

The Friendship Game

A positive game design by Guy Shalev Copyright 2007.

In this game you play a group of friends and the interactions between them. You could play a group of mutant super-heroes, a bunch of lords and ladies in the time of French Revolution, a bunch of stray cats or just neighbours living in NYC.

Sit down with the group of friends you plan to play this game. You'll play characters other than yourselves, like actors in a play, but more like actors in a daily show or a soap opera. Make sure you're comfortable with one another, get to know one another as players, become friends before you begin in portraying an imaginary group of friends.

First, come up with the location and backdrop for the game, which of the groups mentioned in the first paragraph or fictional group you'd portray, what is the setting (France, Post-Nuclear American Midwest, Time Traveling Magicians, whatever).

Next, each player will come up with a name for his character, and a profession. Take nametags or stickies and put them on your shirt, so another player could easily tell who you are in the game.

Now it's time to grab two types of tokens. Glass beads in two different colours work best, but you can also use coins, poker chips, slips of paper or whatever else floats your boat. Designate one group of tokens as "Light" and the other as "Dark".

Answer the following questions for your character, taking tokens as appropriate:

- Does your Character love one of the other characters?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
- Does the other character knows your character loves him or her?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
 - If Not, take a note, write on it "Hidden Love" and place one Dark token on it, this is a Secret.
- Do you make the other characters laugh?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
- Do you lie to the other characters?
 - If Yes, take a note, write down a lie you tell the other characters and place a Dark token on it, this is a Secret.
 - If Not, take a Light token.
- Was your character romantically involved with any other characters before?
 - If Yes, take a Light token for each character he was involved with.
- Do you help the other characters when they need help?
 - If Yes, take a Light token, and come up with the ways you help them, or did before.
- Would you say your character is "innocent"?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.

Make sure your character has at least two Light Tokens by the time you finish answering the questionnaire.

Resolution:

During the game there will be situations where you're unsure what the outcome will be, where the character wants to do something and may fail, or more than one character wants opposite things to happen, we'll call these things "Conflicts", which is short for Conflicts of Interest.

Discuss those situations with your friends. As the player group, that is. Discuss what can happen if the character(s) fail or succeed, or if one character succeeds and the other fails. If only success or failure give you interesting results, then choose those interesting results, success or failure! If however, you have interesting possible results both for success and failure, it's time to roll the dice.

Yes, I forgot to mention, you also need a bunch of dice, of the 6-sided variety, which come with most board games, or can be found in hobby shops nearby.

Every time you want to roll dice, you have to spend a Light token, you then roll 2 dice, plus an additional dice for each additional Light token you choose to spend.

If you roll 7 (7 being the default "Target number") or above, you succeed, and gain two Light tokens.

Any player may describe how a lie, action or inaction on his character's part impedes the effort of the competing character, take a Dark Token and place it on one of his Secrets, and raise the target number by 2.

For example:

Rob wants to try to get a new job, and his conflict is to succeed at the job interview, if he succeeds, it will be interesting because his children rely on him, and he will then be able to sustain them, and if he fails, he'll have to look for help from other resources, which is also interesting.

Rob wants to succeed, so he spends 2 Light tokens, 1 for the conflict, and 1 for an extra die. Lisa who gave him a recommendation, didn't tell him she was fired from the position she held with the company for fraud, so her recommendation actually sheds bad light on Rob, so he rolls 3 dice and needs to gain 9 or higher. Lisa will take another Dark token to place on her "Fraud" Secret.

Tokens (and gameplay):

Place the tokens no one owns in the middle of the table, they are the token pool.

Play goes around the table, each player, at his turn, sets up a scene, describes who is present and what is going on. Once this brief exposition ends, play begins.

The narrating player must spend one Light token to set the scene, or if the scene involves either one of his Secrets or how the Secret affects one or more of his friends, he takes a Dark token instead and places it on the appropriate Secret.

If one of the characters important to this scene is not ran by one of the players, choose a player that does not portray a character in this scene to play him or her. Some groups prefer to have one such player who doesn't play any characters of his own, but instead plays all of the non-player characters, those characters who do not belong to any one player.

Secret: Each Secret is written down on a sheet of paper in front of the player who owns it. Each Secret begins with one Dark token on it. In each scene where the issue of the Secret is brought up (two secretly in love characters kissing while their friends watch TV for example) or has consequences on another character (the above fraud example), the Secret gains another Dark token.

Once a Secret has 5 Dark Tokens it is time for Catharsis. The Secret will be revealed to one or more characters, and play will proceed from there.

Remove the Secret, and if need be replace it with a new Secret belonging to the characters now involved in the manner (a plot to kill the king, now involving two of the characters instead of just one).

The relief at the exposure of this secret is palpable. The Player who revealed the secret gains 3 Light tokens, and each of the characters who partook of the Secret now has a choice: To provide empathy and support to the secret-revealer and receive two Light tokens, or to be judgmental and cold and to receive only one Light token.

If one of the people who finds out a Secret was innocent, ask the player if the character still is innocent; if the answer is yes, give that player an additional Light token.

Hope: Your character will probably have goals; things he wants to come to pass that will need some help. Some may call them goals, other will call them Hopes, regardless, they are yours.

Write what your Hope is on a piece of paper (like a secret) and place it in front of you. After every scene where your character(s) strives towards a Hope, place one light token on it.

Most Hopes take five tokens to complete. Once you have five Light tokens on the Hope, you have achieved it. In case of complex Hopes, break them down, like in "Prisonbreak", or assassinating a king, getting guard training is a 3 successes Hope, getting hired as a guard is another 5, being placed with the king at the right time 7 more, etc.

When you complete a Hope, you gain a number of Light tokens equal to half the number on the Hope card, divided down.

When your character can choose between his friends and outsiders, or between his friends or taking the easy route, and takes the choice of sticking with his friends, he gains a Light token.

When a character/player does something that makes the other players excited, they can award him with Light tokens, for every Light token they give him, he gains another one from the pool.

When a character confides in another character, and that character gives him support, award the supporting character with a Light token from the pool.

If your character is “The funny man”, and he makes the other characters lighten up after a tough time, award him with a Light token.

The default length of the session is two rounds: After every player had set up two scenes, the session ends. Give each player one Light token.