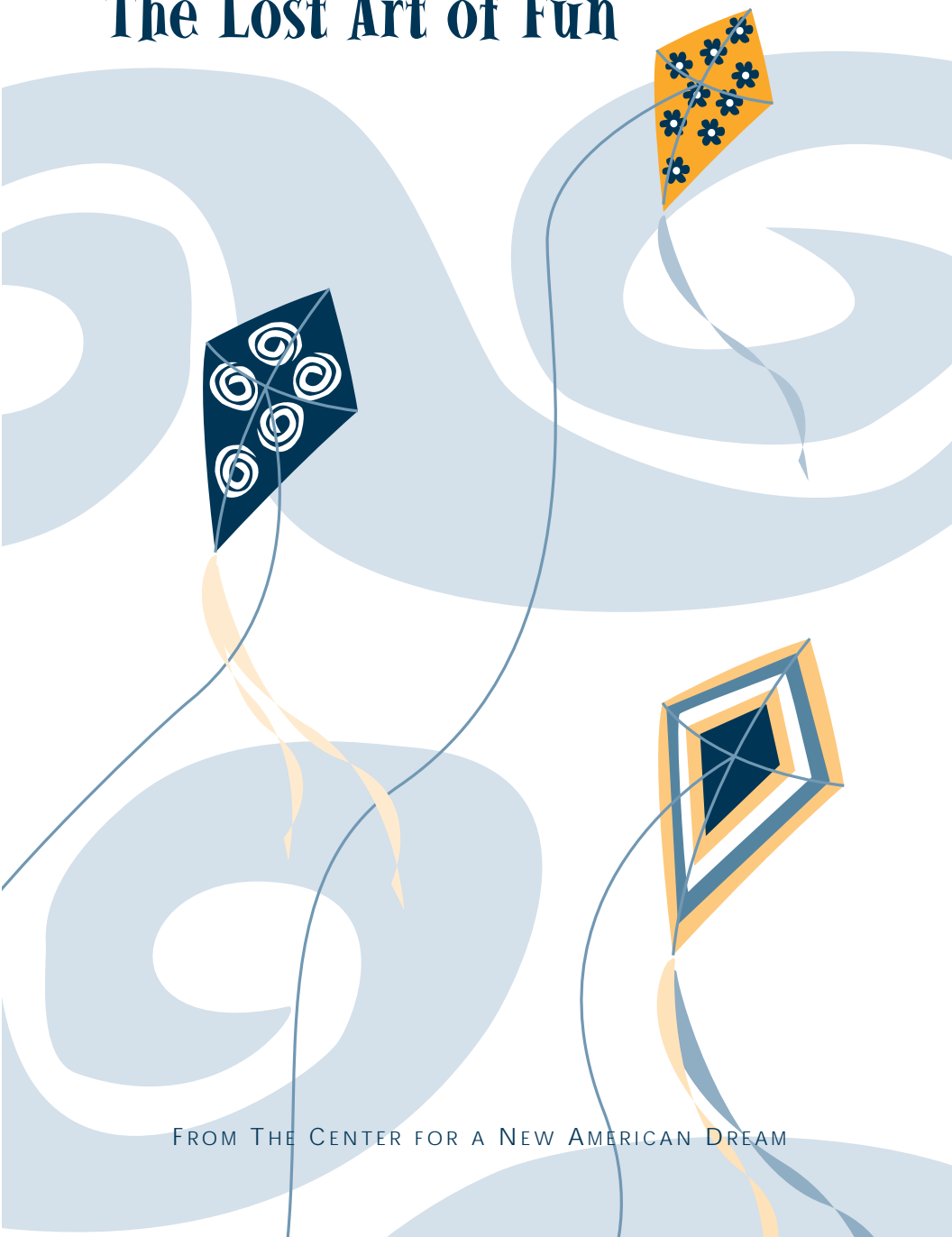



# Good Times Made Simple

## The Lost Art of Fun



FROM THE CENTER FOR A NEW AMERICAN DREAM





**If you never did, you should.  
These things are fun and fun is good!**

**DR. SEUSS**

**Dear friend,**

**T**hank you very much for your interest in the Center for a New American Dream. If this book is your introduction to the Center, we'd like to welcome you to a growing movement of Americans who are challenging the "more is better" definition of happiness.

**Good Times Made Simple** is based on a very simple premise. In our hectic day-to-day lives, it's easy to lose sight of some of the things that bring us real joy - connections with family, friends and nature. This book offers alternatives to commercial TV, video games and trips to the mall. We hope it helps you rediscover the simple pleasures of good, old-fashioned fun.

We've included suggestions for all kinds of different activities. They may be things you haven't done in years, and there will certainly be some things you've never done. We hope you have a fabulous time trying them out. In many ways, the key to fun is creating the space to follow your passions. We don't have a roadmap, just some helpful tips to set you on your way. We hope you'll contact us with your own suggestions for how to have more fun with less stuff.

We'd appreciate your help spreading the word about non-commercial fun and the Center for a New American Dream. If you aren't a member yet, please join! Membership comes with a whole host of benefits (see enclosed envelope for details) not least of which is that you'll be helping us shift American culture away from its excessive emphasis on acquisition toward a more balanced, sustainable and satisfying way of life.

When you join the Center, we'll send you a free copy of **Good Times Made Simple** to share with a friend. Better yet, share the Center with a friend! If you buy a gift membership for a friend when you join, your friend's membership is half-price. We're hoping you'll agree with us that some things, like games and innovative non-profit organizations, are too good not to share!

Sincerely,

*Betsy Taylor*

**"Life is meant to be enjoyed, not endured."**

**ANTHONY J. D'ANGELO**

**1**



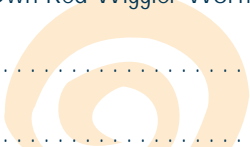
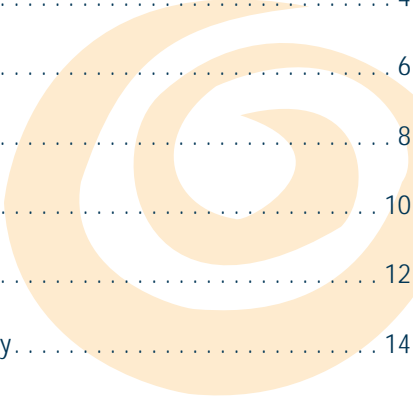


# Good Times Made Simple

## The Lost Art of Fun

### Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	1
Spin a Tale . . . . .	4
Oh, Starry Night . . . . .	6
Creative Carving . . . . .	8
Play Ball! . . . . .	10
Sing! . . . . .	12
Create a Wildlife Sanctuary . . . . .	14
Trace Your Roots . . . . .	16
Board, No More! Indoor Games . . . . .	18
Cut a Rug . . . . .	20
Create Your Own Red Wiggler Worm Bin . . . . .	22
Bad Art . . . . .	24
Forcing Bulbs . . . . .	26



# Spin a Tale

Whether it's an eerie ghost story told around the campfire, the oral history of long-lost relatives plucked from the depths of Nana's memory over Thanksgiving Dinner or a bedtime story shared with a child drifting in and out of sleep, we all love to hear a good story.

Storytelling is one of the simplest ways to have free, non-commercial fun and maybe even learn a little something in the process. Anyone who says that the spoken word is dead is, well, telling you a tall tale. Why not invite a few friends over, bring out the candles, turn out the lights, and share some homemade stories? Be funny; be scary; be inspiring; be unexpectedly bizarre. Be all these things and more!

## Not sure how to start?

Here are some suggestions for first lines of stories you might tell:

The stars were bright in the sky...

It was a night like no other...

Someday, in the future...

The most exciting thing that ever happened to me was...

I once dreamed that...

I'll bet you're wondering why...

What comes next is up to you, whether true, fiction or a combination of both. You might know exactly where you want to go with your story, or you might improvise as you go on.

If you're a little nervous about putting a whole story together on your own, another way to have fun with stories is to create one together in a group. Sit in a circle, choose a person to begin, and have each person add one line to the story. Collective creativity can be wacky or profound, but it always turns out fun!

## Resources

Storytelling festivals and celebrations are thriving across the country, and there are now more than 300 storytelling organizations in the US. You can even get a Master's Degree in Storytelling from East Tennessee State University. For more information about the rich world of stories, contact:

### **National Storytelling Association**

Jonesborough, TN  
1-800-525-4514  
[www.storynet.org](http://www.storynet.org)

### **The California Indian Storytelling Association**

Fremont, CA  
510-794-7253  
[www.cistory.org](http://www.cistory.org)

### **East Tennessee State University**

Johnson City, TN  
423-439-4297  
[www.etsu.edu/stories](http://www.etsu.edu/stories)

### **August House Publishers**

Little Rock, AK  
800-284-8784  
Offers a free catalogue of books and tapes related to storytelling and folk tales.



# Oh, Starry Night

If you travel to the most remote corner of the earth, hundreds of miles from any artificial light, you will notice the night sky looks gray. Why? Pollution? No, stars! Billions of them, as thick as sand on a beach.

Of course, the sky is a big beach. Some of the stars we see are 60 trillion miles away. And they are the close ones. They're so far away that if one of them would blink out today, ten years would go by before the end of its light finally reached the earth. (Hint: this is too far to drive.)



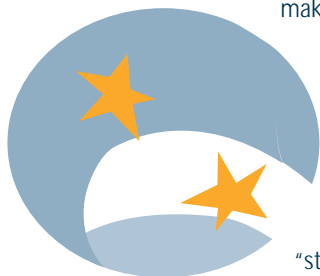
Fortunately, you don't have to visit Alpha Centauri or even Australia to see these ancient lights. The theater of the sky plays a new show every evening in your own backyard or neighborhood park. Take some time to really look at the night sky. The darkest, moonless weeks fall toward the end of each month. If you live in town, find a safe park or a flat rooftop to block out the signs and street lamps. Then give your eyes fifteen minutes to adjust.

Look for constellations. The names for these arbitrary groupings of stars vary from culture to culture, but sky charts showing the Ancient Greek figures are common. Orion, the hunter, is an easy constellation to spot because of the three bright stars that make up his belt.

Try to find Lyra, the lyre, which includes the bright star Vega. In April, in mid-northern latitudes, it will rise around 9:00pm local time.

Lyra appears to be the source of an annual fireworks display known as the Lyrid Meteor Shower. Chinese records from 687 BC describe "stars that fell like rain."

More recently, viewers have counted ten to twenty streaks per hour. Who knows what we'll see this year!







During meteor showers and other sky spectacles, many communities host star parties. Sometimes, amateur astronomers bring their telescopes and let families take turns looking at craters on the moon, or the rings of Saturn. Contact your local natural history museum, planetarium or observatory to find out if there are star-watching parties where you live.



Or throw a party of your own. Dress warmly if the night is chilly, pack cookies and drinks, bring blankets or lawn chairs and take an evening walk. The show runs all night without intermission, and it's completely free.

## Resources

Two books with simple, monthly maps of constellations and stories from Greek mythology are **Discover the Stars** by Richard Berry (Harmony Books, 1987) and **Stargazing for Beginners** by John Mosley (Lowell House, 1998).



A great web site for star watching beginners is [www.calweb.com/~dmurry/](http://www.calweb.com/~dmurry/). The site features resources and frequently asked questions, teaching resources, telescope information, links to astronomy clubs and star gazing party planning tips.

# Creative Carving

Creating something with your own hands can be a truly rewarding experience. Carving is a great way to slow down and find the intrinsic beauty in sticks, twigs and other everyday objects and to find an unexplored artisan within yourself.

If you've never carved before, start small. How about grabbing a bar of soap and a butter knife? Start by chiseling away the brand name and allow your imagination to roam from there. For small children, give them a plastic knife (and keep an eye on them — even plastic knives can cut). When you're finished, collect the soap shavings and use them for a bubble bath.

Once you're ready for real wood, you can start with a penknife and fallen sticks or twigs from nearby trees. Whittle off the bark and make fancy designs in the smooth wood. When you're satisfied with your craftsmanship, give your creations as gifts to friends for display in their homes (hint: tell them why you made the design or why it made you think of them) or hang them in your own home.

Your next step will be to use bigger blocks of wood. You can buy wood scraps at a hardware store, or maybe you'll find some in your yard or local park. From the warm, rich hues of cherry and aromatic red cedar to the clear grains of pine and maple, there is a

wood with beauty and function for everyone's taste and purpose.

Begin this next phase of carving by starting out small — how about whittling a key chain?

Perhaps you could move on to a personalized foot stool or hand-built CD



storage unit.

Discovering your inner woodworker doesn't mean you have to invest in lots of power tools or make a bedroom suite. Many items can be made with tools found in most homes, such as saws, sandpaper, chisels, penknives and patience. If you don't own them, you probably have a friend who does. Many cities also have woodworking clubs where you can get together with others and share tools, and some high schools open their wood shop classrooms to the public.

## Resources

There are tons of information sources for those who want to get into woodworking. Here are a few to get you started.

**[www.taunton.com/finewoodworking/index.asp](http://www.taunton.com/finewoodworking/index.asp)** has a list of woodworking clubs across the country, sorted by state. Some of the clubs offer demonstrations, discussions and shops with supplies where you can carve.

**[www.sculptor.org/Wood](http://www.sculptor.org/Wood)** has a lot of information about where to get supplies and links to local carving and wood-sculpting guilds.

**[www.forestworld.com](http://www.forestworld.com)** is maintained by the Forest Partnership. It features a large database with information about wood species and technical data, a huge directory of related links, a list of where to buy and sell certified sustainable forest products and more.

### **The Forest Partnership**

161 Austin Drive #7  
Burlington, VT 05402  
(ph) 802-865-1111  
(fax) 802-863-4344  
(email) [info@forestworld.com](mailto:info@forestworld.com)

# Play Ball!

There's really nothing like it. A few hours spent out in the great outdoors. There's a lot more to getting outside than weeding the garden, and some of the best outdoor activities require no fussing, no advanced planning and no equipment.

Let's start with the all-time favorite outdoor game.



Yes, we mean catch. Catch is ideal for parents and children — it's a classic, all-American bonding activity.

You can play with anything: a softball, a baseball, a frisbee, a tennis ball, a soccer ball, a soft football. You can play anywhere you can find 30 to 40 feet of relatively unobstructed space. And, with the exception of rainy and icy days, you can play year round.

Drop the ball? No worries, pick it up and keep playing. You don't have to be good. Practice will improve your skills, and you and your catch partner can learn from each other.

It feels great to be outside and moving around. It gets the heart rate up and stress level down. It gives you and your partner the chance to talk in a leisurely way, without the pressure of sitting down for a conversation. The longer you play, the more things will emerge in conversation.

Playing catch is a repeated activity that has a Zen-like aspect to it when you do it for a while. If you play on the street or in a park, you're bound to meet neighbors and reinforce your community. And when you play outdoors, you're spending time in nature. It's impossible to play without noticing the sky, trees, birds and the colors of nature.

For a variation on the theme kick a ball back a forth. Same idea, same fun, just use your feet instead of your hands.

Other timeless classics include hopscotch, jump rope and tag. These games were fun when you were young, and they're still fun. Introduce them to someone under ten as an alternative to video games. Don't know anyone that young? Play anyway! You may just



discover playing around outside is even more fun than you remember. So, come on, give it a go!

Outdoor games range from simple to complex. It all depends on just how involved you want to get, how much equipment you have around and how creative you are.

If you have a badminton or croquet set, pull it out, dust it off and give it a whirl. Or consider playing horseshoes without horseshoes — wedge a stick in the ground and pitch rocks at it. With a bit of ingenuity, the sky's the limit. Invent new games and modify old ones!

There are no good books or websites for this activity: just find a ball, find a friend and get outside!



# Sing!

Singing is a vibrant part of our history. We sang to celebrate and remember...to preserve powerful stories of love, struggle and wisdom...to elevate tedious work in fields and factories...to proclaim our religious faith in churches and temples...to entertain and warm ourselves around campfires...to join families and communities around pianos in homes and schools...to connect with others in recognition of common ground and solidarity. We sang for joy. We sang for fun!



To start, hum a quiet tune while alone in the car or sing out loud in the shower. Can you sing with your family? Ironically, many of us blush at the thought of singing with others, especially our relatives. But in days gone by, family and friends often gathered together to sing by the piano. After decades in decline, many families are re-discovering just how much fun it can be.

If there are no pianos or pianists in your household, buy an album of your favorite tunes and sing along. Or if anyone in your family — young, old, accomplished or amateur — can play an instrument, invite them to accompany you. Don't worry about how it might sound to a critic. Enjoy!

There are also many venues outside the family. In this age of heightened technology and spectator entertainment, small groups of people throughout the country are creating new outlets for the old-fashioned fun of singing by establishing





community song circles. According to the Seattle Folklore Society, a song circle is just a bunch of folks who enjoy getting together to sing. Starting a song circle is simple:

Announce date, time and location (for example: your home, a local park, a community center) to your friends, in the calendar of a community paper or in a folk society newsletter.

Decide whether to invite all instruments, limit instruments to acoustic only or sing a cappella.

Compile and copy initial song sheets or booklets.

In most song circles, singers form a circle and take turns choosing songs. Your song circle format may vary depending upon the musical talent of the average member and the vision of the originator.

For more information about creating local song circles or finding established song circles, contact your nearest folk organization or folk music society. For a list of Folklore societies across the United States, visit the Folklife Sourcebook at <http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/source/societie.html>.

## Resources

**Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook** by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson — Sing Out! Publications (Volume II is on its way)

**Songs and Creations** by Yohann Anderson, Songs and Creations, Inc. Publications

**For the Beauty of the Earth** by Pete Seeger, Raffi, John Denver, Tom Paxton, Tom Lehrer, Bill Staines and John Gorka, Sing Out! Publications

**Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through its Songs** edited by Guy and Candie Carawan Sing Out! Publications.

# Create a Backyard or Balcony Wildlife Sanctuary

When is the last time you got into nature and admired the beautiful wildlife? You don't have to go out to the woods. Suburbs, towns and even cities all have their share of wild creatures — raccoons, beavers, turtles, squirrels and birds — struggling to find a home in an urban world. By planting a few bird- and butterfly-attracting flowers and building some homemade animal feeders, you can provide a safe space for these creatures while appreciating them up close. This year, try adding a new dynamic to your gardening by creating your own private wildlife sanctuary.

If you have a yard or a garden, you can go even farther with birdbaths, feeders and greenery. Summer-fruiting plants such as mulberry and honeysuckle attract catbirds, waxwings and robins. Like Simon and Garfunkel, butterflies love parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. Squirrels and rabbits munch on wild plums and cherries. Be



sure to plant species that are indigenous to your area — once established, native plants don't require fertilizers, pesticides or extra water, so they're low-maintenance and safe for the environment. You can also build feeders and shelters to attract wildlife. A small, circular hole

in a dried-out gourd makes a great hiding spot for finches, swallows and wrens. Scrap wood can easily be turned into funky, creative bird feeders or bat houses. With a little paint and ingenuity, old ceramic pots or even old toilet bowls and bathroom sinks can become beautiful bird baths.

If your access to outdoor space is limited, don't despair. Plant a window box full of purple bee balm to entice butterflies, or build a small feeder to hang outside for birds. You might consider adopting a neglected area in a public space nearby, collecting litter and scattering birdseed so all the neighbors can enjoy a little wildlife. Don't forget to establish your sanctuary in a prominent location, such as outside a kitchen or living room window, for optimal viewing delight. Library books on indigenous critters can help you and your family





learn to distinguish a nuthatch from a downy, a weasel from a mole. So get outdoors and let the fun begin!

## Resources

National Wildlife Federations Backyard Habitat program offers a free brochure, **Creating Habitat for Wildlife at Home, School, Work and in Communities**, which is packed with useful advice for beginners and resources for additional information.

### **National Wildlife Federation**

Backyard Habitat Program  
8925 Leesburg Pike  
Vienna, VA. 22184-0001

Or check out their web site at [www.nwf.org/habitats](http://www.nwf.org/habitats).

**The Wild Ones Handbook** focuses on the importance of finding and planting native species and has tips on landscaping for wildlife.

You can read it online at:

[www.epa.gov/glnpo/greenacres/wildones/#HANDBOOK](http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/greenacres/wildones/#HANDBOOK)

# Trace Your Roots

Ah, America, the great melting pot. Living in a country noted for its diversity, most of us know the basics about our ethnic backgrounds. Whether we're Irish, Lithuanian, West African, Native American or a huge mishmash of ethnicities, we take pride in our respective heritages. But how much do you really know about your family history? Who were your ancestors? What did they do? What kind of people were they? The answers aren't as hard to find as you

might think, and the stories of your past may be even more intriguing than the latest novel. If you wish you knew more about the lives of your great-grandparents and beyond, then-genealogy is for you.

To get started, take a stroll down memory lane with your parents, grandparents, great-aunts and uncles or other older family members. Ask them about their great-grandparents. Chances are good that they'll remember relatives who spoke English as a second language. Perhaps they migrated to America as children or young parents or had parents who did. Your elders can tell you

many stories, from unlikely marriages to unexpected births. The stories you gather from these conversations will help you establish a base of knowledge from which you can draw your extended family tree. And it goes without saying that you'll probably get the dish on some eccentric ancestors! Be sure to record your interviews. You'll want them preserved in years to come.

Once you've got the oral history covered, many books and web sites can help you fill gaps in your data and continue your journey. It's



likely that other distant family members have begun your research for you. Look at family and local histories, articles in periodicals and collections of family papers. Photo albums and scrapbooks are also good sources of clues. The internet has taken genealogical research to new heights of convenience; often you can view online images of documents housed in other states and countries. Your genealogical search can be as detailed or as simple as you choose. Use what you learn to draft a thorough treatise or just consider it an excuse to sit down and chat with beloved family members.



## Resources

Libraries and local historical societies can help you get started. You can also check out:

**The Complete Idiot's Guide to Genealogy** by Christine Rose and Kay Germain Ingalls. MacMillan Distribution. Don't be insulted by the name; this is a fabulous sourcebook for anyone interested in tracing their family tree.

**Unpuzzling Your Past: A Complete Guide to Genealogy** by Emily Anne Croom. Betterway Publications. This book will walk you through all the stages of genealogical research, and includes everything you need to know about utilizing family, state, local and federal resources.

**www.genealogy.com** is a great starting point for beginners and old pros alike. It has tips for recording oral histories, recommended reading lists and lots of links.

# Board, No More! Indoor Games

**H**ave the rainy day blues? Had your fill of Candyland and Monopoly? If so, it's time to get creative!

Some of the best games require no batteries, assembly or expensive gadgets to play. The more games rely on human ingenuity, the more fun they tend to be. To help you get started we've pulled together a list of some of our favorite indoor games. Play them as they are or invent your own variations — indoor games can be as fun as you make them!

**Fictionary** Open the dictionary and put your finger down without looking. What word have you chosen? If it's one nobody is likely to know, then read the word, but don't tell anyone its meaning. Everyone takes a turn making up their guess the goal is not accuracy, but hilarity. The person with the most votes for their meaning scores one point, and gets to pick the next word.

**Scavenger Hunts** are a fabulous, free activity for an hour or a whole afternoon. Begin by choosing a theme and the boundaries for your hunt. Will you be looking for objects in a specific area, or will the items be pre-hidden with clues that reveal where? How long will contestants have to find the items and meet the judge? Make your clues creative — write silly poems, include the participants' names, jokes or pictures. Have a worthwhile but cost-free item be the winner's reward: no chores for a week, a back rub or a special meal. Making up the scavenger hunt can be almost as fun as playing it.

**Fun with cards** Decks of cards are so versatile they can be used for games for children and adults of all ages. Instead of the traditional Go Fish, try something new. Learn some card tricks. Build card houses. Play a game you remember from your childhood. Or learn a new game and teach it to your friends and family.

**Ghost** This game requires no materials at all and can be played by two or more people. The players spell out a word, saying letters one by one. The object is to avoid finishing a word, while not saying a letter

that spells no word at all. (For example, if the first two letters were B-I, a G would complete a word, adding another I would spell no word and an M would be a good answer.) If you suspect that a player has said a letter from which no word could be created, you can challenge them. If the player has a correctly-spelled word in mind, you lose the round. If not, you win. When a word is completed, the person to complete it loses the round. The loser of each round gets a letter, beginning with G, spelling out the word GHOST. The last person to avoid becoming a ghost wins.

But don't stop with these games! Play charades, stage a play or invite your friends and family to invent new games. Pair up and have two people work out the details for each one. Dare them to be creative. Once they've created it, play the game, no matter how silly it seems. You could have the next Trivial Pursuit on your hands, or a game that will entertain your family for generations. In any case, respect the creation of each family member, and have fun!

## Resources

For a list of terrific games, old and new, visit the **Game Finder** at <http://family.go.com/>.

For card games from the U.S. and all around the world, including children's games, solitaire and multiple player games, and games that others have created, visit [www.pagat.com/](http://www.pagat.com/). For great card tricks to impress your family and friends, visit [www.web.superb.net/cardtrick/](http://www.web.superb.net/cardtrick/).

**101 Best Family Card Games** by Alfred Sheinwold and Myron Miller. Sterling Publishing Company. A wealth of resources for card game rules and variations.



# Cut a Rug!

If those interminable fifth-grade gym classes made you swear off dancing for life, it's time to take another look. Dancing can be more than learning moves to music. It is a great way to increase your heart rate and get exposure to a wide range of cultural traditions, while meeting new people and having fun. In cities all over the country, it's increasingly common to find places that can teach you to move to African rhythms, to twirl around the floor in a Viennese waltz, to get down with a mean hustle or to stomp and kick to an Irish beat.

Don't worry about whether or not you have rhythm or coordination. Many programs are geared specifically at beginners with two left feet, and the humor involved in the learning process is a perk in itself. However, when your feet finally take over and your mind lets go, there are moments full of the sheer joy of motion.

Your local yellow pages might list dancing organizations, but also check the bulletin boards in coffee houses, bookshops, and music stores. Folk societies often have contacts for specific ethnic dances, and clubs may advertise nights specifically for swing or salsa. If you're shy, you can always start by borrowing how-to videos from your local library. Invite your friends to watch the videos and learn with you. Or simply gather friends for a free-form dance, boogieing to the moves of your own inner choreographer.



## Resources

There are so many kinds of dancing, it's hard to provide even a basic listing of sources, but here is some more information that can help you put your best foot forward.

### **US Amateur Ballroom Dance Association**

1-800-447-8047  
[www.usabda.org](http://www.usabda.org)

### **Folk Arts of New England**

A good resource for folk dancing, especially in the New England area.

1950 Massachusetts Ave  
Cambridge, MA 02140  
617-491-6083  
[www.facone.org](http://www.facone.org)

### **Sapphire Swan Dance Directory**

This online resource ([www.sapphireswan.com/dance](http://www.sapphireswan.com/dance)) provides links to three kinds of dance web sites: 1) sites that have good collections of links, usually in a specialized area of dance, 2) sites that include information about an area of dance and 3) selected sites of dance organizations and individual dancers.

### **International Network for Dances of Universal Peace**

Drawing on a variety of religious and ethnic traditions, these simple circle dances combine music, lyrics and movements to create a profound and fun collective experience. The website [www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org](http://www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org) can help you find events in your area.

# Create Your Own Red Wiggler Worm Bin

Have you ever wondered what happens to the scraps of fruits and veggies you throw away? You can prevent them from ending up trapped in plastic bags in a landfill. For a creative, educational experience for the whole family, use worms to compost food and plant material. This process, called vermicomposting, is a natural, odorless, low maintenance way to recycle animal-free food waste.

Redworms (*Eisenia foetida*, if you must know) are the species used in worm bins because they are comfortable in moderate temperatures and low-soil environments. Redworms are hearty and prolific, and can adapt to a broad range of living conditions. For optimal worm productivity, put your worm bin in a cool, dry basement or closet. Worm bins should be kept inside since cold weather and outside insect predators can kill your worms.



## Simple Steps for Getting Started

1. Obtain a plastic or wooden bin (approx. 2 x 3 feet and 1 foot deep) with a cover, a stack of old newspapers (not too much colored ink) and a pound of red wiggler worms.
2. Drill or punch holes in the top sides of the bin.
3. Rip the newspaper into strips, place it in the bin and then moisten the newspaper. Make sure the newspaper/bedding is moist at all times.



4. Place the worms in the bin under the newspaper. Do not scatter the worms through the bin. Keep them together.
5. For approximately one week, leave the bin lid off and make sure it gets light. This will keep the worms in the bin (since worms don't like light) until they settle into their new quarters.
6. After the week is up, you can cover the bin and begin to feed the worms. Place small food and plant scraps under the newspaper (not on top, or the food may mold). One pound of worms can eat a half pound of garbage per day.
7. Add fresh bedding (moist shredded newspaper) to the bin every month or so.

The compost that your worms create will provide plenty of nutrient-rich soil for your garden!

## Resources

**Worms Eat My Garbage: How to Set Up and Maintain a Worm Composting System** by Mary Appelhof. Flower Press. ([www.wormwoman.com](http://www.wormwoman.com)). Covers all of the Dos and Don'ts of composting a great book for beginners. You can also buy worms at her site or by calling her at 616-327-0108.

**Let it Rot!: The Gardener's Guide to Composting** by Stu Campbell. Storey Books. A classic in the composting world, this book explains many different techniques for composting waste materials around the house.

**Worm Digest** ([www.wormdigest.org](http://www.wormdigest.org)) provides a comprehensive list of worm composting internet sources. You can also buy worms and other supplies on this web site.

# Bad Art

Among adults, it's pretty much universal. Most of us shy away from art and deny any hint of artistic talent. Even good artists protest that they're nothing like Picasso. (And who but Picasso was?!)

Maybe what we have here is a problem of unreasonable expectations, or maybe we've just lost sight of the end goal. Art is not about perfection but about expression. This is something the kids in your life would be glad to teach you. Here is an opportunity to let go, have fun and make bad art.

The proper supplies can help give you the courage to take artistic risks. So take a few minutes to figure out what materials stimulate your creativity. Buy finger paints or water colors, sketch books and colored charcoal. If you have an art store nearby, don't be intimidated by the art students. Go right in and buy colors that don't match.

Or maybe you prefer a different medium. Perhaps collage is your style. There is no need to limit yourself to old magazines: try gluing yarn, fabric or leaves to paper. Or perhaps you're an amateur sculptor. Bend scrap wire into figures, or create outdoor sculptures out of garden trimmings and yard waste. Printing is also a rich medium. But there's no need to buy expensive stamps when you can carve your own out of rubber erasers, or even potatoes and apples. Even your thumbprints can yield works of art if you use them creatively. There are many other media at your disposal.

Why not make a book (express yourself in a sequence of pages!); or draw with sidewalk chalk (it's not just for hopscotch anymore) or use paints or makeup to create your own elaborate temporary tattoo? When you find supplies that inspire you, the





possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

Once you've got the supplies, the next step is to set aside a bit of time. Tell your family or friends that you'll be having a Bad Art Night and invite them to join you. Cover

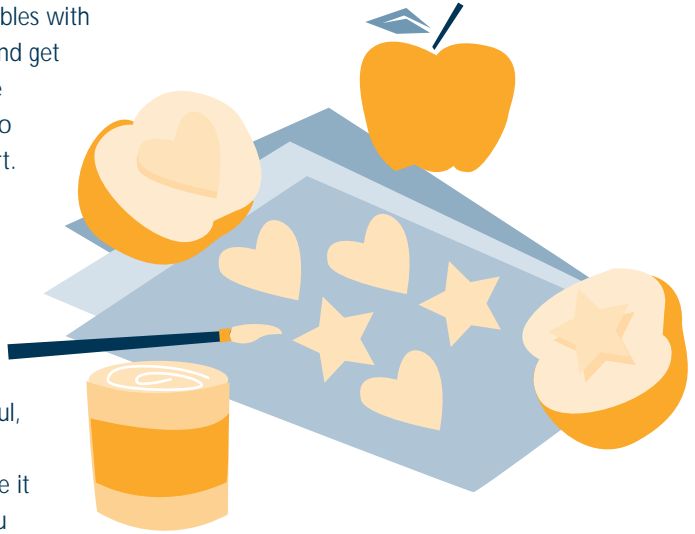
all your valuables with newspaper and get to work. The goal here is to create bad art.

We know, you've heard all your life that the point is to make beautiful, good art.

Tonight, make it as ugly as you can imagine. Put

hot pink stars in an orange sky. Draw bodies out of proportion. Glue fabric on leaves. Stamp star patterns. Express yourself. Have fun.

At the end of the evening, give all participants a chance to describe their work. Have them interpret their intentions as a lunatic critic would. Have them explain what they did to make it bad art. Laugh. Offer positive reinforcement. In case there is any question, the point here is to have fun. Go for it!



# Forcing Bulbs

If you like fresh flowers, you've probably noticed that they're a bit harder to get during the winter months. The flowers that are available at this time are often shipped great distances and kept fresh with chemical preservatives. Forcing bulbs refers to the gentle art of persuading flowering bulbs to bloom early, indoors. Even when using imported bulbs, this technique requires far fewer chemicals and climate-controlled trucks, airplanes and warehouses than buying a similar quantity of imported cut flowers.

For little expense and minimal effort, you can nurture and admire beautiful flowers all year long. Beautiful and fragrant paperwhite, hyacinth and amaryllis bulbs, three of our favorites, are among the easiest to grow. Here's how it's done:

## Paperwhites and Hyacinth

Paperwhites (members of the narcissus family) and Hyacinths are inexpensive, pleasantly scented and easy to prepare week after week for months of elegant spring atmosphere.

Buy the bulbs in the autumn and winter for less than a dollar each. Until you're ready to plant, store them properly. Paperwhite bulbs should be stored at room temperature in a dark spot. Hyacinth bulbs should be stored in brown paper bags in a cool place (about 45° F) for six to eight weeks. A refrigerator is great, providing you don't also refrigerate fruit. Ripening fruit produces ethylene gas, which will deform the flowers of your bulbs.

To plant, put several inches of pebbles in the bottom of a jar or bowl. Line the top of the pebbles with bulbs, sprout ends pointing up. Fill the jar so that the water level barely touches the bases of the bulbs and keep the water at this level. You can also use specific water-forcing jars (available at craft stores and florists).

For paperwhites, encourage their already quick growth by keeping the jar in a brown paper bag until roots sprout and the top shoot is about two inches high. Then enjoy the flowers in indirect light. For

Hyacinths, put the bowl or jars in a paper bag in a cool location (50° to 55° F). When the shoots are two inches tall, move them to a cool, light-filled position.

## Amaryllis

What these dramatic flowers lack in scent they make up for in spectacular blossoms, as many as a dozen per bulb.

Buy the bulbs in the autumn for \$8 to \$12 each.

Store them in a paper bag in a cool place (about 55° F) until you're ready to plant.

Place an individual bulb in a pot that is only an inch wider than the bulb. Surround it with soil.

Keep the bulb warm but out of direct sunlight. Don't water it for two to four weeks until the flower bud and stalk appear, then water it daily to keep the soil moist.

Bulbs forced with pebbles and water grow quickly but will not regenerate for a second season. But with proper care, many bulbs can be potted in soil and coaxed to bloom year after year.

## Resources

**Forcing, Etc.** by Katherine Whiteside. Workman Publishing.

**Flowering Bulbs for Dummies** by Judy Glattstein, National Gardening Association.

Visit [www.gardenersnet.com/hplants/hp6.htm](http://www.gardenersnet.com/hplants/hp6.htm) for bulb sources and more forcing techniques.



# Further Fun Resources

Looking for more fun activities or more reasons to play? Look for these resources at your local library or bookstore.

## For Families

**Fun Time, Family Time** by Susan K. Perry, illustrated by Sandra Forrest (1996, Avon). There are many, many books about fun activities for parents and children. This is one of the best.

**Just Family Nights**, edited by Susan Vogt, illustrated by Beth Gallo. (1994, Brethren Press). A values-oriented approach, presenting almost more fun than you can handle!

## For Adults

**Simple Fun for Busy People** by Gary Krane, PhD. (1998, Conari Press). Krane sees fun as an attitude, and he emphasizes the ways that playfulness can strengthen relationships. Full of good anecdotes and suggestions.

**The Pleasure Zone** by Stella Resnick. (1997, Conari Press). If you need psychological justification for having fun, here it is. A good, readable book that has inspired many readers.

**Utne Reader website:** [www.utne.com](http://www.utne.com). If you search the archives for secret and fun, you'll find Utne's article on rediscovering the lost art of play. They also have a discussion forum in Café Utne ([www.cafe.utne.com](http://www.cafe.utne.com)) completely dedicated to Play.

# About the Center

The Center for a New American Dream is a national non-profit organization helping Americans consume responsibly to protect the environment, enhance quality of life and promote social justice. We work with individuals, institutions, communities and businesses to conserve natural resources, counter the commercialization of our culture and promote positive changes in the way goods are produced and consumed.

## Why a New American Dream?

The American dream once focused on greater security, opportunity and happiness. Increasingly, that dream has been overshadowed by an extraordinary emphasis on acquisition. The more is better dimension of the American dream has enormous hidden costs for the environment. It also affects our financial well-being, psychological health and personal happiness. At the Center for a New American Dream, we're committed to restoring balance, for ourselves and for the planet.

## We Need You!

We're moving American culture away from today's emphasis on commercialism toward a more sustainable, fulfilling and just way of life. We will succeed — but only with the personal commitment and financial support of individuals just like you. Please become a member and join us as we help Americans to have More Fun, Less Stuff!

With your membership, you will receive a copy of the Center's new 30-minute video hosted by Danny Glover, *More Fun, Less Stuff: The Challenges & Rewards of a New American Dream*; our quarterly newsletter, *Enough*; and a More Fun, Less Stuff bumper sticker. We'll also send you a copy of *Good Times Made Simple* to share with a friend. Better yet, if you buy a gift membership for a friend when you join, your friend's membership is half-price.

Some things are too good not to share.

We hope you'll think the Center is one of them.



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