Playing Dungeons and Dragons with Kids

written by CresthavenRPG Guru | December 15, 2015

I was recently invited to my kid's 3rd grade classroom to demonstrate Dungeons and Dragons. I knew that 5th edition was not going to be a good option, as I only had about an hour to teach and run the game, and I needed to rethink how I was going to present the information to the kids so that they would understand and be ready to play. I run across the same issue with adults who are new to the game as well. They don't understand the concept of an open world that they are in control of. Here's how I went about it.

Cresthaven RPG System

The Cresthaven RPG system is designed to be consistent and simple, it's in the name, once I explained the key concept, roll d20, add modifiers and go. The kids rapidly picked up on how to do things, and unlike Pathfinder or D&D 5e, there was no complexity on how to do things. Nothing had to be dumbed down or changed to accommodate the 3rd graders at all. What I especially like about the system is going from Cresthaven RPG to Pathfinder or D&D 5e is a straight upgrade.

Pre-generated Characters

I printed out the provided pre-generated characters and provided them to the group playing. I introduced the characters in a very clear and descriptive way. Something like, "This is the Elf Wizard. How many of you know what an elf is? Anyone seen the Lord of the Rings?" Once the kids heard that, they were all super excited about the prospect of playing an Elf. I only had to run through the things that made each character special, like the elf being able to cast a few spells. Once I introduced everyone, I let the kids choose which character they wanted to be.

Adventure Time!

The adventure I brought with me was an introductory adventure, Ruins of Castle Mystamere, from the 1983 red box that was updated for the Cresthaven RPG system. It had pauses and tips on when to ask the party to do things, and the kids ate it up. Once they understood how to move around, interact and fight, they were having a great time. While they started out rushing into things, their attitudes changed once they encountered something dangerous and started getting hurt or put to sleep.

Team Work and in Character Actions

As a Dungeon Master, I have a story I want to tell, but at the same time, I really pushed the kids to discuss their options and then have one child tell me what the party would do. By forcing them to talk through where they were going or what they wanted to do next, it helps to eliminate a lot of confusion.

Individually, when they would ask questions like, can my character do this or that, and I would put it back on them to be the character and try. Always pushing them to see the game through their characters eyes, “What would an elf do?!?” Ultimately they need to try to do things, I can always say “No”.

Teacher Feedback

After the game, the teacher was extremely excited about the outcome. She commented on how the kids worked together, how they troubleshooted issues, and the choices they made in the game. She also very much enjoyed the way the kids creatively made the story their own and how it used the things they were learning (story writing, math and critical thinking) in a practical application.

Conclusion

I highly recommend you start role-playing games with your kids, starting as soon as they can do basic math. It helps to build their imagination, confidence and critical thinking skills. The teacher even came up to me after the demo and was talking about how she would have reacted to situations and how exciting it was. The class was really split 50/50 on being interested, but those that were talked about it for days after I came in. I have been invited back to run another game, hopefully it will be the start of something special for my kids.