SOFTWARE & TECH

What Are Cards Against Humanity

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What Are Cards Against Humanity: A Comprehensive Guide to the Party Game for Horrible People

In the world of modern party games, few titles have sparked as much laughter, controversy, and cringe-worthy amusement as Cards Against Humanity. If you have ever found yourself at a gathering where someone pulls a white card reading "A Super Soaker filled with cat pee" to complete the sentence "I got my first job because of _____," then you already have a taste of what this game is all about. But for the uninitiated, the question remains: **What Are Cards Against Humanity**? At its core, Cards Against Humanity is a fill-in-the-blank party game that thrives on dark humor, pop culture references, and the sheer absurdity of human creativity. However, that simple description barely scratches the surface of this cultural phenomenon.

Originally launched on Kickstarter in 2011, the game was created by a group of Highland Park High School alumni who wanted to craft something deliberately offensive, irreverent, and hilarious. It is often described as a game for "horrible people," a tagline the creators wear as a badge of honor. The format is deceptively simple: players take turns drawing black question or fill-in-the-blank cards, while everyone else plays white answer cards from their hand. The judge, known as the Card Czar, picks the funniest combination. The result is a chaotic, often shocking, and consistently entertaining experience that has made it a staple of college dorms, house parties, and game nights around the globe.

This article will explore every facet of the game, from its basic structure and rules to its expansions, controversies, and lasting impact on pop culture. By the end, you will not only understand exactly what Cards Against Humanity is but also why it has become one of the best-selling and most talked-about games of the last decade.

The Core Gameplay: How Cards Against Humanity Actually Works

To truly answer the question "What Are Cards Against Humanity," it helps to start with the mechanics. The game comes in a distinct black box and contains two main types of cards: black cards and white cards. The rules are straightforward, but the execution is where the magic happens.

The Deck Breakdown

The game consists of two decks. The **black cards** contain either a fill-in-the-blank statement or a question. For example, a black card might read: "I got my first job because of _____." Alternatively, it might pose a question like: "What is the next big thing in fashion?" The **white cards**, on the other hand, contain nouns, phrases, or concepts that range from the mundane to the mortifying. Examples include "A dead baby," "Natural selection," "A micropenis," or "The miracle of childbirth." The absurd juxtaposition of these white card responses with the black card prompts is what makes the game so funny.

Setup and Player Count

Cards Against Humanity is designed for 4 to 10 players, though larger groups can play by splitting into teams or using house rules. Each player starts with a hand of ten white cards. One player is designated as the **Card Czar**for the first round, and this role rotates clockwise with each subsequent round. The Card Czar does not submit a white card but instead judges the submissions from other players.

The Flow of a Round

Each round unfolds in a few simple steps:

- Step 1: The Card Czar draws one black card and reads it aloud to the group.
- Step 2: All other players choose one white card from their hand that they think best completes the black card prompt or answers the question. They place their chosen card face down on the table.
- Step 3: The Card Czar shuffles all the submitted white cards, then reads each combination aloud.
- Step 4: The Card Czar selects the funniest combination, and the player who submitted that white card earns an "Awesome Point." In the official rules, the player keeps the black card as a point.
- Step 5: The role of Card Czar passes to the left (or right, depending on your group's preference), and the next round begins.

Players replenish their hand to ten white cards at the end of each round. The game continues until the group decides to stop, often when someone reaches a predetermined number of points or when the laughter becomes too much to handle.

House Rules and Variations

One of the reasons the game has remained fresh for over a decade is the flexibility of house rules. Many groups play with variations such as:

- Rando Cardrissian: An imaginary player that submits a random white card from the deck each round, adding an element of unpredictable chaos.
- Blind Draw: If a player cannot decide which card to play, they can draw a random card from the discard pile.
- Pick 2 and Pick 3 Cards: Some black cards require players to submit two or three white cards to complete the prompt, leading to even more absurd combinations.
- Wager System: Players can bet on the funniest combination, adding a gambling element to the game.

The History and Rise of Cards Against Humanity

Understanding "What Are Cards Against Humanity" also means understanding where it came from. The game was born from a simple idea: take the format of the classic game *Apples to Apples* and replace the clean, family-friendly content with the most offensive, bizarre, and hilarious concepts imaginable.

The Kickstarter Campaign

In December 2010, a group of eight friends from the Chicago area launched a Kickstarter campaign with a modest goal of $4,000. They wanted to produce just 500 copies of the game. The campaign quickly went viral, raising over $15,000 from more than 600 backers. The first edition was printed in January 2011, and the game sold out almost immediately. The creators, recognizing the demand, printed a second edition in April 2011, which also sold out quickly.

From Indie Project to Cultural Behemoth

The game's success caught the attention of major retailers, and by 2012, the creators had formed Cards Against Humanity LLC. The company took an intentionally anti-corporate stance, refusing to advertise and instead relying on word-of-mouth and viral marketing. They also made the game available under a Creative Commons license, allowing anyone to download, print, and even sell their own versions. This open-source approach helped fuel the game's spread, leading to countless fan-made expansions and variants.

The “Holiday” Expansions and Stunts

The company became known for its unconventional marketing stunts. Each year, they release a limited-edition

Holiday Expansionthat is only available for a short time before Black Friday. These expansions often contain some of the most niche and absurd cards in the entire collection. Additionally, the company has engaged in numerous publicity stunts, such as:

- Selling a box of actual bull manure for $6 per box on Black Friday (they sold out).
- Digging a massive hole in the ground and asking people to donate money for no reason.
- Publishing a clone of the game called “Cards Against Humanity: The Trump Edition” featuring cards that satirize the former president.
- Selling a “Black Box” for $100 that contained nothing but 30 new cards and a mysterious note.

These stunts not only generated massive media coverage but also reinforced the brand's image as irreverent, self-aware, and unapologetically weird.

Why Is Cards Against Humanity So Popular?

The enduring popularity of the game stems from several key factors. While it is easy to dismiss it as "that offensive card game," the reality is more nuanced. The game taps into fundamental aspects of social interaction and humor.

The Element of Surprise

One of the primary reasons the game works so well is the element of surprise. When you are the Card Czar, you never know what white cards will be submitted. The juxtaposition of a seemingly innocuous black card with a horrifying or absurd white card creates a cognitive dissonance that triggers laughter. For example, pairing the black card "What is Batman's guilty pleasure?" with the white card "The Kool-Aid Man" is far funnier than reading either card in isolation.

Social Bonding Through Shared Transgression

Playing Cards Against Humanity often involves pushing the boundaries of good taste. Laughing together at something that is technically offensive creates a sense of shared transgression. It signals that everyone in the group is "in on the joke" and understands that the humor is ironic. This shared experience can strengthen social bonds among friends who appreciate dark or taboo humor.

Low Barrier to Entry

The rules can be explained in under two minutes. There is no complicated strategy, no points tracking beyond the black cards, and no real skill involved beyond a sense of timing and humor. This makes it accessible to a wide range of players, from teenagers to grandparents (though the content might not be suitable for all ages).

Replayability and Customization

With over 600 cards in the base game and dozens of official and fan-made expansions, no two games are ever the same. The humor depends entirely on the group dynamic. A group of college students will find different combinations funny than a group of coworkers or family members. Additionally, the open-source nature of the game means players can create their own custom cards, print them, and add them to the deck. This endless customization ensures the game never gets stale.

The Controversies: When Humor Goes Too Far

No discussion of "What Are Cards Against Humanity" would be complete without addressing the controversies that have surrounded the game since its inception. The game has been criticized for including cards that some consider racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive.

Specific Cards That Sparked Backlash

Several white cards have been singled out for promoting harmful stereotypes. Examples include cards referencing the transatlantic slave trade, racially charged tropes, and sexual violence. Critics argue that while the game presents itself as "just a joke," these cards can normalize harmful ideas and create an uncomfortable environment for marginalized players.

The “Ironic Offense” Defense

The creators have consistently defended the game by arguing that it is intended as satire. They claim that the offensive content is presented in a clearly ironic context, and that the game is designed to mock the very prejudices it references. However, this defense has not satisfied all critics. Some argue that irony does not negate the potential harm, especially if the humor is directed at vulnerable groups.

How Players Navigate the Offensive Content

In practice, many groups adopt house rules to handle sensitive topics. For instance, some players remove cards they find objectionable before the game starts. Others use the "X-Card" rule, which allows any player to veto a card if it makes them uncomfortable. The creators have also made efforts to update the game over time, removing some of the most controversial cards and adding more inclusive ones.

The Expansions: Expanding the Absurdity

If the base game offers endless combinations, the expansions take it to an entirely new level. Knowing about the available expansions is a key part of understanding what Cards Against Humanity is today.

Official Expansion Packs

The company has released six numbered expansion packs (1 through 6), each containing 100 to 120 new cards. These expansions add new white and black cards that introduce new themes and inside jokes. Some of the best cards in the entire game are found in these expansions.

Themed Expansions

Beyond the numbered packs, the company has released several themed expansions:

- The 90s Nostalgia Pack: Cards that reference pop culture from the 1990s, such as "Surge soda" and "The Macarena."
- The Science Pack: Cards that appeal to nerds and science enthusiasts, featuring terms like "The Higgs boson" and "Dark matter."
- The Weed Pack: Cards specifically designed for players who enjoy cannabis culture.
- The Fantasy and Geek Packs: Expansions that cater to fans of fantasy, sci-fi, and gaming.

The “Bigger, Blacker Box”

In response to player demand for a way to store all the expansions, the company released the Bigger, Blacker Box

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