

Pillage and Profit

Introduction

Pillage and Profit is a variation on the classic *Dots and Boxes* strategy game for 2 players – but instead of each box being worth a single point to the player who closes it, a box’s value is based on its contents. These contents may be doubloons, commodities (food, weapons, or armor) that are exchanged for doubloons at the end of the game, or modifiers that change commodity values.

Objective

At the end of the game, the player with the high score – based on captured doubloons and commodities, and the final values of those commodities – wins the game.

Materials

- A game board consisting of an arrangement of dots, located at the corners of boxes in the shapes of squares, triangles, hexagons, etc.

Each box contains one of the following (e.g. Illustration 1):

- A pile of 1 or more doubloons.
- A symbol representing a commodity type.
- A modifier, consisting of 1 or more operations (e.g. an arrow pointing up for addition, down for subtraction), a number, and 1 or more commodity symbols.



Illustration 1: Board with 3 commodities (clockwise from top-left: food, weapons, armor) and 1 modifier.

As seen in some other *Dots and Boxes* variations, the board may begin with some pairs of dots already connected by lines.

- A legend indicating the starting values of the commodities used on the game board (see Illustration 2).
- A pen or pencil for each player.
- Paper for keeping tallies of doubloons and commodities captured by each player.



Illustration 2: Legend showing commodity values.

Rules for play

1. Each player keeps running tallies of the doubloons and commodities that he or she captures in the course of the game. At the start of play, all of these tallies are zero.
2. Each player in turn draws a line to connect a pair of adjacent (but not yet connected) dots.
 - a. If the new line doesn't close a box, the player's turn is over.
 - b. If the line closes a box, the player captures the box's contents, taking one of the following actions:
 - i. If the box has a pile of doubloons, add the quantity in the pile to the player's doubloon tally.
 - ii. If the box has a commodity symbol, add 1 to the player's tally of that commodity.
 - iii. If the box has a modifier, choose one of the operations and one of the commodities shown, and update the value of that commodity in the legend by the number shown.

For example, Illustration 3 shows a modifier with a single operation (subtraction, indicated by the arrow pointing down) and 3 commodities. A player closing a box around this modifier would choose one of those 3 commodities, and update the value of that commodity in the legend by subtracting 5 from it.



*Illustration 3:
Example
subtraction
modifier.*

- c. After updating the appropriate tally or value, the player continues his or her turn by drawing another line, and once again following the instructions starting in step 2.a (above). In other words, a player's turn continues as long as each line drawn by that player in that turn closes a box.
3. Play ends when all boxes are closed, and no more lines can be drawn.
4. At the end of play, both players exchange their captured commodities for doubloons, using the final commodity values. The player with the larger doubloon total wins the game.

Example game

Illustration 4 shows a game played using the board and legend in Illustration 1 and Illustration 2. A heavy line indicates the current move; closed boxes are shaded to indicate which player closed them. (The colors in the lines and shading are just for clarity, and don't affect game play.)

Initial legend.

Food = 5
Weapon = 5
Armor = 5

Player 1, move 1.

Player 2, move 1.

Player 1, move 2.

Player 2, move 2.

Player 1, move 3.

Player 2, move 3.

Player 1, move 4.

Player 1, move 4 (cont.).

Player 2, move 4.

Player 2, move 4 (cont.).

Player 2, move 4 (cont.).

Player 1, move 5.

Final commodity values.

Food = 0
Weapon = 5
Armor = 5

Notes

- In their respective 4th moves, player 1 captures 1 armor, and player 2 captures 1 weapon and 1 food.
- In the 5th move, player 1 closes a box containing a modifier, and (according to that modifier) must then choose one of the 3 commodities and decrease its value by 5 doubloons. In this example, player 1 chooses to decrease the value of food to zero.
- At the end of play, both players exchange their captured commodities for doubloons. Here, both end up with 5 doubloons; thus, the game is a tie.

Illustration 4. Example game, ending in a tie.

Suggestions for circle leaders

- As an alternative to distributing copies of the “Rules for play”, or to reading them aloud verbatim, consider encouraging students to infer key elements – commodity values, modifiers, scoring – from the game board and legend, and from their previous experience (if any) with *Dots and Boxes*-type games.
- When introducing the game, feel free to start with simple boards. For example, even the use of 2 commodities of different values, without modifiers or doubloon piles, makes for an interesting variation on *Dots and Boxes*. Relatively small game boards can be used to make the concepts clear, without getting bogged down.
- On the other hand, students who are open and ready for more advanced challenges might be interested in inventing their own variations – in board and box shapes (and combinations of shapes), number and value of commodities, types of modifiers, bonuses or penalties for closing certain boxes, etc.

Exploration and discussion

Play the game a few times, using different boards and different opponents, if possible.

1. If you played *Dots and Boxes* before this game, did you find *Pillage and Profit* more difficult? If so, what aspects did you find most challenging?
2. Did you generally choose your moves based on the contents of the boxes – or did you simply try to close as many boxes as possible, as you would when playing *Dots and Boxes*?
 - a. If your approach was based on the contents of the boxes, in what ways (if any) did you treat modifiers differently from commodities? Was this aspect of your approach successful? Why or why not?
 - b. If you chose your moves primarily to close as many boxes as possible, without regard to their contents, were you ever surprised by a game’s outcome, after exchanging commodities for doubloons? If so, what explanation do you now have (if any) for the surprising outcome?
3. If you had the chance to play with multiple boards, which did you find most interesting or challenging? Why?
4. If you were to design a *Pillage and Profit* game board, with an accompanying set of commodity values, what elements – box shapes, variety of commodities and values, modifiers, etc. – would you include, and why?