

An Inconsequential Amount of Peanuts

Content Warning:

Death, grief, allergic reactions, arguments, depression, and blame. This experience also includes physical contact. If these topics make you uncomfortable, proceed with caution. If you are uncomfortable at any point during play, please prioritize yourself over the game.

A game about mistakes and the sometimes unresolved feelings of grief.

By Alex Koeberl, inspired by *Wigilia*, *A Crow Funeral*, and *The Bathhouse*.

Materials:

- Chairs (1 for each player, so 6 chairs)
- A table to sit around
- A keepsake to represent Joseph
- Timer
- An X Card for every player to use to facilitate safe play

Introduction:

It's Joseph's birthday today, so Bonnie decided to surprise him with dinner at the upscale Italian restaurant, *Separare*, by renting out the entire restaurant. After the main course, the family decides to order *torrone* (a nougat confection with nuts) without knowing what it is.

The waiter is 16 years old and just started working the week prior. When the family asks the waiter if there are nuts in *torrone*, he tells them no, having confused *torrone* for *tiramisu*.

Joseph is deathly allergic to peanuts, and the next 20 minutes leading up to his consumption of the *torrone* are unknowingly his last moments. The family invites the chef and waiter to sit with them to have a toast before they enjoy their dessert, which is the last moment of peace these people will have for a long time.

Safety:

This game encourages players to offer each other comfort in the form of physical contact (at the minimum a pat on the back, and at most a hug). Before the game starts, discuss whether all players consent to this or discuss what boundaries should be set. Use the X cards to signal if the conversation is headed somewhere uncomfortable.

Characters:

- Joseph (Husband): Jovial and warm. He will die at the end of the *Dinner* phase. He loves to gush about his family and makes plenty of dad jokes. He is very supportive of those around him, even the Waiter and Chef. In death, he is a silent force that aims to comfort others.
- Bonnie (Wife): Amiable and inviting. She enjoys discussions about hobbies and aspirations, and will often attempt to include people in conversation if they are silent. Represents **anger** after Joseph's death, and will blame the waiter and the chef.
- Gabriel (Son): Energetic and curious. He just turned 11 and asks questions often about things he doesn't understand. Represents **bargaining** after Joseph's death, he will ask other characters about how to bring back his father and will ask why they had to go to dinner tonight.
- Michaela (Daughter): Patient and kind. She's preparing to enter college but is unsure of what she wants from life. Represents **acceptance** after Joseph's death, and will do her best not to raise her voice at others and listen to them before comforting them.
- Chef: Proud and stubborn. He has worked as a chef at Separare for 45 years and plans to retire next year. Represents **denial** after Joseph's death. He cannot accept that he was involved in Joseph's death and will deny to everyone, including himself, that his cooking killed someone.
- Waiter: Ambitious and persistent. He's 16 and just started working at Separare to save up money for college, and dreams of making it big one day. Represents **depression** after Joseph's death, and blames himself for what happened. His dreams have been shattered and he is overwhelmed by immense guilt. This is the hardest role to play.

Sequence of Play:

The game is divided into two phases, Dinner and Grief. Players are encouraged to take a five-minute break between phases.

Dinner:

The waiter has brought the tarrone to the table, and the family invites the waiter and chef to sit with them before they eat dessert. Begin play with the chef asking the family why they rented out the restaurant. Conversation should follow the motivations and personalities of each character. Joseph can use the keepsake meant to represent him as a diegetic object to guide the conversation. If he places it on the table, it acts as a signal to guide the conversation toward it.

After 20 minutes or when players feel the conversation is wrapping up (which can be signaled by saying “I can’t wait to eat dessert”), Joseph will give a toast and thank everyone at the table. When Joseph is done giving his toast, enter the Grief Phase of play.

Grief:

Joseph has passed away. Place the keepsake representing him where he was seated, and have players move to a different part of the room. Have players take their chairs and form a circle here.

Bonnie called the police, and they will arrive at Separare in ten minutes. Begin this phase with Bonnie hanging up the phone. There is no conflict resolution.

Joseph acts as a silent force attempting to comfort those around him and may place a hand on a player’s shoulder or offer them another form of consensual contact. If a player receives contact from Joseph, they are allowed to comfort another player despite their representation of grief if they desire. Alternatively, they may shift the conversation toward Joseph to embody their representation of grief. Joseph can also stand between players physically, forcing players to move around Joseph to continue their conversation or to go talk to someone else. At any time during the five minutes, Joseph can motion for another player to leave the room, removing them from the discussion. The game ends when there is one player other than Joseph left in the room, or ten minutes pass.

Other players should lean into their representations of grief while interacting with each other. Return to conversation held during dinner, have characters lament what they’ve lost whether it is love, family, reputation, a future, or something else. **Aim to lift play rather than to achieve the happiest ending, leaving things unresolved and unforgiven.** Joseph is gone, and the characters within *An Inconsequential Amount of Peanuts* are actively trying to grapple with this fact and will continue to long after the game ends.

Debrief:

Check-in with players emotionally after the Grief Phase concludes. How did you feel while playing? Why do you think there is no conflict resolution mechanic in this game? Reflect on your experience and talk about what went well or poorly. Tell your loved ones you love them.

Golden Cobra Inspirations:

Wigilia: The character Joseph in this game draws directly from The Plant's playstyle. The difference here is that Joseph starts the game alive and passes away between phases, changing his playstyle. I wanted players to form a connection with each other before entering the fraught Grief Phase. Unlike *Wigilia*, Joseph does not get to narrate what occurs after the Grief Phase ends. This is to reflect how grief is sometimes left unresolved and incomprehensible. Instead, Joseph must watch as those he cares about are torn apart emotionally, reflecting how sometimes we are unable to help those immersed in grief no matter how hard we try.

A Crow Funeral: I took the idea of having a player die partway through the game from here, but the most important aspect of *A Crow Funeral* is that there is no conflict resolution. Having no conflict resolution is central to a game that explores grief and its intrinsic complexities. I also decided to have the players physically move for the second phase because of how players seek out a safe place at the beginning of *A Crow Funeral*. The movement of players to a new place is nearly a perversion of the safe space depicted in *A Crow Funeral*.

The Bathhouse: I pulled from The Journey portion where characters reminisce about their past with each other and reflect on their lives up until the present, and a little from The Return Home portion where characters make future plans and grow closer. I also drew inspiration from the fact that each character represents a God in addition to their normal characteristics, as seen by the characters in this game representing the stages of grief (except for Joseph).

This game also focuses heavily on the 2018 Golden Cobra theme of mistakes. Should the chef and waiter be blamed for their mistake? Regardless of player opinion, the characters in *An Inconsequential Amount of Peanuts* have their lives irrevocably changed by this mistake. We no longer have a houseplant as our vessel for an otherworldly force, but it emerges through a mistake.

Life Inspirations:

When I was in my junior year of high school, COVID-19 hit. My grandfather had been living on oxygen for over a year at that point, and we weren't able to visit him. He passed away suddenly from a heart attack on April 30th, 2020. I can't even remember the last time I saw him before COVID, but at the time I remember grieving and moving on relatively fast.

Then, freshman year of college my great-grandma passed away on February 5th, 2022. All of the feelings I thought had been resolved were dredged up and multiplied, sending me into a deep depression. My significant other at the time (now my ex) gave me an ultimatum to go to therapy or end our relationship, so I went to therapy and was able to process my feelings healthily after many months. This larp was made to exemplify how that sort of grief stays with us for the rest of our lives and sometimes may never be resolved. I hope playing this is cathartic for someone out there who needs it. Let the grief out.