

# PLAY!

**It has four letters, but it's not a dirty word!**

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*Fun and Games: Learning through Music, Singing, Playing, and Dancing in the Art Classroom* *Elem*  
Though it has four letters, PLAY is not a dirty word! Participants will leave this fun-filled session with a repertoire of songs, movement exercises and games that help to teach fundamental concepts in Art. In addition, strategies and resources for incorporating learning through multi-disciplinary play will be discussed and participants will have an opportunity to design a song or game of their own. In a world of high-stakes, high pressure testing, this session is designed to empower teachers to allow students to learn by doing what they do best—play.

Have you ever had a song “stuck in your head”? What are the rules to the game “Red Rover”? What are the lyrics to “I’m A Little Teapot”? How do you dance the “Hokie-Pokie”? Can you sing your A,B,C’s?

Chances are that you can answer all of these questions with accuracy. Yet, many of us learned these things when we were children.

What is the Pythagorean Theorem? What is iambic pentameter? What were the newspaper headlines three days ago? How much was the DOW up or down today?

Maybe you cannot answer these as quickly or accurately. But many of us learned these things much more recently. Why is this? Are children’s minds just better at digesting information?

What are the lyrics to your favorite song?

No. It may not be that children's minds are better at absorbing information. It may be how the information was presented. When we are young, we learn through play: song, dance, games, etc. As we grow older these strategies are replaced with ones that are more "age appropriate" or "rigorous". And now, with

high-stakes testing on the rise, many teachers—even art teachers—are reluctant to teach through play, even at the elementary school level. What does this mean? It may mean that students are missing out on some of the most stimulating, engaging and enduring pedagogical methods. But these things I know: students learn through play, you are never too old to play, and teachers should not be afraid to use play in the classroom.

## **Playing With Purpose**

In order for play to be worthwhile, it needs to have a clear purpose. The goal is to teach. The message must be concise, and the content must be worth learning. Play teaches enduring lessons, so make sure the information is worth retaining long-term.

Because play strategies sometimes take more instructional time to teach and execute than worksheets, presentations or demonstrations, it is important to be selective about the information that gets roped into the play. Think of play activities as an investment—don't fritter away such a precious commodity (time) with nit-picky details. Use play to teach broad themes.

## **A Time and Place**

Use play as bookends or as a "breakup" for chunks of information.

Play strategies are most effective when used to introduce, review or re-iterate information.

**And now, let's play!**

# Play!

Ideas for integrating the arts:

## ***Act It Out!***

- Have students act out stories or math problems. Have students act out the roles of scientific phenomena.
- Keep a box of costume pieces in your classroom. Have students dress up to act things out. In math even numbers could wear red and odd numbers could wear blue. In science, let students dress up as parts of cells. In social studies and language arts have students dress up as characters or historical figures.

## ***Move, Move, Move.***

- If you can get them moving, you can get them learning. Introduce movement as often as you can.

## ***Abandon your worksheets!***

- Did you ever hand out the wrong worksheet because it looks just like another? They *all* look the same to your students. If you must use a worksheet, find a creative way to use it—like as a guide for students to move through centers.
- Students will retain more information if they make the graph, make the map, make the flashcards themselves.

## ***Make it a song.***

- Did you ever get a song stuck in your head? So will your students.

## ***Make it an event.***

- Students will work diligently towards a meaningful event. Give them an opportunity to perform the play they wrote or have a poetry reading. Pair up with a younger grade level and have your students “teach” a lesson—or invite parents to be “taught” by your students.
- Give your students plenty of time to show off their learning and talents with the whole school, their parents and their community. Do this through bulletin boards displays, a website, a newsletter or contact the newspaper to run a story about what your students are doing.

# The history of “PLAY!”

In I designed the workshop “PLAY” as a way to encourage other Art teachers to incorporate visual, auditory, tactile, inquiry and experimentation strategies into the Art classroom. I wanted to show teachers how fun and easy introducing PLAY strategies into the classroom could be, so I taught the workshop as though participants were students. We sang, danced, clapped, and played together. Even as adults, they found that they loved learning through PLAY! Then I turned the workshop over to them, giving time for participants to create their own PLAY! strategies. What they left the workshop with was strategies which were ready to implement the next day, both designed by me and themselves.

Soon PLAY! became a workshop for non-art teachers. I collaborated with a friend and colleague, Katrina Schmidt, to design and present PLAY! strategies for non-art classrooms. Though our focus broadened from Art to other subject areas, we decided to include the Art strategies as a model for how strategies can be changed and modified across the curriculum—and this is what I encourage participants to do. Modify, modify, modify. Take something that is working in another area and tailor it to your classroom, your students and their needs. If you are not an Art teacher, you should still read the Art strategies to learn about strategy modifications.

I wanted to share with others the key which had changed my own classroom into a dynamic, collaborative and exciting environment which got the students excited about learning and GOT RESULTS. When I tapped into my students’ strength—the capacity to learn through play—my students retained information and understood concepts in a way. They began to ask for strategies by name “Can we do ‘Improv’ today? Can we play ‘Party Quirks?’ “Are we going to play “Freeze Dance?”. I knew I was on to something...and I wanted to share it.

Bottom line: when students are excited to learn, they are activated to understand, retain and apply. This is the power of PLAY!

## Teaching the Elements of Design

### The Elements of Design Song To the tune of "Cadence" or "Sound Off" *Call and Response*

I know the Elements of Design.  
Space, Shape, Form,  
Color, Texture, Line.  
The tools that artists use each day...  
They use them all the artist way.

Elements...  
Of Design..  
Elements of Design.

### Space

#### Background, Middle Ground, Foreground Game

This game is played like "Simon Says". Find a nice open space to play, like a hallway. Line students up against the wall. Face the students and explain to students that they are a painting and you are the viewer. Right now they are in the background (because they are farthest away from you). If they take two steps forward, they are in the middle ground (because they are closer to you). If they take two more steps forward they are in the foreground (because they are closest to you). You will call out the area of the painting they must run to and the students must "strike a pose" there. Students who are in the wrong area of the painting are "out" and then help you to look for other "parts of the painting" who are not where they belong.

I start my school year with this song. It gives each lesson after it more meaning, because each lesson relates back to our first lesson and as each lesson is based on an element of design. It makes each lesson, no matter how different from the one preceding it, a part of a whole.

You can change this song to include value: "Space, Shape, Form, Color, Texture, Line and Value!"

Explain to students that "The tools that artists use each day" refers to "brain tools" or ideas. You can also say "The things that artists use each day" or "The things that artists know each day".

This game is good as it forces students to actively think about vocabulary because there is a goal—winning the competition. Even students who are "out" must continue to consider vocabulary because they need to know what the words mean in order to find others to be "out". The game does not have to be competitive—no student needs to be "out". Also, if students are helping to judge the game, it is important to set expectations for how to do this nicely so no feelings are hurt.

Sometimes I have students go into the hallway and sit like an audience looking down to the end of the hall. I select three students and send one very far down the hallway, one closer to the group and one right in front of the group. I have students in the "audience" measure or "squish" their classmates with their fingers to compare the size of objects in the background, middle ground and foreground of artworks.

## Shape

### The Shape Rap

To the tune of the "Bananas" song by Gwen Stefani

A few times  
I've been around that shape.  
But it's not a circle  
and the lines aren't straight.  
So it's not geometric,  
It's not geometric.  
(repeat)

\*Ask students "So what is it?"  
Students respond "It's organic!"

The shape is organic,  
o-r-g-a-n-i-c.  
The shape is organic,  
o-r-g-a-n-i-c.

## Form

### In The Round, Relief

This game is played like Background, Middle ground, Foreground except that you call out "In the round" or "Relief". Students are statues that are either attached to the wall or standing on their own.

### Sort It Out

In this game, small groups are given a bag filled with die-cuts and their 3-D counterparts. For example, a die-cut of an apple and a plastic apple. A die-cut car and a toy car. The students have to sort the objects into 2-D or 3-D. This can be done as a race.

I teach this song as call and response first, then I allow students to sing it all in one.

You can add clapping and foot-stepping to the song to employ students' sense of rhythm.

I've used this song in middle school. At first students rolled their eyes, but then I heard them singing it in the hallway. They even taught it to their math teacher!

You can combine this game with dress-up. Bring in hats, scarves, feather boas, etc. Let each student pick an item before going to the hall. If the student is "out" have them pass their item to the person next to them. You will have some pretty far-out "sculptures" at the end of the game and students will continue to be engaged as the remaining "sculptures" get sillier..

# Color

## The Color Families

### Song

To the tune of the "Adams Family" song

They look nice together,  
They're next to each other,  
On the color wheel,  
The color fam-i-lies.

Da, Da, Da, Da (snap)–Red!  
Da, Da, Da, Da (snap)--Orange!  
Da, Da, Da-Red,  
Da, Da, Da-Orange,  
Da, Da, Da-Yellow  
(shout) Warm Colors!

They look nice together,  
They're next to each other,  
On the color wheel,  
The color fam-i-lies.

Da, Da, Da, Da (snap)–Purple!  
Da, Da, Da, Da (snap)—Blue!  
Da, Da, Da-Purple,  
Da, Da, Da-Blue,  
Da, Da, Da-Green  
(shout) Cool Colors!

### It's Secondary\*

To the tune of "London Bridge"

\*This song is by Katrina Schmidt

Red and yellow make or-ange,  
Make or-ange, Make or-ange.  
Red and yellow make or-ange,  
It's secondary.

Yellow and blue make gr-een

Red and blue make pur-ple (vio-let)

I have students look at the color wheel for this song. We draw an imaginary line down the color wheel to separate the colors.

The students have fun trying to snap their fingers or cluck their tongues.

After the students know this song, I use it as a formative assessment: I have them sing it in small or large groups to see if they can a) group the colors correctly and b) shout out the correct color family name.

There is a great set of music CD's called *Songs In The Key of Art* by art educator Greg Percy. I use his *Red, Yellow, Blues* blues-style song to teach Primary Colors. I play the song through once and then I let the students sing and dance along. I have even been known to make a "microphone" with red, yellow and blue markers and sing along myself—sometimes I even let the students sing along with me.

Recently, one of my sixth-graders suggested we limbo to the Jimmy-Buffer style primary/secondary color song. I may took them up on this, giving each student a color and only allowing primary color combos limbo under the bar when their resultant secondary color is mentioned in the song. Worked like a charm, and I've done it ever since. There's the lesson for teachers: listen to your students' ideas and incorporate whenever appropriate. They have great insights that will benefit themselves and future classes.

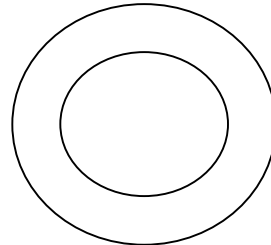
## Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

This game is played like "Red Light, Green Light". Students line up in the hallway and the goal is to get to the finish line/you. When you say a primary color, students may move one step forward. A secondary color gets two steps forward, but intermediate colors get one step back. You can call just colors such as "red" or "orange" or "red-violet". To take it up a notch, you can say "red plus blue" or "blue plus green".

## Table-top Color-Wheel Twister

This game is played like twister, but just with hands. To construct it you will need a white shower curtain (yields four games), colored permanent markers or paint, tagboard and brads. To create the game, divide the shower curtain into four pieces and draw or paint two color wheels on each piece so that there is an inner and outer color wheel.

Try to make the color wheels so that if red is on the left in the outer ring, it is on the right on the inner ring.



Make the spinners by printing out the color wheel on tag-board and attaching an arrow cut-out with a brad.

Each game should fit on a standard sized art table. The game is played in groups of 5 to 8.

One person is the caller. He or she spins the spinner and calls out the color it lands on. The caller may also say "blue plus green" or "red plus blue".

Participants must put one hand on the color that is called, on either the inner or outer color wheels, but only one hand may occupy a color at a time.

If a participant cannot put a hand on the color, one hand must go on the participant's head. Two hands on the head means that person is out for the round. When the game is down to three or people, the

A variation on this kinesthetic game is having students who take the wrong number of steps go back to the beginning. If you go fast enough, almost every student will have to go back to the start at least once.

Another variation is to add complimentary colors as stops. If you say "red plus green" then the students may take no steps. If you play by the above variation, you will have lots of students going back to start.

It is really important to set rules about how much force a student is allowed to exert when placing a hand on the board, so no one is slapped and injured. It is a good idea to have students remove bracelets and rings as well.



participants may only use one ring. This will decide the winner who then becomes the caller.

## **Texture**

### **We're Going on a Texture Hunt**

To the tune of "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" or "We're Going on a Treasure Hunt"

Call and Response

We're going on a texture hunt.

X marks the spot.

Bumpy textures,

Rough textures,

Textures with spots.

I see a texture.

And it's...

(call on a student to call out a texture he or she says a texture they see in the classroom, for example "rough".

Have students try to guess what the first student saw. After a few guesses, have the first student tell or point to what it was he or she was describing, for example "the carpet".)

## **Line**

To the tune of "Are You Sleeping, Brother John"

Ver-tic-al

(hold right arm vertically)

Ver-tic-al

(hold left arm vertically)

Hor-i-zontal, Hor-i-zontal

(hold right arm, then left arm horizontally)

Di-ag-onal, Di-ag-onal

(tip arms like "airplane wings" right then left)

Those are the lines (clap)

Those are the lines (clap)

Sometimes I take this show on the road. I have my students follow me around the school looking for textures that I describe. I may say bumpy for the brick wall, or rough for the cinder-blocks. I ask students to find what I am looking at and then we collect samples on sheets of paper by rubbing a crayon on paper that is placed over the texture. (I photocopy paper with a one inch border and ask the students to stay inside the lines). We then take our papers back to class and paint water color over them. These texture papers make great starters for projects—we have used them in everything from "fabric" for quilts to parts of skyscrapers.

I usually sing this song through many times, the students and I changing our voices each time. We will start singing in our regular voices and then repeat the song in "mouse voices" or "robot voices" or "opera-singer-voices". We always end in our regular voices again.

When I give my line identification assessments, I am always surprised at how many students sing and dance this song to jog their memories and get the right answer.

## Value

### Me and My Shadow

This role-playing game is played sort of like “Keep Away”. It is played in groups of three. One person is the Light, one is the Object, and one is the Shadow. The Light “shines” on the Object by wiggling his or her fingers at the Object. The Object strikes poses. The Shadow must stay on the opposite side of the Object from the Light and must mimic every pose the Object makes.

**Now it’s your turn!**

Use the space below to draft your own play-based learning strategy. It helps to jot down the key points about the subject first. Think of simple, easily recognizable rhythms for songs and simple easy-to-follow rules for games. It is a good idea to base songs and games on existing songs and games.

#### **Simple Tunes:**

- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
- The Farmer in the Dell
- Have You Ever Seen a Lassie
- One, Two Tie Your Shoe
- Pat-a-Cake

#### **Basic Games**

- Red-Rover
- Simon Says
- The Hokie-Pokie
- The Chicken Dance
  - Hop-scotch

**Play! Strategies for General Education Content**

**Play! Ideas for Math and Social Studies**

## **Math**

### **Math “Red Light/Green Light”**

This is for greater than/ equal to/ less than. Choose a number to be the “base number”, let’s use 5 for example. Students start at a starting line and have to make their way to a finish line. If you call out a number that is less than 5 the student must take that number of steps backwards. If you call out a number that is greater than 5 the student must take that number of steps forward. If you call out 5 the student must freeze. You can make the goal for everyone to cross or the first to cross wins. Do this in sight of a number line to help your visual learners. Clap out or allow students to stomp as they walk for auditory learners.

### **Table Top Number Twister**

See Table Top Color Wheel Twister; set up “Twister Mat” and spinner board with numbers and equations. Flash cards can also be used in place of the spinner board.

### **Who am I?**

This is for number facts recognition. Give each student a number. Let’s say one student’s number is 6, for example. Call out a math fact, but personify it. “I am  $2 \times 3$ , I am  $5 + 1$ , I am  $8 - 2$ , etc”. When the student recognizes a math fact that matches his or her number, he or she stands up. It is best to do this so that more than one student has the same number, so small groups will stand up.

## **Social Studies**

### **Make a Map**

Instead of having students color in a map worksheet, have them trace that worksheet and tea-stain it or glue items on to make a topographical map. Students will retain more if they draw the map themselves. You can also draw on bakers’ parchment paper, which works like tracing paper. Place the paper on a cookie sheet and place in oven. Watch the paper closely and remove when it browns—this makes old-fashioned looking maps.

### **Write a Journal**

Have students write a journal describing life during a specific time period. You can type these up on a computer (with pictures!) and then “antique” them with tea-staining and texturizing. Or write a newspaper, with each student writing a different part.

### **Write Authentically**

You can order quill pens from an arts and crafts catalogue. A class pack will cost under \$20 and you can re-use them over and over. Take notes in pen and ink for a day. Your students will be so excited to write that they won't miss a word.

Learning about a different country? Try writing in their language, especially if the written language uses non a,b,c characters. Try writing in *kanji* (Japanese characters) or in Hieroglyphics. Have students "decode" vocabulary words before finding their definitions (make sure to include a key, these can be found in an internet search).

## **Play! Ideas for Language Arts and Science\*\***

### **Language Arts**

#### **BEATnik Poetry**

As you have the kids read poetry, encourage them to find the rhythm of the poem by banging on their desks. This really helps them identify that poetry has a rhythm and also build their fluency and their reading with expression. As the kids find the rhythm, they naturally have a better flow. Have the kids read the poem several times and by the last time, they really are not sounding like robots, but performing the poem as is meant.

#### **BEATnik Cafe**

After the kids have written several original poems, put on a beatnik style poetry slam. I used to call it Café Schmidt and would have the children all wear black and brought in hot chocolate to serve. We would use the overhead to create a "spotlight" and then have a couple of students who like the lime light to MC the event by introducing each student and the title of the poem. I would usually pick a couple of student who I knew would go all out to go first and set the mood. They would read their poem dramatically while acting it out or pausing, and at the end the students would snap instead of clapping. To keep students thinking about the elements of poetry and performance, I would pass out a simple rubric for the students to fill out for each performer. This was a great way to get a listening/speaking grade as well. A PQP type of critique followed the performances and the comments were taken into consideration for the next performance. The children really get into this and it is a really easy way to motivate children to write their best poetry with minimum amount of work for the teacher.

### **Oral Fluency:**

# **Around the World**

Anne Arundel County used Open Court as their reading program and to add a little spice to the regimented program, I developed fun ways to introduce words and phonemic skills while building oral fluency skills. I would write the words on different colored sentence strips and would put them on a pocket chart. Each of the rows of words emphasized a different phonemic skill or prefix or suffix. The first day would be reading the words by blending and then diagramming the words. The second day, I would cut apart each word and place them on the children's desks. I would call out the different groups of words (words with prefixes, long vowel sounds, compound words etc.) and any child who had a word from that group would come up and place it in the sentence strip. The whole class would have to agree with the placement and you can ask kids to verify why that word belongs in the group called (it has a vcv so I know that the sound is a short vowel sound). The third day, I would play Around the World with the students by asking a student to stand up behind another to begin the game (as a teacher you can make the decisions about where to start, you might want to start with some strong readers so that the weaker readers will have heard the words already and have better confidence to read and play the game). I would then flash the word and the student who read it the fastest would then progress to the next desk. The winner is the student who traveled the farthest.

## **Science**

### **Freeze Tag:**

One student is "it" and they have to try and tag the other students (rules and boundaries must be set, no running/jumping, etc). If the other children can name a property of matter (or a planet etc. just plug in whatever terms you are currently studying) before the tagger gets them, they are still in the game. Once a student becomes tagged, they are frozen until another student tags them. To become unfrozen when tagged, they have to come up with the answer they were unable to get out before being tagged.

### **Laundry Basket Relay Race**

To play this game you will need two baskets or containers, 5-10 identical vocabulary objects (planets, frog life cycle, states of matter) for each team. Divide the group into two or three equal teams. Each team lines up behind one container filled with the vocabulary items. Place another empty container several feet behind each team's line. Give the signal to begin. The first person in each line removes an object from the basket, shows it to the second person in line, and identifies the object. The second person takes the object, repeats the word, and passes it back. When the last player receives the object, he places it in the empty basket, runs to the front of the line, and chooses the next object out the front basket to name and pass back. Continue steps 5-7 until every object from the front basket has been transferred to the back basket. The first team to finish wins.

# Steal the Planet (or Life Cycle, Matter, Scientific Method)

Start with pictures, models, or vocabulary cards of whatever unit you are studying (five to ten works well). Divide the group into two teams. Count off the players, so that each team has a one, a two, a three, etc. Line up the teams so that players are standing shoulder to shoulder, facing their number counterparts. Place the vocabulary items/pictures between the two teams. Call off a number. The two players assigned to that number each try to be the first to grab the vocabulary item/picture and return to their line without getting tagged by the other team's player. After one team reaches a set amount of points, declare them the winners.

## **Play! Go-to Strategies for Any Content Area**

### Freeze Dance

This is a vocabulary activity. You can use it to assess what students know or to reinforce and build understanding. The game is very simple. Play some music (I like upbeat Swing or Big Band music). Students be-bop and dance around the room as the music plays (set boundaries: no running, you must move, no touching others, all dance moves must be appropriate for school, etc.) When you stop the music, call out a vocabulary word or key concept: the students must freeze in a way that acts it out. So for instance: (music stops, teacher says “symmetrical”, students pose so that their bodies demonstrate symmetry—think a referee’s field goal stance).

### What Do You Know?

This simple strategy can also be used as an assessment or to reinforce. Students sit in a circle and tap their hands on their thighs, making a beat. The teacher says along with the beat “What do you know?” and the first student in the circle says a key idea or vocabulary word along with the beat, the teacher then chants “what do you know” and the next student says a key idea or vocabulary word along with the beat. The rule is that a student cannot say the same word as the person before them. This game gives you an idea of what information “stuck” from the lesson and what needs to be reinforced—I often do this as a class opener to review information from the previous lesson. It also reinforces information or “refreshes” students’ memories about previous information.

Variations:

Students can also say “what do you know?” during the chant.

You can use this as a pre-assessment to assess students’ prior knowledge or uncover any potential misunderstandings prior to teaching a lesson.

# Party Quirks

*Use for vocabulary/ main characters review*

This game is inspired by an improvisation exercise in the popular *Whose Line Is It Anyway* television show.

During this game students will utilize acting skills to demonstrate an understanding of key terms in an instructional unit. Students will put on a small improvisational skit. The premise of the skit is that a student is hosting a party and as guests arrive they have character traits that link them to vocabulary terms.

## Set Up:

- Select one student to be the “host” of the party. Tell the student what the topic of the party will be. The topic is what category each vocabulary word falls under. Ex. Systems of the Body or Famous Painters
- Select 3-4 students to be “guests”. Give each “guest” a card with a vocabulary term.
- Instruct the rest of the class to be “audience members” and pass out *Guest List* cards.
- Define an area of the classroom to be the “stage”.

## Game Play

- Guests line up off stage.
- The host starts on “stage”. This student pretends to be setting up for a party.
- The first guest comes on stage and makes a doorbell noise. The host answers the door “Welcome to the (topic) party”. Ex. “Welcome to the Systems of the Body party”.  
The first guest replies giving a statement that relates to his or her word. Ex. Vocabulary word is *Respiratory System* “Thanks for holding the door, I’m so out of *breath*”. The student emphasizes the word *breath* because the Respiratory system is responsible for moving oxygen through the body.
- The host tries to guess what the vocabulary word is for the guest by addressing the guest by this word. Ex: “No problem, Respiratory System.” If the host calls the guest the correct name, that guest leaves the stage. If the host does not guess right away the first guest should give another clue.
- If the host does not guess what the guest is after the second clue, the first guest moves to another area of the stage and pantomimes silently. Ex: Respiratory System guest moves aside and pantomimes breathing heavily.  
It is now time for the second guest to come on stage. For advanced students, guests who have not been guessed can interact with each other to help the host go guess. Ex: Respiratory System guest says to Digestive System Guest “It seems you have a *stomach* ache, let’s do some deep *breathing* exercises to see if that helps”.
- The game is over when the host guesses all guests or when teacher stops game for a “commercial break” when the “audience members” can help guess.

Party Quirks  
***Guest List***

**Try to guess who each guest is!**

*First Guest:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Third Guest:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Second Guest:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Fourth Guest:* \_\_\_\_\_

**Variations:**

- To help facilitate the game, break class into small groups. Have each group select a member to play the part of the guest. Have the students come up with a script of possible lines for the guest to say and write these down on the guest card with the vocabulary word.
- The teacher could play the part of the host.
- With teacher playing the part of the host, students could be divided into teams to and compete to see which team's guests leave the party first.



