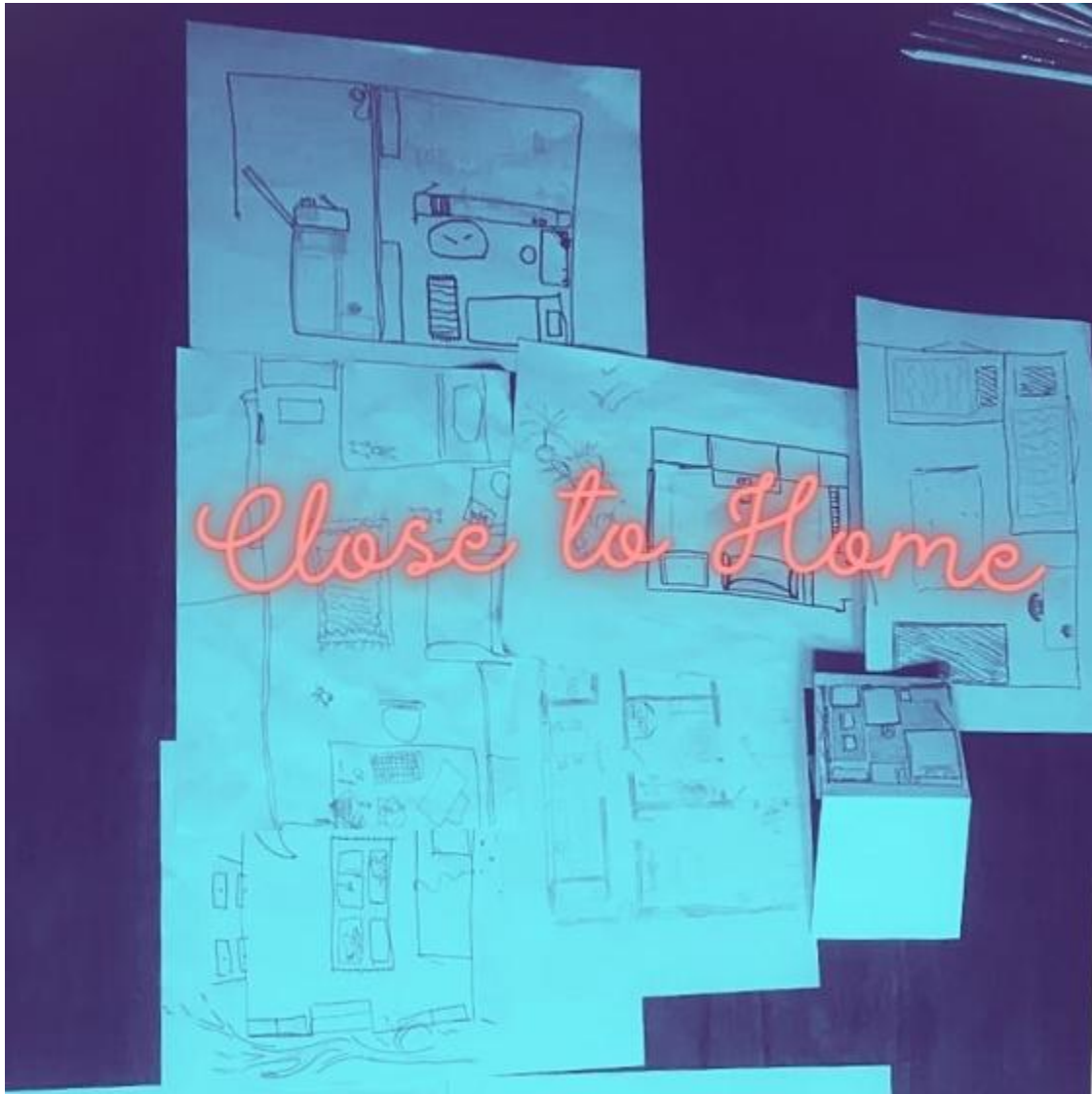


# Close to Home



A semi-larp about memories of colours, spaces and connection

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**4-8 players & 1 Game Master (GM)**  
~ **2 hours** of gameplay including workshop and debrief  
**You will need:** 1 big table, 1 chair for facilitator plus one for each player, sheets of A4 paper, post-its and a good variety of colour pencils, space to move around in the room.

## About the Game

### Synopsis

'Close to Home' is a short larp about memories of colours, spaces and connection. The game builds on the memories of the participants in the form of drawing floor plans of rooms from their childhoods. These rooms then get connected, filled with characters and form the home of a community. At the end we imagine how the larp was that we never played in these colourful spaces. The story of a community emerges "in retrospect", from larping a debrief session.

### Player Experience

'Close to Home' is an easy to play, fast game that accommodates first time or non-experienced players through a thorough workshop, building up to the moment of actual roleplaying. The game aims to create a feeling of togetherness in the players.

The game also plays around with the structural elements of larps. It leads the participants through the workshop phase then jumps to a debrief, thus debriefing becomes the larp itself, giving way to their emergent story.

It is an attempt to invite participants to meditate on the nature of how we can value the most important things, like being part of a community, only in retrospect.

## Narrative

Narrative elements of the game are highly emergent, defined by the players. The starting points are the memories of spaces from their childhood. Thus the game put an emphasis on the theme of nostalgia. The setting is formed upon the consensus of the players, however as based on the memories of spaces from their childhood, it is strongly advised to be set in the 20th or 21st century. Characters are formed based on the drawings and colours as well.

What is set by the rules is that the drawings form a shared home of a community, and that the characters are part of that community and that at the end this community ceases to exist.

## Parameters

**Physical contact:** Might include moderate contact; eg. hugging

**Romance and intimacy:** Not relevant for the larp

**Conflict and violence:** Not relevant for this larp

**Communication style:** Lots of speech and some Silent/Non-verbal Play

**Movement style:** Dancing

**Characters:** Players create their own characters, in a workshop

**Narrative control:** The story is almost entirely determined by player choice

**Transparency:** Fully transparent – players can know absolutely everything in advance

**Representation level:** The fictional space looks very unlike the play space

**Play culture:** Players are collaborating to achieve joint aims

**Tone:** The game aims to create a feeling of togetherness in the players.

### Tags

Colours, Spaces, Connection

Drawing, Improvised movements based on colours, Shared world and community building, Characters based on colours, Guided imagery, In-game debrief, Silent Play, Actual debrief

## Outline for GM

- I. Preparation - 15 min
  - A. **Print these pages** (p. 3 - 4.)
  - B. **Print Guided Imagery Text** (p. 10.)
  - C. Prepare room: **table, chairs, space to move around**
  - D. Prepare materials: **A4 papers** (+ 1 A5 & 2 A6), **post-its, colour pencils**
- II. Workshop - **45 min**
  - A. **Introductions** - 5 min
  - B. **Recap** what the game is about - 2 min
  - C. **Safety** - introduce safety techniques - 5 min
    1. 'X' card and hand gesture
    2. 'Lines & Veils'
    3. Talk about the calibration of the experience via choosing rooms
  - D. Invite the players to draw the **floor plan of a room from their childhood** - 20 min
    - from above, **bird eye view**, preferably filling the entire page
    - can be their room or any room that was important, influential, etc.
    - choosing the room is a **way to calibrate their experience**
    - draw in it the most **characteristic details**
    - if something wouldn't normally be visible but it is important for them, they should still draw it, they are **allowed to distort the perspective**
    - **cover the entire page** as much as possible.
  - E. Ask the players to explain **what the room** they drew **is** and what are the **important details** of them. - 10 min
  - F. Instruct the players to - 5 min
    1. choose a **colour**
    2. **stand up** from the table
    3. represent this colour with **movement**, its atmosphere, dynamics, etc. Can be abstract or something typical of that colour as it moves.
  - G. Ask players to form a **"rainbow circle"** in a way these colours come in succession - there is no "right" order, only what the players agree on - 5 min
    1. Each player **present the movement** and the **others copy it**
- III. Establishing the Setting - 15 min
  - A. Players sit back to the table to **assemble their drawings** into new construction - **a house, a home** of community/ social unit
  - B. Give players **a piece of A5** (half A4) and **two pieces of A6** (quarter A4) paper as **"blank spaces"** that they can add to the layout
  - C. Players should decide **what type of community** that is and the **time period** they are in, **where they are** and **what is in the surroundings** of the house.

- IV. Character Creation - 20 min
- Aks the players to
    - Pick a room** other than their own
    - And **combine it with colour/movement** they picked previously to create a character.
  - Hand players the **post-it papers** to note down the **most important details** of the characters: name, age, traits, habits, etc.
  - Let players **shorty present** their characters
- V. Guided Imagery - 10 min
- Ask players to make themselves comfortable.
  - Read** them the **Guided Imagery Text** (p. 10.)  
Or make up your own
  - Give the players **3-5 minutes to absorb all elements** before jumping into the..
- VI. In-Game Debrief - 20 min
- Remind the players about the **“Yes and...” principle**
  - Go through the in-game debrief **questions one by one** and let each player answer them.
    - What was your favourite moment of the larp?*
    - What was the hardest part of the game?*
    - Which (other) character did you feel the most connected to?*
    - What did your character take with you after the community ceased to exist? (could be concrete or abstract)*
    - (Which scene did you feel the most touched by?)*
    - Is there anything else you feel like sharing?*
- VII. End Scene - 10 min
- Instruct players to **set the final scene**. - Where and when? What are they doing?
  - Invite the players to **stand up from the table** and
  - Play out the end scene, **the final goodbye** in **Silent Play style**
- VIII. Actual Debrief - 30 min
- Invite players to **leave their characters behind** and
  - To take their chairs and **sit in a circle** away from the table
  - Go through the actual debrief **questions one by one** and let each player answer them
    - How was the experience for you?*
    - What do you wish it went in a different direction in the game?*
    - What do you take home with you?*

## Preparation

'Close to Home' requires little preparation from the GM, and zero preparation from the players. The GM should **read this document** thoroughly and **print the 'Outline for GM'** chapter (p. 3 - 4.) and the **'Guided Imagery Text'** (p. 10.) or make up one of their own. These documents contain all information and guidelines for running the scenario.

The optimal space for running the scenario is a **separate room, ideally at least 30-40 m<sup>2</sup>**, empty as much as possible, besides **the table and the chairs** for all participants (players + GM).

The best is to position the table and the chairs around it in a way that leaves **space for the players to move around**, like putting the table in one of the corners in a way that it is still possible to sit around it.

The only extra materials required for running the game are **sheets of white A4 paper**, a good **variety of colour pencils** and **post-it notes**.

At one point the game will require **a piece of A5** (half A4) and **two pieces of A6** (quarter A4) paper. The GM might prepare these in advance, otherwise they will have time to do so during the Workshop.

### To the GM

While the main text of the scenario addresses all participants of the game - players and GM alike - these boxed texts are meant as little tips and tricks for the GM, helping your work in facilitating the game.

The whole text is structured in a way that you are expected to read it through before running the game and printing only the 'Outline for GM' (p. 3. - 4.) section. While you follow the outline as reminder you paraphrase the content of the scenario, using your own words.

However if that fits your style of facilitation better, you can print the entire scenario and highlight the parts in advance that are needed to be read out loud to your players.

## Workshop

### Introduction and Recap

Once all players arrive you should start with a **round of introductions**. It should contain at least your **names** and **pronouns**.

The GM should **recap what the game is about** - they can use the information in the 'About the Game' chapter for that (p. 1. - 2.), even reading it out loud, if needed.

Then you should go through together what the **steps of the game** will be, as laid out in the 'Outline for GM' (p. 3. - 4.).

## Safety

First you should go through the more **general safety tools**: the 'X-Card' and 'Lines and Veils'

**X-Card** is a way to instantaneously stop the game, if any content comes up that any of the participants find triggering. To do so they can call out loud "X" or draw it on a paper, or cross their forearms in front of their face. All the above are valid ways of signalling their discomfort and should be respected by all.

If it happens during the game, it is important to stop immediately, clarify what was the triggering detail and agree on a way that it can be avoided. Although it should never be questioned or demanded explanation for.

**Lines and Veils** are more preemptive techniques. They are to be set at the very beginning of the game. Best is to write them down on a paper placed in a way that is clearly visible to all players throughout the game. Their focus can vary from abstract themes to very concrete objects, locations, etc.

**Lines** are the hard limit. If any of the participants places anything "under the Line" then it should be completely avoided by all during the game.

**Veils** are more of a soft limit. Things "behind the Veil" can come up in play, but should not become the focus of it or explored too much in detail.

Putting things under the Line or behind the Veil requires no explanation.

## Calibrating the Experience

The starting point for the players in this game are memories of spaces from their own childhood.

Dealing with such memories can of course carry the risk of touching upon traumatic events. It is important that players are considerate what memories they choose to interact with. They have the agency to calibrate this experience. Obviously they should avoid any space that they are aware

of having bad memories connected to. Besides that, choosing a space that was very close to them, eg.: their childhood bedroom carries more potential of triggering memories they might not want to revisit, while choosing a room that was less of their personal space, eg.: their grandparents' living room or moreover a friend's room where they liked to stay over bears less risk.

While Calibrating the Experience is a safety technique specific to 'Close to Home', the 'X-Card' and 'Lines and Veils' are more commonly used in role-playing games. The latter is easily replaceable with any other that you find fitting (eg.: Red, Yellow, Green) Make sure that all the players understand how these techniques work. Although if you are absolutely sure that all your players are completely familiar with these techniques you can skip introducing them in detail.

If you feel like, you can read up on the ['X-Card'](#) and the ['Lines and Veils'](#).

## Drawing the Floor Plans

The GM hands each player a sheet of A4 paper and places the pencils in the middle of the table and invites them to draw the **floor plan of a room from their childhood**.

It can be their **own room or any other room** that they find important or influential and as a bottomline: they **have good memories connected to it**.

The floor plan means that they have to draw it **from above**, from a **bird eye view**. Akin to how an architect or interior designer would draw the layout of a room, however the level of precision required is far from that. **The willingness to draw is enough**.

Players can twist and turn the perspective to emphasise important details in the room. Eg.: if there is a poster on one of the walls that would not be visible from above they can just draw the front view of the poster.

The drawing should **cover the entire page** as much as possible. Folding or tearing parts of the paper off is completely fine for “customising” the available space. Later on the players will have to connect these rooms to one another, which might be easier without extra blank space on the edges.

After 10 minutes of drawing, check with the players how they are progressing, whether they need 5 or 10 more minutes. As time passes, remind them when they have 2 minutes and finally when only 1 minute left.

Drawing these floor plans should take around **15-20 mins**.

Once all the players are done drawing they should **go in a circle** telling **what is the room** they drew the floorplan of, and what is **the most important detail** for them in that room.

## Colour and Movements

For the final step of the workshop, the players should **choose a colour**. The variety of colour pencils could help them in this choice.

They **stand up and step away from the table** to the part of the room that has more space to move around. After moving around for a bit players should **find the movement that represents the colour** they chose.

Once all players find the movement they have to **form a “Rainbow Circle”** - a loop of colours in which they follow one another in succession. You are not looking for a scientifically correct answer here. **Colours can come in any order** the players collectively agree upon.

In case a player is not comfortable making movement, it can be replaced with sounds (or even with words) the player associates with the colour. Sounds or words are to be copied the same way by the other players



In the circle the **players present their movements**, one after the other. The rest of the players **copy the presented movement**.

## Establishing the Setting

Players sit back to the table to **assemble their drawings** into the floor plan of a new construction - **a house, a home** of a community or social unit.

The GM should give the players **a piece of A5** (half A4) and **two pieces of A6** (quarter A4) paper as **“blank spaces”** that they can add to the layout, possibly as kitchen, bathroom or whichever type of space they feel missing from their home. If they use these pieces of paper they should do a rough sketch on the paper of what is in that room.

In general rooms can be connected through doors, there can be corridors, staircases, etc in between. However the rooms presented by the **players’ drawings** and by the **extra pieces of paper** should be the **main focus** of the story.

As the players lay down the foundations of this new home they should **discuss the setting**, along these questions:

- **What type of community are we?**
- **Where are we?**
- **When are we?**
- **What is in the surrounding of the house?**

This might overlap with the previous step of establishing the layout. Players might want to change the layout once they have a great idea for the setting. It is completely fine to do so.

As these spaces are rooted in the players’ memories of their childhood, it is strongly advised to set the game in the 20th or 21st century. It is completely fine going further back or into the near future within this time frame. Of course details might get reinterpreted in that case. Like an C64 console in the 1920s might become a fringe scientific invention and in the 2150s an antique relic.

In most steps of the game the players express themselves one after the other, for that I suggest you to go clockwise in the circle. Establishing the Setting you can let them go “popcorn”, adding their ideas as they come up. However, make sure that everybody could contribute, or at least fine with the setting the others came up with.

## Character Creation

For creating a character **each player picks a room**, other than the one they drew the floorplan of. They **combine** this room **with the colour** they previously chose.

This room might belong to this character or might be a room this character spends the most time in. The colour might be interpreted very openly, could indicate something about the character's personality, appearance, or something they like that has that colour...

In case players get lost or take too much time with Establishing the Setting and Character Creation, you can introduce the "Yes, and..." principle to them. See page 11.

The **most important details** of these characters should be **written on post-it notes**, or similar sized cards. Better to jot down only tags that help to recall the character then trying to fit their entire backstory onto such a small piece of paper.

In a quick round each player should **present their character**.

## Guided Imagery

The GM asks the players to **close their eyes** and **imagine a larp** that they played embodying their characters in scenes taking place in the spaces defined through the drawings.

You can make up your own text of guided imagery. The one on the following page is only a guideline, use it if you like it, but it is more important that you are comfortable saying/reading out loud the words. The only fixed point is that you have to end on the note that the community they created ceases to exist.

Some general advice on guided imagery if you want to create your own text:

- Use simple sentences
- Use rather evocative pictures than abstract notions
- Avoid negative forms - *no*, *not* and *none* - in your sentences
- Say them slowly with a soothing voice
- Give your listeners time to breathe
- Guide their attention to their breathing and encourage them to slow it down.

*Close your eyes and lean back.  
Make yourself comfortable.  
Relax.*

*Breathe.  
Breathe slowly.  
Feel as with each breath  
    a comfortable soothing energy  
        flows through your whole body  
All the way  
    to the tip of your fingers  
    to the tip of your toes  
    to the top of your head*

*Breathe.  
Breathe slowly.*

*Imagine the rooms you drew, the house you constructed together,  
a home of a community.*

*Feel the character you created  
                                moving,  
                                acting,  
                                talking  
                                in these spaces.*

*Imagine that you play scenes together  
                                in the rooms you created,  
                                playing them out in the physical space.*

*There are encounters...          discussions..    feelings.*

*There is conflict.  
It is inevitable.*

*Time is passing during the game.*

***And at the end your community ceases to exist.***

*Let these images guide your imagination  
                                wherever they take you.*

After the text ends the players should stay in silence with their eyes closed for another **3-5 minutes to absorb all elements** before continuing.

## In-Game Debrief

The GM should lead the players into the In-Game Debrief scene **right away** as the Guided Imagery ends, reminding them of **the Yes, and... principle**.

### **Yes, and...**

A basic principle originated in improv theatre. It suggests that once a fact is established by a player, other players accept it as part of their shared fiction ("yes") and take it as a basis to build upon ("and...") adding further details.

It does not always mean a way of story generation that lacks conflict. Players can still present obstacles and challenges to their fellow players, but instead of stepping out of the diegetic world to a meta level, following this principle anchors all such negotiations within the story world.

The GM introduces the players to the fictional situation of the In-Game Debrief: the **players play themselves in a feedback session** that takes place **after playing the larp** they have just imagined.

The GM facilitates this scene by asking the following **questions one by one**, each player takes their turn to answer the questions (unless they want to skip it)

- **What was your favourite moment of the larp?**
- **What was the hardest part of the game?**
- **Which (other) character did you feel the most connected to?**
- **What did your character take with you after the community ceased to exist? (could be concrete or abstract)**
- **(Which scene did you feel the most touched by?)** - if they have not expressed it
- **Is there anything else you feel like sharing?**

## End Scene

The End Scene as the final step of the game focuses on the narrative point when the **characters are aware** that they have to **leave their home behind** (literally or figuratively) and whether they will meet again in the future or not, **their community changes** in a fundamental way thus it will **never return what it used to be**.

**All characters** should be **present** in this scene. It is their moment to **express their final goodbye** to one another.

Even if no such moment was defined during the In-Game Debrief, players should take a few minutes to sketch out **where and when** such a scene could take place and what are the **other important details** that might be **different in the room** compared to how it is depicted on the floorplan. They have to **define** the **starting point** of the scene, eg.: who is there, what are they doing, who might arrive later, etc.

Then the GM invites the players to **stand up from the table** and **play out the scene** in a **Silent Play** style, meaning they are **not allowed to talk**, thus can only express themselves **non-verbally**.

The GM lets the players play out the scene that should **take around 5-6 minutes**.

## Actual Debrief

As the final scene concludes the GM should invite the **players** to **leave their characters behind**. To help this transition they should take their chairs and **sit in a circle** away from the table.

The GM facilitates the Debrief by going through the actual debrief **questions one by one** and let each player answer them:

- **How was the experience for you?**
- **What do you wish it went in a different direction in the game?**
- **What do you take home with you?**

## Design Note

In my works I prefer to design for emergent stories, stories that come from the participants, believing this way they can experience something that is truly significant for them. As such, my starting points are often story games. In the case of 'Close to Home' my initial idea was to create a larp/multiform version of the story game '[House of Reeds](#)' by Sam Kabo Ashwell. As my process went on, the game became something different, a thing of its own. Nevertheless the core element of players drawing together the home of a small community is still there. I believe that drawing can really carry us back to a child-like state of mind, while moving our bodies transports us to a different level of consciousness. I apply both in this game, trying to match some of the best aspects of tabletop gaming and larp, having these elements maybe not in the familiar order. Thus seeking an answer to the ultimate question of experience design: what are the minimum criteria to create a shared experience?

## About the Author

[Balint Mark Turi](#) is an artistic researcher and game designer with background in filmmaking and audiovisual arts. He is co-founder of Parallel Worlds Foundation, an NGO dedicated to creating and organising Nordic-style larps in Hungary. Balint researches the long-lived Hungarian educational role-playing tradition, the Bánk tradition, especially the ways its methodologies can be applied to community based artistic practices, research and education.

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## Credits

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Sam Kabo Ashwell for the original inspiration in the form of '[House of Reeds](#)'.

### Techniques

X-Card by John Stavropoulos

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SB0jsx34bWHZWbnNIVVuMjhDkrdFG01\\_hSC2BWPII3A/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SB0jsx34bWHZWbnNIVVuMjhDkrdFG01_hSC2BWPII3A/edit?usp=sharing)

Veils and Lines by Ron Edwards

<https://rpg.stackexchange.com/questions/30906/what-do-the-terms-lines-and-veils-mean>

Textual Parameters by Laura Wood

<https://nordiclarp.org/2022/10/27/description-of-larps-using-textual-parameters/>