

What We Leave Behind
A short game for four to eight people by Peter S. Svensson

Premise: You are a family preparing to quickly evacuate your home due to an impending disaster. Each member of the family picks an item with emotional significance to place into a cardboard box. You will then play out a flashback scene set in your home involving that item.

Venue: An actual home is ideal, but any space with control over lights is fine.

Props required: A cardboard box. Flashlights. Two stopwatches or other time-keeping objects. At least one miscellaneous item that could fit comfortably into said cardboard box per participant. (Anything from a vase to a hat, an envelope to a watch.) Having more items to choose from is nice. Having an entire home full of items is ideal. Just put them back when you are done.

Timing: The scenes in the present day, showing the family choosing what items to take, are done in darkness, lit only by flashlights held by each player. The scenes in the past, where the stories of the items are told, are done in full lighting.

When the game begins, start a one hour timer for the events in the present day. Pause that timer whenever a flashback scene occurs, starting a second one-hour timer for the flashback scenes, and switching between the two as needed. The game ends when one or both of those timers have concluded.

Narrative Control: The player that chooses the object that goes into the box gets to state a single sentence describing the moment that item represents. They then say "Switch," the lights are turned on, and the scene ends. A new scene, set in the past, telling the story of that moment begins. When the player that chose the object feels that the scene has concluded, they say "Switch," the lights are turned off, and the scene ends. This continues until every player has gotten a chance to start a scene.

Pre-Game Checklist

- Players should discuss the basic premise, a family reminiscing about the past of their home in the wake of an impending natural disaster.
- Players should discuss the tone they wish to aim for. (Comedic, serious, romantic, etc.)
- Players should create character and state what sort of relationships their characters have to each other. (Siblings, parents, cousins, friends, etc.)
- Players should choose an Issue for each character. A problem in their personal life that will influence their play. (Losing a job, fear of being alone, anger at a former lover, etc.)
- Players should establish what topics, if any, should be avoided during the game. (Assault, spiders, emotional abuse, etc.)

- Players should review other safety techniques they want to incorporate. (Check-In, Lookdown, Open Door, etc.)

First Scene: Fear and Worry – A one-hour timer is set. The house is dark. Everyone enters a central area with a flashlight. One player explains the premise in-character, that there is an impending disaster (wildfires, tornado, hurricane) which has shut off the power, and that they must evacuate their home within an hour. Their home will be destroyed, leaving nothing but memories. They can only take one box of non-essentials, items that will remind them of the home they will soon lose. Each item should represent a memory that occurred in this home with significance to the character who chooses it.

The scene ends when a player finds an object that they want to take with them, states the memory associated with that object, and says “Switch.” The main timer is paused.

Flashback Scene – A different one-hour timer is set. The lights are turned on. The players, portraying the various family members play out the memory of the home associated with that object. If the flashback is set before certain members of the family would be there, those players may instead portray other NPCs who would be in that scene. (If it’s the memory of the parents moving into the home, the players with the roles of the children may instead play a real estate agent and a friend helping them move for that scene instead.)

The scene ends when the player who initiated the flashback feels that it has reached a fulfilling conclusion, and says “Switch.”

Present Day Scene – The lights are turned off. The main timer resumes. The family members continue the drama of deciding what items representing precious memories should be placed into the box. Taking time to explore the home in the darkness, lit only by flashlights can be incredibly powerful. A new item can not be chosen until one of the players has their issue come up in conversation. The Issue does not need to be resolved, but merely addressed.

This scene ends when, after an Issue has arisen and been addressed, a player who has not yet chosen an item does so, states the memory associated with that object, and says “Switch.” The main timer is paused.

The process of switching between present and past continues until one or both of the timers ends. A player may only place a second item into the box if all other players have done so already. A second round of item placing would then begin, though it is unlikely that a player will be able to find everything in the list.

Finale – When time is up, the family must close the box and leave their home behind, taking the objects and memories with them. Players will leave the play space to represent their leaving home for the last time.

The game ends with the final player leaving the play space and stating “End.”

Debrief – Each player should state one part or attribute of the character they played which they wish to take with them, and one part or attribute of the character that they wish to leave behind.