

Play With Sound

Telephone

Duration: 20 – 25 minutes

Age range: Adults and children aged 9 and over

Players: Six in any group

Some cultures can transmit complex messages over large distances using rhythms played on drums. What follows is a comparatively crude attempt at communicating with rhythm. Even so, it demands a high degree of concentration and is best avoided on Friday afternoons or windy days. The game will work with six or fewer but six is best. You will need something to write on, be it a blackboard, whiteboard, a clear patch of ground or similar.

- Write the following rhythms: ♪♪ (scans with 'Big Fella') ♪♪♪ ('Bigger Fella') ♪♪♪ ('Bigger Man') and number them one, two and three.
- Now teach them to your group so that they can recognise and reproduce them. They can be clapped, played on instruments or even sung.
- Once everyone is conversant with these rhythms, assign each player one of the six combinations possible using all three digits once only. They are 123, 132, 213, 231, 312 and 321. These are the players' telephone numbers and, if possible, make sure they are 'ex-directory' by ensuring that each player only knows their own number.
- Now we can play! One person starts by dialling a number by stringing together the three rhythms in any order. Someone should recognise this number as their own. (If no one does, check the caller hasn't 'called home' and try again.) The two people are now connected and can have a short musical conversation, perhaps two statements each. If they think the words as they make the sounds on their instruments it will be more convincing for everyone.
- The person called now dials a number in the same way and will be answered by the owner of that number. Continue like this until everyone has been called at least once.

Tip: The mathematical consequences of allowing any digit to be used more than once are considerable. For example if any digit can be used twice then twelve new combinations are added making a total of 18. The game becomes unwieldy and people are waiting too long to hear their number. Adding a fourth digit makes a total of 24 possible numbers if each digit is used only once. I believe a fifth digit enables 120 possible sequences using each number only once. (Please tell me if I'm wrong!)

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