Games without fighting: 20 kinds that teach commerce, logic and dexterity

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Twenty kinds of game built around shops, puzzles and steady hands instead of fights, ranked, with examples and what each one teaches.

Fighting is only one of the things a game can ask a child to do. A game can also ask them to run a shop, work out a rule, or steady a hand, and there are whole kinds of game built around each. This post lists twenty of those kinds, ranked, with what each one asks of a player and a few well-known examples. We have been moving Peabody's own games that way, away from "defeat the enemy" and toward selling, solving and doing something carefully, and this is the map we used.

If you want the short version: pick a kind from the list, try one game, and see whether your child is still thinking about it at bedtime. Peabody's games and library are free through 2026.

How we made this list, and what it is not

We first wanted to build it from the category pages on G2, the software review site. G2 does not list games for players. Its category index has game-related entries only for people who make games: game development, game engines, audio engines, physics engines, gaming tools, player support platforms, AR and VR game engines and gamification software. It has no puzzle, farming or tycoon category, so we could not take the kinds of game, or their "major players", from there. Its pages that list products also refused our requests, so we say nothing about what is on them.

So we searched the web and read lists of puzzle, tycoon, farming and simulation games instead. Those lists are mostly written by game sites and vary in quality. Here is what we can say:

- Checked against what we read: Tetris, Baba Is You and The Witness (puzzle lists), RollerCoaster Tycoon, Transport Tycoon, Planet Coaster, Two Point Hospital and Cities: Skylines (tycoon and management lists), Stardew Valley (farming) and Braid (puzzle platformers).
- Examples we know, not looked up for this post: the other titles named below. We chose each for being long-established, and none is a ranking of sales or quality. We have not played them all, and some carry age ratings, so check the rating and a review before you hand one to a child.
- The ranking is ours. It puts first the kinds that ask for the most commerce, logic and dexterity with the least fighting, and that suit children well. It is a judgment, not a measurement, and no statistic sits behind it.

The twenty kinds, ranked

Commerce: games about buying, selling and running things

1. Shop and store games. You stock shelves, set prices and serve customers. Teaches money, change, supply and demand in a very small form. Examples: Papa's Pizzeria, Restaurant Dash.

2. Tycoon and management games. You build and run a business, such as a park, a hospital or a railway. Teaches planning, budgets and trade-offs. Examples: RollerCoaster Tycoon, Planet Coaster, Two Point Hospital, Transport Tycoon.

3. Farming and harvest games. You plant, wait, harvest and sell. Teaches patience, planning ahead and seasons. Examples: Stardew Valley, Harvest Moon.

4. Cooking and restaurant games. Orders arrive and you assemble them against the clock. Teaches sequencing and working with others. Examples: Overcooked, Cooking Mama. Away from the screen, the same habits live in Peabody's Kitchen.

5. City and world builders. You lay out roads, homes and power. Teaches systems thinking, since each choice changes the others. Examples: Cities: Skylines, SimCity, Minecraft's creative mode.

6. Trading and collecting games. You swap, sort and complete sets. Teaches fair value and sorting. Examples: Pokémon's trading cards, Animal Crossing's turnip market.

Logic: games about working things out

7. Block and falling-piece puzzles. Shapes arrive, you fit them. Teaches spatial reasoning under gentle time pressure. Examples: Tetris, Dr. Mario.

8. Rule-change puzzles. The rules themselves are the thing you move. Teaches reading rules closely and testing ideas. Examples: Baba Is You, Opus Magnum.

9. Line, grid and number puzzles. Fill the grid so every clue holds. Teaches deduction. Examples: Sudoku, Picross, The Witness.

10. Escape-room and hidden-object games. Find clues, combine objects, open the door. Teaches noticing and connecting. Examples: The Room, Machinarium.

11. Word games. Build, guess or unscramble words. Teaches spelling and vocabulary. Examples: Wordle, Scrabble, Boggle. Peabody's Deep Dig turns reading words into the job.

12. Memory and matching games. Flip, remember, pair. Teaches attention and recall. Examples: Concentration, Memory, and Peabody's Memory.

13. Strategy and board games. Plan several moves ahead against an opponent, without anyone being "killed". Teaches foresight and losing gracefully. Examples: Chess, Checkers, Ticket to Ride, Catan.

14. Programming and automation puzzles. You give instructions and watch them run. Teaches sequences and debugging. Examples: Scratch, Human Resource Machine, Lightbot.

Dexterity: games about hands, timing and care

15. Puzzle platformers. Jumping with a puzzle inside it. Teaches timing and learning from a miss. Examples: Braid, Celeste, Super Mario Bros. Some of these are hard, so watch for frustration.

16. Rhythm games. Press in time with the music. Teaches timing and pattern. Examples: Dance Dance Revolution, Beat Saber, Rhythm Heaven.

17. Racing and obstacle courses. Steer clean and fast, against the clock or friends, with nobody hurt. Teaches control and course memory. Examples: Mario Kart, Trackmania.

18. Physics and building toys. Stack, balance, launch, tilt. Teaches cause and effect. Examples: Poly Bridge, World of Goo, Jenga-style stackers.

19. Typing and tracing games. Hands learn a skill while play happens. Teaches keyboard and pencil control. Examples: Nitro Type, TypeRacer.

20. Creative and music-making games. Draw, compose, decorate. Teaches making something of your own. Examples: Toca Boca's apps, Incredibox, Minecraft's creative mode.

Where Peabody's own games fit

We aren't claiming Peabody is a cure for anything, and some of our games still have fighting in a cartoon sense. The ones we point to for this post:

- Deep Dig digs deeper each time a word is read right.
- The Kitchen is real cooking away from the screen, with recipes your child can help with.
- Working Waterpark is being built as we write this and is not ready to link, so we won't describe it yet.

You can see them all on the games page. Stories are in the library.

Questions parents ask

Are games with no fighting automatically good for children?

No. A shop game can be built to keep a child tapping for hours or to sell things inside it, and a puzzle can be frustrating. What a game asks the child to do matters, but so do its length, its ads and its in-game purchases. Check those too.

Why not just ban the fighting games?

That is your call, and families land in different places. This post is about adding other kinds to the mix, so that a child who likes games has more to choose from than "defeat the enemy".

How do I tell whether a game really teaches something?

Watch a child play and ask them to explain what they just did. If they can describe a plan or a rule, they are thinking. We make no claim about what any particular game does for a child, and we have no study to point to.

Is Peabody's list of games free?

Yes, Peabody is free through 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/games-without-fighting-commerce-logic-dexterity