Ex Libris

a game of intertextuality

How interconnected is literature? How similiar are its ideas, its themes, its symbols, its questions? In this game, you will puzzle these very connections, proposing and arguing literary connections to complete puzzles of well-known texts. You may not know all of the texts, but there is a world of books to fill in the gaps. Reading invites response, and in this game, readers become writers of their own pathways, navigating the texts of yesteryear and, in effect, making them their own.

Getting Started

Ex Libris is played with 20 unique playing cards, each representing a different text from Western Literature. At the beginning of a new game, players should shuffle the stack of cards, allowing the more general red 'Ex Libris' side to face up. The players should then find a sturdy flat surface on which to play. To begin, players draw the cards from the shuffled stack and construct an array. The cards should remain facing 'up', allowing the 'Ex Libris' side of the books to remain legible. The puzzle array may be made in any size, orientation, or styling, but a standard of 4 columns and 5 rows is recommended for beginning players.

Orienting the Puzzle

Once the puzzle is constructed, the players will need to define starting card or *princip,* and the concluding card or *compleo.* These are the two books that will be connected over the course of gameplay, as players make their way from one book to another, journeying from the princip to the compleo. In horizontal puzzles, the princip will the book furthest to the left and the compleo furthest to the right. In rectangular grids, the princip should the upper left card, and the compleo the bottom right. But again, the players are free to define their own beginnings and ends.

Playing the Game

Beginning with the princip, players will take turns suggesting connections between the texts represented by the playing cards. Connections can only be made between adjacent cards. When a connection is proposed, it will need to be validated by the rest of the player pool, either resulting in the rejection of the argued connection or its approval. If the connection is denied, the cards remain unchanged, and a new argument must be made. If the connection is validated, then both cards are flipped over to reveal the 'down' side. Connections will be made in this way, between adjacent cards, until the players have worked their way to the compleo, signaling the completion of the puzzle. Connections should be made in a linear manner, with one connection leading in and one leading out. The completion of the puzzle witll also allow for a period of overarching evaluation, as the pathway of the connected texts should remain as a testament to the demonstrated intertextuality of the 'played' texts.

Variations

Team Games

When you have five or more people, 'Ex Libris can be played as a team competition. Make teams of two and select a single judge. Play occurs much as before, except that teams now take turns suggesting connections to the judge who at the end of each turn decides in favor of one of the teams' argument. The judge then establishes the connection and awards it to the winning team. When the puzzle has been completed, the team with the most connections wins.

Continued...

Bridge Cards

You may decide not to use all of the Ex Libris playing cards in the construction of your puzzle. In this case, the remaining cards may be held and used as 'bridge cards', or patching texts that can be used as intermediary step between two cards when a direct connection cannot be found. When used, bridge cards require two arguments, one in and one out. This tempers their ability to patch cards together, because they require more relating effort.

In the *Team Game*, bridge cards should be distributed evenly between the teams, and can be used for strategic advantage. During the round of arguments for card connections, the bridge card may be deployed as an intermediary between cards. In this case, the team using the bridge would be required to give both th argument into the bridge and back out.

Duels

Designed for situations where there are not enough players for team competition, duels are a great way to challenge individual players to show off their skill. To initiate a duel, two random cards are drawn from a shuffled deck, and the challenged player has a minute to come up with a connection. May be moderated by a judge, like in the team game, and scored to allow for competition between individuals.

In Review

1. Shuffle Cards
2. Construct Puzzle
3. Select Princip and Compleo
4. Play!

princip

compleo

Fig. 1: A sample puzzle

A Note About Books

You may not know all, most, or any of the books in this game, but you will be able to find them. The books used as game pieces in Ex Libris represent what is called the 'Western Canon' a collection of literature that is considered to be the some of the most central writing in all of Western Civilization. If you have not read a book and are interested in it, check out your local library or go online to playexlibris.com.

HAMLET HUCK FINN
THE ODDYSSEY
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
THE DIVINE COMEDY
ALICE IN WONDERLAND

EX LIBRIS

OEDIPUS LE MORTE D
ARTHUR MOBY DICK
BEOWULF DRACULA
CANTERBURY TALES
A TALE OF TWO CITIES
ULYSSESS FAUST
DON QUIXOTE
PARADISE LOST
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S
DREAM PRIDE AND
PREJUDICE DEATH OF
A SALESMAN LOLITA
THE SOUND AND THE
FURY WAR AND PEACE
THE GREAT GATSBY
A DOLL'S HOUSE HOWL
THE WASTE LAND ONE
HUNDRED YEARS OF
SOLITUDE LABYRINTHS