

# Board Games in Public Libraries: Collection Recommendations and Best Practices

**Recommended Games (by Age Group):** A balanced library collection should include classics and modern games across ages and styles. For **young children (ages 3–8)**, simple race and matching games are staples: *Candy Land* and *Chutes & Ladders* (basic race-path games) are time-tested crowd-pleasers <sup>1</sup>. Early learners enjoy picture-based card games like *Picture Apples to Apples* (matching pictures to cues) and pattern games like *Qwirkle* (color/shape matching), which is praised as “simple to learn, yet strategic... a favorite of all ages” <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>. Dexterity games (e.g. *Animal Upon Animal*) and cooperative kids’ games (e.g. *Outfoxed!*, *Sleeping Queens*) also engage preschoolers.

For **tweens and teens**, include family strategy and party games. Modern gateways like *Ticket to Ride* or *Catan* (resource-trading building games) work well with older kids. Cooperative games such as *Pandemic* (team cures global diseases) teach teamwork <sup>3</sup>. Engaging card games like *Sushi Go!* (fast drafting game) and *Exploding Kittens* (comic “hot potato” card game) are popular for middle-schoolers <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>. Social deduction and party games (e.g. *Codenames*, *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*) encourage group play. The *SLJ* highlights *Sushi Go!* for its ease and appeal to tweens <sup>4</sup> and notes that *King of Tokyo* (dice-based monster battle) “feels almost like a video game” – a hit with teens <sup>6</sup>. Classic titles (*Monopoly*, *Clue*, *The Game of Life*) can be included for familiarity <sup>7</sup>, though librarians may balance these with newer hobby games. The narrative card game *Gloom* (tell sad family tales) is cited as unique and appealing to teens <sup>8</sup>.

For **adults and seniors**, provide a mix of strategy, word, and social games. Light strategy games (*Splendor*, *Carcassonne*, *Dominion*) and worker-placement games (*Lords of Waterdeep*) serve as accessible hobby entries. Cooperative strategy (*Pandemic*) remains popular <sup>3</sup>. Classic word and puzzle games (*Scrabble*, *Boggle*, *Crossword puzzles*, *Rummikub*) support literacy and cognitive skills. Party games (*Trivia Pursuit*, *Cranium*, *Cards Against Humanity* for mature audiences) and traditional games (*Chess*, *Dominoes*, *Backgammon*) foster socializing. Many adults and seniors enjoy games designed for family play (e.g. *Ticket to Ride*) since all ages can participate. (Table 1 below provides representative examples with categories and notes.)

Age Group	Game Title	Type / Category	Notes/Description
Children (4–8)	<i>Candy Land</i>	Children’s Race	Easy “race-to-end” board game for ages ~3+ <sup>1</sup> .
Children (4–8)	<i>Chutes &amp; Ladders</i>	Children’s Race	Classic numbers-path game (slides/ladders) for preschoolers <sup>1</sup> .
Children (6–9)	<i>Picture Apples to Apples</i>	Matching Card Game	Picture-word matching game for early readers <sup>9</sup> .
Children (6–10)	<i>Qwirkle</i>	Abstract Strategy	Tile-laying color/shape pattern game; “strategic and exciting” <sup>2</sup> .

Age Group	Game Title	Type / Category	Notes/Description
Tweens/ Teens	<i>Pandemic</i>	Cooperative Strategy	Players work as a team to cure diseases worldwide <sup>3</sup> .
Tweens/ Teens	<i>King of Tokyo</i>	Dice Combat	Fast-paced monster battle game; themed appeal for teens <sup>6</sup> .
Tweens/ Teens	<i>Sushi Go!</i>	Card Drafting	Quick, easy card game for making sushi combos; very popular <sup>4</sup> .
Families/ Adult	<i>Ticket to Ride</i>	Route-Building	Build train routes on a map; family-friendly strategy (ages 8+).
Families/ Adult	<i>Tsuro</i>	Tile Placement	Simple path-building game; engaging for all ages <sup>10</sup> .
Adults/ Seniors	<i>Catan</i>	Resource Strategy	Settlers-style trading/building game; gateway to modern board gaming.
Adults/ Seniors	<i>Scrabble</i>	Word Game	Classic word-creation game; popular for education and social play.
Adults/ Seniors	<i>Rummikub</i>	Tile Game	Number-tile game (rummy with tiles); easy to learn, good for seniors.
Adults/ Seniors	<i>Dominoes</i>	Tile Game	Traditional matching game; promotes social interaction.

**Collection Durability, Storage & Maintenance:** Libraries should focus on robust games and minimal extra processing. A study found that intensive preservation (card-sleeving, laminating, etc.) yielded **no significant reduction in loss** compared to minimal treatment <sup>11</sup>, and the labor cost outweighed any benefit. It is usually sufficient to label the box (barcode, call number) and use baggies for pieces; fully sleeving every card or piece is often not cost-effective <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>. Some easy precautions help: reinforce box corners with strong tape or cloth tape (e.g. buckram strips) to prevent box wear <sup>12</sup>, and consider simple waterproofing (e.g. clear contact paper on frequently-handled boards). Storing boxes **flat (horizontally)** – not on edge – helps prevent warped game boards <sup>13</sup>. Maintain a small repair kit: WCCLS libraries keep “spare parts” (extra dice, replacement pegs or card sleeves) and routinely fix torn bags or missing pieces <sup>14</sup>. Prioritize games with durable pieces (plastic, thick cardstock) and avoid extremely fragile ones if possible. Whenever games circulate, plan for some wear and replacement (lost pieces, spills) as inevitable, and budget accordingly.

**Circulation Policies & Cataloging:** Games should circulate as a single unit (kit), typically under one catalogue record. Libraries often attach a call number and barcode to the box, treating it like any other book or kit <sup>15</sup>. Check-out periods are often shorter (e.g. 1–2 weeks) with limited renewals to ensure turnaround. For example, Athens-Limestone Public Library allows **1-week loans (renewable to 12 weeks total)** and limits two games per patron <sup>16</sup>. Libraries commonly enforce that games are returned whole: at check-in staff verify all pieces are present before clearing the loan <sup>17</sup>. Until complete pieces are returned, fines may accrue (Athens charges \$1/day until the missing parts come back) <sup>17</sup>. Many policies forbid checking out parts separately – games must return intact <sup>18</sup>. Holding or reservation systems are recommended: patrons can put holds on games that are out (as done in Clayton, NC <sup>19</sup>). Some libraries ask

borrowers to return games to the circulation desk instead of book drops to prevent damage <sup>20</sup>. Overall, treat games much like “makerspace” kits or puzzles: one item record, clear rules to patrons, and staff oversight on returns. Cataloging guidelines suggest noting game title, components, and relevant subjects (like “Games – board games”).

**Programming & Engagement:** Board games can anchor a variety of library programs. Popular events include **game nights or game clubs** for families, teens, or seniors. For instance, Upper Darby (PA) Free Library ran a weekly intergenerational “Tabletop Gaming at the Library” and a monthly “Golden Gamers” club for patrons 65+ <sup>21</sup>. Libraries often host one-off events: **International Games Week/Month** (Oct/Nov) coordinated by ALA encourages libraries to throw open game nights, tournaments, or “play days.” In practice, programs like Family Game Night, Teen Strategy Gaming, or Chess/Go meetups work well. **Game-making workshops** (design-your-own board game) or trivia nights (using familiar titles) also boost engagement. Partnerships amplify impact: team up with local game stores or publishers for demos, or invite college gaming clubs to mentor new players. Marketing is key: use social media, newsletters, and local press. For example, Clayton (NC) publicized its collection launch and now reports that staff “recommend” games to patrons and encourage holds, leading to steady checkouts <sup>19</sup>. Online tools like **Meetup.com** can help form gaming groups and advertise library game events in the community <sup>22</sup>. Finally, leverage “game days” (like ALA’s International Games Month) with signage, contests, or displays to draw attention.

**Durability & Loss Prevention (Table 2):** Libraries should anticipate wear, loss, and space needs. Table 2 summarizes common issues and recommended strategies.

Issue / Challenge	Recommendations
<b>Box Damage &amp; Wear</b>	Reinforce corners with cloth or heavy tape (e.g. buckram) <sup>12</sup> . Store boxes flat to prevent warped boards <sup>13</sup> . Select robust games (hard plastic bits, sturdy boxes).
<b>Spills &amp; Dirt</b>	Encourage seated play. Provide optional storage bags/containers. Clean components (wipes or gentle soap) as needed. Avoid paper game boards or rules with ink.
<b>Piece Loss or Damage</b>	Require that all pieces return together; verify on check-in <sup>17</sup> . Use envelopes or plastic bags for tiny parts. Consider sleeve cards (especially small cards) to prevent tearing. Maintain spare pieces (dice, tokens) and repair kits <sup>14</sup> .
<b>Circulation Processing</b>	Use a single barcode on the box/case (no need to tag every piece) <sup>11</sup> . One study found that counting pieces at each return did <b>not</b> significantly reduce loss, so intensive piece-by-piece processing may be unnecessary <sup>11</sup> . A minimal “kit” approach is often sufficient.
<b>Cataloging &amp; Tracking</b>	Catalog games as serial kits or non-book materials. Include contents in the record so staff know what pieces should be present. Add subject headings like “Games – board games”. Consider giving popular games distinctive labels or call numbers (e.g. “Library of Things” section).

## Lessons Learned & Pitfalls: Experience shows some clear do's and don'ts:

- **Don't over-invest in preservation:** Intensive treatments (laminating boards, sleeve-every-card) are laborious and often unnecessary. One library study found negligible difference in loss between minimally-prepared and fully-sleeved games <sup>11</sup> . Instead, invest time in sturdy storage and box reinforcement.
- **Expect high popularity:** Board games circulate heavily. WCCLS (Oregon) reports about **80% of games are checked out at any time**, with over 100,000 checkouts of ~2,000 games <sup>23</sup> . Likewise, Clayton, NC saw ~150 checkouts within months of adding 30 games <sup>19</sup> . Plan inventory (multiple copies of hot titles) accordingly.
- **Adapt to usage patterns:** The pandemic changed game use. WCCLS notes that post-2020 **most games are now borrowed rather than played in-library**, with demand shifting to family games over large-party games <sup>24</sup> . Some libraries reduced in-house play events and focused on circulating games for home use. Monitor your community's preferences (family vs. teen games) and adjust the mix.
- **Keep it simple for patrons:** Provide clear instructions and difficulty levels. Too-complex or niche games may intimidate casual users. Space these games clearly in the catalog or with signage. (Clayton's librarian remarks that engaging game play teaches "soft skills" like cooperation and turn-taking, so highlight these benefits <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> .)
- **Marketing matters:** A strong launch strategy helps. Kitchener (Canada) launched 100+ kids' games with a press release and donation story, emphasizing learning goals <sup>27</sup> . Social proof (like library staff recommending games or showing people playing) encourages others. Use local or social media to announce new collections and events.
- **Plan for losses:** Despite safeguards, some loss is inevitable. Set policies for missing pieces (replacement fees or forgiveness). WCCLS even kept games *in branch* at affordable housing (to avoid loss) and provided spares for wear <sup>28</sup> <sup>14</sup> .

## Case Studies (North American Libraries):

- **Kitchener Public Library (ON, 2021):** KPL introduced a 100+ game collection targeting **children's early literacy**. A psychology professor donated funds to acquire games "selected for their ability to develop children's language, thinking and social skills" <sup>27</sup> . The games were integrated into the catalog; patrons can place holds online and pick up at any branch <sup>29</sup> . This case highlights partnering with experts/donors and marketing board games as educational tools.
- **Washington County Cooperative LS (Oregon, 2021):** As of 2021 WCCLS had built **2,000+ board games** in its system (the largest in the U.S.) <sup>30</sup> . They attribute success to bringing people together and building skills: "Board games foster literacy and teach... taking turns and... how to respectfully win or lose" <sup>26</sup> . They note that libraries allow patrons to "test drive" expensive games (avoiding wasted purchase) <sup>31</sup> . The collection sees ~80% of games checked out continually <sup>23</sup> . WCCLS keeps spare parts on hand and schedules maintenance (e.g. fixing torn bags) to sustain the collection <sup>14</sup> . Lessons: invest in professional development (staff who know games), keep diverse inventory, and incorporate game services into outreach.
- **Hocutt-Ellington ML (Clayton, NC, 2023):** This small public library added *30+ specialty games* (from hobby game store selections) in September 2023 <sup>32</sup> . They included titles like *Animal Upon Animal Junior*, *Unlock!*, *Catan*, and even a custom "Clayton-opoly" for local flavor <sup>32</sup> . Usage was immediate:

over 150 checkouts in a few months, and popular items often on hold <sup>19</sup>. Their borrowing rules mirror other libraries: 3-week loans, auto-renew (up to 2 times if no hold), limit 2 games per card <sup>20</sup>, and require desk return. The librarian notes the social value (games teach cooperation and critical thinking) and financial benefit (patrons can try games without buying) <sup>33</sup>. Key takeaway: even small libraries can successfully add gaming by focusing on unique or local-interest games and clear circulation policies.

**Summary:** A robust public-library board game collection offers something for every age and interest, enriches patrons' experiences, and has proven demand. By carefully selecting durable, engaging titles (see recommendations above), adopting sensible handling and circulation practices, and promoting games through creative programming, libraries can make board gaming a vibrant part of community service. As case studies show, when done well, a games collection "serves the community" and keeps patrons "coming back" <sup>34</sup> <sup>19</sup>.

**Sources:** Recommendations and lessons above are drawn from library literature and experiences <sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup>, including recent public library reports and professional studies. Each bracketed number links to a specific source excerpt.

---

<sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> **Best Tabletop Games for the Library | School Library Journal**  
<https://www.slj.com/story/best-tabletop-games-for-the-library>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> **Board Games - Whitefish Bay Public Library**  
[https://www.wfblibrary.org/books\\_more/take\\_and\\_tinker\\_collection/board\\_games.php](https://www.wfblibrary.org/books_more/take_and_tinker_collection/board_games.php)

<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>15</sup> **Don't Just Roll the Dice: Simple Solutions for Circulating Tabletop Game Collections Effectively in Your Library | Robson | Library Resources & Technical Services**  
<https://journals.ala.org/index.php/Irts/article/view/6642/8897>

<sup>14</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>36</sup> **The World's Biggest Board Game Collection | wccls.org**  
<https://www.wccls.org/blog/worlds-biggest-board-game-collection>

<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> **alcp.org**  
[https://www.alcpl.org/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Manual\\_Selection-Policies\\_Patron-Policies-UPDATED-2022.pdf](https://www.alcpl.org/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Manual_Selection-Policies_Patron-Policies-UPDATED-2022.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>35</sup> **News Flash • Clayton's Library Is Stepping Up Its Game**  
<https://claytonlibrarync.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=326>

<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> **Board in the Library, Part One: An Introduction to Designer Board Games**  
<https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/board-in-the-library-part-one.html>

<sup>27</sup> <sup>29</sup> **Kitchener Public Library launches new board game collection to enhance early literacy skills | Press Releases**  
<https://www.kpl.org/your-library/press-releases/press-releases/~9-Kitchener-Public-Library-launches-new-board-game-collection-to-enhance-early-literacy-skills>