

Letter Head in the Classroom

By Michelle Nephew, PhD

Nominated for the 2000 Origins Award for “Best Traditional Card Game,” *Letter Head* is a dynamic word-forming card game that can also be used as an effective instructional tool in the classroom.

Players create words using a special deck of cards that feature letters instead of numbers, and points instead of suits. Missing a crucial letter? No problem! Canny players can bluff their opponents into thinking they've got every letter they need by placing some cards face down and others face up when presenting their word. If they get away with it, they get to score the word as normal whether or not it was spelled correctly.

Letter Head is a game for all ages — and is especially rewarding for younger children for whom the game provides an opportunity to exercise essential skills in basic spelling, mathematics, decision making, and social skills. It is also nearly unique in that it's a letter game that is statistically accurate.

Spelling: Not only does *Letter Head* test each player's spelling ability when forming their own words, it also rewards them for finding faults in the spelling of other players. After a word is revealed, any other player may challenge it if she thinks it's not a real word or is spelled wrong. If the word can be found in a dictionary, the player scores additional points for each challenger. If not, each challenger scores extra points and the player forfeits her turn.

Mathematics: To determine how many points you earn for a successfully played word, you add up the sum of the point values on all the cards used in the word, plus bonus points for playing especially long words. In this way, *Letter Head* provides players with a chance to improve their basic math skills.

Decision Making: Should you go for the easy points with a short but low-scoring word, or hold out for the letters to finish off a longer, more-valuable word? Or should you try to bluff your way past the other players and into a pile of points? *Letter Head* requires players to exercise fundamental planning and decision-making

skills by making these kinds of choices about their own words, and also by making players keep track of how close to winning the other players are and judging whether others may be bluffing,

Social Skills: *Letter Head* also tests players' “emotional intelligence” through the mechanism of bluffing. If players correctly call a bluff, the bluffer scores no points and those who called it all gain extra points. If players incorrectly call a bluff on a word that was spelled right, then the falsely accused player scores additional points for every player that called her. The key to success in *Letter Head* is to keep the other players guessing. Act confident when you're bluffing. Act nervous when you're playing a legitimate word. Sometimes wear a blank poker face just to keep everyone off balance. In this way, social skills are just as important as spelling and math ability.

Statistical Accuracy: Unlike most other popular letter games, the distribution of letters in the *Letter Head* deck genuinely reflects how frequently they occur in the English language, and the point values precisely reflect how difficult it is to form words using each letter. For example, since 5% of the letters in any random sampling of words are “H”s, then you can be sure that 5% of the cards in the *Letter Head* deck are also “H”s. This feature allows for especially fluid and enjoyable game play. Playtesters have commented that there always seems to be just the right number of each letter card; this is because, in fact, there is just the right number of each letter card. To determine the true frequency with which each letter occurs, *Letter Head's* designers synthesized the information presented in over a dozen different reliable and detailed studies done over the last century. A complete analysis can be found at www.atlas-games.com.

Letter Head can be used to strengthen a variety of fundamental skills. And, best of all, it teaches those skills in a way that players actively enjoy. Visit www.atlas-games.com for more information on this and other fine products from Atlas Games.

Letter Head

Stock #: AG1230 • ISBN: 1-887801-87-1 • MSRP: \$19.95 (US)

