

Life Lessons

A chamber larp by Mo Holkar

What you'll need

- 5–12 players. 3–4 hours. (It's about two hours plus ten minutes per player.)
- A private room into which all the players can fit comfortably. If you can also have a mingling space outside the room, like a corridor or hallway, that's a good extra.
- A sketch pad/book for each player, and a selection of pencils, charcoals, etc. A chair for each of them, and one for you. If you can get a dais or plinth for your chair, that's ideal.
- Printouts of the game materials below, and blank stickers for names.

Introduction

Read this out to the players:

Drawing a live human model can sometimes reveal more about you than it does about the subject. In this larp, you will play a group of students at a weekly life-drawing class, across a series of six lessons. The process of drawing will open up your characters – to themselves, and to each other – and they will share and bond.

It's important to bear in mind that this larp is not really about drawing: you don't have to be able to draw, or even to enjoy drawing, to take part. Drawing is just a mechanism for approaching the exploration of your character. What you draw during the larp will not be seen by anyone other than yourself, unless you wish it to.

Setting

The setting is by default a contemporary Western town or city; but if you prefer a different time and/or place, that works too. Choose this yourself, or discuss it with the players.

Workshop

Tell the players how the larp is structured: first they create their characters, then they play through the six lessons, then they can if they wish talk together about the experience. Tell them that *The Door is Open* – they may leave the game at any time they wish, without having to explain why.

Give each player a character sheet (*page 5*), and a blank sticker: they should write their character's name and pronouns on this, and stick it onto themselves somewhere visible.

The players should write answers to the questions on the character sheet, without consultation with each other.

Once everyone's done, each player should introduce their character to the others, in a sentence or two.

They then each take a connection card (*page 6*). These have symbols in pairs (with one set of three, which is used when there's an odd number of players), and those who have drawn the same symbol should together by discussion create a connection of some sort. It should be a shallow social connection (for example, one babysits the other's children, or they attend the same gym, or one works in a café where the other drinks...), not a meaningful relationship; and it should be broadly positive, based on an affinity or liking. They must agree on the details: negotiating if necessary.

Talk them through the details of how play is going to work, and the pattern of each lesson. Tell them the sequence of themes of the lessons (*pages 7–8*), and leave this on display somewhere they can see it. Then you are ready to start play.

Play

The six lessons are then played out. Each takes the following form:

- Admit the students to the room. (If you don't have a space outside the room, then just 'admit' them from one corner of it.)
- A few minutes of the students meeting, greeting, mingling, and catching up in an unstructured way.
- Ring a bell, and they take their seats, which face a dais or similar on which there is an empty chair. By each of their seats is a sketchpad and pencil. They may wish to take up different seats from the previous lesson, so they have new neighbours; or not.
- Announce the theme of the lesson, and put the card somewhere everyone can see it. Adopt an appropriate pose, as the model. Explain that students can imagine the model to be nude or clothed, as they prefer. They can talk if they wish, but not to the model, and it shouldn't distract from their drawing.
- While this lesson's music plays, the characters draw the model – or something that represents or is inspired by the model – in their sketchpads. This bit need not be silent, but it's understood that the characters are supposed to be concentrating on drawing, so they shouldn't chatter. You as the model should be silent.

- When the music finishes, put the room into darkness and silence. Into the darkness, each character speaks a truth about themselves, inspired by the theme and by what they have drawn. It might be a memory, a feeling, a thought... just a sentence, or a few sentences. This is all meta and non-diegetic, so it could be a conscious thought the character has, or something about themselves that they do not (yet) realize. (If two people start speaking at the same time, they should stop and allow one to go first. This won't happen too often, once they get the feel for each other.)
- For the first five lessons, once everyone has said something in darkness (you will have to keep track of who has spoken, so that no-one gets missed out), you should ring the bell, put the lights back up, and that's the end of the lesson.
- The student leave the room. More mixing and mingling, in character – perhaps they are in a local café or pub after the lesson, it's up to them.
- Ring the bell, and the players draw cards again. Those with matching symbols form a new (positive) connection, which they have either made or discovered during the week between lessons. Perhaps they decided to visit the cinema together, or to practice some sketching down by the old waterfront. If they match with someone they've already previously matched with, that's fine – they should create a further connection, or strengthen the existing one. (Perhaps after finishing shift at the café, they go for a meal together.) Time this activity to music, otherwise it will extend indefinitely. The designer uses Coil's piece 'Spastiche', which is 3m12s long.
- At the end of the sixth and final lesson, everyone speaks a truth in darkness as before; but after the last has spoken, rather than ringing the bell as usual, instead play a short piece of music – the designer uses a 1m41s version of Brian Eno's 'Another Green World'. The players listen to this, still in silence and darkness. When it finishes, the lights come up, and that is the end of the larp.

Lessons

These are the themes of each lesson, and the accompanying background music that the designer likes to use. You can choose your own, of course, but it should be just about five minutes long.

Theme	Music
Fear	Coil, 'Hellraiser'

Longing	Det Gamla Landet, 'Slicka daggen från en snigel'
Friendship	Simple Minds, 'Sound in 70 Cities'
Excitement	Apollo 440, 'Ain't Talkin' bout Dub'
Misery	Burial, 'Raver'
Love	Dave Brubeck, 'In Your Own Sweet Way'

Debrief

A simple debrief in a round, for those who wish to participate – each player sharing, uninterrupted, any thoughts or feelings that the larp has brought up in them.

Extra lessons

If you have time to make the game a bit longer – especially if you have a smallish number of players – you can add in extra lessons, so the course is seven or eight rather than six. Destruction fits in well after Friendship, and Connection after Misery.

Destruction	Squarepusher, 'My Red Hot Car'
Connection	Santana, 'Incident at Neshabur'

Suggested advanced variation

Suggestion from Quirk Langland that the students could be a support group of some kind -- so they have a common purpose and perhaps an obvious direction of self-exploration. This could be good for more 'advanced' play for the same players after the first time. You would adjust the lesson themes and the music accordingly.

Acknowledgements

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Life Lessons character sheet

Answer these as your character, not as yourself

Name and pronouns:

Approx age, and life situation:



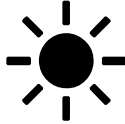


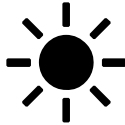









What's your favourite picture or piece of art?

What has driven you to take up drawing?

What is the biggest unanswered question in your life?

Do a quick sketch of some aspect of yourself, or something that's in some way representational of you:

Connection cards (cut these up)

Theme cards (cut these up)

Fear

Longing

Friendship

Excitement

Misery

Love

Destruction

Connection