



Playing for the Period Win

Daniela remembers her middle school teacher telling her to shout “Period!” to get over the stigma. Years later, Daniela wanted to share that same feeling of fun and freedom — so she created The Period Game.

Daniela Gilsanz: In fifth grade, we had our health class where we learned about periods. And it started with our health teacher making everybody chant, ‘Period.’ And the lesson wouldn’t start until every student was chanting. So she wrote ‘period’ — enormous — all across the board. And then we all were like, ‘Period, period, period.’

Narration: Welcome to Feeling My Flo. I’m Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her. And this is the podcast where we wake up shouting ‘Period!’ every morning!

Clip: “Period! Period! Period! Period!”

Narration: Well, okay...maybe not every morning. But you know, we do say that word a lot around here. And in this episode, we’re going to talk about the Period Game, which lets everyone have as much fun talking about periods as we do.

At the top of the episode, you heard Daniela Gilsanz. Her pronouns are she and her. She’s an artist and a designer who grew up in New York City.

Daniela is the co-creator of the Period Game. Her fifth grade health teacher, Ms. Steinberg, was the one who taught her all about puberty...and periods. That classroom moment where everyone’s shouting the word ‘period’? It stuck with Daniela for years.

Daniela: I feel so incredibly lucky for the way that I learned about periods. Um, I think about that all the time, especially now, where that was, like, the most de-stigmatizing way to get us into it. Like, everybody laughed, everybody did what they had to do and they got it out and then we had this amazing lesson that was just like, ‘These are your fallopian tubes and

these are pads.’ And she stuck a pad on the board, actually. And it got stuck on the board and she couldn't get it off. [Laughs.]

Narration: Daniela loved playing board games when she was a kid.

Daniela: I was a big Monopoly girl. Loved Mancala also. I was a little bit of a sore loser, I would say. [Laughs.] Pretty, pretty competitive in a way that I've mellowed out since then. But I have been known to flip a few boards in my...in my youth, I'm embarrassed to say, but it's the truth.

Narration: When she graduated from high school, Daniela left New York to go to the Rhode Island School of Design. It's a really well known school for artists and designers. During her senior year, she was taking a class on design and play.

Daniela: Our first big assignment in that class...was to make a game about the body. So we broke off into groups and Ryan and I were a team.

Narration: At that point, Daniela and her classmate Ryan Murphy had been taking the same classes for three years, but they'd never worked together on a project before.

In the brainstorming process, their classmates came up with a lot of ideas that were also really fun to play.

Daniela: There was this really cool muscle and music game. It was, like, kind of like a bodysuit, but when you move different muscles, they would make different sounds so you could learn about each muscle. Then there was a game that was kind of like Capture the Flag, but it was about the nervous system.

We have an opportunity here to teach about the body, but also, I personally am not that interested in, like, this is how muscles work, or the nervous system.

Narration: Daniela wanted to make a game about periods.

Daniela: And Ryan was a little hesitant at first. He was like, 'No, I don't think we're going to make a game about menstruation.' And I just kind of was like, 'No, no, no, we're gonna do this.' And so in order to convince him, he came over to my house one day, and we did a, like, rudimentary period lesson. So we dipped the tampon in the cup of water and saw it, like, open up. And we put a pad on underwear and I was like, 'Any questions you have? What are your questions?'

Narration: And actually, Ryan had a lot of questions. He and Daniela went back and forth for hours on the specifics of menstruation.

Daniela: So it was interesting to be, like, me, as a — as a menstruator — saying,

like, 'This is really important for us to know.' And then him as somebody who hasn't menstruated, being like, 'Oh, well, like, I had no idea about this, that you're totally taking for granted as, like, learned knowledge.'

Narration: That open, back-and-forth conversation shaped how Ryan and Daniela designed the Period Game.

Throughout the process, Daniela learned to get way more comfortable explaining the actual details of menstruation — and how it works in the body. She specifically remembers this one time in class.

Daniela: I literally was standing on a stool in a class of 20 people. I don't even know why I was up there. [Laughs.] But all of a sudden I was like, 'This is how a menstrual cup works, this is what a menstrual cup is.' And people had lots of questions around that. And then that was kind of, like, my last personal barrier of discomfort where I was like, 'Okay, we can, we can talk about anything now.'

Narration: Daniela's fifth grade teacher, Ms. Steinberg, is still teaching. We were curious about her...so we reached out.

Sue Steinberg: My name is Sue Steinberg. My pronouns are she, her, hers.

Narration: Ms. Steinberg works at the United Nations International School in New York City. And she's still encouraging her students to shout the word 'period' out loud.

Sue: So we will start, oftentimes, at a whisper and I'll say, 'Okay guys, can you say period?' Or possibly it's 'vagina' or whatever the word is. And then they will say, 'Period,' and they'll look at me strangely, and I'll say, 'Okay. Now say it kind of like you're okay with saying it. Say period.' And they'll be like, 'Period.' And we go on and on. 'Period, period...' until we're sort of chanting it. And you feel it. And I say, 'Say it with vim and vigor and say it as though you really, really mean it. Perioood!' Sometimes we'll go to singing it, operatic style. 'Perioood!' Or sometimes rapping it. 'Period...pa pa pa period.' That gets them so that later on when we're actually using it in a sentence that it makes sense and it's biological or that we want to be comfortable with it, it doesn't sound quite so strange.

Narration: Shout out to Ms. Steinberg. Okay, why don't we do that right now? Go ahead and shout out the word 'period.' We'll do it with you.

Clip: "Period! Period! Period! Period!"

Narration: We love games at Feeling My Flo. Our producer Mia grew up playing Taboo and Scrabble. And our editor Juleyka and her sons always have a game of Uno going on at her house.

When I was a kid, my family would have barbeques...and I'd spend hours playing cards and dominos with my sister and my aunts at my grandma's house. Like Daniela, I'm pretty competitive. So when it comes to the Period Game, we had lots of questions about the game play.

Okay, so first off, picture a round board. In the center, two white ovaries sit on top of a red base. Ovaries are the part of the female reproductive system that makes eggs. Every time a player spins one of the ovaries, a marble comes shooting out from the bottom.

Daniela: So a red marble means you've got your period and a clear marble means you don't, and you just move forward one space. And a purple marble means you leaked, and you go to the next nurse's office.

Narration: Once a player has advanced four spaces, that means a full menstruation cycle has been completed. The board has different types of period spaces: PMS spaces, menstruation spaces, and just plain spaces...because menstruators don't spend all their time thinking about periods.

The winner is the first person to make it all the way around the board.

After graduating from college, Daniela's design partner Ryan moved to London. And these days, he's less involved in the game. But Daniela knew she wanted to keep going. And before the game could be considered finished, she wanted to see how people would actually play it.

So in 2015, the game was played for the very first time in a fourth-grade classroom in New York City.

Daniela: The whole class could opt in and every single student did opt in, which was really exciting. We laid out five games on different tables and I had a presentation that I did at the top of the class, which was like, 'This is how you play.' But also within that it was baked in, like, 'Does anybody know what a period is? Does anybody know what ovaries are?'

Narration: After playing, the students filled out a survey to say what they liked or didn't like about it. Daniela says the whole experience was such a hit...that it created a domino effect.

Daniela: We started with that fourth-grade classroom and then the other fourth-grade classes wanted us to come in. And then one of the boys in that class had told his older sister about it. And so we went to, then, the seventh grade classes, and over the years we actually, I've developed a lot of relationships with the teachers at that school.

Narration: Daniela's tested the Period Game at that same school eight or nine times so far.

Daniela: You pretty much can't play without saying, 'Period.' Um, so every time you get a red marble, you get your period and then you have to land on period spaces. And so you say the word period a lot. But usually what

happens is in a classroom you'll have one person, typically a boy, um, who will yell very early on yell, 'I got my period!' Or we've had people make up period dances that they do every time they get their period...um, 'cause they're like, 'I'm winning!'

Narration: That moment when players yell, 'I got my period!' sounds familiar. It's a lot like that moment

in Daniela's own fifth-grade class, when her teacher, Ms. Steinberg, had the whole class chanting, 'Period, period, period!'

Daniela: Once you have one person in a class do that, everything changes. Like, it's really, like, you have somebody scream, 'I got my period.' Everybody laughs, and then it's over. And then that's it.

Narration: The Period Game design mirrors the first year of a typical menstrual cycle. One card in particular works like a Go Fish card.

Daniela: So you can ask somebody else, like, 'Hey, do you have a pad?' Or 'Hey, do you have a tampon?' And that was also important because that's a question you probably have to ask in your life. So once you've asked it in this game, it becomes a lot easier the next day at school to be like, 'Hey, do you have a pad?'

Narration: During the testing process, Daniela got really useful comments from the students.

Daniela: There was one eighth grade girl in a school in Brownsville who turned to me very emotional and said that she had been experiencing a lot of PMS, but...nobody had ever told her what that was.

Narration: Testing also helped improve and shape how the game was played.

Daniela: Actually, the fact that the menstrual cup is a reusable card was an idea of one of our young people who said, 'Well, when you explained this, you said menstrual cups were reusable, so why do I have to give up my card?' And I was like, 'Yeah...honestly, like, you're right.' [Laughs.] And so we changed the rules based off of that.

Narration: In 2019, after four years of testing, [Daniela launched a fundraising campaign](#) to make the game. She's also donated 300 games to public schools...and at the end of last year, she started shipping orders of the finished game.

After spending so much time creating and developing the Period Game, Daniela hopes it'll change the way people think and talk about menstruation.

Daniela: I think there's a lot of different levels of things you can take away from the game. There's, like, the first basic level that everybody should get is... 'I feel okay saying the word period; and I feel okay talking about periods.'

And then there's kind of, like, the level up from that, which we also hope you get, which is like, 'I know what a pad is. I know what a tampon is. I know the difference between a tampon, a super tampon, and a menstrual cup. And I know, kind of, the benefits and drawbacks of each or when to use each one...and I know about PMS and I know how to handle that and I know what that might look like so I can recognize those symptoms in myself.'

Narration: Since beginning this journey in 2014, Daniela's hard work has really paid off. [In 2016, the Period Game won a Red Dot design award.](#) Pretty perfect, right?

Most importantly, thanks to Daniela and the Period Game, people are having fun while learning about periods!

Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when it might be awkward to talk about periods, but you want to find a way.

You can find out more about the Period Game...at periodgame.com.

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This episode was produced by Mia Warren. She's our executive producer. It was mixed by Kojin Tashiro. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. I'm Kamilah Kashanie.

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