

FREE CABIN FEVER  
EDITION

# SOCIAL NONSENSE

CREATIVE DIVERSIONS FOR TWO OR  
MORE PLAYERS - ANYTIME, ANYWHERE



**DOUG SHAW**

FOREWORD BY JILL BERNARD!

# SOCIAL NONSENSE

*Creative Diversions for Two or More Players -  
Anytime, Anywhere*

By Doug Shaw

Doug here. I'm reading a whole bunch of facebook posts from friends who are at home with families, and starting to feel trapped.

This is a free edition of my book - it has some of my favorite games ready to play with your family. Feel free to distribute to anyone who needs it.

**SOCIAL NONSENSE**

**Creative Diversions for Two or More Players- Anytime, Anywhere**

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A portion of the proceeds will go towards charities encouraging creative learning for underprivileged children.

# Social Nonsense

This is the paragraph where I make you discontent with the way you and your friends socialize, to make you desperate to apply the solution I am going to teach you in this book. I'm not up for that. I'm not here to fix a problem, I'm here to enhance your good times together, to make them even more fun and creative.

You and your friends will share a deeper bond, and maybe even change your self-images a bit, seeing yourselves as more complex, artistic, and inventive than you do now. It is time to transition to boldface questions and answers, so you feel like part of a conversation, even though I'm in complete control of what you are going to say.

## **So what exactly will we be doing?**

You and your friends are going to be creating art when you have a few extra minutes, like after you've ordered at a restaurant and are waiting for your food. Or when everyone is chilling in your living room or dorm room and it's time for the Next Thing to happen. These activities will be fun even for people who never thought of themselves as "creative" and normally don't do this sort of thing. You'll have a laugh, feel satisfaction out of proportion to what you actually did, and you'll all want to do it again the next time you get together.

## **What kind of art?**

Writing, drawing, and storytelling.

## **I'm eager to start, but possibly not, depending on who I am.**

Tell you what: read through the first couple and try one at your next gathering. I'm confident you will want to try more once you see what happens.

## **What materials do I need?**

A pen or pens. Colors are nice if you have them, because colors are always nice if you have them. No pencils – you don't want anybody erasing anything. Paper will be required, but you can always ask for some scrap paper from your host, or a kiddie menu at the restaurant, or anything else that people won't mind you writing on. A few of the games will require a stopwatch – you have an app for that on your phone.

## **Isn't this evocative of techniques and games used in the Surrealist movement in early 1920s Europe?**

Yes. They didn't do it at restaurants, though. So this is like hanging out with Salvador Dalí, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Ernst, Joan Miró, and René Magritte, except that afterwards someone brings you an omelet, or pizza, or chocolate cake<sup>[\*]</sup>.

## **Is the fun we will be having actually a way of practicing flow and Zen Mindfulness?**

That would be telling.

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[\*] Okay – I can't resist talking about the Surrealists. They were visual artists, musicians, and writers who chose to bypass Rational Thought to try to access the unconscious directly. They were into Mindfulness before it was cool. They all had their favorite obsessions and imagery, but their works had a dreamlike quality in common. And they got together, talked pretentiously, and played writing, art, and storytelling games, like the ones in this book!

**I've never done this before. Do I need any special sort of certification or license to be able to initiate/lead these activities?**

Unfortunately, you do. Fortunately, the licensure process is easy. Sign the form on the next page and you are officially an official Social Nonsense official facilitator/celebrant. To make it even more official, drip a bit of candle wax on the form and press something onto it to make a seal.

A printable copy of the license is on the website:  
[www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras](http://www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras)

**What if my group does something really, truly, amazing?**

Take a picture and share it with me! Seriously, I would LOVE to see it!

**Here's where you can find me and share:**

- On the web: [www.socialnonsensegames.com](http://www.socialnonsensegames.com)
- Email: [doug@socialnonsensegames.com](mailto:doug@socialnonsensegames.com)
- Twitter: [socialnonsense1](https://twitter.com/socialnonsense1)
- Facebook: [@SocialNonsenseGames](https://www.facebook.com/SocialNonsenseGames)
- Instagram: [socialnonsensegames](https://www.instagram.com/socialnonsensegames)

Now the fun begins!

# Be It Forever Known That

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Your Name Here)

*By right of courage, valor and wisdom has been proven worthy of the title "Social Nonsense Facilitator/Telesant" and is thereby entitled to all benefits, opportunities, and privileges thereto. This document is official.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Dr. Douglas Shaw*

**DR. DOUGLAS SHAW**  
Lovable Professor

\_\_\_\_\_  
*A Random Stranger*

**A RANDOM STRANGER**  
Someone who was here

# EXQUISITE CORPSE

## // Drawing

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An all-ages art game!

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## Level One

Drawing, Light Storytelling

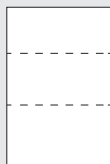
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The Surrealists moved from a text-based game to a drawing game and didn't change the name because that is how they rolled. This game is the one people are most likely to have played.

Some will say cynical things because it is always cool to be cynical but look at the smile at the corners of their eyes. Most people don't get to draw unless they are really good at it, and people rarely get to draw with other people.

The collaborative nature of drawing games takes personal responsibility away, and everyone has a good time. Don't be surprised if people want to photograph the final pictures. The final step of this version came from a session hosted by Stephanie Brown.





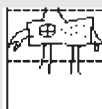
Everyone gets a piece of paper. People fold their paper into thirds to make creases, and then unfold their paper so it looks like this.



Everyone draws the head of a figure, extending the neck lines a little below the fold. Then they fold the paper back.



They then pass to the right. Or to the left. Or to someone else.



They draw a torso, extending the leg lines a little down, with the same time constraints, and pass again.



You know what's coming next.

Pass a final time.

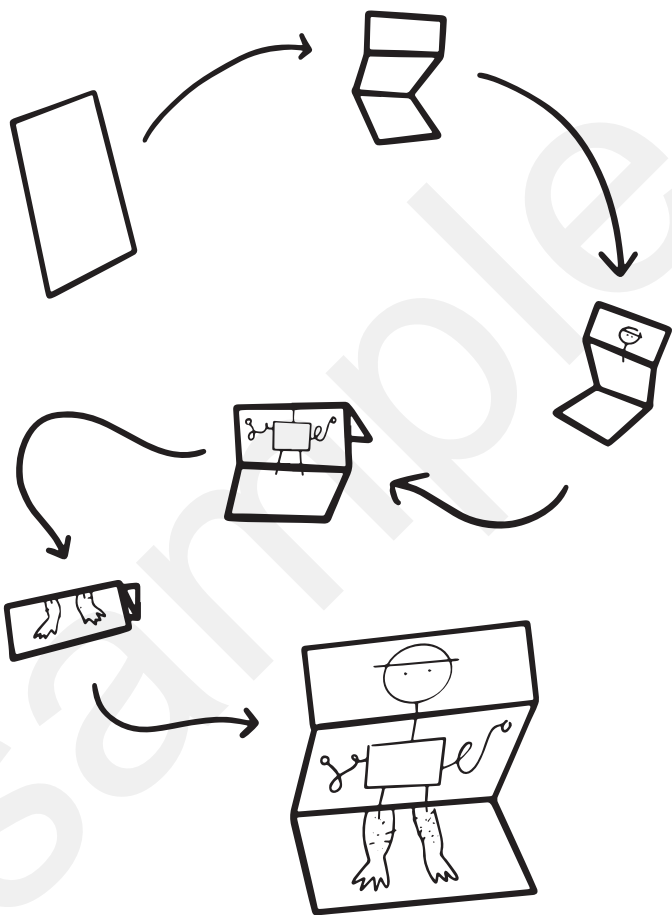


Then you all take turns around the table. When it is your turn, you unfold the picture so only you see it. After a few seconds, you turn it around, take a deep breath, and in a sentence or two, tell everyone about the creature depicted

The story cannot take longer than that one breath.



**This is Mary Sullivan, whose mother loved music so much that she married her stereo, and whose pregnancy was unexpected, but she decided to keep the baby.**



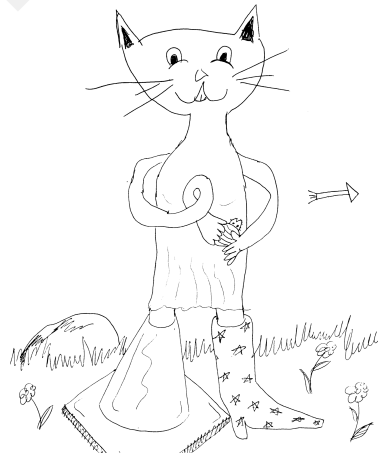


### Example Three

From a workshop at The Space.

### Example Four

From a different workshop at  
The Space.



## Variants

The Surrealists divided their paper into four sections: head, torso, legs, feet. Feel free to try it that way! If you have a mix of perfectionists who feel they have to take a long time to get their pictures “right” and insecure artists who take five seconds to avoid having to take the responsibility for trying, you might try having everyone work on their piece for a fixed time period you set. People must draw the whole time, adding details and backgrounds until “time” is called.

If you play this game several times in a row, people tend to get delightfully creative and silly, as the “obvious” ideas get taken. Another nice thing about it – all ages can participate.

Art is good.

Which of these characters would you least like to / most like to date? Which of these characters would be the most welcome at your next birthday party? Etc.

# STORY SPINE

## // Whimsical Version

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Collaborative storytelling with a can't-miss structure!

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## Level One

Category: Storytelling

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Kenn Adams observed that many stories have this structure at their core, or “spine.” It’s a great way to get collaborative oral storytelling off and running.

The Story Spine adores you and will not let you down. If you have a table full of people who love to tell tales, here’s a way you can all improvise one together!

### **Additional materials:**

The story spine table, either physical or displayed on a device. (Available on the website [www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras](http://www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras))

*Adapted from Kenn Adams*

THE STORY SPINE	STRUCTURE	FUNCTION
Once upon a time...	Beginning	The world of the story is introduced, and the main character's routine is established.
And every day...		
But one day...	The Event	The main character breaks the routine.
Because of that...	Middle	There are dire consequences for having broken the routine. It is unclear if the main character will come out all right in the end.
And because of that...		
And because of that...		
Until finally...	The Climax	The main character embarks on success or failure.
And ever since then...	End	The main character succeeds or fails, and a new routine is established.

*There's a PDF on the website at [www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras](http://www.socialnonsensegames.com/extras)*

Show this table to your group, or if you like, just the first column. This will be the structure of the story you are telling out loud. Player One starts with “Once upon a time, there was a ...” and introduces the main character.

Play proceeds around the table, each person delivering the next line according to the spine. (For the middle part, players can “And because of that” as much as they like until someone feels it’s time to deliver the “Until finally” line.)

If people tend to freeze up trying to come up with a first line, you can do it, or communally come up with one for the first player to deliver. The idea is not to worry about being too “creative” – just relax and state your line. Maybe toast at the end, if you have glasses to clink. If someone is critical of someone else’s line, remind them that that isn’t what this game is about.

People love stories. In general, collaborative storytelling can go off the rails, as people introduce things out of left field to be “clever,” or freeze up because they are overplanning. The beauty of this structure is it teaches the idea that a wonderful story can come from just “taking the next logical step,” which, when you think about it, is a good way to live a mindful life.

We will revisit this game later.

## Examples

Once upon a time, there was a professional boxer. And every day, he would punch a random person in the arm, to stay in practice. But one day, he punched someone who hit him back twice as hard. And because of that, he learned to see things from the perspective of the punched. And because of that, he didn't like hitting people any more. And because of that, he gave up boxing to be a masseuse. And because of that, he met another masseuse and they got married. Until finally he and his wife opened their own studio. And ever since then, he and his wife have been giving massages to people, albeit sometimes extremely firm ones.

—*Friends drinking wine*

Once upon a time Sophie decided she wanted to go to summer camp. And every day poor little Sophie's parents would be against summer camp because their parents had such bad experiences as children. But one day Sophie had a new plan, and her new plan was to talk to her parents who unbeknownst to her had given away her twin at birth. Because of that Sophie always felt there was something missing in her life. And because of that she tried to block that feeling out with drugs and alcohol. And because of that she ended up at summer rehab camp. Until finally she cleaned herself up but didn't go to summer camp. Ever since then her parents have been pro summer camp.

—*Professors at a conference*

Once upon a time there was a puppy who was very sad. And every day he sat in front of the patio door and went [whimpering noises]. But one day the schoolbus came and dropped off hundreds of children. And because of that one little boy who had been lonely for a friend found a dog that was also sad. And because of that the two moved to Vienna and started a dog rescue. And because of that hundreds and thousands of dogs found new homes. Until finally there were not lonely puppies to be found. And ever since then we've had Vienna sausages.

—*Group of friends, old and new, having lunch at Panera*

# QUESTIONS

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Unexpected answers to  
unexpected queries

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## **Level One**

Category: Writing

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This game is the simplest, fastest, and least risky of the ones in this book. It requires a group of people who find Dadaist results delightful.

### **Additional materials:**

Index cards (optional)

*Adapted from Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding*



Everyone takes a sheet of paper (or an index card if you happen to be in an index card rich environment) and writes a question that does not have a yes-or-no answer. They now turn their paper over, so the question is on the back. Pass the papers, so everyone is holding a piece of paper with an unseen question on the back. They now write an answer. Pass once more. The players now, in turn, share the question on their paper, and its answer.

## Examples

⇒ What is the saddest thing?

... Magenta.

⇒ If you were a dog breed, what would you be?

... It's largely dependent on the local spider population.

—*From a Friday evening happy hour*

⇒ Why do people love things that are bad for them?

... Because people like to be perceived that way.

⇒ Is the Universe by Design?

... Not always, but when the moon is exactly right in the sky, then absolutely!

—*From a workshop at The Space*

⇒ Where is Waldo?

... Under the stairs behind the dead body.

⇒ Why is Bohemian Rhapsody so long?

... Because people are simultaneously too sensitive and not sensitive enough.

—*From another Friday evening happy hour*

## Variants

You can add the rule that the person who writes the question turns the paper over, and then writes the first word of the question on the upper-right hand corner of the card, to give some minimal guidance to the answer writer.

Alternatively, you can constrain the scope of the questions by stipulating that they must begin with a specific word such as “how,” “why,” or “what.” You can combine this game with *Exquisite Corpse (Word Level)*, where the questions are generated with no constraints, and their answers are generated a word at a time, according to a format like “The [adjective] [noun] that [verb] [adverb].”

A graduate student from Zimbabwe, Taps, happened upon us during a workshop and joined us and suggested that after the questions and answers were read, we should pick a question or two and go around the table, answering it as honestly as possible.

The sudden change from nonsense to sincerity was liberating and caused the whole group to become closer. It probably would not have worked had we known ahead of time we might have to answer the questions we were writing, so as a certified Social Nonsense facilitator/celebrant this is a step to keep in mind, even if you don't announce it ahead of time.

Sample

# PORTKEY

## // Original Version

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Storytelling that goes in unexpected directions

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## Level Two

Category: Storytelling

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In **Portkey** the players take turns at the story level, not at the sentence or paragraph level.

(The name “portkey” is a Harry Potter reference: A portkey is an enchanted object that brings anyone who touches it to a location.)

Player One makes eye contact with someone, who names an object. Player One immediately (before thinking) says, “[Object] brings me to…” and describes a place from her life that contains the object. The description does not have to begin with the object, or even mention it.

When Player One is done she throws an object from her description to someone else, who will be Player Two. “[New object] brings me to…” If a player draws a blank, another player can help by taking the object instead.

The piece ends when everyone has described a location.

The places and descriptions must be real. The emphasis is on remembering, not inventing.

### **Example**

“Brick”: Player One described a coffee shop that she and her first husband opened, after it had been completely flooded.

*Then she threw the word...*

“Bakery Case”: Player Two described an Italian bakery, which was not the one her grandfather opened in the United States, but looked like what she imagined her grandfather wanted his to look like.

*She threw the word*

“Cookies”: Player Three described making gingerbread men with her daughters in their kitchen, and the candies that were laid out for them to decorate the confections with.

*She threw the word...*

“Toothpicks”: Player Four described his fourth grade classroom, building things with his friends, and making forts with toothpicks.

*He threw the word...*

“Forts”: Player Five described, not a specific fort, but the general sunburned boredom she felt going on road trips with her father, who would stop at every fort they passed on their travels.

—From friends old and new sharing lunch at Panera

For some reason, I feel like I'm writing in the style of Yoko Ono in Grapefruit or her sequel, Acorn.

I think it was the sentence, "The piece ends when everyone has described a location." But that's how I feel about Portkey – it is, to me, a piece of collaborative ephemeral art.

We will revisit this game later.

Sample

# FACILITATING TIPS!

SHARE!

Let's keep in touch!

I want to hear your thoughts about Social Nonsense – what your results have been, what effect has it had, how you've been using it, all of that. This is a community, and you are part of it, so we should connect.

- 🔗 The Hashtag. When you post your creations on social media, please do me the honor of using #socialnonsense. That way it will be easy for us to find each other's thoughts and art.
- 🔗 The Website. Find me at <http://www.socialnonsensegames.com> . There you'll find PDFs of things like your official certification, blank Restaurant Bingo cards, etc. You'll also find information about Social Nonsense events and meetups, and anything else I can think of or that you suggest. You'll also be able to email me from there.
- 🔗 Facebook: Let's share our Social Nonsense creations, facilitating tips, and thoughts. We all really want to hear your stories and ideas. Many of the games you've just read about end with a passing final product around a table. The Facebook group and page are like a really big table!
- 🔗 Visiting You. I'd love to come visit and do a Social Nonsense workshop for you and your organization. You can get details on my website. I love this stuff, and love to facilitate it.
- 🔗 The App. This does not exist. Would you like to make it exist? We should talk.
- 🔗 Social media—I play around here:

...On the web: [www.socialnonsensegames.com](http://www.socialnonsensegames.com)


...Email: [doug@socialnonsensegames.com](mailto:doug@socialnonsensegames.com)

...Twitter: [socialnonsense1](https://twitter.com/socialnonsense1)

...Facebook: [@SocialNonsenseGames](https://www.facebook.com/SocialNonsenseGames)

...Instagram: [socialnonsensegames](https://www.instagram.com/socialnonsensegames)





*Social Nonsense* is a collection of fun activities you can do after you've ordered at a restaurant and are waiting for your food; when everyone is chilling in your living or dorm room; when you want to have kids do an interesting and creative activity in a group setting; whenever you have a little extra time with your friends and your hands are moving dangerously close to your phones.

Collaborative art, writing, or storytelling can unlock surprising truths, and show people they are more creative than they know. These games are fun ... even for people who would never say they're "creative," who don't think they can draw, write, or tell stories, and normally don't do this sort of thing. Each activity is accompanied by instructions, examples, and commentary.

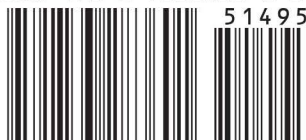
**PUT AWAY YOUR SCREENS AND ENJOY CREATING  
SOMETHING MEMORABLE!**

*"This opportunity to engage in interactive, creative experiences is the perfect antidote to our society's obsession with screens and social media. The book is not only fun, but also promotes mental health and wellness." - Dr. Jenna Z. Berendzen (Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner)*

*"Doug has a unique gift to bring an honest, unpretentious, joyful sense of play everywhere he goes. Now, he went and put it in a book. Enjoy!" - Joseph Scrimshaw (Comedian, writer, and variety show host)*

*"BRILLIANT!" - Gary Kroeger  
(Writer & Actor - Saturday  
Night Live and CEO, Outlier  
Creative Solutions)*

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