



April 13 is National Scrabble Day—a day set aside to enjoy a game played around the world and to acknowledge its creator, [Alfred Moshier Butts](#). It's also a great time to develop the **Adapt** critical thinking trait with this lively spelling activity. Alfred Butts used his flexible thinking to overcome unemployment during The Great Depression. Let's use the **Adapt** trait in his honor as we enjoy his clever game design.

Note: Preview literature and Internet websites for appropriate content to match your district guidelines.

Getting Started

Critical Thinking Trait Focus: Review the **Adapt** critical thinking trait with students and explain they will be using it to play a board game in an unusual way.



Adapt: I adjust my actions and strategies to accomplish tasks.

Learning Standards Focus: basic mathematical computation, spelling, listening and speaking, dictionary skills

Vocabulary: accurate, addition, multiplication, alphabetical order, adapt, the prefix un- as in unemployed

Prepare for the Activity: Ask parents (or post on community social networking groups) to borrow or donate Scrabble boards for the class.

Prepare for the Activity:

- In the early 1930s, Alfred Butts was an unemployed architect. He used the **Adapt** trait with his design of Scrabble to make money.
- Butts studied the front page of [The New York Times](#) to calculate the frequency each letter of the alphabet was used. This helped him determine how many of each letter he would include in the game.
- The game was first named “Lexiko” and “Criss Cross Words” before Scrabble.
- Today, one hundred and fifty million Scrabble boards have been sold worldwide.
- To memorialize Butts and his game, the [street sign](#) at 35th Avenue and 81st Street in New York is stylized using Scrabble letters, with their values as subscript.

Instruction

Activity Directions

1. Introduce students to the **Adapt** trait using media or literature titles listed below (see Literature Suggestions or Additional Web Resources). Use this time to examine related vocabulary.
2. Prompt students with thought-provoking questions to facilitate the development of the **Adapt** critical thinking trait. Examples include:



- In what ways can you show appreciation for different ideas and perspectives.
 - In what ways do you think [character] prepared to accomplish the task or solve the problem?
 - What steps would you have taken (refer to literature)?
3. Organize students in groups of 2–4 to compete in an unusual game of Scrabble. Provide a dictionary at each game station to check for spelling accuracy.
 4. After students have played Scrabble with their group for approximately 7–10 minutes, guide students to shift one table to the left and continue using the progress and tiles at the new station. Repeat this step, shifting groups to the next board as long as time allows.
 5. At the conclusion of the game rotation time, challenge students to write number statements representing the score for various words on their current Scrabble boards.

Reflect

After students have adapted to play an unusual game of Scrabble, facilitate a discussion about their thinking and learning. Guide students as they focus on how the **Adapt** critical thinking trait helped them complete the task. Encourage discussions to help students recognize the need for flexible and fluid thinking when their tiles and the words on the board changed abruptly.

Extend the Learning

- Research topics related to The Great Depression to better understand why unemployment was a problem.
- Allow students to explore related articles about Alfred's other game. Challenge students to recreate the game that never took off.

Literature Suggestions

Books about Adapting: *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales; *How to Be a Lion* by Ed Vere; *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley; *Perfect* by Nicola Davies; *A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin* by Jen Bryant; *The Moon Within* by Aida Salazar

Additional Web Resources

[How To Play Scrabble](#)