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Party games for 8 to 100 guests

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presents . . .

“Murder On The Prairie”

Host Guide

For the play version

by Stephanie Chambers

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Host's guide

It is easy to prepare and run a mystery party. We recommend that as host you should also take a role and participate along with everyone else. With our mysteries, not even the criminal knows who did it. But with a little intelligence and a careful ear for important clues, it is possible to solve the mystery.

Preparing for the party

- 1 Decide when you will be having the party, where and who will play each role. You should read the description of each character and try to select a role for each guest. It is better if people play roles that are as different as possible from themselves. Or you may like to give your guests a choice of the roles not yet taken and let them decide for themselves.
- 2 We recommend that you tell your guests to: "Please dress up as your character. Over dressing and going to extremes is highly recommended." We generally find that the more people put into the event, the more fun it is.
- 3 Decide how you want to do the invitations. You can print out the Word or Adobe Acrobat versions and handwrite the details, or you can type in your party details before you print it out. There are versions with four invitations per page. You can print them in color or black and white or you may like to print them on colored paper.
For versions with optional roles: For the guests playing optional roles, cut out and attach their character description or copy and paste it into their invitation.
- 4 Or you could paste the jpg version into an email and add your party details and send this to each guest.
- 5 Move to the page(s) which show the character descriptions for the main characters (suspects). You need to send each guest a copy of these pages along with their invitation. Print as many copies of these pages as you need using Print Current page and specify the number of copies required.

- 6 If you are emailing the invitations, copy and paste the text from the suspect pages into your email message. You can select the text (page by page) from the Adobe Acrobat file.
- 7 Print out the play.
- 8 Cut each page in two using a guillotine/paper trimmer or scissors. Don't read the play beforehand as it will spoil your enjoyment of the party, and you may spoil everyone else's enjoyment by letting on that you know everything!
- 9 Staple the pages together into a booklet for each act.
- 10 If it says the line may be said by "Anyone" (eg if the specific character mentioned isn't present), it can be said by one of the optional witnesses. If there are few people playing optional roles, then the suspects should take a turn saying one of these lines, however, they shouldn't say it if it is a question for their character or about their character. You may like to work out beforehand who will say each of these "Anyone" clues and write their character's name next to each one. Try and make sure everyone has a similar number of lines to say.
- 11 The "Who Did It" pages are at the end with a warning beforehand not to read the next section. Fold these unread, put them in an envelope and open it at the end of your party to find out who did it.
- 12 Print a name tag for each guest. You can print them in color or black and white or you may like to print them on thicker or colored paper. Cut these up and have some small safety pins handy.
- 13 Decorate the room just before the party (see *Décor suggestions*).
- 14 Prepare or arrange for food for the event (see *Menu suggestions*).
- 15 Decide whether you are going to have prizes for the party (see *Preparing prizes*). This is optional, but recommended.

Décor suggestions

These are suggestions you might like to follow to make your place look American:

- Check tablecloths
- Daisies in vases
- Rustic furniture
- Bales of hay
- Play square dance / hillbilly / folk music.

Menu suggestions

First Course:

- potato skins
- creamy corn filled pastries.

Second Course:

- roast dinners
- steaks and salads
- meat and/or vegetable pies.

Desserts:

- pumpkin pie
- apple pie
- caramel cream pie
- lemon meringue pie.

Search for recipes on the Internet (eg search for “American recipes” on www.google.com).

Preparing props

You may like to stuff some clothes as a body of the victim.

Preparing prizes (optional)

This is optional, but you may like to have some prizes available to give to the people:

- who guess who did it
- with the best costume.

You can reduce the number of people you have to give a prize to by asking for details as to who, how and why the person did it.

If you do have prizes, you should let people know they exist just after you read out “*The Rules*”.

Tip: Don’t assume that only one person will guess who did it. It is best to have a prize you can divide up (eg a box of chocolates or a bag or box of Turkish Delights). If no one guesses correctly, divide the prize up amongst everyone.

If you have a color printer and some T-shirt transfers, you may like to download and print out some of our special T-shirt logos (ie “I Gussed Who Did It” and “I Had The Best Costume”). See <http://www.merrimysteries.com/tmm/prizes.htm> for details. These are free to download.

Running the party

We suggest that you run the party as follows:

- 1 Give each guest their name tag and a small safety pin to attach it with.
- 2 When everyone has arrived, read *The Rules* to everyone.
- 3 Have everyone introduce themselves to the group by saying their character’s name and a few words about themselves from their description.
- 4 Check that everyone has read the “*The Suspects*” pages. If they haven’t, give them a few minutes to read them quickly. There may be important clues in “*The Suspects*” pages.

- 5 Serve the First Course of your meal or have dips available. Generally we don't recommend you continue with the play while people are eating unless you are pressed for time.
- 6 Start Act One of the play. Pass the play booklet around to each person mentioned. If it says "Anyone" can say the line, give it to someone playing one of the optional roles or if you don't have any people playing these roles, give it to someone who hasn't had much to say as long as it isn't about them. You may like to work out beforehand who will say each of the "Anyone" clues and write their character's name next to each one. Make sure everyone reads out all their lines and that everyone participates.
- 7 Serve the Second Course of your meal (if applicable).
- 8 Do Act Two. Serve Dessert (if applicable).
- 9 Do Act Three.
- 10 Serve hot drinks and after dinner mints (if applicable).
- 11 Ask each person to think about who did it and why and how they did it. Ask them to write down their final choice. When they are ready, go around the group and ask everyone who they think did it and why and how they did it.
- 12 After everyone has had a guess, take the *Who Did It* pages out of their sealed envelope and read as specified.
- 13 Present the prizes (if you are providing these). If more than one person guesses correctly, give the prize to the person who has the most correct answers as to how and why the person did it. You may like to also give a prize for the person who has the best (or most creative) costume.

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The Rules

These are to be read out by the host to the whole group at the beginning of the party:

Welcome to “Murder On The Prairie”!

Yesterday in Mitchido Richard Woods – a wealthy landowner – was shot down in cold blood whilst he was riding to town. He leaves behind his wife Katherine and daughter Annabel. There is a gathering of his family and the townsfolk to discuss what should be done. The people at the meeting look uneasy. They are not sure who will be arrested as the murderer and they are afraid that the gunslingers that are present might take the law into their own hands if they don't like the verdict.

There are three acts in this play. Only read your lines as required and please don't read the pages ahead of time. There are assigned lines and there are lines which can be said by “Anyone” (eg if the assigned optional character is not present). These lines are to be said by people playing the witnesses. We will be taking turns to say these lines and making sure we all get to participate. If there is another character's name written next to a line, then that person should say it.

There is no need to hurry through this and you can adlib a little if you want. You do not have to read each clue exactly as it is written – embellish it if you want. You might like to speak in slang or with an accent. For example, if you are playing a snob, you might speak as if you have a plum in your mouth. If your character is distressed, you could reveal your clues in between sobs. Act it out to the fullest. This is your chance to be dramatic!

At the end of the party you will be asked to guess who performed the crime and how and why they did it. If you work out who did it before the party ends please keep it to yourself. *Optional:* There is a prize for the people who guess who did it. There is also a prize for the person with the best costume.