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Heidi Darby
Buffalo County Extension
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Winter Doesn't Have to Mean Isolation

It has been a great winter so far. Who wouldn't enjoy 60 degrees in November? Unfortunately, we all know that the colder weather is around the corner. After all, it is Nebraska. When the temperatures dip and the snow starts to fall, winter can be a bit isolating, but it doesn't have to be.

At the end of our day and our trudge home, it's easy to just stay home and skip some of our socializing with friends. I say, make some hot cocoa and cookies and plan a game night. This could be for just your family, or you can choose to invite friends and neighbors over too. There are many fun cards and board games that are great for all ages. Yes, even kids will enjoy this fun night. Just be selective about the best games for all ages. As an example, Monopoly can be fun for adults and older kids but a five-year-old is not going to enjoy this game as much as they would Memory or Uno.

In our family, our all-time favorite game is called "The Farming Game". It has been a family favorite since I was a child. My mom and dad brought the first game home from an auction when I was little, and I still have that original game. In the game you are a farmer, and you have a small acreage. As you maneuver around the board from January 1 to December 31, you face a lot of similar pitfalls of farmers today such as weather, illness, and expenses. Players start out with 20 acres of wheat and grain and draw "option to buy" cards to add cows, fruit, corn, and equipment to their farm.

As the game was invented by a farmer in Washington that was facing economic ruin, there are always expenses to each harvest season. The roll of the dice tells you what your profit for the year for that crop will be. In true farming fashion, there are "Operating Expense" and "Farmer's Fate" cards to be drawn. These cards have different fees that must be deducted from your harvest check. They could be fertilizer fees or even notice of a bad frost that froze half your cherries so your check must be cut in half.

The game has a lot of parallels to real farming with its successes and losses. This game is a success story about a small farmer in Washington state. He invented the game “on the seat of a tractor” and made enough to save his farm and over the years has sold several hundred thousand games all over the world.

Although The Farming Game is great for older kids and adults, it’s not the best for those under 10. In that case, you will want to have some other options. In our home we played a lot of Candyland, Go Fish, and hours upon hours of tic-tac-toe... If you have not played tic-tac-toe with a five-year-old, you are missing out. I’ve lost a lot of games to my children and my nieces and nephews over the years. Their winning dances would rival any NFL touchdown dance on T.V.

If you want to take game night one step further, help your kids to create their own board game. I have seen tic-tac-toe played on tree circles with rocks and pinecones. We’ve played it in the sand with shells and sticks and many other ideas that the kids thought of. Designing their own board game is also a fun project that 4-H members can exhibit at the County Fair. Whether it’s a simple design that a Clover Kid (ages 5-8) would exhibit, or a more elaborate, age-specific game designed by those over age nine, we welcome their handiwork. See your local Extension office for project information. This is a great chance for them to let their imagination run wild. They can design the board, rules and playing pieces. Ask for more information on these project areas: Human Development and Clover Kids.

Whether you are losing your life savings to a five-year-old in tic-tac-toe or celebrating a record harvest of cherries in The Farming Game, enjoy this time of year. Drink your cocoa, watch the snow, and make the most of your downtime and your “isolation”.

Heidi Darby

4-H Extension Assistant

Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County

1400 East 34th St. Kearney, NE 68847 308-236-1235