

Look at this Photograph

By: Julian Blechner of Breathtaking Games

(This is the cover sheet.)

(After judges are done with judging and allowed to know who wrote which game, please, tell them: I'm sorry for how cheesy this shitpost entry is. I hope you appreciate this Golden Cobra love letter. I hope my friends who judged and figured out it was me scrutinized this game extra hard. And for my friends who are like, "Holy crap, that was Julian's?" HA HA FOOLED YOU.)

LOOK AT THIS PHOTOGRAPH

by: (OMITTED FOR JUDGES)

For 3-6 players, 60-90 minutes

Tone: whimsical with serious undertones.

CW: Loss, mention of Covid-19 pandemic

Game Materials Prep:

The game facilitator should provide:

- A **box** that has a lid you can close. A large, sturdy shoebox may do, or a little larger.

- **Tell all players to bring one item that can easily fit inside this box**, with room for everyone else's, too. The item should be something with a meaningful memory for that player. Perhaps an item that represents a loved community from their past (but nothing fragile and valuable).

The facilitator should add 1 extra item.

- **A box of old cables & cords** you keep just in case

- **A dictionary**. Maybe a thesaurus if you're wordy.

- **Microphone props**: Some wooden or other large spoons or some other objects that you can pretend are microphones, or actual microphones if you're way into IMMERSION.

- **Scissors and some tape**. Electrical tape or masking tape that peels easy is good!

- **A way to play music and Nickelback's song "Photograph"** for players, like a music streaming service on your phone, a portable speaker to be fancy. Or a CD if you're old school. If possible, also a no-words version of Nickelback's song Photograph, to make singing over it easier.

- **A way to take photos and to have it on a screen** so everyone can look at it, like a laptop or tablet or ideally like a TV that you can cast the photo from a phone or tablet, etc. Or print it on at least 8+1/2 x 11" paper, if you wanna go old school.

- **Writing implements** like pens and paper

- **Nametags** and **markers**

- **Print copies** of the lyrics for Nickelback's song Photograph on paper for everyone, provided in this game document on pages 4 and 5.

Before game:

Hand out a printed copy of the lyrics to all players. Collect items players brought into the box. If the facilitator is playing, use some fabric or whatnot so each person can put the object in the box without you or them looking.

Accessibility:

Ask players about any accessibility needs or helpful accommodations, in advance if possible. Work with them so they can play and have fun.

Safety:

Please remember that players are always more important than the game! Discuss tone and safety with players. See final page for some safety tools.

Premise:

In 2022, you're started to cautiously do more things after the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before it, you each had different beloved social community activities. You tried, but it never really came back, and so either you left, or it's gone. It's now 2023, and you're ready to move on, because you really really miss having a regular social group. You saw an online listing for a meet-up for amateur singer/songwriters, or at least, wanna-be singer/songwriters. You thought it could be a fun way to connect with people and make new friends. It's nearby, and the group's safety measures align with yours, so, you show up, optimistic, and hope to at least make a friend, and maybe a hit song.

During the game, players will roleplay as strangers who lived near each other. They'll meet up, introduce themselves, write some song lyrics, and hopefully make a couple memories and friends.

If you haven't in advance, now decide collectively with players if you'd like to record audio or even video of the performance.

Characters: Gotta Be Somebody

Each player on their own should choose a name and pronouns, and something your character does for a living that is NOT what you the player do. Write these things in marker on a name tag and put it on. (Note: Characters may know each other vaguely, but no one should be existing friends or know each other more than vaguely.)

For each scene that follows, read the scene details aloud, first, and then spend time roleplaying the scene, taking actions at appropriate times as indicated.

Scene 1: (Look at this) Photograph

(This scene is out-of-character.)

Open the box together, everyone should take about a minute to look inside at the same time. Really try and be present IN THIS MOMENT. One at a time, as mood hits you, say your real-life player name aloud.

Then, take a selfie of the group, with the box open and try and get it so you can kinda see the contents if possible. (I know, a lot to ask!) Put the photo up so everyone can see it.

Play Nickelback's song Photograph aloud for everyone. Everyone should remain silent for the song and look either at the photograph, or each other in unironic wistful, meaningful ways. As you listen, think about the items in the box and imagine ways they may be emotionally meaningful to other people.

Players take turns looking in the box. TAKE A MOMENT to soak in the items in the box. Then, take 10 or 15 seconds to select an item that is not the one you brought to the game as a player. (Return it after game, normally.) If you're the last player, you should have 2 items left, so no chance to be stuck with your own. This item is your character's memorable item.

Quietly, to yourselves, take a few minutes and make up why this item is memorable to your character and the community it used to represent. You have paper and pens if you wanna take notes. Use this time to get into character.

Scene 2: How You Remind Me

(This scene, and subsequent, is in-character.)

You're all meeting for the first time and introducing yourselves. Since it's the first meeting of the group, you all decided in advance to talk about the social community you lost because of the pandemic.

When everyone's ready and comfy, and take turns and describe the object you chose and its associated memory and the community the character used to belong to. As each player does this, they choose another player. That other player's character has always been interested in that activity / community that the first player belonged to. In character, the two of you should talk about this for a bit. SAVOR THE MOMENT as the first potential spark of friendship ignites. Make sure all characters have just 1 "always have been interested" connection with another character. Overall, the scene is a typical "getting to meet you" conversation for a group.

Scene 3: Someday

It's time to get down to the business of the meet up that you all came here to share your interest: songwriting. You'll use a template song for this go-around to make it easier: Nickelback's song Photograph, which was a huge, catchy 2005 hit. Everyone should have a printed copy of the lyrics to Nickelback's song Photograph and a writing implement. Get them handy, now.

Together, players, in character, should fill in lyrics on the "Your version" side with ones that relate to / describe / honor / etc your character's memories. Everyone is working on the same song; there's no "I" in "group effort here"! But you all want to have copies for yourself to read from later.

Ideally, make entire stanzas about one person unless it makes more sense otherwise. Use the dictionary and/or thesaurus to look up synonyms of words so that it sounds poetic.

Feel free to debate whether you want to make the lyrics more "common person's voice" with simpler language like Nickelback, or higher brow like you're The Decemberists and you want your listeners to have to have their own dictionaries to understand words like "panoply" or know what a "cormorant" is. Regardless, your song WILL be to the tune of Nickelback's song Photograph.

Don't think about this too hard. The goal of your character's social group is supposed to be creative, collaborative, and improvisation. None of you are Wayne Brady¹, so don't expect perfection in an improv'd-on-the-spot song!

Then, finally, rehearse it once. Just once. Use the music if it helps as a backing track.

Scene 4: Rockstar

Everyone take a wire from that box of cables & cords kept just in case, and the spoon or fake mic or real mic or whatever that you will use as a prop mic in the game. Tie them or tape them together somehow. WOO IMMERSION. But, really, mostly this is just to give people a bit of a fourth wall for players who may not be public singers.

SING IT. Play Nickelback's song Photograph (instrumental version if you have it) and sing it! If you really can't or don't wanna sing along, you could hum, instead, or stomp your foot or clap to keep beat! Percussionists are important! For bonus pizazz points, record the audio or video. Don't be judgey, in or out of character! Your characters are really hoping to make new friends,

¹ Note: Unless one of you IS Wayne Brady, of Whose Line Is It Anyway? and other comedy fame. If he's playing this game: He should take a photo of himself, sign it, and send it to the game's author, Julian Blechner. Whatever inscription is cool, Wayne's choice. You ROCK! So do all of you players!

and you all went in knowing some of you may totally not be great singers.

As soon as the song ends, take a group selfie. Everyone should hold their fake and/or real mics. Heck, take a couple selfies. You earned it!

Scene 5: (Look at this) Photograph (reprise)

Put up the selfie you just took so everyone can look at it again. All players, as their characters, again: Look at this photograph. Reflect on what you've lost and what you've gained. Mean it.

If you're all masochist and you recorded it, replay the song as you listen, but, be warned, I know I sometimes cringe at the sound of my own voice. Otherwise, replay Nickelback's song Photograph (instrumental version, if you have it). Remain silent until at least after "Oh, whoa, whoa, Oh, God, I...". Feel free to talk (quietly, probably) in character for the remainder.

Scene 6: Someday

As the song ends, you realize the time for your meetup group is just about up. Take 5 minutes and say goodbyes to your new friends, make promises to hang out real soon and chat up online which you may or may not actually mean.

Epilogue (Optional, Recommended)

You can debrief by:

- Compare the before / after photos
- Talking about who might meet again, who forms friendships, and any other epiloguing you may want to talk through.
- Return the objects to their owners and talk about their real-life meaning.
- Take time and celebrate this game and the friends you shared it with.
- Share your favorite moments from game.

Original (for reference):

Look at this photograph
Every time I do, it makes me laugh
How did our eyes get so red?
And what the hell is on Joey's head?

And this is where I grew up
I think the present owner fixed it up
I never knew we'd ever went without
The second floor is hard for sneaking out

And this is where I went to school
Most of the time had better things to do
Criminal record says I broke in twice
I must have done it half a dozen times

I wonder if it's too late
Should I go back and try to graduate?
Life's better now than it was back then
If I was them, I wouldn't let me in

Oh, whoa, whoa
Oh, God, I...

Every memory of looking out the back door
I had the photo album spread out
On my bedroom floor
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of walking out the front door
I found the photo of the friend
That I was looking for
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye
Good, good
Good, goodbye

Remember the old arcade
Blew every dollar that we ever made
The cops hated us hangin' out
They say: somebody went and burned it down

We used to listen to the radio
And sing along with every song we know
We said: someday we'd find out how it feels
To sing to more than just the steering wheel

Your group's version:

Look at this photograph
Every time I do, it makes me laugh

And this is where _____

And this is where _____

I wonder if _____

Oh, whoa, whoa
Oh, God, I...

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

Good, good

Good, goodbye

Remember _____

We used to _____

Original (for reference)

Kim's the first girl I kissed
I was so nervous that I nearly missed
She's had a couple of kids since then
I haven't seen her since God knows when

Oh, whoa, whoa
Oh, God, I...

Every memory of looking out the back door
I had the photo album spread out
On my bedroom floor
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of walking out the front door
I found the photo of the friend
That I was looking for
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye

I miss that town
I miss the faces
You can't erase
You can't replace it

I miss it now
I can't believe it
So hard to stay
Too hard to leave it

If I could I relive those days
I know the one thing that would never change

Every memory of looking out the back door
I had the photo album spread out
On my bedroom floor
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of walking out the front door
I found the photo of the friend
That I was looking for
It's hard to say it, time to say it
Goodbye, goodbye

Look at this photograph
Every time I do, it makes me laugh
Every time I do, it makes me...

Your group's version:

Oh, whoa, whoa
Oh, God, I...

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

I miss _____
I miss _____

I miss it now

If I could I relive those days

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

Every memory of _____

Goodbye, goodbye

Look at this photograph
Every time I do, it makes me laugh
Every time I do, it makes me...

Safety

Every game and every player is different, but here's some safety tools worth considering and sharing with players to ensure that everyone has a good time and reduce risk of physical or emotional harm. As a group, discuss comfort levels, any desired content limits, other safety needs, and accessibility needs players may have before play.

Cut: Announce "cut" to pause the action of the entire game. All players should stop roleplaying, be quiet, and determine what needs to happen to make everyone feel comfortable before continuing. This also can be used for something as mundane as pointing out someone is about to trip over something.

Let's Not: If someone says something or makes a suggestion that is inappropriate, out of the tone of the game, or just is making you or someone else uncomfortable as a player, you can say "Let's Not". The other player should choose a different suggestion or just move on. In-game, roleplay as if that suggestion or comment never happened. Just move on, and keep the flow of the game going.

Keep in mind that everyone's playing to have fun. Don't poo-poo people's ideas; instead, build on them and expand. And if someone seems to not be having a good time, use "cut", discuss, and just change whatever you need to in order to have more fun in the game. It's play, not High Theater, and no one is keeping score!

Epilogue: The game has some suggestions for epilogue, and they serve a purpose more than just fun. Because all players lived through the Covid-19 pandemic, and this game's setting draws from that, there's a likelihood there may be some big feelings people may have, or simply need to wind down.

Optional drinking game variant

(for 21+ only, please enjoy alcohol responsibly or use non-alcoholic drinks!)

- Take a sip every time the rules mentions "Nickelback"s song Photograph"
- Take a sip at any Nickelback song title.
- Take two sips if the rules mention "immersion".
- If the rules mention "take a moment" or similar, sip it very very slowly in that moment. Savor the drink intensely. BE IN THAT MOMENT. IMMERSED. YOU ALL ARE CHAMPION ROLEPLAYERS!
- Any time the rules mention "old school", look at your drink and chuckle at it.
- Any time the rules mention looking at a photograph, ignore the drink. You're looking at the photo. Duh. Did I really need to explain that to you?

Special Thanks:

Golden Cobra organizers and judges! (REDACTED FOR JUDGES) for proofreading! Any lovely playtesters I get after I submit this game to the contest, who ideally I'll update this document with their real names, lol. Nickelback, because writing pop rock songs that lots of people love isn't actually at all easy. Please don't sue me. This has got to be Fair Use, right? :D