



HOW TO HOST YOUR OWN
MURDER MYSTERY
AT THE CIRCUS

HOST'S INSTRUCTIONS





You are about to embark on a fun-filled evening of
intrigue, deceit and wrongdoing!

It's August 1905 and there has been a murder at the Starlight Circus. All the circus performers are in the frame.

Can anyone work out whodunnit?

You can host your Murder Mystery over dinner, but this isn't essential. Ideally, you will need a table to set up the various components of the game.

You will act as the host; however, you might want to ask a friend to help with the hospitality side whilst you are busy orchestrating the game.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

- 13 NAME BADGES
- 13 PINS (one for each name badge)
- 12 CHARACTER NAME cards
- 12 SECRET TRAIT cards
- 9 MURDER WEAPON props
- 1 DETECTIVE NOTEPAD
- 1 EVIDENCE FILE
- 1 PLAN OF THE CIRCUS
- 12 ROUND ONE cards
- 12 CHALLENGE Cards
- 3 sets of ROUND TWO cards (6 BLUE, 6 GREEN and 6 YELLOW cards)
- 3 sets of ROUND THREE cards (6 BLUE, 6 GREEN and 6 YELLOW cards)
- 1 ACCUSATION and VOTING PAD
- 3 SOLUTION SHEETS and 3 SOLUTION ENVELOPES (one for each time you play the game)
- 3 AWARD TROPHIES
- 1 INSTRUCTION BOOKLET

Extra items you will need to provide:

- 1 pen per guest
- 1 red item of clothing for setting up the crime scene



TIP

The plot is broken down into three main rounds, designed to run as one round over each course of a meal. We recommend that you have a short break at the end of each round so that your guests can make notes and discuss what's happened so far.

GAMEPLAY

Preparing your murder mystery party is simple. Just choose a minimum of four friends or family members to invite, set the date, and send out your invitations! This game can be played by a maximum of 12 people (plus the host), but needs at least five participants (including the host) to run effectively. It can be played up to three times with a different solution each time you play. For the best experience, invite different guests each time.

- Select a colour: each one relates to a different gameplay and a different ending. You can choose from **BLUE**, **GREEN** and **YELLOW**.

The game is split into six sections:

1. INTRODUCTION
2. THE MURDER - Crime Scene and The Missing Murder Weapon Hunt
3. ROUND ONE clues
4. ROUND TWO clues - **BLUE**, **GREEN** or **YELLOW** cards according to the gameplay colour chosen
5. ROUND THREE clues - **BLUE**, **GREEN** or **YELLOW** cards according to the gameplay colour chosen
6. FINALE - the Accusations, the Solution and the Awards

There is a **CONVERSATION STARTER** at the beginning of each round of clues to determine which of your guests should go first. These are intended to be played in character.

Have a quick read of the whole booklet before the evening.

INVITATIONS AND ALLOCATION OF CHARACTERS

There are a few things you might like to do to make your party go with a bang!

- Send out invitations for the evening to your chosen guests to tell them their character name and occupation in advance.

You should include the following details in your invitation:

- Time and date
- Character (tip: you could take a photo of the character card to send to the guest)
- Information on the 1905 circus theme
- Ask your guests to dress up and bring a suitable prop, inspired by the character card and 1900s era
- Let them know there will be an award for best detective, best costume and most impressive acting

IMPORTANT: There are 12 possible characters (plus the host), but you MUST allocate Bobby Blaze, Al Lusion and Sam O'Salt every time you play. Once you have taken those three out of the stack of CHARACTER NAME cards, randomly choose as many as you need to give all your guests a character to play.

Visit talkingtables.com for printable/emailable invitations to send to your guests.

BEFORE YOUR GUESTS ARRIVE SETTING UP THE CRIME SCENE

Place the following in an area where people can easily gather round, but preferably out of sight when they first arrive:

- Pillows in the shape of a body, under a white sheet
- A "bloodstain" on the sheet, around the head area of the "body" (create using an item of red clothing)
- Hide the nine MURDER WEAPONS provided around the area, in a different place from the crime scene

CHARACTERS

- Take the relevant NAME BADGES out of the box for the characters who are attending, along with the CHARACTER NAME cards, ready to give out to your guests when they arrive. The first time you play, you will need to attach one of the supplied PINS to the back of each name badge. There are 12 characters in total (plus the host): four male, four female, and four that can be either sex (Bobby Blaze, Al Lusion, Sam O'Salt and Vee Sharpe)
- Place all SECRET TRAIT cards face down on the table

LAY OUT THE ROUNDS

- Place all CHALLENGE cards face down on the table
- Set out the three rounds of CLUE cards in separate piles, face down on the table, correlating to the colour of game you are playing (ROUND ONE cards are all RED, ROUND TWO and ROUND THREE cards vary in colour)
- Place the PLAN OF THE CIRCUS where everyone can see it
- Place the empty EVIDENCE FILE on the table – you will need it to keep all the clues safe once they've been revealed, so they are available for review
- Place the DETECTIVE NOTE SHEETS and some pens around the table so the guests can make their own notes
- Keep the ACCUSATION SHEETS handy as you will need them towards the end of the game

- Select the sealed SOLUTION ENVELOPE corresponding to your chosen gameplay colour. Keep it handy as you'll need it later, but make sure no-one opens the envelope - no peeking!
- Keep the trophies somewhere nearby so you can access them easily at the end of the game, when it's time to award them to deserving guests.

MUSIC

Add to the atmosphere and the drama of the evening with some music. Scan this QR code with your phone camera to access our Spotify playlist to accompany your game.



NOTES FOR YOU

You, the HOST, are Dani Dingaling, the owner of Starlight Circus. Your role is to make sure things run smoothly.

You have a strange habit of singing very tunelessly whenever there is a lull in conversation. You also tend to laugh loudly whenever anyone (including yourself) says the word 'circus'. Demonstrate these character traits throughout the evening!

All the guests are members of Starlight Circus, and they each have their particular talents. There are 12 performers in total. They might not all be physically present this evening, as some of them might currently be elsewhere on circus grounds - in their caravans, for example. How many of them are here depends on how many guests you have invited, but all 12 are still suspects in the murder. Although you, the host, are not a suspect in this murder, you might still have skeletons in your closet, and you won't know whodunnit until the very end, so you can play along with your guests and try to guess the identity of the murderer!

YOUR GUESTS ARRIVE

Introduction

- **Serve pre-dinner drinks.**
- Give out the relevant CHARACTER NAME cards to each of your guests. Ask them to read what's on the card, but not to share this information with anyone else for now.
- Now ask each guest to take a SECRET TRAIT card at random.

- Return the remainder of the SECRET TRAIT cards to the box.
- Tell your guests to read the information on the SECRET TRAIT cards to themselves and not to reveal it to each other until the end of the game.

When your guests are ready to start the game, read out the following:

"Good evening, everyone, and welcome to what is certain to be the most exciting night of 1905! My name is Dani Dingaling and I would like to welcome you to a very special night for Starlight Circus. There's a lot at stake tonight! Based on your performance in this evening's show, our ringmaster, Rollo Upp, will decide which six performers will be going with him - and me - to join the new super-circus, a joint venture between Starlight Circus and our long-time rivals Big Topp. The new circus will showcase the very best acts - in fact it's going to be the world's best circus. The rest of you I'm afraid will be out of a job, but there's nothing I can do about that, so get ready to give your best ever performance!

Most of you already know each other, but some of you don't, so let us take a minute to introduce ourselves".

Now ask your guests to introduce themselves to each other using the information on their CHARACTER NAME cards, remembering their SECRET TRAITS. Remind your guests to keep their CHARACTER NAME and TRAIT cards face down at all times to stop others peeking.

Encourage your guests to throw themselves into the traits and personalities shown on their cards throughout the evening.



TIP

This is a good time to remind everyone that award trophies will be handed out for Best Acting, Best Costume and Best Detective at the end of the evening.

Once your guests have taken it in turns to introduce themselves to the rest of the group, read out the following:

"Now, I've gathered you all here in the Starlight Circus big top because we need to rehearse this evening's event. There is a lot at stake so it is important everyone knows their role and the performance goes smoothly.

Before we get started, I think it is best if I do a roll call to see who's here. Please say 'Yes' if you're present!

Bertie Bicep, Hugh G Shooz, Juan Wheel, Ben D Boddy, Sally Swinger, Krystal Ball, Barbie Boom, Donna Droppitt, Bobby Blaze, Al Lusion, Sam O'Salt, Vee Sharpe!"

NB: You won't need to say this last line if you have invited 12 people.

"Well, I don't know where the missing people have got to, but we'll just have to keep an eye out for them".

CRIME SCENE AND MISSING WEAPON HUNT – THE MURDER!

Make an excuse to leave the area/room and go to the crime scene you prepared earlier. You could cock your head, look alarmed and say:

"Oh my goodness, that sounded like the police! I have to go and investigate!"

When you reach the crime scene, act alarmed, scream or do whatever you fancy, but make it clear there has been a MURDER!

Go back to your guests and explain that you think it's important that everyone sees what you've seen. Warn those of a nervous disposition that they may need to prepare themselves for a horrible sight. Lead your guests to the crime scene, then tell them the following:

"You can look but not touch! It's probably a good idea to make notes of anything you think is relevant, and you can take photos if you wish. This is exactly how the body was found - in the ringmaster's tent - by Wendy Munniums, the ticket seller. Nothing has been touched".

Once your guests have had a good look at the crime scene, return to the main room and read out the following:

"I'm sorry if you were upset by that awful scene. I have to tell you that the body is that of our beloved ringmaster here at Starlight Circus, Rollo Upp. As you know, he was due to judge your acts this evening. What an awful shame the show cannot now go ahead!

There's very little information at the moment, but one thing that seems to be missing is a murder weapon! There are, in fact, nine potential weapons hidden around the place. It's time for a little game of 'hunt the potential murder weapon!'

You're looking for:

A Dumbbell, a Dagger, a Juggling Ball, a Pistol, a Magician's Wand, a Giant Shoe, a Bicycle Pump, a Whip, and a Crystal Ball...

If you find something, bring it back here and make sure you examine it closely.

I hope everyone has their wits about them this evening. If there is any chance of this terrible murder being solved, you need to remember that everything you see and hear could be relevant!"



TIP

This is a good time to remind everyone that they're going to need to concentrate this evening and write some notes.

As the weapon props are found, the interesting information on the back of each one will need to be shared with the group - the person who finds the weapon should read the information aloud to the group. Make sure all nine weapons have been found and examined. Put them in the EVIDENCE FILE.

ROUND ONE

- When everyone is ready, ask your guests to sit down at the dinner table.
- **Serve the starter.**
- Make sure the ROUND ONE clues and CHALLENGE cards are easily accessible, face down. Read out:

"Now it's time to start looking at the clues and evidence that's gradually coming to light. It's now 6.30pm so the sooner we can get this all sorted out, the better!"

CONVERSATION STARTER - Decide who is to go first by asking each guest in turn: "What was the naughtiest thing you did at school?" The best or funniest answer (in your opinion) goes first.

That person should now take the top ROUND ONE card and follow the instructions on it. Once they have done that, they should take a CHALLENGE CARD and follow the instructions on it. After they have performed the challenge, the next person around the table should take the next ROUND ONE card and follow the instructions, followed by a CHALLENGE CARD. Repeat until all ROUND ONE cards have been used. When all those clues have been revealed, put them in the EVIDENCE FILE.



TIP

At the end of this round, it is a good idea to recap some of the juicy bits of information that have just been uncovered.

ROUND TWO

Serve the main course.

Make sure the ROUND TWO cards are accessible. Read out:

"The second round will give you some forensic, witness and character clues; it would be a good idea to take notes."

CONVERSATION STARTER - To decide who should start, ask your guests: "If you were ever to be arrested, what would it be for?" Whoever comes up with the most impressive answer should take the first ROUND TWO card and follow the instructions on it. The clues must come out in the specific order marked on the reverse - from Clue 1 to Clue 6. If there are more than six guests, you might like to select which guests reveal the other five clues. If not, your guests can simply take it in turns. When all the ROUND TWO cards have been used and the contents read/acted out, put them in the EVIDENCE FILE.

ROUND THREE

Serve the dessert.

Make sure the ROUND THREE cards are accessible. Read out:

"The final set of clues will provide some physical characteristics of the suspects and other vital clues. Use these clues to draw your conclusions on who the murderer is."

CONVERSATION STARTER - To decide who should start, ask your guests: "Which body part do you wish you could detach and why?" Whoever comes up with the best/funniest answer should take the first ROUND THREE card and follow the instructions.

Again, they must come out in the specific order marked on the reverse - from Clue 1 to Clue 6. If there are more than six players, give players who did not reveal a clue in ROUND TWO the opportunity to reveal the ROUND THREE clues.

After all the clues and information have been revealed, invite everyone to review both their notes and all the evidence contained in the EVIDENCE FILE.

FINALE - THE ACCUSATION

Serve coffee and after-dinner drinks.

Give each guest an accusation form and a pen. Read out:

"So - all the evidence is in and the time has come to make your accusations. Complete your accusation form and be ready to reveal and justify who you think killed poor Rollo Upp."

Each person should now complete their form with the following information:

- Their own character name
- The name of the person who they believe murdered Rollo Up
- What they think the motive behind the murder was
- How they reached their conclusion
- Their votes for Best Actor and Best Costume

Remind everyone that apart from you (the host), everyone in the room, as well as any other characters mentioned in the course of the game, is a suspect. As the host, you can play along and guess the identity of the murderer, as the solution is contained in a sealed envelope.

Once everyone has written down their proposed solution, work your way round the guests, starting wherever you choose, and ask them all to reveal out loud what they have noted on their accusation form. They should all be prepared to justify and defend their accusation!

SOLUTION

You may now open the sealed SOLUTION ENVELOPE corresponding to the colour of the cards you used in ROUND TWO and ROUND THREE. Read the contents aloud to the room.

AWARDS

Once the murderer has been unveiled, collect everyone's accusation forms and tally up the votes. It's up to you who gets Best Detective!

It's time to hand out the trophies based on:

- The person (or persons) who guessed the murderer/motive (or who came closest) for the Best Detective Award
- The highest number of votes for Best Costume
- The highest number of votes for Best Acting

SUBSEQUENT GAME PLAYS

Simply choose a different gameplay colour, which will lead to a different solution. Don't forget to use the appropriate coloured cards in ROUND TWO and ROUND THREE.

THE END

CHECKLIST

Advance Preparation:

- Decide whom to invite (minimum of four and maximum of 12 guests). Send out your invitations in good time, ensuring you've invited the obligatory characters and then added others
- Make sure everyone is clear on the location (send maps/directions if necessary) and what time they need to arrive
- Encourage your guests to dress to impress in the 1905 circus theme

Party Food and Drink:

- If much of your menu can be prepared in advance, you will have less to do on the night

The Room:

- Arrange the furniture, making sure there is plenty of space for everyone and for all the components of the game
- Decorate the room to fit the 1905 circus theme
- Set the table in advance
- Set up the crime scene as per instruction
- Have a small separate table for the EVIDENCE FILE so the evidence is easily accessible for review during the evening

On the Night:

- Get everything ready at least an hour before your guests are due to arrive so you can make any final touches
- Remember to document the evening. Take photos and videos and encourage guests to do the same
- Capture the moment and share your memories
#HostYourOwn #MurderMystery #TalkingTables

