



a crow funeral

A Crow Funeral is a game for 2+ players which can play in 10-30 minutes. The game is intended for a busy space, like a convention or mall or the outdoors. Players should know that the game involves touching hands and people being shouted down for speaking out of turn.

In *A Crow Funeral* the players will take the roles of opinionated crows arguing the cause of death of a member of their murder. At the beginning of play players will split apart for a short while, then come together and join as a group. The game uses a simple handstacking mechanic guiding who can speak at any given moment. There is no conflict resolution mechanic.



Preparing for Play:

Form the players into a loose circle in an out-of-the-way spot in a busy area. This circle may be formed in a sitting or standing ring, or around a table, as long as everyone can easily touch hands in the center. Players should take this opportunity to remove sharp or large rings. Read these rules aloud with each player taking a turn reading a paragraph.

A fellow crow has died and we will gather to mourn their passing, but more importantly to understand why they died. Not in a metaphysical way, but in a practical way - what killed this creature and how can we ensure it won't kill us as well? We are crows and this is the crow way.



The center of our circle is where the body of the deceased crow lies, this is where we will play most of the game.

After acquainting ourselves with the rules we will begin the game by spreading out, traveling in different directions for one minute. At the end of that one minute of travel we will stop in a safe place; this is our home. Around us is the environment we have spent our crow lives, these are the things to which we are acclimated and do not fear. Players will spend two minutes standing still and observing this environment while thinking peaceful, safe thoughts. Ask yourselves: What do I eat here? Where do I sleep? How do I spend my time?

Study the objects, the motion, the people around you. Listen to the sounds, smell the air. Nothing here is a threat.

While sitting in their home the crow should find a small object of some sort which can be used as a token: A pebble, a piece of paper, a stick, anything that conveniently fits into the palm of the hand. This object should be clean and safe to handle. If the player is uncomfortable taking something from the environment they may use something of their own, such as a coin or a die.

After the two minutes have elapsed all the crows will return to the play area for the funeral. As crows arrive they should arrange themselves back into their circle. When most of the crows have arrived the funeral will begin.

Beginning the Funeral:

To begin the funeral each player extends an empty, open, downward facing hand into the circle, forming a vertical stack of hands in the center. When a player speaks they move their hand to the top of the stack. When another player speaks they then move their hand to the top, covering the previous player. A player should not speak if their hand is not on top of the stack.



The purpose of the funeral is to determine how the deceased was killed and how this should affect the lives of the living. No understanding is gained from the body, that is not how crows see the world. Instead crows should compare their home environment to the area of the funeral; what is different and therefore possibly dangerous? Crows should argue from their own experience, based on the time they spent in their crow home.

Hey!:

If a crow ever speaks while another's hand is on top of the stack, or two crows attempt to speak over each other, or there is instability in the hand stack, or a crow begins speaking with an uncrowlike understanding of the environment, ALL the crows should begin shouting "Hey, hey, hey!" until the situation is rectified. If one crow hears another crow saying "Hey!" they should take up the cry and repeat it until the problem is identified and solved. Think about the scolding and arguing of crows; this is what you are doing.

Interruptions:

If anything or anyone not playing the game interrupts the crows they should break the circle and scatter, then regroup after the danger is gone. The circle reforms, the handstack remade, and play continues as before.

Ending the Funeral:

When a crow believes that they understand the nature of the danger they will place a closed hand on the handstack, inside their hand is their token. This action is done without speaking, and play will progress normally for the other crows. When the closed hand finally reaches the bottom of the hand stack the crow's belief about the cause of death is spoken aloud.



Other crows will say whether they agree or disagree, this is not a time for argument though a single sentence may be spoken in support or disagreement. If the entire murder is in agreement then the game ends immediately and the crows return to their lives, wiser and safer. If the group does not agree then the belief may either be discarded and all the crows return to the discussion, or the agreeing crows may withdraw their hands from the stack and leave the murder. If a crow withdraws their belief and stays with the murder they discard their token on the ground.

Leaving the murder is a serious and permanent decision, a new grouping is formed and the two murders will never be friendly again. Crows in the new murder are no longer bound by the rules of the funeral and may leave the play space or hover about the funeral offering commentary. They may speak freely as the hand stack rules do not apply to them.

Play then continues until the remaining crows have all resolved beliefs about the cause of death. Players may then gather for a short debrief.

*Stop reading aloud here. Go play the game.
Gather afterwards for a quick debrief.*

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Recommended questions for the debrief:

What informed the arguments of the crows? Will they actually be safer for what was learned at the funeral? If there was a split in the murder, how will those different beliefs affect crow society?

Did anyone drop their token to remain with the murder? What did this represent?

Whose hands were usually at the top of the stack? Whose were at the bottom? Did the people who were mostly at the bottom feel respected during the funeral?

Who is speaking the most during the debrief? Is there a correlation between how people are speaking now and how they spoke during the game?

Designer's Notes:

This game was written in response to the 2015 Golden Cobra Challenge.

This game uses touch to track social interactions, both as a record of how recently players have spoken and as telegraphed intent as players move their hands into position before they speak. We can lend significance to the act of communication by tying it to an unrelated act, in this case physically moving your hand to the top of the stack.

The empathy experiment comes from the establishment of arbitrary frames of reference for the individual crows. Different crows come from different environments and as the players argue in the place of those crows it may help them reflect on the arbitrariness of their own beliefs.

This game was created by Tim Hutchings, of PlaGMaDA.org. He also drew the pictures. This game could not have been made without the generous support of the freeform game community in Portland, Oregon, especially Ben Kaser, Jessie Giardino, and the whole Games to Gather group.

Alternate Titles: A Murder Mystery, Caws of Death Unknown