\* Our kid was given a set of three Winnie the Pooh stuffed animals when he was born. They were weird in that Pooh was dressed as different animals. We called one dressed as a dog “Dog Pooh.”

We've gotten a lot of great stories by parodying a classic tale, such as Hiro's classic tale \*\*\*\*\* of:

### "The Runaway Ice Cream Beer"\*\*\*\*\*

So, once upon a time, there lived an old woman and an old father, two ice cream makers\*\*\*\*\* and they were making ice cream one day when they noticed they weren't rich so they couldn't get lunch. So they decided to make a new ice cream with all the flavors in the whole earth. So they mixed and stirred and stirred and stirred and stirred and then put it in the freezer to get frozen and then they waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited until it was all done and then when they opened up the freezer the Ice Cream just popped out and shouted

"you're not my licker and you can't come here I'm the Ice Cream Beer" and the old woman cried "come back so I can put you in the freezer" and then he ran away again and he turned into a monster and the monster did come back and then he said his poem:

"Come back Ice Cream Beer I want a little lick of you"

And then he cried the same old poem until he met a chicken who said "Bwock Bwock I want a bite of you",

And Ice Cream Beer said the same old poem until Ice Cream Beer met a Squirrel who talked very well and the squirrel said to the Ice Cream Beer "you can't run away from me I'll lick you" and then at the end the squirrel said everybody was running after the Ice Cream Beer and the squirrel said "I'll help you", and put him in the freezer and he waited.

The End

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\*\*\*\*\* I've recorded every word exactly as it came out of his mouth, bad grammar and all.  
\*\*\*\*\* I had to ask several times if he was saying Bear or Beer. He said it was the stuff we drink. Don't judge.

\*\*\*\*\* To this day I am still not sure if the characters were old ice cream makers or the man and woman owned ice cream makers.

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- Fisher, Valorie. *Ellsworth's Extraordinary Electric Ears and Other Amazing Alphabet Anecdotes*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003. (Gr. PreK+) Call # J PIC Fisher.
- Johnson, Stephen. *Alphabet City*. New York: Viking, 1995. (ages 3-7 yrs) Call # F PIC Johnson.
- Martin, Steve and Roz Chast. *Alphabet From A to Z With Bonus Letter Z!* New York: Flying Dolphin Press, 2007. Call # J E Martin.
- Macdonald, Ross. *Achoo! Bang! Crash! The Noisy Alphabet*. Brookfield, Conn. : Roaring Brook Press, 2003. (ages 3-6) Call # J PIC Macdonald.
- McMullan, Kate & Jim McMullan (illustrator). *I Stink!* New York: Joanne Cotler Books, 2002. (ages 4-8) Call # J PIC Mullan.
- Shannon, George. *Tomorrow's Alphabet*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1996. (ages 4-8 yrs) Call # J PIC Shannon.

### Chapter IV.

- *Ella and Louis Again*. Universal City, Calif.: Verve Records : Distributed by Universal Music & Video Distribution Corp., p2003. Audio CD. Call # LDC 31173 [CD]
- *Joslin, Sesyle and Maurice Sendak (illustrator). What Do You Say Dear?* New York: Young Scott Books, c1958. Call # J-E JOSLIN
- Cleary, Brian. *How Much Can A Bare Bear Bear? What Are Homonyms and Homophones?* Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press, 2005. Call # J 428.1 C
- Kawakami, Kenji. *The Big Bento Box of Unuseless Japanese Inventions*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. Research Call # JSD 05-178 @ NYPL only.
- Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. New York: HarperCollins, c2004. (Gr. 1-3) Call # J 811 Silverstein

- Prelutsky, Jack and Arnold Lobel (illustrator). *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. New York: Random House, c1983. Call # J 811.08 R
- Cole, Joanna. *The Eentsy, Weentsy Spider. Fingerplays and Action Rhymes*. New York: Morrow Junior Books, c1991. Call # J 793.4 C

#### Chapter V.

- Jacobs, Paul DuBois and Dan Yaccarino (illustrator). *Count 1-2-3 on the Subway*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. (age 2-5 yrs) Call # J E JACOBS.
- Niemann, Christoph. *Subway*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2010. (age 4-8yrs) Call # J-E NIEMANN.
- Raffi. *Baby Beluga*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1997. (age 2-5 yrs) Call # J PIC Raffi.
- Raffi. *Singable Songs for the Vary Young*. Cambridge, MA: Rounder, 1996. Audio CD. Call # J CD CHILDREN Raffi-8211.
- Scieszka, J. & Smith, L. (Illustrator). *The Math Curse*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995. (Gr. 1+). Call # J-E SCIESZKA.

## Resources:

### **Bookstores**

#### Manhattan:

##### Bank Street Bookstore

2780 Broadway @ 107<sup>th</sup> Street

The most well-informed and experienced bookstore staff I've ever encountered work here. With their encyclopedic knowledge of children's literature, they can recommend anything for any young reader at any age no matter what their interests. The last time I was there, I eavesdropped on a 30 minute conversation between a worker and an eight-year-old advanced reader, discussing the finest books and what to read next. They also have an amazing line up of free author readings and children's events.

##### Books of Wonder

18 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street (between Fifth and Sixth Avenue)

This large children's bookstore, which was the inspiration for the Nora Ephron film "You've Got Mail", has a great selection and a huge carpeted area to read with your children, surrounded by gallery walls hung with original works by best loved children's book illustrators. It's a wonderful place to go for a breather after running around at Evelyn's Playground in Union Square. My son and I used to go there for the Cupcake Factory's amazingly realistic floral cupcakes. Those have since been replaced with goodies from the Birdbath Neighborhood Green Bakery, a pop-up café of the City Bakery. Try their banana split with gelato topped with cherries and coco bits. Mmmmmmmmm, after you read Mo Willims book, *Should I Share My Ice Cream? (An Elephant and Piggie Book)*

##### The Strand Bookstore

828 Broadway @ 12<sup>th</sup> Street

When the original Strand bookstore opened in 1927 on Fourth Avenue, it existed on "Book Row"; six city blocks that had 48 bookstores in it's vicinity. Can you even imagine having 48 bookstores in one borough, let alone in 6 square blocks? This store has persevered and changed with the times, and NYC is so much the better for it. The stock now goes beyond the musty used

and rare titles to now selling everything from books to book related paraphernalia. The children's section on the second floor is surprisingly vast, selling both new and second hand books. Not only do they have children's book authors stopping by to do readings of their new books, every weekend a book character makes a visit. The last time I was there looking for the most recent Captain Underpants, I literally bumped into the Gruffalo!

#### Westsider Books & Westsider Records

Books: 2246 Broadway between 80<sup>th</sup> a& 81<sup>st</sup> street.

Records: 233 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street between Broadway & West End Ave.

I visit this jam-packed west side bookshop when I feel nostalgic for the claustrophobic visits to the old Strand. Walking into this floor-to-ceilinged book-filled narrow store will take you back to the days before Amazon.com. It's a tight fit but if you have the patience, you'll find children's books in great condition. Last time my son and I were there, we bought an almost brand new copy of *Grossology* for \$1 from the outside book cart.

#### BookOff USA

49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenue

This is the store you go to on a biweekly basis when your child becomes a reader and you don't want to go broke buying books. This secondhand Japanese bookstore that also sells books in English, has an amazingly organized children's section. The books are not only categorized by age, topics, fiction, non-fiction, Japanese children's books and manga, and also alphabetized. They may not have everything you want but its easy to see if they do have what you're after. A lot of the books in my son's room came from this store for only a \$1. They also buy used books, so when you are done with those Dr. Suess books, sell them here to reinvest in different books. And if you so happen to need a Japanese cell phone, you can get service here. The only drawback to this store is that there is no bathroom or cafe, so you probably won't spend hours here with your child.

#### Albertine Books

972 Fifth Avenue in the historic Payne Whitney mansion.

Walking into this French bookstore feels like visiting an extremely wealthy relative. As you walk up to the Italian Renaissance building and pass under its huge French flag, you think it must be the French Embassy, but the sign outside says "we're open -- come inside." A marble statue

of a boy missing arms and feet (a copy of a Michelangelo statue now on loan to the Met) greets you in the foyer, the lad's triangular pedestal teetering on three marble turtles. This is no Barnes and Noble. Everything exists in a hushed state...as my son put it "there's no music, no announcements, it's like you're going back to 100 years ago." This is not quite a bookstore for children, though they do have lovely children's books. There are little nooks with comfy velvet pillows where you and your child can hide out and look at recently published picture books, mostly in French. You can also show the little ones what books used to look like. For example an 8-volume set by Moliere published in 1781 sits inside a glass case along with historic works by Breton, Camus, Voltaire and Dumas, which by the way are for sale.

You must be at least 12 to enter the Frick museum down the street. With all its whispering, not touching glass cases, and delicate Regency furniture on tiny wheels, Albertine is a good place to practice behaving yourself in such places.

Add:

192 Books

192 Tenth Avenue @ 21<sup>st</sup> Street. Chelsea

If you are on the highline- this is a great pit-stop out of the heat or cold.

Kinokuniya

1073 Sixth Avenue between 40<sup>th</sup> & 41<sup>st</sup> Street

McNally Jackson Books

52 Prince Street in SoHo

Rizzoli Bookstore

1133 Broadway @ 26th Street

St.Mark's Bookshop???

New location

136 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (Avenue A)

Posman Books

30 Rockefeller Plaza

Transit Museum shop

Tenement Museum Shop

Queens:

The Astoria Bookshop

31-29 31<sup>st</sup> Street between 31<sup>st</sup> Avenue & Broadway

Artbook@ MoMA PS1

Brooklyn:

Powerhouse Arena

37 Main Street

Dumbo

PS Bookshop

76 Front Street in Dumbo

Brooklyn.

Greenlight Bookstore

686 Fulton Street @ South Portland

Brooklyn

BookCourt

163 Court Street between Pacific & Dean Street

Places to “find” books to take or exchange

Laundromats

Free newspapers outside train turnstiles.

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