

Cards Against Humanity got its start in Highland Park

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If you've ever played the popular party game Cards Against Humanity, you have Highland Park to thank for its inception.

All eight creators of the game — Josh Dillon, Daniel Dranove, Eli Halpern, Ben Hantoot, David Munk, David Pinsof, Eliot Weinstein and Max Temkin — are graduates of Highland Park High School, class of 2005. They've been friends since elementary school.

"We have a long history of making games together," Temkin said.

Cards Against Humanity came out of a New Year's Eve party during winter break while the creators were in college.

It started as a complicated question and answer game that asked players questions about one player in particular, such as, "If I could eat only one food every day for the rest of my life, what would it be?" The players would write down their prediction of what the person would say on a note card, and the player in question would collect the cards and choose the one that was either correct or the funniest.

"That was really fun for the eight of us to play," Temkin said. "But with other people, it was hard to play because other people didn't know us well enough."

The game was then simplified more and more until the final iteration, the Cards Against Humanity that millions of people now know and love for its wit as well as its inappropriateness, was created. It bills itself as "a free party game for horrible people." The game thrives on the shocking, ridiculous and hilarious combinations of cards that players come up with.

"What we found is that the more we put inappropriate or taboo things in the game, the more fun it is," Temkin said. "It was always just our sense of humor, just absurd or silly or nerdy."

When the creators went back to school, they printed out their own copies of the game and started playing it with their college friends. It was instantly popular.

"We started playing it in our



The creators of Cards Against Humanity — (left to right, back row) Eliot Weinstein, Josh Dillon, David Munk, David Pinsof, (front row) Eli Halpern, Ben Hantoot and Max Temkin — are graduates of Highland Park High School. PHOTO SUBMITTED

dorm rooms with two or three people and an hour later 30 people were crammed in because they heard us laughing and wanted to join in," Temkin said.

The group never thought of turning the game into a business; they just wanted to share it with people and make them laugh. So they put the game up online as a free download. Suddenly, millions of people had downloaded the game and were clamoring for more.

That was around 2011. Now, Cards Against Humanity has four expansion packs - cards that can be added to the original game - which sell for \$10 a pop. The original game can still be downloaded for free and printed yourself, or purchased for \$25. The eight creators of the game continue to do everything — writing the cards, designing them and printing them — themselves.

"We haven't had any hierarchy,

anything like that," Temkin said. "We don't even like to vote on things if we disagree about them."

The group's creative process is just as egalitarian. Twice a year, the group gets together for a few days and marathons writing new cards. During the rest of the year, they add their random thoughts or new ideas to a giant spreadsheet they call "the hopper," and once a week they move the good ideas from it to a shorter list, which they then use for card ideas for the game or a new product. Nothing is created without unanimous approval by the group.

"We'll argue about those [ideas] on the short list for hours and hours," Temkin said, laughing.

Fans of Cards Against Humanity can look forward to seeing many things come from the eight team members in the next few years.

"We're in an interesting place," Temkin said. "Since we do every-

thing ourselves, we've had to build a lot of infrastructure. We're thinking about opening up the things we've developed for other people who make games."

In a way, growing up in Highland Park lent itself to Cards Against Humanity's creation. Temkin said that living in and experiencing the city influenced the writing of many cards.

"We all got an amazing education at Highland Park High School," Temkin said. "We got exposed to a lot of subjects, a lot of great things. I think that comes out in the game. It hits on a lot of subjects, and it's very witty."

But Cards Against Humanity is not *just* a game. Temkin talked about how Cards Against Humanity is meant to be politically and culturally subversive (perhaps hinted at in the title of the game). He and the seven other creators of Cards Against Humanity are po-

litically progressive, and the game reflects those progressive values. Part of Cards Against Humanity's hidden purpose is to inspire conversations around things that make people uncomfortable.

"The game gets people to think about heteronormativity, class, race and privilege," Temkin said. "It's about finding a way to get to talk about those things. People are willing to go there if it's in the context of a joke."

"We observe things that are absurd or unfair in our culture, and write them down [as possible cards]"

Although Cards Against Humanity is meant to be subversive, Temkin said the most important aspect of creating the cards is still asking the same questions that helped gain the game's popularity in the first place: "Is this funny? Does it make us laugh?"