



# waiting room

by Tayler Stokes

## Introduction

*Waiting Room* is a high-contact experiential freeform designed in pursuit of magical realism. Play requires one person to facilitate, eight or more people as players, the player instructions on the following page, and a space large enough for all participants to move around freely. Play time varies though the facilitating player does have some control over pacing; however games with more players will tend to last longer. For a game involving ten to twelve total participants budget approximately an hour. Inform players that they will be photographed during play, but that if they wish pictures with their image can be cropped, modified, or discarded. All the facilitating player must do is provide the other players with their instructions, field player questions or concerns, and occasionally follow instructions themselves.

**Playing with an audience is ideal.** The facilitating player should consider how this may be achieved (such as playing in a public space) but may forego having an audience in favor of other considerations. Optionally, the facilitator may set the play space with red lighting, John Adams' *Become Ocean*, or additional props for players to interact with. Though these specific atmospheric touches are optional, it is strongly encouraged that the facilitator set a potent atmosphere in some fashion in order to make the space a place set apart, where things strange and wonderful can happen. If at all possible, the facilitating player should take pictures frequently, hopefully capturing each player. The facilitator is permitted to make any adjustments or additions if they are so inspired.

## Scenario

**The following are instructions for the facilitating player.** The facilitating player will need to source three poems for use in play, such as *Nautical Astronomy* by Alberto Rios, *Snow Storm* by T.U.F.U., and *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams. The facilitating player will also need to print and cut out the player prompts on the following page; the facilitating player can make their own if they prefer or if they have additional players. Finally, the facilitating player should present safety and support tools of their choosing to the group, such as those found at [gamestogather.org/support-signals](http://gamestogather.org/support-signals).

## Warmup

**All players move around the room.** Begin to join hands and form one chain that is spiralling inward in a counterclockwise fashion and slowly wrapping itself up tightly; keep moving as long as possible. You may, if you wish, break away from the spiral and start a new wrapping spiral, but you must go clockwise instead. Once all spirals have been wrapped up as tight as possible, the members of each spiral must decide which single player will remain standing by coming to consensus through humming; all other players will sit. Once accomplished, all players close their eyes, avert their gaze, or shield their eyes (if possible).

## Brief the Players

Randomly distribute the player instructions in a manner of your choosing. Explain the following:

- △ **This game is non-verbal.** You may make noises, laugh, or weep; but during most of play you may not speak.
- △ If you need to speak to anyone for any reason, *whisper*.
- △ Your *general action* describes how you will generally interact with other players throughout the game. Attempt to interact with every other player more than once.
- △ Each player participates in one and only one scene as described in your *scene prompt*; this is the only time you may speak freely. When you are ready to have your scene go sit in the middle of the room and become as small as you are able. Another player will come to wake you; stand and have a scene with them. Scenes can be played between two or three players (should a sitting player be joined by another, both awakened by the third player) and should be only a few lines of dialogue. Exit the scene by moving to the edge of the room.
- △ Your *truth* is something you are seeking to discover or reveal through the course of play; nobody besides yourself need understand your truth.
- △ **Three short poems will be read during play.** The first initiates play. The second is a signal for any remaining scenes to be performed sequentially. The third initiates the final sequence of play: spiraling up just as we did in the warmup exercise. Allow these poems to influence your play.
- △ Go collect whatever freely available materials interest you for use in play. Seek materials that speak to you about the mundanity of the world, the weight of civilization, or secrets overlooked.
- △ **Play begins in 15 minutes.** Gather your materials and return.



## Play

Ask for any final questions before you begin. Players may switch out for new player instructions at any time. Once any questions are answered, head to the playspace as a group.

**Initiate play by reading the first poem aloud.** Play should not be excessively long, be an observer and photographer as you move around the space. Read the second poem to signal to the group that it's time to finish their scenes. Shortly after the final scene read the third poem to begin the spiral. Allow players to wait in silence for a moment before you conclude the game. Take pictures of the final position from multiple angles. If players seem lost or bored you may offer them new instructions or improvise some obscure tasks for them to undertake.

## Debrief the Players

After a short break, reconvene in a new space. Sit on the floor in low lighting if possible. Take turns discussing your play experience, the scenes, and the truths found or exposed. Be sure everyone may speak by limiting talking time to *one minute* at most.

If you took pictures, find the most striking, arrange them into a series, perhaps captioned by lines of poetry, dialogue or player prompts, and share the collection with players and non-players alike in a manner of your choosing. Allow players to remove their images from the collection prior to sharing the collection publically.

### Designer's Notes

*Waiting Room* takes its name from the paintings *Waiting Room* and *Waiting Room II* by George Tooker. Though this game means many things to me, it's personal meaning to me isn't the point. That said, my goal is to create a fluctuating and predominantly *paidiac* experience that takes us back to a moment when a world that was wide with wonder became constrained by failings, memories, and prescriptions. I hope that you delight in shared strangeness and mourn it's passing.

**Thank you:** Adrian Boctor, Tim Hutchings, Jefferson Lee, Charlie Moor, Shawn Stokes, Jay Sylvano, *Games to Gather* and *the Game Garden*

## Player Instructions

△ General Action	△ Scene Prompt	△ Truth
You and another are playing chess, both losing	You have become immortal and lost touch with pity, compassion, suffering	What is your greatest lie?
You and another are playing Go, the other players are your pieces, you're both losing	You have the opportunity to learn of your own death	Who is missing the most fingers?
Make a box with your body and get each player to climb in and out of the box	It is up to you to determine who here will be executed	What are you most guilty of?
Make a box with your presence and get each player to climb in and out of the box	They are the ghost of your grandparent, whom you never met	Whom do you love unconditionally?
Make a box with your actions and get each player to climb in and out of the box	They are the spirit of your grandchild, whom you will never meet	What do you despise the most?
You have chosen to forget all of these people	You are a concerned but frightened passer-by, late for an appointment	What do you want to believe in?
You cannot get to sleep	This is your first day out from prison	What is the most kind act?
Do not allow anyone to see your face	They are the artist, you their art	Who is your kindred spirit?
Shamefully beg for spare change or food	You blame them for...?	Who can you help?
Begin old and become younger	You are their lover, and you've just realized this will never work	Where are you most afraid to be?
Everyone else is a conflicting memory of a family member	They are how others see you	Who's childhood would you like to visit?
Never quite get around to saying goodbye	They awaken in you a quiet sadness	What keeps the night out?
Read everything, dismiss everything	You can't help them	How does one laugh most freely?
Urgently please everyone	You don't have the courage necessary for this conversation	When will tea be ready?
Phase into another reality	You are lost and in need of directions	When is your breathing the tightest?
Become impregnated by someone's gaze	You need a better jacket	What is the language of wrinkles?
Indulge in intoxicating grandeur at the expense of others	Try your best to forget, to deny	Who is watching?
You are being punished	You are being forced to apologize even though you've done nothing wrong	Who or what possesses you?