



TEENDOM

"don't cry, don't raise your eye, it's only teenage wasteland..."

A Role Playing Game by Fabrizio Botto

PREMISE

TEENDOM is a Role Playing Game for early teens (13-16) and a grown-up facilitator. This is a game about adolescence, I like to think of it as “a safe place to try out dangerous things”. I use this game with teens with special educational needs in contexts such as schools and community centers, but it's also perfect for summer camp activities, parties or after-school time.

In the following pages I will often refer to the players calling them "Teenagers" and to the adult that facilitates the game calling him "Game Master (GM)".

All this work is built on the game [Shadows](#) by [Zak Arntson](#).

CHARACTER CREATION

Teenagers interpret themselves as characters. On a sheet of paper divided into two halves by a vertical line, each one writes his own [personality traits](#) and attitudes: the ones he likes and that usually shows to others on the left side; the ones that he keeps more hidden and he's not very proud of on the right. Each of the [two](#) personalities set has a different color [twenty-sided dice](#) assigned.



Lucas starts thinking out loud “Well I find myself to be **funny, generous, modest** and **loyal**” and he writes down these four traits on the left side of his character sheet. “Sometimes I find myself doing what people ask me to do, even if I wouldn’t like to... maybe because I want them to like me” and he writes down **compliant** on the right side. “I also feel very bad when they don’t like me... sometimes I feel bad even when a friend thinks I’m wrong about something” Lucas adds **thin-skinned** to the right side of his sheet. “Finally I’m a bit **envious!** I don’t like it and I don’t show it but that’s how I feel sometimes. “OK, I give the **green die to my visible traits** and the **red one to the hidden ones.**”



The process of character creation may need some time and help from the adult. You can start brainstorming to create a list of words that refer to personality traits and explore their meaning together. Leave the necessary time to the teens. Make sure that there are **at least 3 traits in each of the two columns** and then leave the teens free to add more of them during the game.

PLAYING THE GAME

When a character takes one action or reacts to something in uncertain and interesting situations, the GM asks for a **resolution roll**: The Teenager narrates two different outcomes, one dictated by his "**Visible Personality**", the other by the "**Hidden Personality**", then he rolls his two dice: **the outcome associated with the highest die occurs** (doubles are re-rolled).



We are at a party. A guy approaches Lucas. He complains to feel excluded from the fun. He says that all the boys and girls feel super-cool but, according to him, they are all idiots. So he asks Lucas to help him make a prank: steal two bottles of tomato sauce and pour them into the swimming pool.

Lucas thinks for a moment and says: "OK, if the green die wins I'll say no: it's true that I feel excluded too, but I do not want to ruin the party. If the red die wins. instead.. I'll say yes, because I also hate all these Hypebeasts!"



Note that the two outcomes are generated before rolling the dice and they only concern the behavior of the character. In no way they can include actions of NPC or environmental events, these are dictated by the GM.



Lucas thinks for a moment and says: OK, if the green die wins I'll say no and the guy will understand that pranking them is not a good solution to our problem. If the red die wins, instead... I'll say yes, but nobody finds out that we have been pranking them.



Both these **outcomes** are **not valid** because they include things that do not belong to the character, such as the reaction of NPC: only the GM can decide for it.

Teenagers also have **three coins** each. These are an in-game-currency that is spent to intervene in someone else's future:

After a Teenager makes a resolution roll, anyone (but him) can pay him a coin and force him to re-roll one of his dice.



Lucas rolls his dice: the green one is a 17, the red one is a 14. His loyal side won. Cristina, however, is more interested in hearing a story of a pool filled with tomato sauce, rather than seeing Lucas behave like a good boy. So she gives him a coin and tells him to re-roll the green die...



Coins are therefore not burned, they circulate among the Teenagers.

When a Teen runs out of coins she simply doesn't have any more power to intervene in her mates' future until someone spends his own coins on her.

One or more Teenagers can intervene several times in a specific situation but the **cost of re-rolls increases by one coin each time.**

Moreover it must be paid entirely by a single teen, it is not possible for the group to pitch in.



Lucas re-rolls the green die: 19! he's very lucky... but Cristina is determined to make that pool turning red... she takes two more coins, gives them to Lucas and invites him to re-roll the green dice once more...



Now Lucas has six coins (he had three, and now three more are given to him by Cristina in this scene), while Cristina just ran out. She will no longer be able to intervene in anyone's future until someone will intervene in hers, giving her one or more coins.

Spending coins to intervene in resolution rolls has a **role playing** and narrative **side** in the game.

This happens through two possible ways:

If the Teenager who's paying for the re-roll has her **character on the spot**, then she has to narrate how she intervenes to try to change the outcome.

SCENARIOS

The playsets of this game are called **Scenarios**. A Scenario is a physical and social environment open to different dynamics of occurrence, but closed enough to avoid being dispersive.

Make sure to download the **Anthology**, which contains four Scenarios I wrote.

Each Scenario comes with **Places & Activities** that help the GM building some fiction and encourage teenagers to do things.

In any case, Scenarios should be filled with NPC (teens and adults) who interact with the teenagers.

I never prepare anything. I like to improvise and invent right in the moment. Since I don't have to prepare NPC with "stats" and "numbers", but I just have to imagine what kind of people they could be, the only thing I have to concentrate on is inventing pieces of story and interesting interactions.

Each of the Scenarios comes with some **Seeds** to build scenes on such as:

"On the bumper cars some arrogant guys don't let you have a peaceful fun, they keep on provoking and targeting you..."

"A group of girls and boys is starting a beach volleyball match but they are in lack of one player..."

These are simple suggestions to create bits of your story. You can use them as they are, modify them or ignore them and tell something completely different.

Play the Scenario through scenes: ask freely who wants to do what, let the teens interact and then play their personal moments one at a time.

I tend to break scenes frequently, dedicating 6 - 8 minutes to each player and rotating. After a resolution roll I leave the things on hold, I invite the player to think about what is happening and I pass to someone else to return back there later.

I suggest you to print the Scenario, cut the lower part with the Seeds and keep it for yourself as the GM, then place the rest of it with the Places & Activities list in the center of the table.

It works as a **list of possibilities**: teenagers look at it to decide what they want to do / where they want to go.

It is also cool to ask the teens to draw a simple **map** and to place a small personal object (a ring, an earring, a pen cap, a lighter...) on it as a marker to track their characters' positions.

CREATING NEW SCENARIOS

If you wish you can **create a new Scenario**. I would be very happy to receive it and attach it to the Anthology to expand it. The rules that I suggest to create a Scenario are:

- Choose a situation close to the life of teenagers: something that arouses their interest; some place they would go for real. As I said it must be something broad enough to allow different dynamics to happen, but not too much, otherwise it becomes dispersive. "On school trip" may be too wide because it would require too much effort to do such things as keep track of the temporal sequence of events. This penalizes the immediacy of this game.
- Once you have chosen the situation you have to detail it with 8 - 10 **Places & Activities** that have different atmospheres and dynamics and that allow teens to do different things.
- Now think of a series of situations that could happen, such as meetings with other teenagers or adults, and write down some **Seeds** to build fiction on.
- Finally, write everything down and ask a teen to draw a map.

HOW TO GM

Let the Teenagers have fun and explore things and interactions they may care about in real life. In my experience this means guiding them towards such themes like friendships; sentimental relationships; sexuality; appearance and outfits; body changes and acceptance; social networks; being cool; transgressing; affirming themselves or finding their own place/role among peers; trying out new experiences; fighting and struggling to find out what's important for them and to define their own identity.

I find language to be very important and I'm totally OK with teenagers' slang and with bad and foul words. However, while I allow colorful expressions, I always keep an eye on this, especially when it comes to offenses.

Fear, anger, sadness, joy, trust, shame, pity, envy, jealousy, love are what you're looking for. Don't be afraid to sail into such emotive and behavioural oceans, this game is meant to safely navigate in this deep-adolescence-waters. However always remember the Teenagers you're going to play with that this is a game, it's not real life! Keep a constant eye on their reactions and ask them how they feel about role playing specific themes and events. I frequently do meta-talks about what everyone is experiencing both to involve some form of mentalization on what it's happening and to intentionally break down the role-playing flow which may become very intense.

I find **two levels of interventions** of the GM to be very important.

The **first** one is about **having a playful experience** and **learning how to role play** and how to share a narration process: I always facilitate the narrative side of the game giving inputs and making questions on what the characters may be feeling in that very situation, re-narrating events and suggesting alternative or multiple interpretations on what's happening in the fiction. In my experience this is important especially when it comes to spend coins to twist outcomes. I noticed that Teenagers tend to skip the narrative side of this mechanic because they are focused on, and caught by, the possibility of dictating their will. So what I do is slow down the excitement flow and force them to justify their choice of intervening by role playing and narrating something in topic and in mood with the scene. I see this as the right price to pay for the great power available through the coin mechanic.

The **second** level of intervention of the GM regards a much more delicate layer of this role playing experience: **dealing with teenagers' emotions and behaviors** and guiding them in an expressive and potentially educative process.

The way to do this is in the hand of the adult who facilitates the game as an educator before than a Game Master. Anyway you don't have to be psychologists or pedagogists to run this game, just be receptive and keep your sensibility alive.

Here are some thoughts that may help you.

I have observed these [dynamics](#):

At first Teenagers may tend to boycott each others. This is fun, but they will soon discover that focusing on a player to make him fail or make him look bad means spending a lot of coins on him. This indeed gives him a great power to play his revenge when a new scene is narrated. As soon as they realize that this leads to a monotonous ping pong they don't find it that fun anymore.

Alliances against someone may happen too. This is also fun, but more delicate. if I see that things start going too far, I can simply balance everything up with the narrative authority the Game Master is given. I can make a lucky event happen for the player targeted; I can summon an NPC to complicate things in the alliance. I can even "punish" their behavior with uninteresting encounters or poor scenes.

The third phase of this process is usually one in which teenagers understand that they can all win by helping each other. They begin to spend coins to save their mates from looking bad; to help a friend to get the girl or the boy; or to be welcomed into a group. They begin to offer themselves by saying "I help you now, then when I'll need you will do the same with me". This is beautiful and satisfying but it is not necessarily the ultimate goal of the game. I find it right that all the three phases described occur, alternating themselves.

I believe that an important part of this role playing experience is to understand that the hidden and less beautiful sides of our behavior/character are something we can laugh and joke on, but also something that, sometimes, can lead us to positive consequences.

This is why I always try to put "negative" outcomes in a different light.

I remember a very shy boy whose "hidden" dice used to say "I do not have the courage to talk to her ... I reject the invitation because I'm ashamed".

I remember his amazement when, after several of these failures, I told him how a girl was positively impressed by his shy and reserved personality, thus deciding to invite him to eat an ice cream with her.

About Resolution rolls & Coins:

After a resolution roll remind the teen who did it to leave the dice still on the table, because someone could decide to intervene.

Leave a few seconds of silence to see if someone takes the floor. If nobody does, just ask them. Leave them a few more seconds to decide, then authorize who is playing the scene to take his dice back: this is the sign that the scene is closed.

Also be clear with the teenager explaining them that whoever pays the coin decides which of the two dice must be re-rolled.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

The **maximum number of players** I suggest is **6**. In this game, thanks to the coins mechanic, all players have active roles even while waiting to play the scene of their own characters. However with more than 6 players (plus the GM) the game may become chaotic.

At a certain point the **dynamics may begin to loop**: teens always looking for the same kind of interactions; scenes all resembling each others. This happens if you have kept the Scenario too long (or if you have played too many sessions). It may be time to change Scenario and invent something new ... or perhaps to play another game!

It's nice for teenagers to relax and just be themselves during the game. Play some music: ask each teen the title of 5 - 6 songs and make a playlist to use as a **soundtrack** of your gaming session. You will probably end up spending two hours at the sound of trap, hip hop, EDM...

Anyway, since you are the adult, at any time you want, you should exercise your authority: stop the music and start a playlist of super cool 80's and 90's songs that will make you look like an Australopithecus in the teens' eyes.

Obviously it is mandatory that these songs have the word "**teen**" in the title.

Here are some suggestions:

- Placebo - Teenage angst
- Nirvana - Smells like teen spirit
- The Jesus & Mary Chain - Teenage Lust
- Hole - Teenage Whore
- The Ramones - Teenage lobotomy
- The Cramps - I was a teenage werewolf
- The undertones - Teenage kicks
- Teenage FBI - Guided by voices
- My Chemical Romance - Teenagers
- Hayley Williams - Teenagers
- Aiden - Teenage Queen
- The Avengers - Teenage Rebel
- Alice Cooper - Teenage frankenstein
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme

CREDITS

TEENDOM is written and designed by [Fabrizio Botto](#), and it's based on [Shadows](#) by [Zak Arntson](#).

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