

GAME REVIEW: *DRAWSOMETHING*

Amanda Murphyao

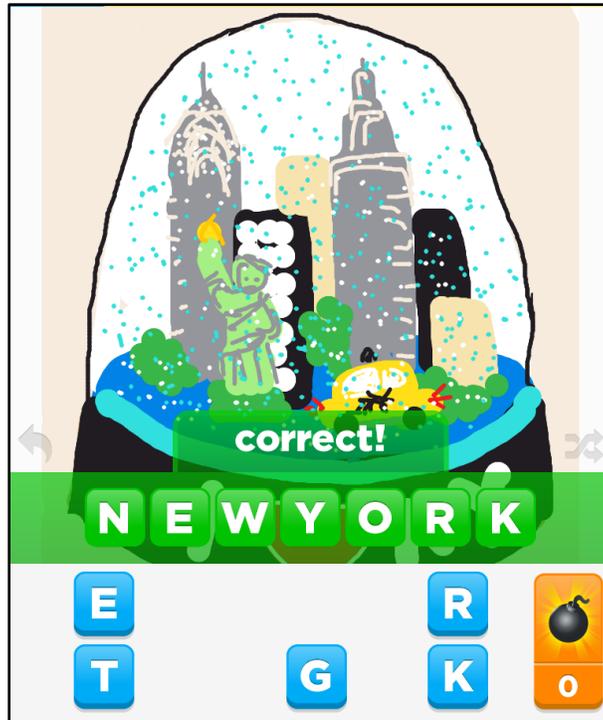
Telephone Pictionary is a wonderful party game. If there are seven players, each person gets a stack with seven small pieces of paper. On the first piece paper, each player writes any sentence they please. (“The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” is always a favorite.) Then, everyone passes their entire stack of paper to the person beside them.

Everyone reads the sentence they have just been given, places it at the back of the stack of paper, draws an illustration of the sentence on the second piece of paper, and then passes the entire stack on. The next person moves the illustration to the back of the stack, writes a caption for the illustration, passes it on, and so on, until the papers come full circle and the ridiculous transformation enabled by many, many lapses in symbolic communication has occurred.

If, for whatever reason, the six people you would have had at this party are spread across the globe, DrawSomething is the next best way to stir confused laughter in the hearts of your friends. This mobile app game, developed by OMGPOP and now owned by Zynga, is, in its own words, “drawsome” (OMGPOP 2012).

A winning combination of Pictionary and Hang Man, DrawSomething allows you to choose from a list three words to draw for your partner in the game. Once you send the drawing off, your partner receives a (slightly fast-forwarded) animation of you drawing the image. They then guess your drawing using the 12 letters provided as hints. They choose a word (or phrase) to draw in return, and the game is on.

You can watch your friend guess ridiculous letter combinations as they struggle through your drawing (and find out just which line in your ornate snow globe rendering of the city got them to guess “newyork”), or you can skip their guessing process and move on to your next turn to draw.



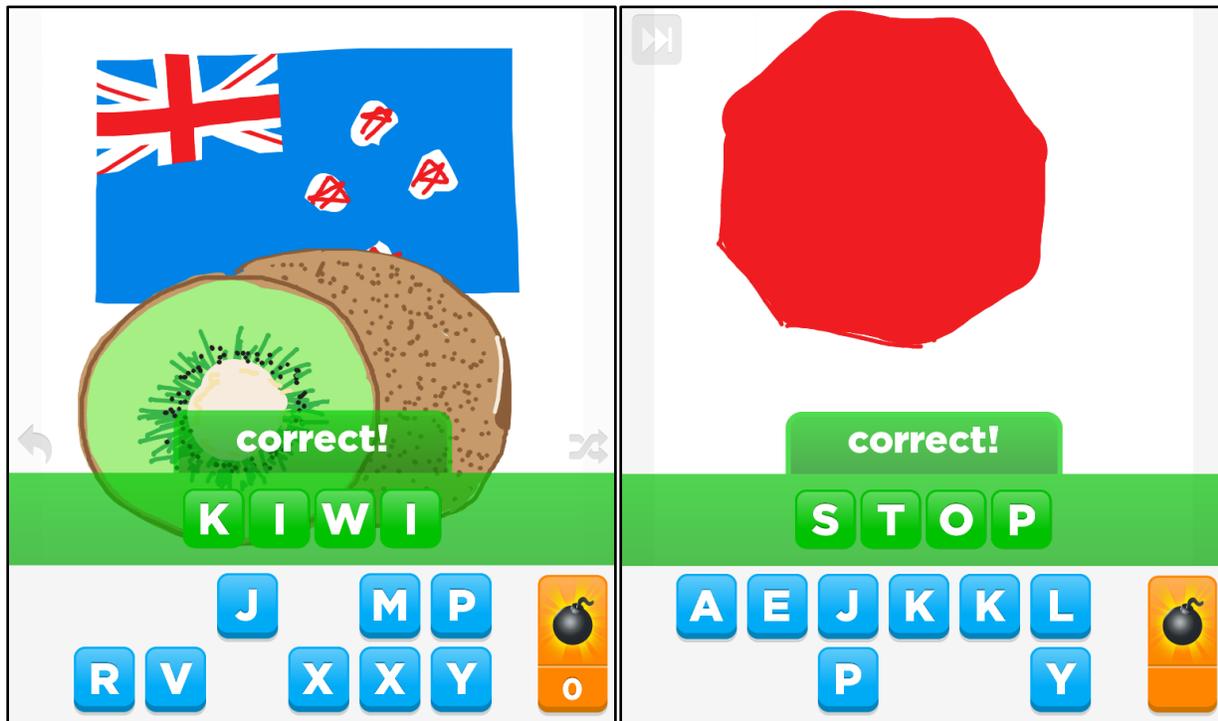
“newyork” by Heather Poole

For each successfully guessed drawing, you and your partner are awarded points in the form of one, two, or three coins (based on your original one, two, or three coin word selection). Coins can be used in-game to buy ‘bombs.’ Bombs can be used to eliminate some of the 12 letters and expedite guessing, or to unlock different categories of words with higher coin-earning potential (anywhere from five to nine coins).

Free to play, available for most mobile devices, and incredibly fun, it is no wonder that the app is so popular, boasting over 20 million downloads by March 2012 (Smith 2012). Although perhaps less addictive than other games, DrawSomething boasts 3,000 drawings per second at peak times (BBC 2012).

One of the best parts about the game is that you can devote as much (or as little) time to it as you would like. I have friends who spend several minutes researching the New Zealand flag and meticulously detailing every aspect of a “kiwi,” and others, like me, who stick to a basic red

hexagon for “stop.” The choices in word selection and the open-ended nature of the game make DrawSomething appropriate and accessible for players of varying levels of skill (and patience).



“kiwi” by Heather Poole

“stop” by Amanda Murphyao

For the overly ornate (or particularly hilarious) drawings that you make, there are buttons with the option to share the image on Facebook or save it to your mobile device. Advertisements in the free version are not incredibly annoying, and, after some adjustments by Zynga, are no longer intrusive to game play (although they pop up between every turn). Players are rewarded with three coins in the game for watching 30-second video advertisements, which players can watch repeatedly via a link in the coin bank from the home screen. In December, Zynga gave out free coins to users who log in to the game (and, like most apps, you can stay logged in on your own device).

The message sending option between drawings is a nice touch, as the messages often provide illuminating insight into what my dad was trying to draw, albeit after the fact. I have

only played with friends and acquaintances, but DrawSomething offers the option to solicit partners at random in addition to finding partners via e-mail, Facebook, or username.

While Telephone Pictionary has proven to be a more interactive in-class pedagogical tool, sharing images that I have made or received in DrawSomething with my students has fostered some excellent class discussions about communication, symbolism, iconography, shared frames of reference, and popular culture.



“blueivy” by Timothy Murphy

Screen captures from the games offer a solid, timely introduction to visual culture for students of any age, offering a convenient segue into discussions of stereotypes.



“wedding” by Heather Poole

“beaver” by Heather Poole

The word selections available in DrawSomething offer an opportunity to explore the limits of visual communication and the possibilities for linguistic miscommunication, as two variations on “pitcher” attest:

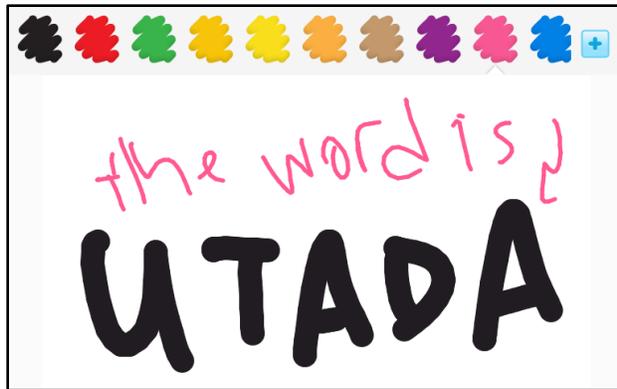


“pitcher” by Amanda Murphyao

“pitcher” by Heather Poole

Some complaints I have heard about DrawSomethinginclude the repetitiveness of words, which is partially remedied by the ability to unlock different categories of words after earning at least 400 coins. The ‘premium’ (\$2.99) version of the game boasts “2000 more words and hours of fun,” which may be a shrewd investment for avid DrawSomething users (OMGPOP 2012).

At times, the coinscale does not seem to correlate to the word difficulty, making an elaborate one-coin word not ‘worth it’ if you are playing exclusively for the prestige of pixelated coins. Some of the words are actually two words crammed together, like “lionking,” making it somewhat more difficult to guess. However, there is the option of writing the answer at the bottom if your illustrative skills are not up to the task, or if you accidentally chose the bonus category of “asian themed” and got a bunch of Japanese pop star names that would be unrecognizable to your mother even if you did know how to draw them.



“utada” by Amanda Murphyao



“leehyori” by Heather Poole

Drawings made on an iPad are often significantly easier to guess than drawings made on smaller mobile devices, particularly if your partner doesnot own a stylus.



Image courtesy of Peyton Polanek

It seems a bit unnecessary that DrawSomething is available as a board game (for \$39.99), since Pictionary already exists, and paper and pens are generally available without additional expense, but the option is available for those who are disinclined or unable to download the app.

The free version of the game has occasionally been buggy. I once drew a baseball field for the word “pitcher,” but my partner was only left with letters to guess “nest.” He was forced to concede the round, which reset our turn counter, but this did not have any impact on our coins or general game play (other than some angst). However, message boards about the problem seem to indicate that this issue has been sorted out for current versions of the game (GetSatisfaction 2012).

Overall, I highly recommend the free mobile app version of the game DrawSomething, both for its entertainment value and for its pedagogical potential. It serves as a reasonable substitute for the old pen and paper routine, maintaining much of the original charm of Pictionary and offering new avenues of bemusing miscommunication through the wonders of digital access.

– Amanda Murphy, Carleton University

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