
Fork Creek Almanac

*Who has heard them whisper
under shadows all grown long?
Who has seen them sleeping there
Beneath forgotten stones?
That was Clement, that one Meg,
And that one's name is gone.
Who will hear them whisper when
The winds begin to moan?*

Overview:

You were once residents of an Appalachian town called Fork Creek. The town is small and quaint, everyone knows everyone else ... and everyone talks about everyone else, too. If there's an unofficial pastime in Fork Creek, it's exactly that: talking about the other residents of Fork Creek.

The game begins and ends in the Fork Creek Cemetery, where the players will portray the dead citizens of this small town. But don't worry! *Fork Creek Almanac* is not a scary game. Unless, of course, you find things like regret, small-town gossip, and the inevitability of death to be scary.

The players of *Fork Creek Almanac* will help the dead citizens of the small town of Fork Creek remember their lives and give voice to their memories. Players will take on the role of a resident of the Fork Creek Cemetery on an evening when the dead begin to whisper about the fragmented memories of their past lives. Some of these memories may be simple and uncomplicated reflections on the beauty or sadness

of the characters' lives, but others may reveal secrets and regrets. The residents of the Fork Creek Cemetery have discovered an honesty in death, and while these memories may create a prose-poem about pastoral life that reflects the small-town setting of Fork Creek, they may also reveal regrets and mistakes that belie the genteel masks the townsfolk wore in life.

This game is intended for 2-20 players of any age, and can be played in any open space. Dim lighting is preferred, but the game can be run in full light, or even in darkness, if each player has a flashlight or other light source.

As these characters discover the memories of their lives, they may find that trauma, loss, or other difficult subjects come up. Players are encouraged to establish limits and boundaries as a group that will keep the game safe for all participants.

Sequence of Play

Name The Dead: Players create their character, selecting an epitaph at random and creating a name and job or role in town for their character.

Remember Their Lives: Players relate brief memories of other characters and attach emotions to them.

Speak as They Lived: Players act out short scenes from their characters' lives and then reflect on them.

Walk the Cemetery: Players wander the space, interacting with other ghosts and acting out moments of their lives at any age.

Return to Rest: Players sit down and silently write a short reflection in verse or prose. They give that reflection to another player whose character mattered to theirs.

Name The Dead:

Players begin the game by creating a character who resides in the cemetery. These characters begin as a hazy recollection, and so creating them does not require much detail. The player must know the short epitaph carved on their character's grave, and use that to create their character's name and role in the town.

Each player writes down a short epitaph on a piece of paper. They may create this epitaph themselves, or select one from the list at the end of this guide. The epitaph should be only a few lines long, and it can be a simple sentence or a bit of poetry.

Players then put these epitaphs in a pile, mix them up, and draw one at random. Once everyone has drawn, they create a name for the character that they think fits this epitaph, and decide what job or role they held in the town of Fork Creek. Each player writes this information on the epitaph sheet, and then places it in front of themselves. This is their character.

The players introduce their character by first sitting in a circle in silence and dim light. Each player speaks the name and job of their character, and then reads the words from their grave. Players do not need to do this in any particular order—they should speak when they feel it is time to speak, and if two players speak at the same time, they should stop and wait a moment, and then one or the other should repeat and continue.

Remember Their Lives:

Once each of the residents of the cemetery have introduced themselves, they begin to remember. Characters' memories are not about themselves, but about the people that surround them.

Players remember by describing their memory of someone while still sitting in the circle. They speak in character, describing a single image or action of another character in the game. The player is encouraged to be specific, describing a particular place and time that they saw someone, rather than a general attitude. The player then describes in a single sentence how that memory made them feel when they were alive.

For example, a player might say "I remember Lepriah Davis. She was sitting at the railway depot and waiting, but when the train came, she walked home alone. I felt such sympathy, but I also felt satisfaction."

Players may ask each other questions as they remember; after all, the dead are forgetful. Questions can be clarifications about names or jobs, or they may nudge the memory in new directions. But it is always the character who is *remembering*—who is presenting the memory to the group—who decides how to respond to the questions.

For example, a player might say "Pharmacist — what was your name again? — I remember clear as a bell the time we snuck off to the swimming holler together, but I can't seem to recall your name!"

"My name is Lucius, of course! You should remember my name, Agatha. That swimming holler is where I asked you to marry me!"

Any memory created in this way becomes part of the character's past. This is a serious responsibility, as players will be creating aspects of other people's characters. These memories do not have to be flattering or positive, but they should not be cruel to the other *player*.

Players may share more than one memory. If there are few players (2-5), players should share several memories. If there are many players (10-20), they should share only one.

The next memory is given/shared by the person who was just “given” a memory—the person whose past was just described. Once all players have shared at least one memory, the dead may begin to speak.

Speak as They Lived:

The dead speak by acting out scenes from their lives.

In order to speak, one of the players must stand up and walk across the circle, where they help another player to their feet. They speak to that player in character, both of them acting out a moment from their lives. This moment may correspond to one of the memories described already, or it may be an entirely new interaction.

This moment of speaking is created entirely through dialogue and action. Players do not need to describe where they are or what they are doing—they should simply act out this fragment of their lives as it happened, without context or explanation. Players listen and respond as they think their character would have when they were alive, not trying to create a larger story or build towards conflict.

This scene ends when either player breaks away and returns to the circle. Once both players are sitting, each of them briefly describes how they feel about that interaction now that they are dead.

For example, Donna Marie Torres might stand up and walk to Fred Simmons. She takes Fred’s hand and helps him stand. They then act out the moment when Donna found Fred crying under the Fork Creek Trestle and comforted him, although she did not really know him yet. When the moment is finished, they both return to the circle, where Donna reveals that later she would fall in love with Fred, and Fred reveals that he regrets their divorce many years later, even though he knows now that they were better off for it.

Once both players have said how they feel, a different player gets up and acts out a scene with someone else. As with remembering, players in small games may want to speak more than once, while players in large games should only speak a single time and can perform briefer scenes.

When every player has spoken at least once, the dead begin to walk.

Walk the Cemetery:

At this point in the game, all players stand up and begin moving, creating simultaneous scenes throughout the space.

The players walk through the space as though they are ghosts walking through the cemetery. The moment that they encounter and interact with another player, they do so not as the ghost of their character, but as though they are living out a memory. That is, in the interaction, they do not know that they are dead or what will happen later in their lives.

When two players encounter each other in this way, they begin to act out a fragment of something that happened between their two characters in their lives. This moment can be simple and insignificant or it can be incredibly important to who they are. These scenes can be brief, lasting only a few lines, or they can be quite long, though players should make an effort to interact with several people in the walking stage of the evening.

When a suitable time has passed (perhaps as little as 15 minutes in a smaller game, and up to 45 minutes or more in a larger game), players should return to the circle. This time interval is intentionally ambiguous; walking should end when any player feels it is over, and sits back in their place in the circle. Once one player sits, the other players should finish their interactions and join the circle, where they will be able to rest.

Return to Rest:

The residents of the Fork Creek Cemetery return to their rest by writing a small snippet of what they remembered.

Players should turn their character/epitaph? sheet over and write a final statement of who they believe they are or what is most important to them. This can be a continuation of their epitaph or a reflection on a memory or interaction that they had during the game. Players are encouraged to write this reflection as a bit of poetry (this poem does not need to follow any form, and it need not rhyme). If a player would prefer write in prose, though, they may.

Players write this final reflection entirely from the point of view of their character. These are their last words from the grave; allow the character to be totally honest with themselves and others, and to say only what is most important to them. If a player is unsure of what to write, they can begin by writing about that uncertainty.

Players should take no more than five minutes to write this reflection. They should then fold it up and give it to someone whose character impacted theirs. The player who receives it may read it or simply keep it, leaving it unread. As soon as a player gives their reflection away, their role is finished, but they should wait for others to finish before speaking.

When all players are finished, the dead have been put to rest and the game is over.

Players are encouraged to end the game slowly, and take a moment for a cool-down after playing. Maybe a period of silence, with the lights off if possible, to "let the dead rest."

When the lights come up, you could take a quick bathroom break or just move around a bit to shake the game off, and then discuss what

happened, out-of-character. Give kudos or discuss your favorite memories or encounters, and check in with each other emotionally.

Epitaphs from the Fork Creek Almanac

You may use any of these epitaphs when adding one to the pile at the beginning of the game, or you may write your own:

<i>Nothing's So Sacred As Honor And Nothing's So Loyal As Love.</i>	<i>"For their mourners will be outcasts, And outcasts always mourn."</i>	<i>"And were an epitaph to be my story I'd have a short one. I would have written of me on my stone: I had a lover's quarrel with the world."</i>
<i>"They taught us all we know"</i>	<i>"O Rare!"</i>	<i>"Even amidst fierce flames, the golden lotus can be planted."</i>
<i>"Excuse my dust."</i>	<i>"We'll gather lilacs again"</i>	<i>"Here lies a Proof that Wit can never be Defence enough against Mortality"</i>
<i>"If I take wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea."</i>	<i>"Time held me green and dying Though I sang in my chains like the sea..."</i>	<i>"Now she is like all others."</i>
<i>"O, That they had one more song to sing."</i>	<i>"Called Back"</i>	<i>"Cast a cold Eye On Life, on Death. Horseman, pass by!"</i>

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