



OVERVIEW

Game of Awesome is a card game and general resource aimed at engaging students and inspiring them to write. It was developed with a specific focus on suitability for boys in years 5 to 8, but it is intended for all students in that year range, and can be used with older and younger students as well.

The heart of this resource is the *Game of Awesome*. The game presents undefined pieces of a story like “best friend” and “showdown”, then asks players to choose specific ideas that fit these pieces in interesting and appealing ways. These then become the building blocks of stories.

The game is fun, easy to master, and has a layer of easy strategy to keep the attention of older students. Several variations to the game are also available, each providing different challenges and developing different skills.

This flexible resource can be used in a variety of other ways. The cards can be used to support writing exercises and many other activities. The cards have enormous potential, and the more they are used, the more opportunities for innovation will be revealed.

“One of my students who is a very very reluctant writer, normally you would only get a sentence out of him, wrote almost a whole page.”

Year 3/4 teacher

FROM CARDS TO STORIES

Here is an example of how the cards can be used in combination to make stories.

Example card combination



Example story

When I was trying to *finish my homework*, I got *distracted* when a package came for me. I ripped it open and found a great surprise: a set of temporary tattoos of scary faces!

I forgot all about my homework and decided to put one on right away. I picked a really scary face with red eyes, and I put it on to my arm. As soon as it was on my skin, the red eyes blinked! I *discovered* it wasn't an ordinary *tattoo*—it was alive!

The tattoo started to talk to me! It said, "Hey kid, do what I say and I'll make you rich and famous! Just send me to *the Prime Minister*! He's my real *target*! Once I'm the Prime Minister's tattoo, then we'll have some fun!"

I got out my pen and drew a zip over the tattoos mouth so it couldn't talk any more. I couldn't wait to show everyone my silent tattoo!

"I like the game because you can be creative and it makes you think hard."

Student





ABOUT THE CARDS

There are four packs of cards, each with its own theme. Each pack contains 50 *Idea Cards* (white) and 15 *Awesome Cards* (coloured).

The packs are designed to be used on their own but they can easily be mixed together when games or activities need bigger sets.

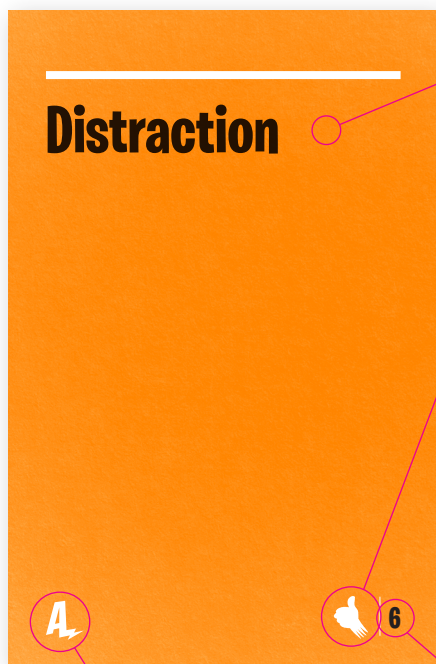
Themes are not applied with a heavy hand and each pack can tell all kinds of stories.

The themes are:

-  **Into the Danger Zone!**
– Action and adventure.
-  **Adventures in Space and Time**
– Fantasy, sci-fi and horror.
-  **Best. Day. Ever.**
– Everyday life, relationships and whānau.
-  **Just the Facts**
– Science, history and weirdness.

Awesome cards





Awesome cards have a coloured background and present a word or phrase that describes a building block for a potential story.



Each card has an Awesome symbol showing it is an Awesome Card.

Icon & colour unique to each pack to aid sorting when packs are mixed.

Each card contains symbols to show the type of idea.

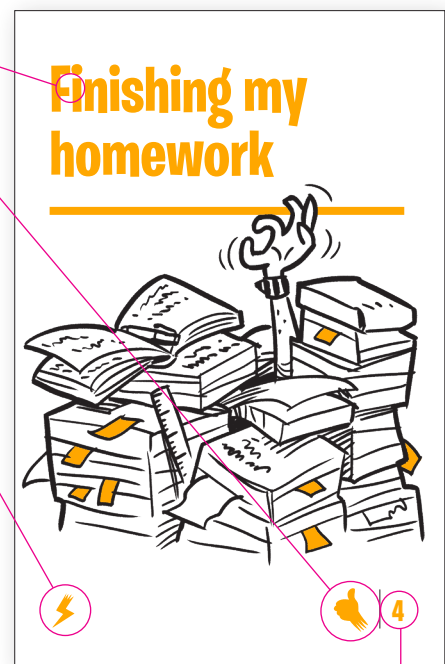
-  Character
-  Location
-  Action
-  Object

Some cards contain more than one type of idea, e.g. Racing cats is both an action, and an object.

Cards are numbered to help with sorting and for reference purposes.

Idea cards

Idea cards have a white background and contain ideas for specific actions, locations, objects or characters that could appear in a story.



CREATE YOUR OWN CARDS & PACKS

Customise *Game of Awesome* by designing your own cards! Blank card templates, alternate rules, and much more can be found at awesome.tki.org.nz

PLAYING GAME OF AWESOME

The rules

 3-4  10-20 MIN

Game of Awesome is easy to learn and easy to teach. The best way to introduce the game to a new classroom or community is to play one round with a small group and then send the players out to launch their own games.

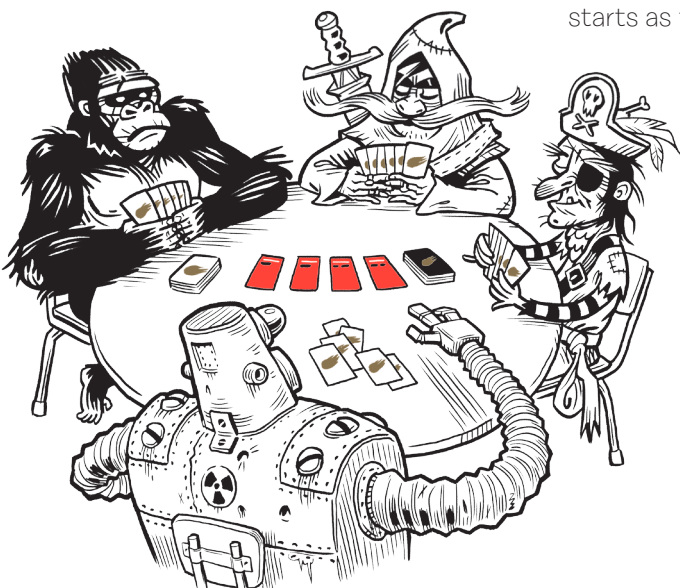
In this game you see blank pieces of a story, and match them with funny and interesting ideas. Every time your idea gets picked, you move closer to winning!

Getting Ready

- A.** Sort the cards into two decks – a deck of white *Idea Cards*, and a deck of coloured *Awesome Cards*.
- B.** Shuffle the *Awesome Card* deck and put it on the table upside down so the cards are hidden.
- C.** Flip over the top four story cards from the *Awesome Card* deck. Put them on the table so everyone can see them.
- D.** Shuffle all the *Idea Cards* and deal 6 secret cards to each player.
- E.** Put what's left of the *Idea Cards* down on the table, upside down so the cards are hidden.
- F.** Now everyone can look at their cards – but keep them secret!
- G.** Choose a player to be the first *Judge*. If you can't decide, whoever is oldest starts as the *Judge*.

“That was a powerful moment, [the class] really responded to these expert kids sharing the rules, sharing their knowledge with the rest of the class.”

Year 3/4 teacher

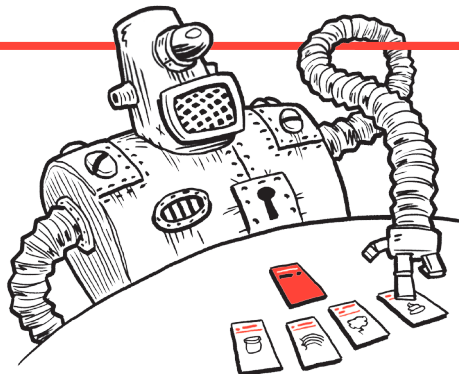


To play

1. The *Judge* looks at the visible *Awesome Cards* and chooses one.
2. Everyone else chooses one of their white *Idea Cards* to pair up with the *Judge's Awesome Card*.
3. Players pass their secret *Idea Card* to the *Judge*.



4. Without looking, the *Judge* gives the secret cards a quick shuffle.
5. The *Judge* shows the *Idea Cards* to everyone and reads them out.



6. Which *Idea Card* makes the best pair with the *Awesome Card*? The *Judge* chooses their favourite.
7. Whoever played that card wins the round! They get one *Awsome Point* and put the *Awsome Card* and their winning *Idea Card* in front of themselves.
8. Put all other used *Idea Cards* at the bottom of the white *Idea Card* deck.

9. Everyone except the *Judge* takes a new *Idea Card* so they hold six cards.
10. Flip over another *Awsome Card* and put it with the others so everyone can see it.



11. The player who won becomes the *Judge* for the next round.
12. Return to step one and play another round!

To win

The first person to three *Awsome Points* is the winner!



Or try this extra *awesome way to play...*

The first person to three *Awsome Points* must describe a story that includes all three of their winning pairs of cards.

If they can, they win!

If they can't describe a story, they lose a point, and put one of their card pairs out of the game. Then everyone keeps going!

COMMON QUESTIONS

How do you match cards?

Every type of *Idea Card* can match with every *Awesome Card*, although sometimes the link won't be obvious.

If players are getting stuck for ideas, take some time together to think creatively about how the cards can match each other.

For example:

- A *character* card can say who does the Awesome thing, or who is affected by it.
- A *location* card can say where the Awesome thing happens, or where it's going, or where it's from.
- An *action* card can say how the Awesome thing happens, or what it involves.
- An *object* card can say what the Awesome thing is for, or what gets broken or changed by the Awesome thing.

Each round, a judge has to choose the winning card match. There is no simple rule for making this decision - that's why the game needs a judge!

Every individual judge just has to follow their imagination to find the card match that is most exciting and interesting for them.

How much story is enough?

In the advanced game, players claim their win by describing a story using all their cards. The story doesn't need to be amazing or detailed to win, the player just needs to give it their best shot using the cards they have collected during the game.

After the game is finished, players have an opportunity to go deeper with story development. They can discuss the winner's story and consider how to strengthen the links between the different ideas, fill in gaps in exciting ways, extend the story beyond the cards, or make small changes that would make the whole story richer and more satisfying. Some will want to go further: they might describe an imagined movie trailer for their story, or give a detailed plot summary showing how all the bits fit together, or launch into a first-person narrative.

After playing the game a few times, as you get more comfortable with the storytelling component, you can challenge your group to tell their stories in special ways. Perhaps you all agree to present the winning story in the form of a news report, or to come up with a dramatic title for your story before telling it.

What are some other ways to play?

Game of Awesome can be tweaked in many ways to deliver different experiences. Here are some ideas to inspire your own experiments:

- Shuffle two or more packs from *Game of Awesome* together for even more awesome combinations and to play with more than four players.
- The game can also be played in teams instead of with individual players.
- In the basic rules, the Judge chooses their favourite match without knowing who submitted which cards, or why. Try a variant where players play their cards "face up", and they can explain why they think their card is a good match. (There is a catch here, because it means the Judge will know when someone is about to win and might decide not to award that player a point, no matter what!)
- The game can last longer by playing to five points instead of three, but it's hard to tell stories involving five pairs of winning cards! Unless you feel up to the challenge, it's better to play a series of games and carry over the points from each round.
- Try out one or more of the official rules variations on the next page.

VARIANT GAMES

The Game of Awesome cards are flexible enough to support many other games. Try the featured variants of the game at awesome.tki.org.nz.

But don't stop there! See what else you and your students can discover as you explore the possibilities of these cards.

“The basic rules are a good starting point, especially for the younger students. Older students wanted to explore and create variations of the game.”

Year 3/4 teacher

Talk the Talk

Introduces an oral element to the standard gameplay, where players earn points by explaining how a new card fits their story best.

Edit as you go

Puts the focus on collectively editing a shared story, swapping out old ideas for new ones.

Ultimate Awesome

Tactical and strategic play is emphasised when players have to make the best use of their entire hand of cards.

Story Showdown

Players refine their story by deciding over and over again whether to swap out a current card for a new one.

Write is Might

Players get to create their own Idea Cards as they play and pit them against the pre-printed cards.

Mixing Bowl

Players pull Idea Cards out of a bowl and act them out for their team to guess.

Keep Talking!

Storytelling is centre-stage in this variant where players take turns continuing a shared story, trying to include elements from their secret cards.

USING THE CARDS TO SUPPORT WRITING

This resource was developed to support and encourage students' writing. There are many ways to approach this objective, but as an example, one pathway is explored in detail below.

Phase 1 –

Use the cards to play *Game of Awesome*.

Phase 2 –

Use the cards to help plan a story.

Phase 3 –

Use the cards as reference markers as the story is being written.

Phase 1. Playing the game

As well as being a fun activity in its own right, *Game of Awesome* generates enthusiasm for creative writing and develops foundational skills that support story-making.

- Gameplay involves reading, listening and talking, providing a multi-sensory experience that suits multiple learning styles.
- Players build vocabulary, share creative thoughts, combine ideas in unexpected ways, and explore the connections between different story elements. Anyone who struggles with ideas for their writing will find plenty of inspiration in *Game of Awesome*!
- Players experience thinking about stories at a concrete level of specific ideas like “the planet Mars” and “my know-it-all-sister”, and the more abstract level of plot components like “mentor” and “betrayal”. This improves understanding of how stories work and how they can be assembled.
- Bringing these skills together is part of the game: to claim victory in *Game of Awesome*, a winner must describe a story that uses all the cards they collected as they played.

Phase 2. Planning a story

After building excitement through the game, students can use the cards to plan a story. They might use their winning cards from a game, or select new cards just for this task.

Students lay the cards out as they please, arranging them - and rearranging them - into the shape of a story they want to write. By physically manipulating the cards, students can discover interesting combinations and experiment with different story options.

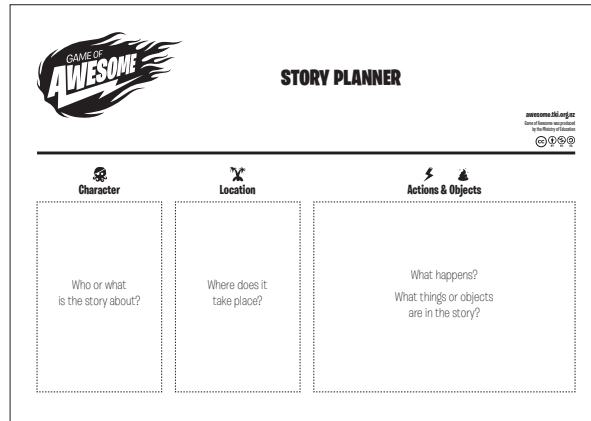
The opportunity to easily try different combinations by manipulating the cards is particularly useful for learners who find planning for writing difficult.

Stories can be planned alone or in groups. The interaction as students develop explanations for new card combinations leads to rich and interesting story ideas.

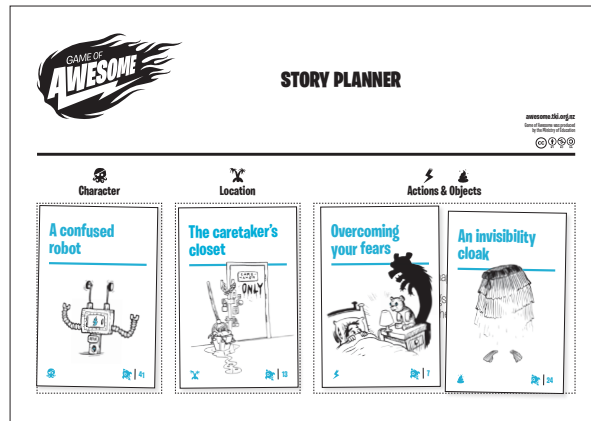
Phase 2. CONT. Story planner templates

Students can use story planner templates to help focus their ideas. Templates can be downloaded from awesome.tki.org.nz or you can create your own.

Story planner templates make use of the symbols identifying Ideas as characters, locations, actions and objects, so make sure students know where to find them on the cards!



1. A story planner template can be used to help a student begin structuring their story. The categories of cards support this planning.



2. Once the elements of a story are selected, the cards make thinking about different options easy. For example, would it be better if it was set on a futuristic battlefield? Just swap one location for another.




3. To fill in gaps, and to further plan, written notes can be added.

Phase 2. CONT. Genre and purpose specific planners

Here are a some further examples of story planners designed for specific types of story.

Download at
awesome.tki.org.nz.

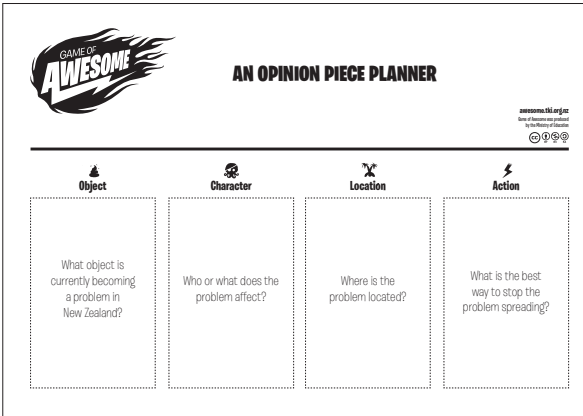


A HERO'S QUEST PLANNER

awesome.tki.org.nz
One of Awesome's products
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Character The hero of the story	Action The hero's special skill	Location Where the story starts	Character The villain of the story
Object The object that the villain is associated with	Location Where the hero must travel to	Action The villain's plan	Object What the hero uses to defeat the villain

A story planner for a heroic fictional story.



AN OPINION PIECE PLANNER

awesome.tki.org.nz
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Object What object is currently becoming a problem in New Zealand?	Character Who or what does the problem affect?	Location Where is the problem located?	Action What is the best way to stop the problem spreading?
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A story planner for a non-fiction opinion piece.



A POEM PLANNER

awesome.tki.org.nz
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Character Object Action Location What is the poem about?	Your idea How should the poem make the reader feel?
Interesting words What are some words that will be useful in the poem?	

A story planner for a poem combining cards and student notes.

Phase 3. Using the cards to help write a story

Once a story has been planned it is time to write. The cards give the student a clear visual reference for their story, reminding and inspiring them as they write. This helps the student get started and stay on track.

One way of using the cards is to line the cards up in order. For each card, the student can write a sentence or a paragraph before moving on to the next one, building their story piece by piece.

Breaking through the blank page

Sometimes writers find it hard to get the first words on the paper. To help overcome this obstacle, offer students a sentence to begin their story. Make sure there is a blank space in the sentence where they can write one of their Idea Cards. The starter sentence should be something like this:

"I had to get to _____ before the sun went down. I didn't know how difficult it would be!"

"My adventure began when _____ asked me for a favour."

"As soon as I saw _____ I knew I had to have it!"

"I had always wanted to try _____. I decided today was the day!"

Writing together

Sometimes writers are full of great ideas but actually writing them down is more of a struggle. The cards, and the Game of Awesome itself, strongly encourage students to talk together and share ideas and collaborate in their creative activity. This could help reluctant writers who could share their thoughts verbally with someone else who types or writes them down. They could take turns as the scribe, or one person could do the whole story allowing the others to focus on their storytelling.

Non-Fiction?

Although the cards are obviously geared towards fictional storytelling, they can also be used – with a little bit of extra care! – to support non-fiction writing.

- Use blanks to allow students to create their own cards if they can't find a card that fits the point they're trying to make.
- Ask students to go through the packs and select cards that relate to their everyday life. Play a game using only these cards. Remember, even though some of the illustrations show extraordinary and unreal things, the ideas usually have an everyday meaning as well!
- After a field trip, work as a class to create new cards inspired by the experience.

"One boy who is a really struggling writer said 'how do you spell vicious?' This is not a word he would ever have used in his writing, but because he really got into it, it lifted the range of language that he was using."

Year 4/5 teacher

UNLEASH YOUR CLASSROOM CREATIVITY

The cards were designed to encourage writing but as you and your students get to know Game of Awesome you will discover many other fun and creative ways to use these cards to support learning across the curriculum. Below are just a few ideas to get you started!

Idea cards

Idea cards can provide a burst of inspiration by describing a single specific thing with a provocative illustration. They can be used to answer questions in surprising ways.

- Use Idea cards to inspire a skit or to challenge drama performers.
- Ask a class to come up with new illustrations that express the Idea on the card in as many different ways as they can.
- Explore metaphors and similes by thinking of everyday things that feel like the most outlandish Idea Cards. What else might feel like “jumping into an active volcano”? What else is as unappealing as “snot lipstick”?
- Use the idea cards as the basis for an exercise in writing newspaper stories - send student reporters out to uncover stories, picking cards at random to decide who, what and where the stories are about.

Awesome cards

Awesome cards are more abstract. They provide the shape of a story, but they need to be filled in with details whenever they are used. They provoke questions: who, what, why, where?

- Ask a class to think of a favourite film or book, and then identify the Awesome Cards that are present in that story. Is there a showdown? Is there a hiding place?
- Take one Awesome Card and start applying Idea Cards to it: a location card could show where the Awesome Card happens, a character card could show a person who was involved, and so on. See how many Idea Cards you can add without repeating yourself or getting tangled up!
- Go through some Awesome Cards and talk about whether they are probably good things or probably bad things for the hero of the story. A mentor is probably a good thing, and a betrayal is probably a bad thing. Is it always easy to decide? Would a story where only good things happened be fun? What about a story where only bad things happened?

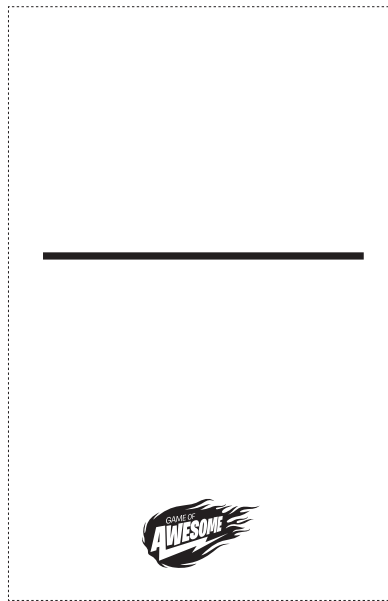
Awesome potential

When you use the cards you'll see students exploring ideas and making new connections. There will also be lots of laughter, as the humour in the cards keeps engagement high.

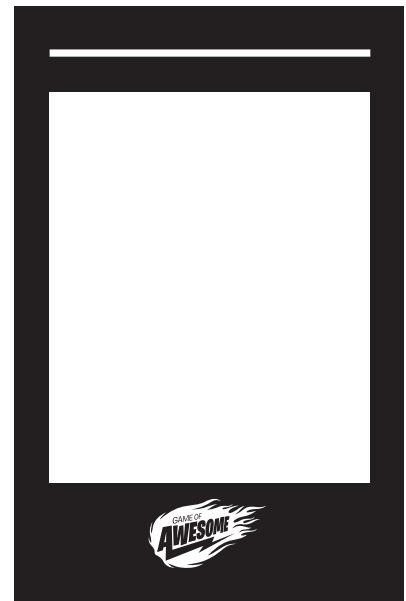
You'll also find plenty of opportunities to grab hold of something in the student experience and dive into it. In particular, watch out for:

- how students share ideas and actively listen to each other;
- the ways students develop ideas collaboratively in groups, instead of by themselves;
- how the cards stretch and extend vocabulary and build understanding;
- how students learn to exercise their judgment and make decisions in ambiguous situations;
- different methods used by students in giving and receiving feedback;
- the ways students use knowledge from their lives out of school to enliven their stories and contributions;
- the things students reveal about themselves and their perceptions of the world as they give meaning to the cards during play.

CREATING YOUR OWN CARDS & PACKS



Students are encouraged to design their own *Game of Awesome* cards and packs.



Blank card templates, alternate rules, and much more can be found at awesome.tki.org.nz

CREDITS

Game of Awesome was produced for the [Ministry of Education](#) by [Chrometoaster](#):

- **Design and writing team** – Robert Whitaker, Aaron McKirdy, Morgan Davie, Nic Gorman, Dave Turnbull
- **Illustrator** – Gavin Mouldey
- **Education consultancy** – Michael Absolum and Ian Stevens (*Evaluation Associates*), Rachel Bolstad and Sarah Beresford (*NZCER*)

The ideas on the cards were developed with groups of boys from Te Aro School (Wellington) and St. Patrick's College (Wellington). Special thanks to the teachers of Newtown, Houghton Valley, Korokoro and Kilbirnie Schools who helped with the design of the game.

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RESEARCH AND THIS RESOURCE

Several streams of evidence suggest how these cards, and the *Game of Awesome* activity, can promote and support learning.

Learning in diverse classrooms

The *Best Evidence Synthesis Diverse Students* (2003)¹ was designed to provide a collation of the evidence of what works within the context of diverse classes of students, which is the reality for New Zealand teachers. Features of successful approaches are listed in this paper:

- Teaching and tasks are structured to support students' active learning orientations.
- Students help each other with resource access and provide elaborated explanations.
- Pedagogical practice is appropriately responsive to the interdependence of socio-cultural and cognitive dimensions.
- Relevance is made transparent to students.
- Ways of taking meaning from text, discourse, numbers or experience are made explicit.
- Teaching builds on students' prior experiences and knowledge.
- Student diversity is utilised effectively as a pedagogical resource.
- Teaching is responsive to all learners.
- Students have opportunities to resolve cognitive conflict.
- Optimal use is made of complementary combinations of teacher-directed groupings, co-operative groups, structured peer interaction and individual work (including homework) to facilitate learning cycles.
- Tasks and classroom interactions provide scaffolds to facilitate student learning.
- Students receive effective, specific, appropriately frequent, positive and responsive feedback.
- Teaching promotes metacognitive strategy use (e.g. mental strategies in numeracy) by all students.
- Teaching scaffolds reciprocal or alternating tuakana teina roles in student group, or interactive work.
- Teaching promotes sustained thoughtfulness (e.g. through questioning approaches, wait-time, and the provision of opportunities for application and invention).

1: <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>

Learning in diverse classrooms

CONT.

This resource easily supports many of these successful features, indicating that it is very suitable for use even in highly diverse classroom environments.

“As a first step to improve boys’ achievement we need to ensure that they are engaged in, and excited by, their learning.”

– Boys’ Achievement: A Synthesis of the Data. (2007)².

Evidence such as the Boys’ Achievement report clearly indicates that boys are not achieving as well as girls in reading and writing. *Game of Awesome* was developed with a specific focus on addressing this growing disparity. This resource is not a panacea but it has the potential to generate motivation and engagement among a group that has been difficult to reach.

This resource is aligned with research into successful strategies for teaching boys. An international study by Richard Hawley and Michael Reichert examined narratives submitted by teachers and boys from 18 schools representing the United States, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa³.

The narratives described specific lessons and practices that the submitters deemed especially effective in teaching boys. Successful lessons all shared some of the following features:

- They introduced dramatic novelties and surprises.
- They produced products.
- They were structured as games.
- They required assuming a role or responsibility for promoting the learning of others.
- They presented “open,” unsolved problems.
- They required a combination of teamwork and competition.
- They required vigorous motor activity.
- They focused on boys’ personal realization (their masculinity, their values, their present and future social roles).

2: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/25052/24895>

3: Hawley, R., & Reichert, M. (2009). *Teaching boys: A global study of effective practices*. Pawling, NY: The International Boys’ School Coalition. <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/604-hawley.aspx>

Learning in diverse classrooms CONT.

A lesson using *Game of Awesome* also shares many of these features:

- The lesson revolves around a game.
- Game content has been designed by boys for boys.
- Knowledge of the game is typically shared and refined on a peer-to-peer basis.
- The game supports a mild competitive element as well as team work.
- The game presents open, unsolved problems.
- Players can generate new cards, producing new permanent content for the game.
- The game constantly presents dramatic novelties and surprises.

The entertaining creativity promoted by the game also provides a robust basis for developing a respectful relationship between teacher and students, identified as an important component in lifting student achievement by Wayne Martino (2008)⁴.

4: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Martino.pdf>

CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Game of Awesome is a resource to support teachers in achieving the vision and objectives of The New Zealand Curriculum, and in particular the achievement of boys in writing.

“Literacy in English gives students access to the understanding, knowledge, and skills they need to participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of New Zealand and the wider world. To be successful participants, they need to be effective oral, written, and visual communicators who are able to think critically and in depth.”

The New Zealand Curriculum,
page 18

“As language is central to learning and English is the medium for most learning in the New Zealand Curriculum, the importance of literacy in English cannot be overstated.”

The New Zealand Curriculum,
page 16

English learning area

Speaking, Writing, Presenting:

Level 3 Achievement objectives

- Students will integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies with developing confidence to identify, form, and express ideas.
- Students will show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.
- Students will select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.
- Students will use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.
- Students will organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Level 4 Achievement objectives

- Students will integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies confidently to identify, form, and express ideas.
- Students will show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.
- Students will select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.
- Students will use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.
- Students will organise texts using a range of appropriate structures.

Key Competencies

Thinking

Using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas.

Using language, symbols, and texts
Working with, and making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed, representing and communicating information, experiences, and ideas.

Relating to others

Relating to others is about interacting effectively with a diverse range of people in a variety of contexts, including listening, recognising different points of view, negotiating, and sharing ideas.

Participating and contributing

Being actively involved in communities and drawing together for purposes such as learning, work, celebration, or recreation.