The Joys of Gamification
By Dylan Baker

With smartphones and Facebook in hand, most of us have experienced the joy of playing a game. Whether lining up a skillful match in Candy Crush or using all 7 tiles in Words with Friends, games provide a strong sense of reward, engagement and mastery. Harnessing those positive aspects in the classroom with gamification (utilizing the fun and addictive elements of games in other real-world activities) promotes engagement.

Here are a few components of gamification that support learning:

**Achievements & Badges**: Acknowledging students’ progress and accomplishments with discrete badges provides a free (or low-cost) reward to strive for and collect. Badges can be digital (simple graphics on a webpage) or physical (like custom-made buttons from a button maker), so long as students can view and display the collections with pride.

**Challenges & Quests**: String individual assignments and homework into a narrative or interlocked story to transform the mundane into a more epic activity. For example, reframe a set of worksheets into the puzzles of an escape room which students must solve to survive.

**Choices & Options**: Games often present players with choices regarding which level they want to tackle next and sometimes offer a choice of rewards for their characters, as well. Implement this by presenting students with multiple paths of demonstrating their understanding of a lesson, such as a choice between completing a test, an essay or a presentation.

**Cooperation & Competition**: Placing students in teams and providing team or class-wide goals with rewards for helping their peers succeed breeds cooperation (and reinforces their own comprehension). On the other side, publishing leaderboards and accomplishments fosters healthy competition between individuals or groups that encourages extra effort to achieve a top-tier standing.

**Failure & Perseverance**: Good games present failures as necessary obstacles that can be overcome with repeated attempts informed each time by learning from previous mistakes. Providing opportunities for do-overs and second (and third) chances cultivates resilience and construes failures as learning opportunities.

Gamification incorporates many models that can help reach students by making learning more fun and engaging. For more information on incorporating gamification into your classroom, talk with your school librarian. And don’t forget to award yourself a Low Hanging Fruit badge and 1000 XP (experience points) for your newfound knowledge of gamification!