

## **Spice Up Meal Times (and kill time on long car trips!)**

### **Questions**

Print out the list of questions at the FishEaters website (in the same area you found this document) and discuss them with your family.

### **At Breakfast**

Discuss any dreams your family had before waking up, what they could mean, etc. Challenge each other to perform one “random act of kindness” during the day and to discuss them at dinner that night.

### **Sunday Dinner**

On Sundays, make a point of remembering the Mass readings, maybe bringing them to the table with you as you eat and re-reading them if necessary. Ask your kids what lessons can be learned from those readings, what it all meant, etc. Also ask your kids about the priest’s homily, what he said, what it meant, etc.

### **Aesops Fables or Proverbs**

Get a book of Aesop’s fables or proverbs, read one or two to your children over dinner, and see what they think they mean. This can get rather hilarious when dealing with young children, I promise.

### **Minute Mysteries, Logic Puzzles, Riddles, Lateral Thinking Puzzles**

Go to Amazon.com and search for “One-Minute Mysteries,” “Five-Minute Mysteries,” and other like books that are filled with very short, quickly read mysteries that you and your children can try to solve during dinner. This will help your kids hone their reasoning skills. Other books that can be used around the dinner table are books of riddles, logic puzzles, lateral thinking puzzles, etc.

### **Haiku or Limerick Writing**

Give a topic, a first line, a word, or what not, and have your family verbally compete (either singly or in teams) or act all together as a family to come up with the best haiku, limerick, or other form of poem.

Note: A haiku's structure is three lines with the first line having 5 syllables, the second line having seven syllables, and the last line having 5 syllables! (5 - 7 - 5). Sample haiku:

Whitecaps on the bay:  
A broken signboard banging  
In the April wind.

A limerick's structure is 5 lines with an AABBA rhyming scheme, typically of 8-8-5-5-8 syllables. Sample limerick:

'There was an old man with a beard  
Who said, 'It is just as I feared,  
Two owls and a hen  
A lark and a wren  
Have all built their nests in my beard!'

### **Count Your Blessings, Share Your Sorrows**

Have each family member, in turn, relate what they are most grateful for on that particular day. Then have each relate the biggest problem they endured that day and talk about how they handled it, what help they might need, etc.

Variation: If there's no serious problem going on and everyone is in a good mood, challenge each family member to relate how his day went – but without using any words that start with a certain common letter (e.g., T, M, S, etc.).

### **Fables and Proverbs**

Collectively write a fable (a fable features animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized ) in order to expound a moral you have chosen.

Challenge your family to make up a story that illustrates various proverbs (e.g., "haste makes waste" or "all that glitters is not gold" or "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush").

### **Rhyme 'Til You Drop**

The leader says a word, and each player in turn has to come up with a word that rhymes with it. The first person to fail to do so is out, and a new round begins.

### **Before and After**

Leader thinks of a word. The others make a guess, naming a random word, and the leader has to tell them whether that word comes before or after his word in the dictionary. Players make a second guess, leader does the same thing in letting them know whether it comes before or after his word in the dictionary, and this repeats until the word is guessed. It's akin to guessing a number between 1 and 100, so a decent strategy would be to halve the options at each guess – i.e., guessing a word that begins with M first, and then a word that begins with either S or G, depending on the leader's answer, with the next guess being a word that comes at least roughly halfway between the leader's clue and a correct guess at each step.

## **Story Time**

One family member starts a story, and each family member adds to it. You can decide beforehand that each person adds one line, two lines, three lines, etc., or talks for an allotted amount of time, so that each person gets a turn. You can choose genres, basic themes, a moral of the story, etc. -- or not.

Variation: Have one person tell the story, with others jumping in and yelling out a word that the storyteller must include. E.g., “And then, when the little girl walked into the room” – (someone yells out harmonica) --- “she came across a golden harmonica, which only played beautiful music.”

Variation: Have everyone add sound effects to the story being told.

Variation: Take a well-known story, such as a fairy tale, substitute or add words in the title, and re-tell the story. For ex., tell the story of “Goldilocks and the Three Dogs” instead of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” or “Snow White and the Seven Meatloafs” instead of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.”

Variation: Talk about well-known stories by asking “what would’ve happened if...?” and changing a detail of the story. For ex., “What would have happened if the Three Bears had come home while Goldilocks was eating the porridge?” or “What if Goldilocks hadn’t fallen asleep in Baby Bear’s bed but left the house before the Three Bears returned?” or “How could Cinderella have gotten to the ball without the help of a fairy godmother?”

Variation: Focus on “Just So stories” – those stories that recount things such as how the elephant got its long nose, how the seas became salty, how the Moon came to have phases, etc.

Variation: Have each person write down two words on two different pieces of paper. Put them all in a bowl and shake them up. The first person draws one of the word and begins the story in such a way that incorporates the word drawn. The next person draws a word and continues the story using the word he drew. And so forth.

## **Getting Creative**

Take turns having each family member think of an object. Everyone then thinks of things that can be done with that object that aren’t that object’s primary purpose.

Variation: After an object is chosen, have each person perform a commercial to “sell” the object.

## **Who Am I?**

The leader thinks of a famous person or character – historical, fictional, etc. – and whispers that person’s name to the one sitting next to him. That person then whispers it to the person next to him, and so forth, until everyone but the one who has been designated to be “It” knows that name “ (alternatively, “It” could be made to leave the table while his identity is chosen). It” then “is” that person and must try to determine his identity by asking yes or no questions. A variation could be that everyone has to talk to “It” as if he is the person whose identity he’s assumed – being mindful, of course, to not give away direct information that’d give “It” the answer.

Variation: Each person takes a turn, choosing his identity for himself (he can mimic the person whose identity he assumes, if he desires). The others ask yes or no questions until they figure out who he is.

Variation: The leader writes down character/celebrity names or the names of animals or objects, etc. on post-it notes and sticks one on each person's forehead without that person reading it. Each person has to interact with the others and ask yes or no questions until he guesses his identity.

### **Word Association**

The leader says a word. The person to his right says the first word that comes into mind after hearing the leader's word. The third person says the first word that comes to mind after hearing the second person's word, and so on.

### **You Don't Say**

"It" thinks of the name of a famous person. He then breaks that name up, mentally, into syllables and gives the other players clues so they guess the sounds of each syllable -- and he gives these clues out of the order they occur in the name. Players have to arrange those sounds to come up with the name "It" is thinking of. The other players guess as they go along, with no order, with each player shouting out his guesses as they occur to him. The syllable sounds don't have to be exact; approximations, rhymes, or sound-alikes are fine. "It" can grab an ear lobe to indicate that the syllable sound he's giving rhymes with the actual syllable sound. He can also make a chopping motion with his hand to indicate to the other players to lop off letters -- e.g., if he's trying to get them to guess the sound "tah," he can give them the clue "an old-fashioned stereotypical British way of saying goodbye," which would have players guessing "ta-ta". He makes a chopping motion indicating that they should break "ta-ta" up so they just get "ta".

Ex. "It" chooses "Marie Antoinette"

It: If you fish, you might use a fishing line, or, if you want to catch a bunch of fish at once, you might use a \_\_\_\_\_

Player 1: Net!

It: Yes! The fifth letter of the alphabet is \_\_\_\_\_

Player 3: E!

It: Yes! If you deface something, you might be said to \_\_\_\_\_ it...

Player 2: Harm? Hurt? Destroy?

It: Nope...

Player 2: Mar?

It: Yes! When a baby is born with another baby at the exact same time, that baby is a \_\_\_\_\_

Player 3: Twin!

It: Yes! An insect that loves picnics is an \_\_\_\_\_

Player 2: Ant!

It: Yes! That's all the clues.

Players now try to put together all they've heard... "Ant twin mar ee net...", "Twin ee mar net ant," etc. until they figure out "Mar ee Ant twin net" and, from there, guess the name.

### **Letter Junction**

Have someone name a city, a country, a food, a song title, a celebrity, or some other thing of whatever category you choose. The next player has to name something from the same category that begins with the last letter of the word or phrase spoken by the first player, without repeating any answer already given. And on it goes.

Ex. The category "Countries" has been chosen.

Player 1: FrancE

Player 2: EnglanD

Player 3: DenmarK

Player 4: KuwaiT, etc.

Variation: For young kids, you can forget about categories and stick to three-letter words, four-letter words, etc. CaT could lead to TwO could lead to OwL could lead to LiP and so on.

### **You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile**

One person is selected to be "it." That person is the only one in the group who is allowed to smile. He can do anything he wants to try and get someone to smile. If someone other than "It" smiles, he or she becomes "It." You can play, instead, so that everyone but "It" can smile, and everyone at the table has the goal of getting "It" to laugh.

### **Jabberwocky**

Challenge everyone to come up with replacement words for words that come up in conversation – words that "sound" as if they might be true words and which somehow evoke the "feel" of what they're trying to signify, all in the manner of the poem "Jabberwocky".

### **Debate**

Choose a topic, divide everyone into two teams, assign one team to take one side of the issue, and the other team to take the opposing view. Then have an old-school debate. This could be a great way to teach your kids logic (and possibly find out if you have a budding attorney at the table). Parents could stay out of the debates themselves and play the roles of moderators. In that

instance, parents could also conduct a Q&A afterward or between rounds to encourage more thinking.

Variation: Instead of having people debate as teams, two could be chosen per dinner to debate while the others act as the audience and vote as to who won the debate. Note that this “game” could also act as an important lesson in the value and dangers of good rhetoric. When someone takes the side of a debate that all know is the wrong side, but wins the debate, it could teach children to not mistake style for substance, a crucial life lesson.

### **Hot Seat**

Each person takes a turn being on “the hot seat.” While on the hot seat, others get to pose five questions to him – and he must answer them, though he has the power to veto one question. After he’s done being on the hot seat, it’s someone else’s turn.

### **Name Five**

Divide into teams. The leader names a category, and then each team tries to name five things in that category more quickly than the other team can. Ex., name five Disney movies, five types of dinosaur, five Books of the Bible, etc. If things get too rowdy, teams can take turns instead, with a new category given to the second team – i.e., with two categories given per round. It could be played so that whichever team names five things the most quickly wins, or the team that can name the most things in their categories in an allotted time wins, etc.

Variation: Everyone can take a turn naming something in the given category, and the first person who can’t think of anything is out.

Variation: Instead of categories, one can play either of the above versions using rhyming words – i.e., players have to come up with five words that rhyme with a word the leader of that round has chosen, or each person has to name a word that rhymes and the first who can’t think of one is out. “Silver” and “orange” are out :P

### **The Queen Likes (A.k.a. “Fanny Dooley” and “Green Glass Doors”)**

The leader thinks of objects that have something in common, and he presents those objects to the other players alongside objects that don’t fit in order to help players discern what his chosen objects all have in common. Categories can be anything, from “things that are red” to “words with two syllables, but not three” to “things a person can lift,” etc.

Ex. The leader, thinking of the category “things with four legs,” says: “The queen likes tables, but not turkeys,” and “The queen likes cows, but not birds,” and “The Queen likes dogs, but not people,” etc. The strategy is for the people at the table to figure out what characteristic tables, cows, and dogs have in common – and which turkeys, birds, and people don’t possess.

### **Banned Words or Banned Letters**

Choose one or a few everyday, common words, preferably ones that would likely be used during a family dinner, that cannot be spoken during dinner. Whoever utters one of the banned words loses. The same thing can be done by naming a letter, and banning any word that begins with that letter. You can give each player tokens to keep score with, with their having to put one of their

tokens in a jar or hand it to the person who catches them using the banned word or letter. This game could be played “one game per night,” or you could play every night for a week and see who has the most tokens at the end of that week.

### **Magic Words**

Have each family member come up with a word that he will try to get the others to speak during the course of normal conversation (i.e., without direct clues). The first person to get another to speak his word wins; the last person to get another to speak the word loses.

### **The Big Bad Wolf**

One person – the Sheriff – briefly leaves the table while the other family members – the Little Pigs -- designate someone remaining at the table to be The Big Bad Wolf. When the Sheriff returns, The Big Bad Wolf surreptitiously winks at another player, trying to not let the Sheriff see him do so. When a person is winked at, he counts to ten, and then says in mock terror, and without giving away who the wolf is, “The wolf huffed and puffed and blew my house down!” The Big Bad Wolf must “blow down the houses” of X number of the Little Pigs before the Sheriff catches him, and the Sheriff can only make Y guesses as to who The Big Bad Wolf is lest he lose the game. In other words, the game is actually between the Sheriff and The Big Bad Wolf. Let the values of X and Y be determined by your family size, the mental ages of the players, etc.

If this is something your family plays often, you can make cards that can be drawn, with one reading “Sheriff,” one reading “The Big Bad Wolf,” and the others reading “Little Pig.” Whoever draws the Sheriff card must announce himself; the others don’t.

### **Breakfast Combo**

The leader mentally picks an object which the others have to identify. Their coming to identify “It’s” object is done by their naming other objects and hearing “It” tell them if it is like his object or not. After the first guess, “It” lets the others know whether it is more, much more, less, or much less like other guesses they’ve made by saying things like, “It’s more like X than anything you’ve guessed so far” or “It’s more like Y than X, but like Z is the closest guess yet.”

Ex. “It” picks “oatmeal” as his object. The others guess “frying pan.” “It” says “no.” Then the other players guess “shampoo.” “It” then can say “It’s more like shampoo than a frying pan.” Players then guess “soap.” “It” then would likely say “It’s more like shampoo than soap.” At this point, the players will likely guess that “It” is thinking of something that is liquidy, so they might guess “water.” “It” then has to decide whether oatmeal is more like shampoo than water, and let them know. He decides that both water and oatmeal are consumable, so chooses water. Players then might guess “soup,” etc.

### **Twenty Questions**

In this game, the leader thinks of something, and the others have to figure out what it is by asking yes or no questions. The first questions are typically to discern whether the object chosen is animal, vegetable, or mineral. If, after twenty questions have been asked, the object hasn’t been figured out, everyone loses.

## **Botticelli**

“It” thinks of a well-known person and tells the others the initials of that person. The goal of the game is for the other players to guess the person “It” is thinking of. As they’re guessing, players try to win the right to ask yes or no questions about “It’s” person to narrow down the possibilities. Players win the right to ask these questions by stumping “It,” which can be done by asking leading questions about the initials.

Ex. “It” chooses Jimmy Carter and announces the initials “J C”.

Player 2, thinking of “Johnny Cash,” might ask “It”, “Is your person a singer?”

Now “It” has to try to think of a singer with the same initials. If he responds "No, my person is not Johnny Cash or some other singer with the initials “J C,” then he has not been stumped, and the players must try again. If “It” can’t think of a singer with those initials, then the player who stumped him can ask a yes or no question about the person “It” has chosen (e.g., “Is it male or female?” “Is he alive or dead?”, etc.)

The "stumping questions" the players ask cannot be repeated, but similar questions can be asked that are either more or less specific. For example, after the singer question above was asked, another player could try the question "Is your person a country singer?" or "Is your person a female singer?" to try to stump “It” with “June Carter”.

The game can be won either by asking “It” either directly or indirectly about his chosen person. For example, enough information, has been given, the players might suspect that the person is Jimmy Carter. They could directly ask “It”, "Is your person Jimmy Carter," which would let them win, or they could ask "Is your person a former president?" In the second case, that question would be enough to win, since there are no other former presidents with initials JC, so “It” would have to answer "Yes, my person is Jimmy Carter." However, if the question were more general, “It” could have a chance to save himself. So if the question were "Is your person involved in politics," “It” could respond, "No my person isn't James Carville."

The strategy is for “It” to pick a name that has common initials. Even better if somebody in the same or a similar field has the same initials. Andrew Jackson would be a good one, because it gives you an out for the president question with "Andrew Johnson." The strategy for the players who are not “It” is figuring out how to best phrase their stumping questions so as not to reveal the person they have in mind. They want to make the questions broad enough that they won't give clues to “It,” but specific enough that “It” won't be able to answer with somebody else in the same field. Even if the other players are thinking of somebody specific, “It” can respond with any person with the correct initials if it answers the question.

Variation: This game is much easier to play if only one initial is chosen (for the person’s last name) instead of two! Another variation is to play using one letter and choosing objects instead of people.

Variation: To help young kids more fully join in, use rhyming words. The leader picks a word – e.g., “cat” – and says something like, “I’m thinking of a word that rhymes with a mouse-like animal that flies (bat), but you don’t wear on your head (hat).” Someone might guess, “Is it a way of making lace (tat)”? , is answered, and play proceeds until someone guesses the right word.

## **Ghost**

Players take turns adding letters to a growing word fragment, trying not to be the one to complete a valid word. If a player completes a word, he loses that round of the game and starts a new round. Each fragment must be the beginning of an actual word.



Usually some minimum is set on the length of a word that counts, said limit being set by the age of those playing, as a general rule (i.e., shorter words for young people who are new to reading).

The player whose turn it is may challenge the previous player to prove that the current fragment is actually the beginning of some word. If the challenged player can name such a word, the challenger loses the round; otherwise the challenged player loses. Bluffing is fine, of course – but a player can always be challenged!

The player selecting the starting letter for the first round is chosen at random. In subsequent rounds, the player to the immediate left of the previous round's loser selects the starting letter for that round. A variation of the game is to make it so the word fragment isn't necessarily at the beginning of the word, but that it's included in the word in that same order. Score is kept by the loser getting a letter, starting with "G," then "H," and so forth until the word "Ghost" is spelled out, at which point, that player is out of the game.

Ex. Leader, thinking of the word "Comb" in a game with a 4-letter word limit, says "C." The next player, thinking of the word "Crab," says "R." The third player, thinking of the word "Crow," says "O." The fourth player, unable to think of a letter, loses that round and earns a "G."

### **Opera**

Everyone must sing anything he'd otherwise say during the course of normal conversation – preferably in the style of Italian or German opera.

### **Guess the Questions**

Give the players an answer, such as "eight." Then have them come up with questions for which the answer is "eight" – e.g., "how many legs does a spider have?", "what are 2X4?", "how many years can a president serve if elected twice?", etc.

### **Transformation**

Players move from one word to another word of equal length by changing one letter at a time and by making only real words at each step. As an example, they could be asked to move from SOAP to BATH:

SOAP  
SOAK  
SOCK  
SACK  
BACK  
PACK  
PATH  
BATH

If played competitively, the player to find the shortest route in the fastest time is the winner. This can be played as a family, with no winners and losers, with everyone working toward the same goal of changing the first word into the second.

### **Talk-A-Thon**

The leader names an object, and the person who's "It" for that round must talk about that object non-stop and without repetition of any major word (i.e., not "a," "the," "an," and conjugations of "to be" or "to have," etc.) for a certain amount of time, say one or two minutes (less time for younger family members). The talk doesn't have to make sense, but it must be grammatically correct, and, of course, the funnier the better.

### **Road Toad**

A rhyming game in which one player comes up with a pair of rhyming words and then provides a second pair of unrhymed words (or, at least not necessarily rhymed) as the clue.

For example, the leader chooses "Road Toad" as the rhyming phrase for the others to guess. He gives the clue "street frog."

### **One, Two, Three**

This game has to be played in twos, so two family members can play one round, with the next two playing the next, etc. Each of the two players playing a given round choose a word, and at the count of three, say it out loud together (very important!). Then, as quickly as possible, each has to think of a new word or phrase that somehow relates to both of the words just spoken and then announce those two new words together at the count of three. This is repeated until each player says the same word at the same time.

Ex. At the count of three, at the exact same time, player one says "plant" while player two says "red."

Then, at the count of three, at the exact same time, trying to come up with a word that applies to both "plant" and "red," player one says "tulip" while player two says "rose."

Then, at the count of three, at the exact same time, trying to come up with a word that applies to both "tulip" and "rose," player one says "flower" while player two also says "flower." Round over! And the next two around the table play a round.

### **Button, Button, Who's Got the Button?**

You'll need a button or some other tiny trinket for this one. Have everyone close their eyes and put their hands together and out toward the center of the table with palms up. With the button in your hand, touch each person's hands – but drop the button in to only one person's hand (or keep it yourself!). The person with the button should then make a fist around the button to hide it. Tell everyone to keep their eyes closed and to put their hands on their laps. This is when the person with the button hides it under his leg. Then everyone opens their eyes, and the game is to find out who has the button.

Play goes around the table, with each person in turn asking, "Button, button, who's got the button?," watching others' faces for signs of button possession and trickery, and then making a guess if he thinks he knows. It can be played such that if someone

guesses incorrectly, he's out of the game. Or it can be played so that anyone can guess on his turn with no negative consequences for being wrong. Whoever finally guesses who has the button gets to hide the button in another's hands on the next round.

Variation: While one person leaves the room, have everyone else sit in a circle and pass around the button. The person who'd left the room then knocks three times on the door before re-entering. Upon hearing the knocks, the person who has the button has to keep it hidden. After the three knocks, the person who'd left re-enters the room and has three chances to guess who has the button. If guessed correctly, another person becomes the one to leave the room; if guessed incorrectly, the same person has to leave the room again for another round.

### **Two Truths and a Fib**

Have each person relate two true things about himself, and one fib, but not in that order. The goal is for the others to figure out which is the fib.

Variation: Instead of revealing something about oneself, players can relate two bizarre, "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" style facts and one bizarre fib.

### **Finders Keepers**

Hide a few trinkets in a room so that they're visible from the dinner table and challenge your kids to find them, from their seats. Trinkets could be assigned with different values if you are wanting to keep score and make things competitive.

### **The Great Silence**

The challenge is to mime and use body language to communicate throughout the entire meal (after Grace is prayed, of course). No words can be spoken, but conversation can most definitely be had – as long as verbal communication isn't used. How will your family respond, without words, to your asking how their day went? How would you ask that question? How can you even ask them to pass the peas, please? The only way to find out is to give it a try!

Variation: Instead of proscribing all use of verbal language, stick to questions and answers consisting of one word only.

### **I Spy With My Little Eye**

Have each person at the table take a turn picking out an object, visible from the dining room table. He'll then say, "I spy with my little eye something that is \_\_\_\_\_" and names the color of the object. An alternative way of going about this is to say, "Riddle-ee, riddle-ee-ree, I see some thing you don't see, and the color of it is \_\_\_\_\_." Everyone looks around the room and tries to guess which object "It" has in mind.

### **Emotions**

Have one person leave the table for a moment while the others choose an emotion (happy, sad, angry, surprised, nervous, excited, etc.) that will be the focus of the round (another option would be to have cards written out, each indicating one of the emotions

you'll be using, and then drawing a card and passing it around the table so everyone but "It" sees it). Whichever emotion is chosen, all players but "It" will be expressing it facially, by tone of voice, etc. The goal is for "It" to label the emotion that the others are expressing as they otherwise carry on as usual in terms of topics of conversation, etc.

Variation: Instead of choosing an emotion, the people at the table choose an adverb (words that describe verbs, typically ending in -ly, such as 'angrily,' "stealthily," "hurriedly," etc.). When "It" returns, he calls on one person at a time to perform an action or speak a sentence in the manner of the adverb chosen.

### **Alliteration**

Pick a letter at random and let each person take turns coming up with a different word beginning with that letter. The game ends when a word is repeated. To make things more challenging, include a category – for ex, "Foods", so that each word must begin with the chosen letter and also belong to the chosen category

### **Analogies**

One player thinks of a person known to all (famous or not). The others are to guess the identity of that person by asking questions the answers to which describe the person by analogy. For ex., the players ask, "What food is this person?" And the answer might be "A cabbage." Other questions might be, "What religion is this person?", "What vehicle is this person?", "What sort of building is this person?", etc. Remember that the answers to these questions aren't (necessarily) what that person *LIKES*, but what that person *IS LIKE* (e.g., the person's favorite food might be fajitas, but the person is more like a candy bar by virtue of his sweetness).

Ex. "It" has Henry VIII in mind:

What does this person taste like?: a turkey leg

What does this person sound like?: a lute

What does this person smell like?: perfume

What does this person feel like?: ermine

What does this person look like?: a pig

What color is this person?: gold

What flower is this person?: a rose

What animal is this person?: a stag

### **I Went on a Picnic**

Players take turns coming up with things they "took on their picnic" -- but each object has to begin with a consecutive letter of the alphabet, and each player has to list all of the answers that came before. Ex.: First player says, "I went on a picnic and I took an apple." Second player says, "I went on a picnic and I took an apple and a ball." The third player might say, "I went on a picnic and I took an apple, a ball, and a cat," etc.

Variation: Instead of "I went on a picnic and I took \_\_\_\_\_", start with "I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_", with each family member naming something he is grateful for in alphabetical order.

Variation: The form “I’m going to (place beginning with the letter) and am taking my (adjective beginning with the letter) (noun beginning with the letter)” – e.g., “I’m going to the Antilles and am taking my adorable apple.” You could add a name to it all, as well: “I’m Amy, and I’m going to the Antilles and am taking my adorable apple.”

### **Six Degrees of Separation**

Have two people simultaneously name two actors (or have actors’ names written down on cards and have folks draw two). The goal is to find the shortest route of links between the two (e.g., Star 1 was in a movie with X, and X was in a movie with Y, and Y was in a movie with Star 2”).

Variation: Instead of trying to connect two random stars, the leader can name an actor or actress. The others have to name a movie that person was in along with another person who played in that movie. Then they have to name a different movie that second person played in, after which they have to name someone else who was in that movie. And so on. Answers go back and forth between actor > movie > actor > movie, etc.

Ex. Clark Gable > Gone With the Wind > Vivien Leigh > Streetcar Named Desire > Marlon Brando > The Godfather > Al Pacino > Heat > Robert de Niro, etc.

### **Contact**

“It” chooses a word, the length of which depends on the level of education of the players. He then gives the first letter of the word chosen. The others think of words that start with that letter, and one will challenge “It”, asking him if the word is X, where X is a description of the category of the guess he has in mind. “It” must either reveal that it is in that category, or he must say it isn’t by saying “No, it’s not \_\_\_\_,” where he fills in the blank with a word that begins with his letter and fits X. At any time, someone else who thinks he knows the challenger’s word may yell out “Contact!”, and the person who challenged “It” and the person who yelled out “Contact!” have to the count of three to come up with a word begins with the letter he chose and that fits the category his challenger chose – and the words they choose must match. Meanwhile, “It” can also make a guess, and if he does before the challengers make theirs at the count of three, play resumes. If “It” doesn’t come up with a relevant guess, and if the challengers do match, “It” has to reveal the next letter of the original word he’d chosen; if they don’t match, players continue as they had in the beginning, challenging “it” by asking him if the word fits some sort of category.

Ex. “It” chooses “Dog,” and announced that his word begins with D.

Player 1, thinking of “doctor”: Is it something that relates to medicine?

It, trying to think of something, anything, that starts with his letter and is relates to medicine: No, it’s not diphenhydramine.

Player 5, thinking of day-lily: Is it a flower?

It: No, it’s not a daisy.

Player 3, thinking of “door”: is it something you can walk through?

It, stumped, unable to think of something that begins with a D and is something you walk through: I can't think of anything...

Player 2, thinking that Player 5 was thinking of "door": Contact!

Players 2 and 3 now have to shout out their words at the same time, at the count of three. If they don't match, play resumes; if they do match, "It" has to reveal the second letter of the word he'd chosen.

### **Find the Link**

Have two people (the two heads of the two teams if you're playing in teams) announce the names of people or things aloud at the same time. The goal is for people to find a link between the two people or things mentioned. Boundaries could be set so that the link must be an actual historical link, a link found in a movie, TV, art, etc. The best link earns a point for that person or team.

### **Random Letters**

Have two people yell out random letters (it might be wise to exclude the letters K, Q, X, Y, and Z). Then challenge everyone to come up with a person whose name begins with those letters (e.g., if they yell out "T" and "R," then "Theodore Roosevelt" might be a good answer). Make it more difficult by having them come up also with a person whose initials are in the reverse order, for ex., in addition to coming up with "Theodore Roosevelt," they'd have to come up with someone whose initials are R and T, in that order.

Variation: Instead of having them come up with a person, have them come up with a place or thing that contains both of those letters. For "J" and "C," "Jacksonville" could be an answer. To make things more difficult, challenge them to come up with a word that begins with one letter, and ends with the other.

### **Copycat**

Each person takes a turn being the leader for a few minutes. During a person's leadership, the others at the table have to mimic how that person sits, moves, talks, eats, etc. --- but all are forbidden to laugh. If the leader laughs, everyone else wins; if one of the followers laughs, the leader wins.

### **Guess the Word**

The leader thinks of a word, announces it's starting letter, and gives clues pertaining to the guesses made about the word he's thinking of. For young people, using only three or four letter words would likely help them better enjoy it.

Ex. Leader, thinking of the word "Cat" says "C."

Player 1: Is it "clap"?

Leader: No, but the A is right, but in the wrong position.

Player 2: Is it "candy?"

Leader: No, but the A is in the right position.

Player 3: Is it “cap”?

Leader: No, but the A is in the right position.

Player 4: Is it “cart”?

Leader: No, but C and A are in the right positions. T is right, but in the wrong position.

Player 5: Is it “cat”?

Leader: Yes!

### **Number Replacement**

Start counting, with the leader beginning with “1,” the second saying “2,” the third saying “3,” etc. – but with each person replacing any odd (or even) number with an animal sound, a clap, or whatever you choose. Or, instead of replacing odd or even numbers, replace multiples of 3 or 5 or 7 or what have you, depending on the math skills of the group.

### **Thumper**

Have each person take a turn saying something nice about each person at the table, in order of how they’re seated.

### **Categories**

Name five objects that fit under a single category. Challenge your kids to figure out their commonality. E.g., you might say, “Apple, Pear, Banana, Cherries, Peaches.” The category would be “Fruit.” The categories can be more elusive as well, for ex. “lamp, book, green rug, slippers, phone charger” being “things in my bedroom.”

Variation: ‘One of these things is not like the other’: Name 5 things with only four of them matching, and one being the odd one out. Ask your children to figure out which one doesn’t fit. E.g., You might say “Apple, Pear, Tire, Cherries, Peaches.” The answer would be “Tire.”

### **Encore**

Someone names an everyday word – “love,” “red,” “boys,” etc. The challenge is for each person to take a turn and name a song with that word either in its title or lyrics, whichever you choose.

### **Code Word**

When each person comes to the table, whisper to him a word and a physical gesture on it (e.g., "Baby" and "Scratch your nose"). Each time each player hears his code word during dinnery, he performs the gesture. The goal is to discover everyone’s code words

by watching carefully while interacting. If you think you know someone's code word, ask him. Once someone's code word is guessed correctly, he's out of the game. The last person to have his code word guessed correctly is the winner.

### **One Thing To Another**

This has to be played either by two players at a time, or by having one person – “It” -- leave the table for a moment while the others collectively decide on an object. Henceforth, the “non-It” player(s) will be referred to as the Guessers.

The Guessers – whether a single player or a team -- chooses a tangiblen object. Again, if the “non-It” players act as a team,” they make their decision while “It” is away from the table and outside of hearing distance.

“It” does the same, choosing a tangible object. The Guesser(s) name(s) their object out loud. “It” has to try to get the Guesser(s) to name It’s object by describing that object in terms that are relevant to the Guesser(s) object. The point is to find the similarities between the two objects.

Ex. The Guesser(s) think(s) of the word "house." “It” thinks of the word "cigarette.” “It” tries to get the Guesser(s) to guess the word "cigarette" by describing a house in a way that could also be used to describe a cigarette. For ex., he might say, "I'm a house in a neighborhood with 19 other houses [there are 20 cigarettes in a pack]. I am white with a brown roof, and smoke comes out of my chimney."

Variation for more than two people (called "What is My Thought Like?" in a Victorian book): Everyone thinks of something (an object, say). The leader of the round announces his word, and then each of the players, in turn, has to state how what their object is in some way similar to the object the leader chose. Ex., the leader chooses "Rose" and the first player chooses "Child." The first player might say "Both are soft and sweet."

### **Random Associations**

Two people each choose one word. Then the challenge is to find some relationship between those words. For ex., Person 1 chooses “flower,” and Person 2 chooses “cup.” One association could be that a cup can be used as a vase. Sometimes the association might take some work to discover, for ex., Person 1 might choose “pumpkin” and person 2 chooses “pen.” “A pen was used by the Brothers Grimm to write down their fairy tales. One fairy tale is “Cinderella,” who had a pumpkin coach.” Etc.

### **Thank God You’re Here!**

One person should leave the dinner table for a moment while the remaining players pick a scene -- present day, historical, from a movie, etc. -- and the characters they’ll play in the scene. They also assign a scenario. Then they assign a role to the person who’d left the room. The person who’d left the room now returns and walks in to hear, “Thank God you’re here!”, and to see the other players in their roles, interacting with each other and with him, in character. He has to figure out where he is and who he is and what’s going on.

Ex. All the players are in the movie “The Wizard of Oz.” One’s the Lion, another the Scarecrow, another Dorothy, another the Tin Man, another Glenda the Good, etc. The scenario is that Toto needs to visit a vet. They assign the role of Wizard to the person



who's left, invite him back to the table, and behave according to their characters and the scenario until "the Wizard" figures out where he is, who he is, and what's going on.

### **Telephone**

Have a player make up a random action-packed sentence with details and specific information (e.g., instead of including a bit about how "a horse galloped by the window," say "a white horse with bells around his neck galloped by the window and slipped on some ice."). Have the first player whisper it to the second, who whispers it to the third, and so on until all have heard the message. Have the final player recount what message he received -- and freak out about how much it's changed from the original.

Variation: Instead of using words, use silly faces. The leader hides his face except for showing it to the person sitting to his right or left, depending on whether you want the play to go clockwise or widdershins. He makes a silly face at that person, who then looks to the next player, hides his own face, and tries to duplicate the leader's expression. This goes around the table, with the last person making the silly face for all to see – as the leader does the same. Do they match up?

### **Would You Rather?**

Have each person pose a question in the form of "Would you rather X or Y," where both X and Y are either really good things – or really unsavory things. Ex. "Would you rather go to Paris or Rome?" or "Would you rather get sprayed by a skunk or spend the night with a bad headache?"

### **I Never**

Take turns with each player making a statement in the form of "I never \_\_\_\_\_," where what he's never done is something that others at the table most likely have. Every time anyone at the table has done the thing the person whose turn it is names, he raises a one finger (including the thumb). Once a person's raised five fingers, he's out of the game. Keep playing until there's one person left.

Ex. Player 1: I've never eaten lobster.

Players 2, 4, and 5 have, so they each raise a finger.

Player 2: I've never been on a roller coaster.

Players 1, 3, and 5 have, so they each raise a finger. And so on.

### **Fortunately, Unfortunately**

This game is played by each player, in turn, uttering either a fortunate or unfortunate statement, with the fortunate and unfortunate statements going back and forth, one for one. Game play might look something like:

Player 1: Fortunately, today will be sunny.

Player 2: Unfortunately, we all have to stay inside because a gorilla escaped from the zoo.

Player 3. Fortunately, I happen to have a can of Gorilla-Be-Gone.

Player 4: Unfortunately, this particular gorilla is immune to that stuff. Etc.

### **Mental Hide-and-Seek**

Whoever is “It” for the round mentally chooses a place to hide. This place can be the family home, Grandpa’s house, someplace from a movie or TV show all have seen (e.g., “inside the whale in “Pinocchio”), a foreign city, a famous landmark, etc. The others try to “find” the hider by asking questions, with the hider using the words and phrases such as “cold,” “cool,” “getting warmer,” “hot,” etc., to indicate how close the others are to finding him.

### **Criteria**

The leader chooses a category – e.g., things that are larger than a breadbox, things that are red, things you use in the bathroom, things spelled with double letters, etc. He then says, “I’m going on a trip and am taking X, Y, and Z,” where X, Y, and Z fit the criterion of the category he’s chosen. Each player in turn asks, “Can I take \_\_\_\_\_?” The leader says yes or no, depending on whether that object that person’s chosen fits the criterion. The goal is to figure out what the criterion is. A variation is to have each player ask about two different things – e.g., instead of a player asking, “Can I take \_\_\_\_\_?”, he asks “Can I take \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_?” The leader can exclude both, include both, or include one but not the other.

### **Proverbs -- or Movie, Song, Book, and TV Show Titles**

One person – “It” -- leaves the room and those who remain decide on a proverb (or title of a movie, song, book, or TV show). The person who went out comes back in and asks questions which the others answer with a sentence that uses the first word in the proverb or title. After asking a second question, the others answer with an answer using the second word. A third question is answered with a response that uses the third word in the proverb, movie title, etc. When the words of the proverb or title are used up, the person must guess or forfeit.

Ex. The team chooses the song title "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?"

“It” comes into the room and asks: "So what did you do today?"

First person answers: "What did I DO? I ate breakfast, went to the gym, and came home."

The second person is asked another question, such as, "What did you eat for breakfast?" which is answered with "Wouldn't YOU like to know?"

Third question: "What is your favorite hobby?" Answer: "If I told you, then you'd KNOW!"

Fourth question: "How do you celebrate your birthday?" Answer: "Like most people, I guess, but THE cake is the most important thing."

Fifth question: "What is the meaning of life?" Answer: "Jesus is the WAY, the Truth, and the Life."

and so on.

### **Be Another**

The leader secretly assigns roles to each of the players – but the roles are those of the others at the table. In other words, the youngest kid might be “Mom,” and the middle daughter might have to take on the role of the oldest sister, etc. Once everyone has a new character, they talk, eat, and otherwise express themselves as that person. The goal is to figure out who is “playing” whom. (If preparation is doable, writing everyone’s names onto slips of paper and having them draw their characters would allow everyone to be included as it’d obviate the need for a leader).

Variation: Assign roles that are historical or fictional characters. Or have each person come up with his own.

### **Two Letter Beginnings**

The leader chooses two letters, such as D and O. He then thinks of something that begins with those letters, say “Dog.” He then says, “D O and one other letter makes an animal.” The others guess what he’s thinking of. Whoever guesses it then takes those same two letters and makes a new word, say “Door.” He’ll say, “D O and two more letters make for something you walk through.” Etc.

### **Alphabetic Song, Movie, TV Show, Book Titles, People, or Other Categories**

Each person takes a turn naming a title in the chosen category. E.g., if “Song Titles” is chosen, “All You Need is Love” could be the first answer, followed by “Born Free,” followed by “Candle in the Wind,” etc. Other possible categories: fruits and vegetables; animals; cities, countries, states; girl names; boy names; vehicles; tools; flowers; animated characters; hobbies, etc.

Variation: List first and last names of real people that start with AA, then AB, then AC, etc. Ex. Alan Alda, Angela Bassett, Adam Corolla, etc. To play more, move to the next letter in first position: BA, BB, BC (e.g., Bryan Adams, Barbara Billingsly, Bill Clinton, etc.)

### **Powers of Observation**

Without warning, have your kids close their eyes and ask if they remember what their other siblings or you and your spouse are wearing, or what color the plates are, or where a certain dish is on the table, etc.

Variation: One player – “It” -- closes his eyes, and as he does, the others remove one object each from the table (alternatively, just the leader can remove one single object from the table). “It” then opens his eyes and tries to figure out what’s different.

Variation: Someone can leave the table, change something about himself, and return, challenging the others to notice what’s different.

Variation: Instead of one person closing his eyes, everyone but one person – “It” -- closes their eyes. Then “It” removes one object from the table, everyone else opens their eyes, and whoever first figures out what’s missing wins.

### **Four-Word Sentences**

Have someone name a 4-letter word. Then see who can come up with the best 4-word sentences in which each word of the sentence begins with the letters of the 4-letter word, in order.

Ex. the 4-letter word is IDEA

Possible sentences: I Danced Eagerly Away; I Don't Eat Apples; I'm Danged Effervescent, Anne

This could easily be varied to use longer words.

### **Psychiatrist**

One player (the psychiatrist) leaves the room. The remaining players decide on some ailment or strange thing they have in common, or some rule they'll operate under. The psychiatrist re-enters the room, asks questions randomly of the players – one at a time, in no certain order -- with the goal of figuring out what is wrong with them or what the rule is. Things that could be wrong with them could be "They are all under the belief that they are WWI soldiers" or "They think they are Napoleon" or "They believe today is Christmas." Rules they could be operating under could be that each answers as the person to their right, or each time the psychiatrist uses the word "the," they all cough, etc. The psychiatrist obviously can't ask a question such as "What's wrong with you guys?", but just asks random questions with the goal of gathering information – e.g., "What is your favorite holiday?" or "What is the last book you read?"

If one of the "patients" answers in a manner that is not consistent with the collective problem they're suffering from, or the rule they're operating under, he must be called out so the psychiatrist has a chance. A simple "Nah, that's not a good answer" will suffice.

### **Kids vs. Parents**

Divide into two teams – kids vs. parents. One of the parents starts the game by asking the kids questions about their parents' lives (e.g., "Do you know what my first pet was?" or "Do you know your Mom's favorite song?", etc.). The kids respond, and then each child asks his parents, as a team, a question about himself (e.g., "Do you know my favorite teacher's name?" or "Do you know my favorite book?"). Questions are asked in turn by teams, but when the children ask questions of the parents about themselves, each takes a turn for a given round (i.e., two questions are asked each round, one by the parents, and the other by one of the children. The next round, the parents ask a question, and a different child asks a question of the parents, etc.). Whichever team answers the most questions correctly wins.

### **Act Natural**

This one actually does require a tiny bit of preparation. Write silly but not "too silly" sentences and place one under each person's plate. When everyone sits down, each reads his sentence, keeping it secret from the others. At some point during the course of dinner, he must speak his sentence – slipping it naturally into the conversation, without letting on that he is speaking his secret

sentence. Others have to try to detect when another is speaking his secret sentence – but if a person makes a wrong guess, he is out. Whoever speaks his secret sentence without getting called out for it wins. If the head of the family thinks that someone is randomly speaking silly sentences in order to get someone to accuse that person of speaking his secret sentence, he can call that person out so that he loses the game as well. Conversation should flow naturally, aside from the secret sentence, so that rule keeps things honest and more challenging.

### **Straight Face**

Designate one person to keep a poker face. Then have everyone at the table do what they can to make that person laugh. A variation is to give Poker Face a phrase with which to answer any question put to him – for ex., “my left foot.” He is then asked silly questions, which he must respond to by the phrase “my left foot,” and not laugh.

### **What’s My Line?**

In turns, each player chooses an occupation (e.g., priest, policeman, teacher, etc.). The other players, taking turns, ask yes or no questions in order to determine what that occupation is.

### **Rename**

Rename the titles of movies, books, TV shows, or songs by using words that are similar in meaning to replace the actual words in the titles. For ex., “Frozen” could become “Icy,” and “The Wizard of Oz” could become “The Magician of Australia,” etc.

### **Password**

You’ll need a leader-moderator and two teams of two people each. During each round, one member of each team will be the Giver; the other will be the Receiver. Whisper a word to the Giver of each team, or have prepared two word lists – List A and List B – and hand them out so that each team has one copy of both lists. The Giver has to get the Receiver to guess the words given to him by the moderator or by the list being used. He gives clues by giving the Receiver one-word clues. After one clue is given and one guess is made by a team, the second team’s Giver tries to get his Receiver to guess the same word by giving him another one-word clue. Play goes on around the table. When a Receiver on a team finally guesses his Giver’s word, that team wins that round. Play continues until a set number of points have been reached (for ex., the first team whose Receiver guesses 7 words wins that round). On the next round, Givers and Receivers switch roles. The words can’t be proper names.

Variation: Each round’s words can work together to describe something else, such as a movie, place, city, etc. (proper names are OK here). For ex., the first round’s word lists include: Time, Round, Face, Numbers, Bell, Old, and Fog, all of which describe Big Ben. While playing the round, the Receiver tries to also think of what all the word clues together are describing. The first Receiver who, on his turn, answers “Big Ben” correctly gets an additional point.

### **Pass the Sign**

Each person chooses a personal gesture, such as touching his nose, tugging one ear, adjusting his glasses, etc. One person is chosen to be “It,” and while “It” has his eyes closed, the leader makes his personal gesture to someone else at the table, passing his personal gesture on. He passes on his personal gesture by making eye contact with the person he wants to pass his gesture on to, making that other person’s gesture to make that person sure he’s passing the gesture on to that person, and then making his own personal gesture. The person to whom he passes on his gesture recognizes that he’s having a gesture passed on to him by making his own sign. “It” now opens his eyes, and the person who’s just received the gesture from the leader passes the leader’s sign on to someone else per the above procedure. “It” has to figure out what the leader’s gesture is.

### **The Manners Game**

Each person at the table – adults included -- should be given three markers – perhaps alike coins, decorated popsicle sticks just for family dinners, sugar packets, etc. Whenever anyone breaches etiquette, whoever catches the culprit gets to take one of the rule-breaker’s markers. Whoever has the most markers at the end of the meal wins, and whoever has the least loses. Make sure that your kids know that this game is for family only and that they’re not to correct others’ manners, especially adults, anywhere else.

### **Movie Title Mash-Up**

Think of two movie titles that have word in common, then mash together their plots in order to get the other person/people to guess the two titles -- and propose a hopefully clever blended title.

Ex. Player 1 thinks of "Gone With the Wind" and "Gone Girl." He tells the other player a mash-up of their plots: “A beautiful southern belle fakes her own murder.” Player 2 tries to come up with the names of each movie Player 1 is thinking of, and then proposes a blended title, such as "Gone with the Girl."

### **Roleplay**

Pretend that you are all strangers. Now “meet for the first time.” Talk with each other as if you’d never met before and know nothing about each other. This could not only be fun and possibly help you learn things about each other, but could help you hone your children’s conversational and social skills, teach them how to talk to people they’d never met before, to keep conversations flowing, to be polite, etc. With older children, you could roleplay by taking on the role of “that kid” who applies peer pressure in order to get your child to do something he doesn’t want to do, or the role of someone who has no clue about Christian morality and how to deal with that person in a Christ-like way that also keeps your child safe, etc. Dealing with your taking on the roles of bully, ominous stranger, someone who’s doing something dangerous to himself – all sorts of various personae – can help your kid navigate life, especially if you switch those roles so you can demonstrate to your child what to do – and not to do.

### **Charades**

“It” decides on a person, book title, song title, a TV Show, or movie title and has to get the others to guess what he’s chosen through the use of gesture alone. First he signifies whether it’s a person by touching his chest, or a book title by shaping his hands into the form of a book, or a song title by putting his hand on his mouth and moving it away, or a TV show by drawing a rectangle in the air representing the shape of a TV, or a movie title by making the gesture of using an old-fashioned movie camera (left hand at an eye, with right hand next to it moving in a small circle away from and back toward the face). Then he’ll let others know how

many words are in the name or title by holding up the relevant number of fingers. Then he'll focus on a given word of the title. If he starts with the second word, for ex., he'll hold up two digits to signify that. He'll then hold up the relevant number of fingers to indicate how many syllables that word has. If he wants to further break the word down into syllables in order to give clues that pertain to those syllables, he'll signify what syllable he's describing by placing against his forearm the number of fingers indicating the syllable.

The voice can't be used; gestures only! "Rhymes with" is indicated by tugging the ear lobe. Articles (A, An, and The) are indicated by holding up the fingers very close together to indicate "tiny word." To shorten a word, one makes a chopping motion with the hand, and to elongate a word, the fingers are put together and drawn apart. This game can be played in teams for points, or just for fun by each person taking a turn giving clues.

### **Japanese Movie Foley Artist**

Have ready a box of things that make noise (things to blow, whistle, bang, smash together, tear apart, rip, etc.). Turn on a short film, turn off the volume, and have at it replacing dialogue and sound effects.

### **Chasing Accents**

One person starts speaking with everyone else while using a recognizable accent or in a given character's voice. The others have to talk with him using that same accent or type of character (or as a different character in the same movie or genre). At someone else's whim (or when a pre-set timer goes off), the accent/character changes, and someone else starts in with a new accent/character which everyone else follows.

### **Free Association**

One person says a word and, going clockwise, the next person says the first word that comes to his mind after hearing the word just said. Keeping a rhythm going is a definite plus, and is something (non-driving) players can do by clapping twice on their laps and then clapping their hands together once for a count of three (think of the rhythm of the Queen song "We Will Rock You"): players have to say their words on the count of three, when the rhythm-keepers' hands are clapped together.

### **Rhythm Machine**

One person starts clapping, banging on the table, snapping their fingers, etc., to keep a rhythm. The next person joins in, either adding to the rhythm or adding a melody line. The third person does the same. What do you end up with?

### **Family Members Guessing Game**

This one is for parents or grand-parents to lead; it has the goal of teaching the younger people about their elders: Select two older family members (e.g., Aunt Sue and Grandma). Ask questions like "Which one went to college – Aunt Sue or Grandma?" or "Which one knows how to play the piano – Aunt Sue or Grandma?"

### **Taboo**

Before dinner begins (or before a car trip), give each person three pennies. Then write down seven words that are forbidden to speak. They should be words that are hard to avoid (for ex., if you're eating pizza for dinner, forbid the words: pizza, pepperoni, slice, napkin, good, Italian, cheese). Each time a person uses a forbidden word, he gives up a penny. Whoever has the most pennies at the end of the game is the winner.

### **Would You Rather?**

The first person asks a question in the form of "would you rather X or Y?" – e.g., "Would you rather wrestle a pit bull or swim with sharks?" The game can be played such that he asks the person to his right, who answers and then asks his own question in that same form, or it can be played such that the question is asked and everyone answers as they please.

### **Never Have I Ever**

Everyone holds up one hand with all five fingers raised (alternatively, each person is given five pennies). The first person says "Never have I ever \_\_\_" and fills in the blank with something he's never done (for ex., "Never have I ever jumped out of an airplane."). Everyone else at the table who has done the thing the first person has never done puts one finger down (or gives up a penny). Play continues to the right until someone has all of their fingers down (or has lost all of their pennies). Adults play this game by having anyone who has to put a finger down (or lose a penny) take a drink each time.

### **Cat or Cow**

The leader calls out either "Cat!" or "Cow!" If he calls out "Cat!", everyone must say "meow!"; if he calls out "Cow!", everyone must say "moo!" He then randomly calls out either, going faster and faster until someone gets it wrong and mews when he should be mooing, or vice versa.

### **Quotations**

This game comes from Maria von Trapp. To play, divide into two teams that have the same number of people. Think of a quotation or sentence made of the same number of words as there are players on each team. Write down the quotation so that one word of the quotation goes onto a single piece of paper. Jumble them up. Do this again so you have the quotation written out across two stacks of paper. Now pin the words of one stack onto the backs of the first team, and do the same with the second stack for the second team. The teams, without speaking, have to arrange themselves in the right order by reading only the backs of the other players on their team.

### **Treasure Hunt**



Everyone gets a list of objects that have been hidden in a room (or predefined set of rooms) – e.g., a cherry, an olive, bar of soap, egg, toothbrush, clothes pin, stamp, onion, etc. Set a time limit (say, 20 minutes) and have each write person quietly write down where the objects are after they've found them. Whoever finds the most, wins.

### **Smiling Contest**

Divide into two teams, nominate two judges (one for each team), and have handy two tape measures and pencil and paper. One at a time, a player smiles as widely as he can, and the judge for his team measures his smile and writes down its width. The length of the smiles are added up, and the team with the biggest smiles wins.

### **Situational Awareness Exercises**

These are things that could help your kids in terms of safety. Being aware of one's surroundings is very important! To help them gain greater awareness of what's happening around them, try these games:

- Put 24 or so everyday objects on a tray, have them look at what they see for a minute or so, cover the tray, and have them write or recount the items they saw. Play this same game, but blindfold the kids and have them identify the objects by feel.
- Randomly throughout the day, ask your kids questions about what they see or what they just saw in a place they've left. For ex., while standing in line at the grocery, have them close their eyes and tell you how many people were in line with you, what the person just ahead is wearing, what the cashier looks like, etc. When driving down the road, ask them about a bridge or building you'd just passed, etc.
- Escape routes: When entering a new place, ask your kids where the exits are, where to sit to have the most comprehensive view of the room, if there are any potential dangers they see, what to do if that danger were to happen, etc.
- While hidden from sight, use objects that make sounds and have them identify those sounds. For ex., cut a piece of paper, open a can of tuna, light a match, etc.
- Arrange an event to happen in front of them, and then ask them questions as if they are witnesses to a crime.
- Increase your kids' observational skills by turning any outing into a scavenger hunt. Instead of physically gathering objects, they simply have to see them and write them down. For ex., while walking through the woods, have them look for a bird's nest, a squirrel's nest, poison ivy, a maple leaf, animal scat, etc. When walking down a street, have them look for a red shirt, a sign with the name of a day of the week on it, a soda can, etc.
- When out in public, have the kids observe people – what they're wearing, doing, saying, how they're walking, sitting, etc., and use reason to extrapolate about them, as Sherlock Holmes would do.
- During dinner, have your children or friends shut their eyes while you remove a few objects from the table. When they open their eyes again, will they know what's missing?

### **Food Play**

- When eating something like mashed potatoes, challenge your kids to make the best "sculpture" using their cutlery only (no hands!).

- For children just learning their letters, have them make letters, on their plates, out of diced vegetables.
- Challenge your kids to come up with a sentence consisting of words that start with the letters that begin the words for the foods making up that night's dinner. E.g., if you're eating bread, steak, potatoes, and asparagus, "Barbara Sang Positively Awfully" could be a sentence that fits. Or challenge your kids to name animals, countries, cities, or other things of a category you think of, that begin with those letters.
- Ask your kids where the foods they're eating came from. "The store" isn't what we're after; the goal is to get them to think of how God created such foods, and how man has had to work and cooperate with other men to get those foods onto your dinner table – e.g., how man has cultivated those foods, how the various foods are grown and harvested, how they're packaged, how they end up at the stores, how Mom and Dad have to work in order to get money to pay for the foods, how someone has to go to the store to buy them, how someone has to spend time in the kitchen preparing it all, etc. Having pictures of the fruits and vegetables in their natural states, in their gardens and orchards, would be a lovely thing to show them, as would learning about and teaching your kids the history of the foods, how they're viewed in different cultures, etc.
- Flour Tower: Pack flour into a medium sized glass, put a plate over the opening, and flip so that the flour maintains its shape on the plate. On top of the flour tower, place a small, lightweight object, such as a blueberry. Hand each player a butterknife and challenge them to remove a bit of the flour without making the tower collapse, causing the object you've placed on top to fall.
- Grab a blanket, have each person grab his dinner plate, and go outside to have an impromptu picnic – an especially good thing if you build a quick bonfire to eat around.
- Make dinner special by having special lighting, candles, music, and all that good stuff. Each person at the table could have a turn choosing the music for the evening. Choose a kid to decorate the table, letting a different kid decorate the next night, and so on.
- Exploring Herbs and Spices: This is a two-day game, with the first day being a teaching day, and the second day being the game day. During the first dinner, bring a selection of spices and herbs, in their jars, to the table. Have your kids smell, taste, and look at them while you teach them their names and what those flavors are typically used for. At the next dinner, keeping the labels hidden (or taking some out of the bottles and putting them on plates), have your children do the same and see if they can remember the names of the herbs and spices you'd chosen. If you're a good cook with lots of spices, you could play this game a few times using different spices – or sneaking in some of the ones you've already used and seeing if the kids catch on and remember them.
- Name That Food: Have the little ones close their eyes. Then have them smell one of the items on their plate (help them with this, putting some on a fork or spoon and lifting it to their nose). See if they can identify it. Then have them taste the food and see if they can identify it. Does their identification of the food change between the smelling and the tasting?

### **Things to do in Cars**

A few ways to help pass the time in cars in addition to most of the games listed above:

- Challenge your kids to wave at people and have a contest to see who can get the most people to wave back. Then, of course, there's the old pastime of getting drivers of the big rigs to blow their horns for you by making the proper motion (arm out, elbow bent as if you're showing off your biceps, and making a downward tugging motion with the arm in that position).

- Travelling Alphabet Game I: Challenge everyone to watch out the windows and find an object that begins with each letter of the alphabet, in order (apple orchard, barn, cat, Dodge car, etc.). Feel free to omit problem letters such as K, Q, X, Y, and Z. You can make it more challenging by requiring them to find objects that have two instances of each letter.
- Travelling Alphabet Game II: Another way to play the Alphabet Game is to search for words on signs, billboards, words on trucks, art on vans, etc., that begin with each letter of the alphabet, in order – license plates excluded.
- Numbers Game: Instead of looking for letters, look for the numbers 1-25. Once you're into double digit numbers, you have to find those numbers right next to each other – e.g., when looking for 12, you can't find a 1 and a 2 separately; you must find 12 so that the digits 1 and 2 are together, including, say, as in the number 5126.
- Sing! Teach your kids old songs, especially those silly ones, like "The Three Little Fishes," "Mairzy Doats," or "Abbadabba Honeymoon," etc. If your group has talent, harmony makes everything all that much more fun!
- Counting Volkswagens: An old game which some people play by punching the person sitting next to them when they see a VW Bug, hence the name "Punch-Buggy" or "Slug Bug." My family plays the gentler version, with no punching. And we give double points (a "twofer") when someone spots an old-style VW Bug.
- Trying to find as many out-of-state license plates as one can, or trying to find license plates from as many different states as one can, is a classic.
- For young kids learning their letters, challenging them to find each letter of the alphabet, in order, on license plates could keep them from becoming bored. This game can be done with road signs instead (or can include road signs along with license plates).
- See if your kids can make a word out of all the letters on a given license plate, or make up a sentence in which each word begins with one of the letters on a license plate.
- See who can most quickly add up any numbers on a license plate. For older players, change the operators and have them multiply.
- Challenge everyone to find a car of different colors, with the person who finds cars of all the colors winning. The colors would obviously have to be chosen beforehand – e.g., black, white, red, yellow, blue, silver, green, etc. You can play so that finding a care with a rare color, say pink, makes for an automatic win, or counts for more points, etc.
- Use your radio's "seek" button and hit it so it lands on a station playing music. Let it play music for 7 seconds, and play "Name That Tune" with the song you hear.
- When you come to a tunnel, everyone but the driver holds his breath and see who can last the longest.
- Have your kids look for a certain object or letter that is available – but not "too available" -- in whatever landscape you're driving through, and count them, seeing who counts the most of those objects or letters in a given period of time.
- Place bets as to how many of the next 20 cars will be of a given color or will have a license plate that ends in an odd or even number or will have a female driver or will have some other characteristic, etc.
- Pool: Have a pool as to how many minutes will have passed before someone in the car spots a certain object (e.g., a barn or stop sign) or type of person (a woman wearing red, or a policeman).
- Have everyone guess how far off in the distance something you're driving toward is, and then check your odometer when you reach it to see who came closest.
- With the radio off, each person chooses a word (articles – a, an, then – and other such words don't count). Then turn on a talk radio channel, and the person whose word is spoken first on the radio wins.
- Moo: The challenge is to be the first person to moo at a cow as you drive by one. Or neigh at a horse, bleat at a sheep, etc.

- Another cow game (though you can choose any sort of animal or object to play this) involves players calling out “Cows on my side!” when they see cows through the windows on their side of the car. They call out “Cows on your side!” if they see cows on the opposite side of the car – and if they call that out before the team that’s sitting on that side of the car yells out “Cars on my side!” for themselves, a point is scored by that team, and a point is lost by the team who failed to call the cow on their side. When driving by a cemetery, whoever calls out “Ghost cow!” first wins all the points scored by the other team.
- Remember those little paper “fortune tellers” young girls used to make in school? A road trip version can be played by each person, in turn, choosing a number between 5 and 10. If, for ex., she chooses 7, then the 7<sup>th</sup> car that passes you will be her future car. Then the next 7<sup>th</sup> car that drives by with a male who driver will be steered by a man who looks like her future husband. Then the next 7<sup>th</sup> car that drives by will have a license plate from the State she’ll live in. Then the next 7<sup>th</sup> car will reveal the age at which she’ll marry, as shown by the first two digits of that car’s license plate. Finally, the next 7<sup>th</sup> car’s license plate will reveal how many children she’ll have, given away by the last number shown on it. You can easily add other categories, using the car’s color, number of passengers, etc. to signify something.
- Guess what the lives of the drivers you pass are like – who they are, what they do for a living, what their hobbies are, whether they’re married or single, whether they’re conservative or liberal, etc.
- Listen to books on tapes and/or Old Time Radio shows. You can find tons of old radio shows at [archive.org](http://archive.org). Download, burn onto a CD, and visit yesteryear. When you’re done listening, talk about them. How did everyone mentally “see” the characters? What did the place they were in “look like” when they imagined it? Etc. I recommend the shows “Lights Out”; “CBS Radio Mystery Theater”; “Suspense”; “Box 13”; “Dragnet”; “The Inner Sanctum” “Family Theater”; “Lux Radio Theater”; “Molle Mystery Theater”; “The Price of Fear”; “The Unexpected”; and “Sears Radio Theater.” Of course, Orson Welles’s “War of the Worlds” is worth a listen, and your kids should know the back-story!
- While You Were Sleeping: If one of your passengers falls asleep, as soon as he wakes up, everyone else starts telling a tall tale – but not one that’s “too” tall, perhaps about something you’d seen while he was sleeping – something bizarre but believable. The goal is to fool the sleeper, get him to believe it.
- Throwing Out Fingers: Two kids at a time can play this one, one child being “Odds,” and the other being “Evens.” Each child, using one hand and at the count of three, throws out between 1 and 5 fingers. If they match, they both win; if the fingers add up to an even number, the “Evens” child wins, while if the number of fingers thrown add up to an odd number, the other child wins.
- Rock, Paper, Scissors: For two kids at a time. Each child throws out a hand gesture signifying “Rock” (a fist), “Paper” (a flattened palm), or “Scissors” (extension of the first and middle fingers). Rock “smashes” scissors, so beats scissors. Paper “covers” Rock, so beats Rock. Scissors “cuts” paper, so beats paper.
- Write letters, words, or draw pictures of objects on each other’s backs and see if the person being drawn on can recognize what’s being drawn.
- When you pass a billboard, see if anyone can name a song, book, or movie that contains one of the main words on the sign (articles – a, an, the – and similar words don’t count). Or, challenge people to make up a story or song that incorporates words on the billboards you pass.
- License Plate Poker: The numbers on a plate are what they are, and most of the letters mean nothing except for A=Ace; J=Jack= Q=Queen; and K=King. Order of play is determined in whatever manner you choose (e.g., clockwise, oldest to youngest, etc.), with the first player getting the “hand dealt to him” by the first car that passes your car. The second player gets the second car that passes, and so forth. Whoever has the highest hand, wins. Suits won’t play a role in License Plate Poker, so flushes won’t exist. And because As=Aces, 1s are simply 1s. Here’s the ranking of License Plate

Poker hands in descending order: Five of a Kind; Four of a King; Full House (a triplet and a pair); Straight; 3 of a kind; 2 pairs; 1 pair. You can play so that Dealer Plates or some other factor provide a wild card.

- When you come across interestingly named cities or signs pointing out curious things, Google it if someone in the car has a smart phone. And, by all means, stop to see those cool roadside attractions, to eat at the Mom & Pop places instead of the McDonalds, etc., as time allows!
- Travel Scavenger Hunt: Before you leave, print out lists of things for your kids to look for as you're travelling around. This is akin to Travel Bingo, but lasts longer and time is a less important factor.
- If your kids have smart phones or cameras, challenge them to a photography contest, asking them to take the best, most interesting pictures both inside and outside the car during stops. You can have a contest that lasts all-day, for the entire vacation, for X number of hours, etc.
- In the manner of a sports announcer, give a play-by-play account of what you're seeing on the road.
- Write down best guesses as to what the next relevant sign reveals about how many miles to your destination. Ex., if you're traveling from to Chicago from 433 miles away, write down everyone's guesses as to the number of miles away the next "X miles to Chicago" sign says. Keep playing until you get to where you're going, updating guesses as you go. As you come upon each sign, subtract to find out how off each guess is and assign a winner for the closest guess for each round. At the end of the trip, for each player add up the numbers indicating how off he was with each guess. The player with the lowest number wins the game overall. Ex. Round One: Player 1 guesses 420; Player 2 guesses 400; Player 3 guesses 390 for the first sign. The sign actually reads 415. Player 1 is 5 off; Player 2 is 15 off; Player 3 is 25 off. Player 1 wins that round. Round Two: Player 1 guesses 360; Player 2 guesses 375; Player 3 guesses 350. The sign actually reads 355. Player 1 is 5 off; Player 2 is 20 off. Player 3 is 5 off. Players 1 and 3 tie for that round. Play continues. At the end, add up 5 + 5, etc. for Player 1; 15 + 20, etc. for Player 2; 25 + 5 for Player 3, etc. Lowest score here wins.
- Spot the Lie: Turn on a talk radio channel and get everyone to point out the lies they hear. This can be played with advertising in addition to talk shows. This sort of game, which can be played while watching television as well, will help your children become more media-savvy.
- Travel Bingo: On the next pages are four cards you can use. If you laminate them and provide water-based markers, they can be wiped clean and re-used.

# TRAVEL BINGO

 <p>BENCH</p>	 <p>YARD STATUE</p>	 <p>CHURCH</p>	 <p>POTHOLE BIGGER AROUND THAN A BASKETBALL</p>	 <p>OUT-OF-STATE LICENSE PLATE</p>
<p>Y</p> <p>THE LETTER Y</p>	 <p>BICYCLE</p>	 <p>PUBLIC MAILBOX</p>	 <p>WEEPING WILLOW TREE</p>	 <p>VAN WITH ART ON THE SIDE</p>
 <p>BIRD ON A WIRE</p>	 <p>DOG</p>	<p><b>FREE</b></p>	 <p>RESTAURANT</p>	 <p>YIELD SIGN</p>
 <p>GAS STATION</p>	 <p>ROADKILL</p>	 <p>BILLBOARD</p>	 <p>TRAFFIC CONE</p>	 <p>VOLSWAGEN BEETLE</p>
 <p>NEWSPAPER STAND</p>	 <p>POLICE CAR</p>	 <p>FOOT BRIDGE</p>	 <p>SCHOOL</p>	 <p>FLAG</p>

IF THE DOG HAS HIS HEAD OUT THE WINDOW OF A CAR, TAKE A FREE SPOT  
IF THE VOLSWAGEN IS YELLOW, FORCE ANOTHER PLAYER TO UNCOVER A SPOT

# TRAVEL BINGO

 POLICE CAR	 DOG	 WEeping WILLOW TREE	 BILLBOARD	 PUBLIC MAILBOX
 FLAG	 VOLSWAGEN BEETLE	 AIRPLANE	 BIRD ON A WIRE	 CHURCH
 SCHOOL	 TRAFFIC CONE	<b>FREE</b>	 BUS	 BASEBALL CAP
 SODA CAN	 BLUE HOUSE	 YARD STATUES	 ROADKILL	<b>W</b> THE LETTER W
 VAN WITH ART ON THE SIDE	 BICYCLE	 OUT-OF-STATE LICENSE PLATE	 BUMPER STICKER	 NEWSPAPER STAND

IF YOU FIND A BLACK DOG, TAKE A FREE SPOT  
IF YOU FIND A CAR WITH MORE THAN 1 BUMPER STICKER, FORCE ANOTHER PLAYER TO UNCOVER A SPOT

# TRAVEL BINGO

 PUBLIC MAILBOX	 BASEBALL CAP	 NEWSPAPER STAND	 BOULDER LARGER THAN A BASKETBALL	 FLAG
 VOLSWAGEN BEETLE	 VAN WITH ART ON THE SIDE	 THE LETTER N	 YARD STATUES	 DOG
 WATER TOWER	 TRAFFIC CONE	 FREE	 BUS	 AIRPLANE
 BRICK HOUSE	 POLICE CAR	 BUMPER STICKER	 BIRD ON A WIRE	 OUT-OF-STATE LICENSE PLATE
 ROADKILL	 BIRDBATH	 BEER BOTTLE	 CONSTRUCTION SIGNS	 WEeping WILLOW TREE

IF THE DOG IS WITH ANOTHER DOG, TAKE A FREE SPOT  
IF THERE'S A BIRD AT THE BIRDBEEDER, FORCE ANOTHER PLAYER TO UNCOVER A SPOT

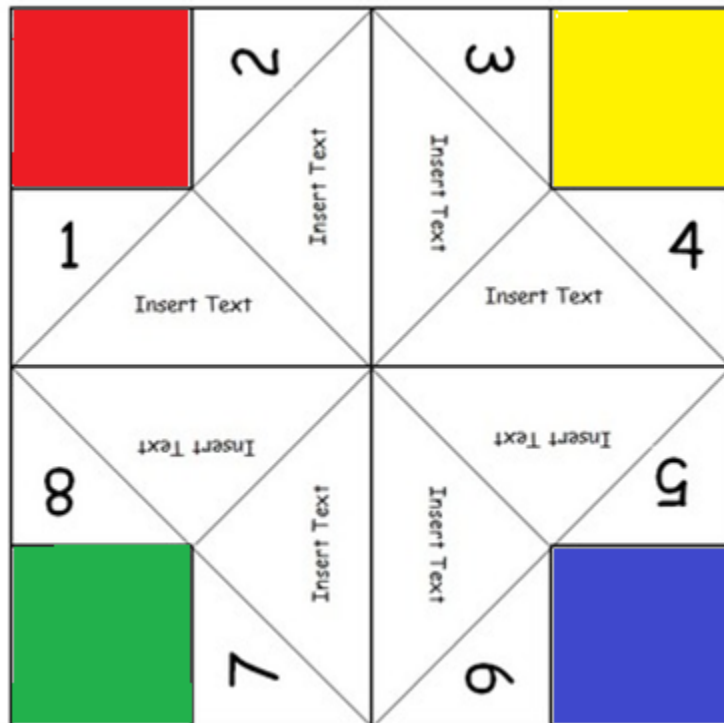
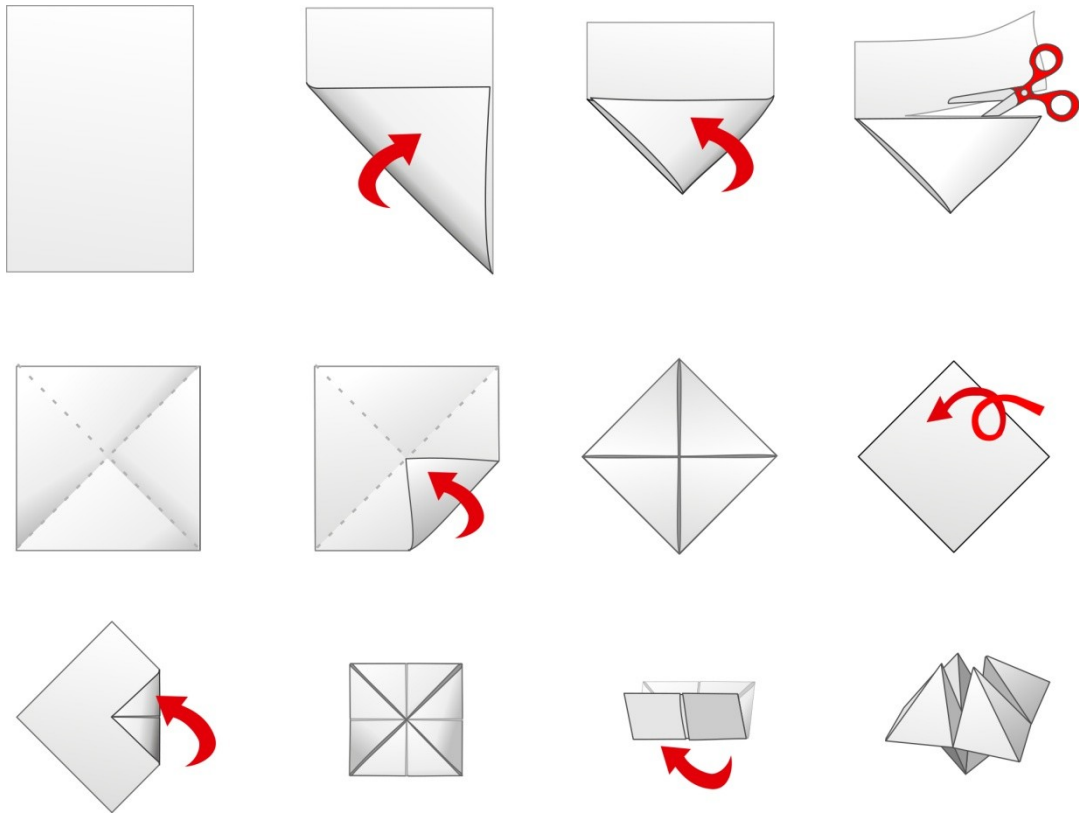


# TRAVEL BINGO

 PUBLIC MAILBOX	 CRANE	 BEER BOTTLE	 SOMEONE GETTING PULLED OVER	 VAN WITH ART ON THE SIDE
 HOUSE WITH A BLACK DOOR	 BASEBALL CAP	<b>F</b> THE LETTER F	 YARD STATUES	 DOG
 TAXI	 TRAFFIC CONE	<b>FREE</b>	 BUS	 AIRPLANE
 OUT-OF-STATE LICENSE PLATE	 NEWSPAPER STAND	 BUMPER STICKER	 BIRD ON A WIRE	 BIRDBATH
 BENCH	 STRIP MALL	 VOLSWAGEN BEETLE	 GRILL	 WEEPING WILLOW TREE

IF THE DOG IS BARKING, TAKE A FREE SPOT  
IF THE STRIP MALL HAS A BEAUTY SALON, FORCE ANOTHER PLAYER TO UNCOVER A SPOT

## How to Make Paper “Dreamcatcher” Fortune Tellers



Unfold and write in colors in the corners; Numbers along the edges; “fortunes” in the center square.  
Refold and use.