

THE
QUIET
GAME

by Laiv.it

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The quiet game

Close your eyes: we're going back to childhood, before words, before the complexities of adult relationships. Back to pure feelings, meeting and clashing. By giving and receiving emotions we'll learn to know each other, between fights, games, and moments of solitude, up until we look into each other's eyes and realise we've grown up. But, as always, there is a price to pay.

The quiet game is a completely silent scenario, in which every interaction between characters happens through movement and contact. A group of nameless, voiceless children go through daily lives made of ritualised games and gestures, in search of their lost identities. Through the lens of this unusual childhood, players will get the chance to directly confront their base emotions, to know themselves, to see themselves in each other's eyes.

Roles: 12+

Time: 3 hours

Replayability: Medium. Characters are not predetermined. The game experience is focused and strongly connotated.

Leitmotiv: Childhood, emotion, colours, growth, loss

Setup

Let's find a timer or cell phone, two rolls of masking tape, a pouch and a box of assorted chalk sticks in eight different colours. If possible, we should get them in yellow, blue, red, purple, orange, pink, brown and green. We need a total of three chalk sticks for each player, equally divided between all available colours. Let's count them out and put them all together in the pouch, carefully give it a shake, and leave them be for now. If we have no chalk, we can instead colour popsicle sticks with sharpies or cut out as many finger-length strips of coloured paper as we need.

The space we play in must be wide and free of obstacles: As children we will spread about the room, and we need to be able to move freely and safely. We should also be able to put masking tape on the floor without fear of ruining it.

To finish preparing, let's print out the *Return to childhood* containing the instructions that will help us step into our characters' shoes for the game, as well as the two summary sheets titled *Game phases* and *All the colours of emotion*, both of which we can put up somewhere visible. The last handouts we need are the two *Endings*. Let's take care not to read them as we fold them in half and put them in two envelopes if we have any available. In any case, the two headers should be transcribed on the back of the sheet, so that we

can tell them apart later; once we are done, we can put them aside for the time being.

Game mechanics

The core of the game is made up of several phases, which we will cycle through for four consecutive times. Over these four *Seasons* we will relive the days of our early childhood: Words will be banned, our only means of expression will be our bodies and physical contact. Each *Season* consists of timed phases, which a volunteer must keep track of through a timer or cell phone: ideally, the alarm sound should be that of a school bell. The last phase of each *Season* is an exception: It last exactly as long as we need it to.

The instructions for each phase, found below, mention elements such as Beds or the Hopscotch court: These are things we will set up right before the start of the game, as we follow the *Return to childhood*.

Naptime

We run to our Beds lined up along the walls, lie down and close our eyes. Let's breathe slowly, stay silent and try to listen to our bodies, our environment, our friends sleeping by our side. When the bell rings, we all get up and move to the space between the two rows of Beds, and begin moving about.

In every *Season* following the first, *Spring*, not everyone will get to go back to their Beds. Those who took part in the last phase of the previous *Season*, *The quiet game*, will return to their bed right afterwards and set the timer to count two minutes. Those who were left out from the game will spend these two minutes wide awake and free to run around, jumping and screaming in the vain attempt to wake up their friends. Only when the others open their eyes at the sound of the bed can the excluded children run back to their Beds: as the others get up, they must keep lying down and silently count to twenty for each time they have been left out of *The quiet game*.

This means that a child who was left out of *The quiet game* in *Spring* will skip *Naptime* in *Summer*, screaming and running around the room as the others rest, then stay in Bed and count to twenty after the others have woken up. If they are excluded from *The quiet game* in *Summer* as well, they will skip *Naptime* in *Autumn* then count to forty and so on, up to sixty seconds in *Winter* if they have always been left out.

This phase lasts 2 minutes, counted by a timer.

Freeze Tag

This is our favourite game, and we will learn its rules during our *Return to childhood*. It serves as a representation of every care-

free game we play as kids, with no mechanical consequences, so there is no need to expand on it right now.

This phase lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Recess

During our *Return to childhood*, each of us will receive three chalk sticks, corresponding to three *Starting emotions*. There are ways to obtain more chinks and thus learn more *Emotions* during the course of the game, as well as to lose the ones we have, as we will soon discover.

For each *Recess* phase, every child must choose a single *Emotion* to experiment with from those they already possess: They will display that *Emotion* as obviously as they can, so that others may recognise it by watching them. The chosen *Emotion* must be tied to a whole chalk, not one that has been broken in half as may happen during *The quiet game*. Only when we find ourselves with no whole chinks are we authorised to put in play an *Emotion* associated with a broken-off stick. If we end up with no chinks whatsoever, we must act numb and apathetic, completely uninterested in joining the other children in their activities.

This phase lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

The quiet game

This is the phase where chinks are exchanged or broken, letting us learn new *Emotions* or depriving us of them. During the game, it is crucial to follow this ritual to the letter, so let's make sure everyone understands it before moving on: There will be no room for explanations once we fall silent and play. If we want to try this part out after reading the instructions, we just need to distribute one to five chinks randomly to each player, then remember to put them back in the pouch before our *Return to childhood* begins with a clean slate for everyone.

To play *The quiet game* we stand in a circle, extend our cupped hands, and show everyone the chinks in our possession. The child with the most chinks leaves the circle and goes to stand at the left end of an imaginary line; everyone else must line up after them in descending order, according to how many chinks they own. The one with the least sticks of chalk will thus stand at the right end of the line.

In case of two or more children have the same number of chinks, we must break the tie with a silent game: The quickest starts it by thumping their chest, then waves their closed fist until everyone involved is imitating them. At their indication, everyone involved displays a random number of fingers. The child who started the game starts counting silently, pointing to themselves

and then to every participant in turn until they reach the sum of everyone's fingers. The child they are pointing at at the end of the tally is the winner, and the first to join the imaginary line. In case there are more than two tied children, the winner decides for everyone: They simply instruct the others to hold hands in the order they prefer, then bring them to join the line.

Once we are all lined up, the child with the most chalks steps forward to show everyone the stick (only wholes count, not halves) corresponding to the Emotion they displayed during *Recess*. This will be the game's *Stake*. All those who do not already own that colour of chalk take a step forward to show their interest in learning that *Emotion*. The child offering the *Stake* can now choose their partner for *The quiet game* by going to stand in front of them. Everyone else takes a step back, while the two participants in *The quiet game* take the roles of the Cat and the Fox.

The Cat breaks their chalk, the *Stake*, in two, and gives half to the Fox. The Fox brings both hands behind their back and takes every one of their chalks, *Stake* included, into one hand. They need not worry if they have too many to hold them all, the point is choosing a winning side and a losing side. Once the Fox is ready, they nod, and the Cat taps the arm where they think their *Prize* is: If their guess is right, they can take a whole chalk of their choice (no halves) from the Fox, provided they find a colour they do

not own yet. If they guess wrong, or there are no chalks they need in the *Prize*, the Cat gets nothing. Once they are done, the Cat and the Fox must form a new line, on the opposite side of the room from everyone else.

Their turn is over, the next Cat will be the child now standing at the left end of the starting line, and they will be able to choose their Fox in much the same way. Nobody can play twice in the same *Season*, so the children in the newly-formed line are excluded from any following turns.

Aside from this, *The quiet games* repeats identically for a number of times equal to a third of the players, rounded down. So, if there are twelve of us, there will be four Cats each *Season*, each choosing a Fox for a total of eight players.

This means that every *Season* a third of the children will not be chosen, nor will they be able to choose anyone. The phase ends when these excluded children destroy the chalk of the *Emotion* they experimented with during *Recess*. Nobody can lose *The quiet game* and take it well: As the others begin the next *Season* with *Naptime*, the excluded may freely vent their frustration and even voice it, jumping and screaming their throat raw, as long as they never utter a meaningful word.

This phase lasts as long as needed, no timer required.

Epilogue

At the end of the fourth iteration of *The silent game*, in *Winter*, we will go back to our Beds for one last *Naptime*, the fifth and final repetition of this phase. But this time, when the bell rings, we must all get up: Nobody needs to stay asleep for longer. We must each pick up our chalks and gather around the Hopscotch court.

Each of us must take place on the square corresponding to the number of chalks they own, or near it if someone else with the same number of *Emotions* is already standing there.

There we will find the two *Endings* we placed down during our *Return to childhood*: The child with the most chalks will pick up the envelope *For children with 3 to 7 chalks*, and the one with the least will pick up the envelope *For children with 0 to 2 chalks*.

By following the instructions contained inside, we will find our voices again and let ourselves be guided towards the end of the quiet experience we shared.

It will not always be easy to build our story without words, nor to bring nameless characters to life. We will need to put ourselves in play in an unusual manner, by finding new approaches and always counting on each other. Let's work on our body and touch, and try to find new shades to our

Emotions through new gestures, without making them too cliché or too naturalistic. Let's try to turn the absence of words into an opportunity by carefully watching our fellow players: their actions speak volumes and we are called to listen. Both to win at the game of chinks like a child would want to, and to ensure that everyone always feels involved in the experience.

Even when the *Emotion* they feel is shame and their way of expressing it is retreating into a corner. Let's do our best to support each other, because all we have to play with is ourselves, without elaborate plots or pre-written twists.

The quiet game is about growth, the challenge we all face. The most important rule is that nobody can really win if they choose to play alone.

Return to childhood

Introduction

Now we begin our approach to the game proper, one step at a time. During this journey we'll try to get in touch with our body in its entirety, become familiar with the space where the children spend most of their days, and leave our words behind little by little, in favour of gestures, facial expression and bodily tension. One of us will need to guide the others through each step by reading the instructions out loud, while everyone takes part in a series of quick preparatory games.

It's normal to feel scared or weirded out by the idea of abandoning words: Let's try to think of ourselves as chilly swimmers, trying to walk into the cold sea and feeling every inch of skin we manage to get into the freezing waters. Even at the very end, we'll need a bit of courage to dive in!

The game proper will begin right after *Step 6: I never want to grow up!*, with no more readings or instructions. Before that, we're still allowed to exchange words or sounds, although with every *Step* we'll be encouraged to speak lower and lower, or to stay quiet, especially as we focus on individual activities. Let's focus on the sensations generated by the lack of words, auditory or otherwise.

Step 0: In Kensington Gardens

Let's spread randomly about the room, on our own, without forming pairs or groups.

We'll begin moving around, focused only on our own steps. Let's imagine we're in a public park, green, well-kept, lined with paths and sprinkled with flowerbeds. We're not alone in here, but everyone else is a perfect stranger. When we cross paths with someone, let's greet each other politely and exchange a few pleasantries, just like in our daily lives. Our interactions must be brief and devoid of emotion. We can use all the words we want, but in the end, they mean nothing.

The goal of this step is to break the ice and warm up a bit, starting with an approach to communication opposite to the one we'll adopt once we complete our *Return to childhood* and find ourselves in silence. In this Time of Adulthood, we should be as neutral as possible and resist the temptation to crack jokes or be ironic: There's no need to distance ourselves from the inevitable formalities of everyday life.

This Step lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Step 1: Someone's been lying in my bed!

Two of us must pick up a roll of masking tape each and stand at the two extremities of our game space. Everyone else should go stand by one or the other and two groups of about equal size with a wide empty space in the middle. When we're all in position, we can fall silent as we try to each think of a song, a rhyme, or a lullaby we remember fondly from our childhood. We don't need to recall the words, the melody is more than enough.

Now let's lie down as comfortably as we can and imagine a little Bed that fits us just right, big enough to take a nap in. Let's pass around the masking tape and help each other mark down the confines of every Bed in our group. If we have actual beds at our disposal, we should spend this time carefully making them, tucking in the bedsheets and fluffing up the pillows. Let's try to speak as little as possible as we make our Beds; instead of chatting, we should quietly hum our bedtime song.

The goal of this step is to familiarise with the game space and to make the Beds truly our own, as we'll be required to lie in them over and over during the course of the game.

This step lasts as long as needed, no timer required.

Step 2: Off to Neverland

Let's all gather in the middle of the room and imagine we're back in the gardens, though we're now in the Time of Youth: we're all around sixteen or seventeen, and we're here to play a friendly match.

Let's agree on a sport: volleyball, football, dodgeball or whatever else comes to mind. Then we'll decide who brought the ball. Whoever it is, they must give it shape through their hands, whether they're holding an invisible ping pong ball between their thumb and index finger or raising both hands to their chest as if to lift a basketball, heavy and unseen. When they're ready, they'll throw the ball and we'll all move accordingly, trying to catch it or kick it or calling for a pass.

The goal of this step is to warm up our whole bodies, to stretch out our limbs and learn to move as a group.

This step lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Step 3: Red and yellow, green and blue...

Let's pick up the pouch we've filled with chalks and pass it around, drawing three sticks each in turn. They must all be in different colours (so if we draw a duplicate, we can just put it back in and try again).

The chalk sticks we're choosing in this way represent our *Starting emotions*. To know which is which, we just need to con-

sult the *All the colours of emotion* sheet we've already put up. Still, let's do our best to learn these associations by heart: If we notice we're missing one of the suggested colours, this is the time to agree on a substitute and update the list accordingly.

Once we have our chalks, let's all go back to our Beds and spend the rest of this step colouring the masked tape that marks its borders; if we're using actual beds, we should put some tape on their frames and colour that instead. Let's give free rein to our creativity and let the colours we've obtained inspire us, together with our own childhood memories. This is another good time to quietly hum our bedtime song. Let's leave our chalks in our bed once we're done.

The goal of this step is to familiarise with the chalks and to finish making our Beds.

This step lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Passo 4: Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

Let's all gather in the middle of the room and once again return to the gardens, though this is the Time of Childhood: We're all kids, around nine or ten years old, and the park is suddenly much bigger, vast and mysterious. Our ways of moving and interacting change, as do the eyes with which we see the world. Words become less and less important, while gestures matter more

and more, but our goal is still the same. To play.

One of us immediately becomes It, and their goal is to tag everyone else by touching them. When we're tagged, we must immediately freeze in whatever pose we were in and stay still until one of our still-free friends manages to reach us and touch us. To avoid being tagged and frozen, we can either run away or hug another child: This way we'll both be immune to tagging as long as we keep a hold of each other. Be careful, though, because It won't be the same child for the entirety of the game! In fact, the player who's It can decide to give their role to any of the frozen children just by ruffling their hair. Let's keep passing around the role of It and just enjoy playing *Freeze Tag* for a while.

The goal of this step is to learn the rules of *Freeze Tag*, the game that makes up one of the phases of every *Season*.

This step lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Step 5: Scurry, hurry, and a Worry

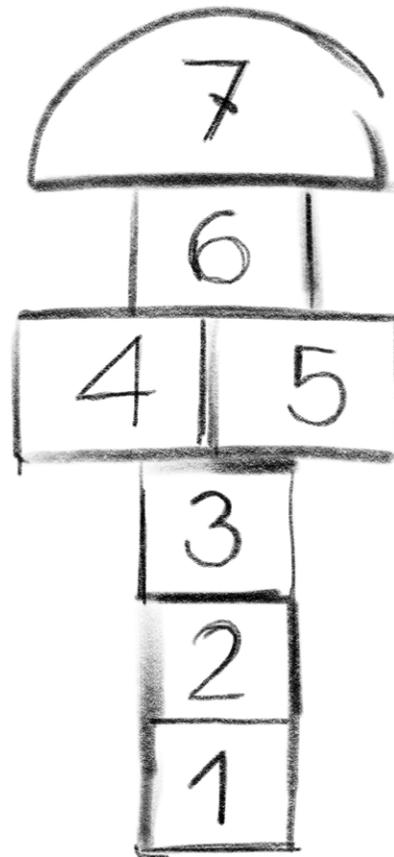
Let's all go back to our Beds and choose one of our coloured chinks, the one representing the *Emotion* we're most interested in exploring right now. Then let's gather at one end of the game space, away from both rows of Beds.

Let's start drawing a Hopscotch court on

the floor with our chinks, similar to the one below. If we can't draw on the floor directly, we can make the court out of masking tape and colour the lines instead. Once our Hopscotch is done, let's pick up the two *Endings* and place them in the corresponding squares, 0 and 7.

The goal of this step is to create the Hopscotch court and play with chalk one last time.

This step lasts as long as needed, no timer required.



Step 6: I never want to grow up!

Let's all gather in the middle of the room and return to the gardens one last time. This is the Time of Infancy: We're all children about five or six years old.

In this last step, the game truly becomes quiet: From now on, we must make an effort to abandon spoken words entirely. This is where we let our bodies do the talking, communicating through gestures, conveying meaning through contact.

What does such a young child feel as they walk around such a big park, all alone? How did we end up here? Will we try to leave as soon as possible to run back into Mother's arms, or will we turn this amazing jungle into our new home?

The goal of this step is to complete our Return to childhood and introduce The quiet game. When the alarm rings, we'll form a line and go back to our Beds. Whoever closes the line must set the timer to count down 2 minutes, the length of our Naptime; afterwards, we can all close our eyes and let the sound of our bedtime song carry us away. When we open them again, the game begins.

This step lasts 5 minutes, counted by a timer.

Ending

For children with 3 to 7 chalks

Let's read out one sentence each, passing the sheet along until we've reached its end.

I... We... We've grown up. Together.

We've discovered words. Together.

Many sounds from silence. Different, like us.

More and more complex. Complete, like us.

Every heart is a canvas. For others to paint.

Every heart is a melody. For others to play.

Joy and Sadness. Walking arm in arm.

Anger and Fear. For fun, under the bed.

Love and Disgust. Beauty lies in the beholder.

Surprise and Shame. Of growing and growing.

I became me. Because you remained you.

You became you. Because I remained me.

Ending

For children with 0 to 2 chalks

Let's read out one sentence each, passing the sheet along until we've reached its end.

I... We... We've disappeared. Little by little.

We've played with children. Little by little.

Many friends from silence. Different, unlike you.

More and more confused. Simple, unlike you.

Imagination is a canvas. For you to paint.

Friendship is a melody. For you to listen.

Yellow and Blue. Like the stripes on my fur.

Red and Purple. Like the tongue in my maw.

Pink and Brown. Like my nose and my paw.

Orange and Green. Like my little wild eyes.

I became me. Because you needed me.

You became you. Because you imagined me.

All the colours of emotion

YELLOW: Joy

BLUE: Sadness

RED: Anger

VIOLA: Fear

PINK: Love

ORANGE: Surprise

BROWN: Disgust

GREEN: Shame

Return To Childhood

Step 0: In Kensington Gardens (5')

Step 1: Someone slept in my little bed!
(until needed)

Step 2: Off to Neverland (5')

Step 3: Red and yellow, green and blue...
(until needed)

Step 4: Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?!
(5')

Step 5: Scurry, hurry, and a worry (5')

Step 6: I never want to grow up! (5')

Spring

Naptime (2')

Freeze Tag (5')

Recess (5')

The quiet game (until needed)

Summer

Naptime (2')

Freeze Tag (5')

Recess (5')

The quiet game (until needed)

Autumn

Naptime (2')

Freeze Tag (5')

Recess (5')

The quiet game (until needed)

Winter

Naptime (2')

Freeze Tag (5')

Recess (5')

The quiet game (until needed)

Hopscotch

Naptime (2')

Hopscotch (until needed)