

These are testing times. Literally.



Brit School Hijinks



Brit School Hijinks

A roleplaying game about making your own entertainment in British secondary schools, (probably around the late 1990s) and seeing what trouble you can get into, and preferably out of.

It's pretty upfront about that, honestly, the clue's really in the name.

Written by John Shimmin.

Brit School Hijinks

So what is this game about?

This is a game about getting into hijinks at British schools.

What are “hijinks”? Dictionaries describe it as “boisterous fun”, “disruptive or rowdy merrymaking”, “getting into trouble, but not serious trouble” and so on. That seems about right.

The risks and consequences of hijinks, *within the genre of the story*, are treated seriously by the participants but with a curious kind of equity: being clapped in jail for a long stretch of “porridge”, losing a fortune at the races, or having one’s career ruined are neither more nor less tragic than having a long-awaited cake scoffed, getting a caning, or failing exams. Either is a catastrophic defeat, but one the character can nevertheless face with a measure of fatalism and grace. There is no grim in hijinks.

Hijinks also tend to involve a fair amount of complexity, for that gives space for the inevitable complications to arise. Straightforwardly buying a hamper of food and holding a midnight feast in the dorm is *not* hijinks; you should smuggle the items in on the cleaner’s cart, hide them in the headmistress’ study, and hold the feast in the cricket pavilion, causing the art teacher to suspect ghosts.

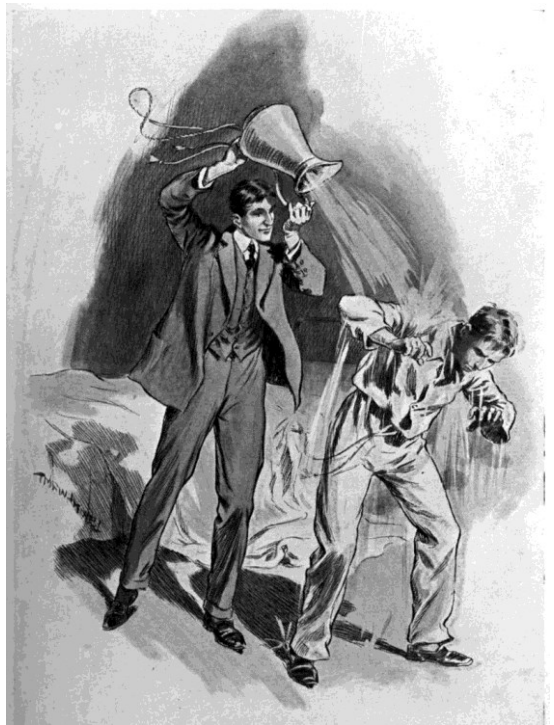
Examples of hijinks:

- Winning the tournament against overwhelming odds through trickery and courageous schemes.
- Holding a midnight feast without permission.
- Placing long-shot bets to earn enough money to stop the playing fields being sold off.
- Foiling a government inspection that would close the school.

- Thwarting a gang of crooks who concealed treasure on the school grounds.

Ideally, hijinks involve several interlinked schemes that complicate matters further.

- Cheating at an exam in order to accompany the head on a trip to *The Phantom of the Opera*, giving you a chance to see your sweetheart from another school and snog on the balcony.¹
- Raising enough cash to buy all the raffle tickets so you can win back the family heirloom (containing the secrets to a hidden treasure) that your drunken uncle donated.
- Impersonation, kidnapping, mistaken identity; asking someone out for your best mate and them thinking it's you; accidentally switching bags with bank robbers; and otherwise creating an elaborate and intricate house of lies to avoid disclosing something mildly embarrassing.



For a really thoroughly hijinking, have several different factions pursuing their own schemes and complicate each other. Is Jones feigning illness to skip games, so he can slip out of the sick room and search the Head's office for a confiscated drone? Yes, but eight other pupils have had the same idea – and now the nurse is frantically announcing an epidemic and imposing quarantine measures.

¹ Yes, inevitably you'll end up being caught up in the performance, but *that's hijinks!*

Classic hijinks

"Sir, as you said in the science class, your car had always been oxidizing; now it's just doing it faster." – Nimona, class 11B, attempting to hide a box of matches behind her back.

You can find examples of the sort of thing we're going for in sources like these:

- *The Belles of St. Trinians* (of course)
- *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- Most things written by PG Wodehouse, whose oeuvre of pig-stealing would-be-suitor imposters vying with blackmailing lovestruck criminals is rife with this stuff.
- The whole Ealing Comedy back catalogue, notably *The Lavendar Hill Mob*, *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, and *The Ladykillers*.
- *Roman Holiday*
- *The Blues Brothers*, *Sister Act*, *Catch Me If You Can*, *Paddington*
- *The Associate*, *She's the Man*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.
- The *Wayne's World* and *Bill and Ted* franchises.
- *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Easy A*
- Virtually any crime caper

Introduction

In this game, you play a crew of schoolmates who get into various kinds of mischief, predicaments, trouble and adventure.

Specifically, you play British secondary school pupils, most likely getting ready for GCSEs, in a moderately realistic setting. Your adversaries are rivals, kids from other schools, teachers, and members of the public – though at the upper end of the scale you might tangle with police, government inspectors, and criminals.

This **isn't** meant to be a game of gun-toting action, paranormal mystery, teenage angst or gritty social commentary. It probably isn't very good for those things, so maybe check out another game that **is** meant to handle them.

If you want to skip straight to making characters, go to *Character Generation*.

Throughout this book, you'll find several types of text box. Each one has its own meaning.

For example:

Anything in a red box like this is an example of the rules in play.

- A blue box like this is used for lists of options.
- You might pick one option from the list...
- ...or they might be ideas you can mix and match

Text in a purple box like this is a comment from the author. It may be explaining the reasoning behind a rule, offering advice on adapting a rule, or just adding some info.

Absolute Basics

This is a roleplaying game. It seems wildly implausible that you aren't familiar with roleplaying games if you've got this far, so let's keep this brief. The point is... well, the *point* is to have fun, but basically you **play** the **role** of one or more characters interacting with each other, with some rules to help you decide how things turn out.

Brit School Hijinks is a fairly traditional roleplaying game:

- It uses dice to decide how well you succeed (or fail) when you try to do something challenging.
- One player takes the part of the Game Master (GM), who is responsible for coming up with some other characters, events, and some basic plot for the game. Often things will veer wildly away from what you originally thought of; that's fine.
- The others each play the part of one pupil at a secondary school.

Those are the basic assumptions, but if you want to resolve everything with marbles or cards, or share the job of GM, or play several characters each, or even establish a player co-op with collaborative ownership of all the characters in play... I'm not stopping you.

Planning a Game

Before playing the game, you need to decide what the game should be like, and create the basic setting. These steps are best done as a group, though the GM may want to finish designing the school and neighbourhood by themselves.

Establishing Tone

The first thing you need to do is agree amongst yourselves what tone you want the game to have. This defines the kinds of things that happen in the game, and what is realistic or reasonable. For example:

- **Blytonesque** – teachers are mostly nice. People are mostly well-meaning. Stolen goods get reported to the police in exchange for a shiny medal and tea with the Superintendent. Let's have a midnight feast!
- **Noir** – teachers are gaolers. People are weak, hypocritical and struggling to get along in a murky world. Stolen goods are a lever to get what you want. Let's try to get out of this mostly intact.
- **Mercenary** – teachers can be bought, even if not with money. People have their price. Stolen goods are money in your pocket. Let's go to Vegas.
- **Alienation** – teachers are The Other. People are an enigma. Who can say what the significance of these stolen goods may be? Let's hope we can make it to graduation.
- **St. Trinianite** – teachers are drunks, barmy or spies from the Government. People are the butt of pranks. Stolen goods will buy a lot of gin. Let's hotwire this bus, go to the zoo and ride zebras around.
- **Adventurous** – teachers are all right in a pinch. People are probably disguised princes, abducted inventors or Russian spies. Stolen goods are the beginning of a trail

that leads deep into the Amazon by submarine. Let's get after them!

This will affect the kind of things you get up to, the way NPCs behave, and the elements likely to appear in your game. It will also reflect the way you tend to approach situations and challenges. A Blytonesque game would ask Miss Higgins for a favour, a Noir game would find a way to manipulate her, a Mercenary game would make a deal with her, and a St. Trinianite game would lock her in the cellar and steal her car.

Keeping Comfortable

The rules don't provide any way for characters to actually die during a game (see *Death By Misadventure?*). If you have other ideas, it's definitely something to talk about.

On the same lines, agree beforehand how you'll handle any sensitive topics. School life **potentially** includes quite a few: bullying, drug use, identity, relationships, sex... and that's before getting on to any more fantastical material. Even if people are fine with these **in general**, they might be uncomfortable in the context of a game about teenagers, especially if it might come close to home in terms of people's own experiences at school.

“These examinations and certificates and so on —what did they matter? And all this efficiency and up-to-dateness —what did THAT matter, either?” – James Hilton, Goodbye, Mr. Chips

A Very Short Introduction to British School

This is an attempt – inevitably doomed – to summarise how the British school system(s) work(s), which will inevitably handwave a lot of detail, exceptions and complications.

Even the term ‘British school’ is a tricky, loaded and politically-awkward one. It’s often used as a synonym for ‘English’, or for ‘from the UK’, and these are not at all the same.

Scotland is part of Great Britain but has a different education system from England and Wales.² Nevertheless, it is British and it would be weird to leave it out. Nobody asked me for a game about “English and Welsh School Hijinks”, after all.

Northern Ireland is *not* part of Great Britain, but *is* part of the United Kingdom (“of Great Britain **and** Northern Ireland”) and has basically the same education system as England and Wales. The current consensus is that it’s appropriate to include it within ‘British’ here.³

Meanwhile, some former British colonies use the GCSE system or the older O-Level & A-Level system, but it’s not appropriate to call these ‘British’.⁴

I will try to be clear about what we’re talking about.

The first thing to highlight about schools in the United Kingdom is that there’s more than one system at work. England and Wales have one

² We could equally say that England and Wales have their own education system independent of the Scottish one.

³ Still a highly sensitive topic, and a vast field of history that I couldn’t possibly cover here. Read up on the history of Ireland and “The Troubles” if you want more.

⁴ Not least because most of them fought bitterly to **stop** being British

system, which Northern Ireland mostly parallels but not entirely.⁵ There's a National Curriculum controlling what must be studied, but private schools don't have to follow it. Meanwhile, the Scottish education system is entirely separate, including different qualifications.

Most of EWNI has a two-tier structure of primary (4-10) and secondary (11-18) school. However, some areas have a three-tier system with middle schools (about 8-13ish).

From 1944 to the 1970s there was a system of **grammar schools** (academic-focused) and **secondary moderns** (vocational), enforced by the **11-plus exam** which judged whether you were bright enough to attend a grammar school and get a middle-class job. This system was later replaced by the **comprehensive** school meant to take all abilities, though in a few areas grammar schools remain as an option (fewer than 200 in England, fewer than 100 in Northern Ireland, and none in Wales).

Almost all schools in Britain are **state schools** (which elsewhere would be called 'public schools') and 93% of kids go there. They range from underfunded hotbeds of delinquency to comfortable oases of learning with all the latest facilities, largely based on how middle-class the area and the local parents are.

Don't get confused!

State School: a school funded by the national government, with no tuition fees. Often called a 'public school' in other countries. Follows the national curriculum.

Public School: A fee-charging **independent** boarding school. A subtype of independent school, using the term 'public' for historical reasons. The exact opposite of what you might expect from the name. Doesn't follow the national curriculum.

⁵ Let's call this group "EWNI" for convenience.

Independent School: A fee-charging school with its own entry criteria. Run by a board of governors (or, in the case of a **private school**, a single owner). Doesn't follow the national curriculum.

Boarding School: any school where some or all pupils live on the premises. There are about 40 state boarding schools in the UK, but most are independent.

Bear in mind

For any players without personal experience of the British school system, there may be some unexpected differences. Some quick tips:

Life

- It's not like Harry Potter, even in the posh schools.
- Most schools have uniforms.
- There are school activities like geography trips to study the landscape, chemistry trips to factories, history trips to landmarks.
- Extracurricular activities like music, sports, drama or science clubs are considered important by schools and parents alike. However, most are only once or twice a week (not every day) and people often belong to several different groups.
- You move to the next class each year; there's no 'passing' or 'failing' a particular school year.
- Sports isn't uniquely important. We don't have star athletes. It's not much different from being in the choir or something.
- You can't get a driving licence until you're 17 at best; virtually nobody drives to school. Walk, cycle, bus, train, or get a lift.
- You have to stay in full-time education until you're 18, either in school or in an apprenticeship or training college.

Study

- Lessons are meant to be interactive, with students asking questions and actively participating in the lesson.

- From about 14, you're studying for the national exams. It's nowhere near as intense as, say, China – an 'all-round education' is considered important, not just grades.
- Grades are based on specific pieces of work and final exams. You don't accumulate credit. 'Extra credit' does not exist.
- For the first few years of high school, you get a range of lessons like art, sex education, religious studies (various religions as well as ethics and philosophy) and at least one language.
- The system forces you to specialize. You pick GCSEs at ~14, and by 17 you're taking only 4-5 subjects for A-level.
- University admissions are for a specific major right off the bat, so by A-levels *at the latest*, you're meant to have life planned out.
- You apply for university, get offers, and accept them months *before* taking your final exams, then work to meet that target.
- Homeschooling is rare, well under 1%, but it's legal.

Building a School

Next, design your school. Is it a flash modern centre of academic excellence? A finishing school for the children of the great and good? A reform school for people who've been thrown out of every other school in the country, and whose parents told them to choose between here and Siberia? A shambling ruin that's only still open because the Ministry of Education lost track of it? A training ground for spies? Is it in the city, the countryside, a small town, a desert? What sort of places are there nearby? These aren't exhaustive, just useful things to decide ahead of time.

Consider what distinct parts of the school exist. Is there a single mass of classrooms, or an Arts Tower and a Science Cluster? If there are dormitories, are they part of the main school? Is the sports centre at the far side of the pitches, making it an excellent site for furtive meetings? Does the school divide into segments (like a pie), concentric circles (like a dartboard), or haphazard zones? How easy is it to get between them – are there fences, hedges, walls? Are some parts on a different site altogether?

You might also want to decide on some plot elements as a starting point, especially if running an improvised game.

Random School Generation

If you're not sure where to start, try rolling on some of these tables.

School Type

Who is the school for? Is it all-inclusive or selective?

d6	School Type	
1-3	Comprehensive	An ordinary school, with no academic selection criteria, teaching the whole range of abilities.
4	Grammar	A selective school. Pupils must pass the 11+ exam to qualify for entry. Tends to be more traditionally academic than a comprehensive.
5	Independent	A fee-charging school with its own entry criteria. Run by a board of governors (or, in the case of a <i>private</i> school, a single owner). Doesn't follow the national curriculum.
6	Public	A fee-charging private boarding school. A subtype of independent school, using the term 'public' for historical reasons.

d6	Subtype	
1-3	None	Just an ordinary school
4-5	Faith school	The school is associated with a particular religion. It may have formal links to religious organizations, most teachers are believers, and admissions are often based on the family's religious background. The school's ethos is influenced by this faith.
6	Boarding school	A significant proportion of the pupils live in the school, either in dorms or shared houses.

Subject Focus

Specialist schools come and go under various schemes. Some subjects may be dropped, though it's hard to get away from Maths and English.

2d6	Focus	
2	Maritime School	The school is associated with the Navy or Merchant Navy. Pupils learn to swim, sail and all kinds of naval traditions.
3	Creative Arts	Fine arts and media. The school has studios, and links to TV and the film industry. Highly-strung temperaments are encouraged. Psychedelic substances are not <i>officially</i> encouraged.
4	Languages	Everyone studies a couple of languages, and exchange students and school trips abound. Exposure to a weird range of media tends to strengthen bonds – who else can you talk to about that experimental Italian TV show?
5	Humanities	History, geography and politics (maybe law too). Probably quite a bookish school. Humanities tend to breed debate and discussion – do you hold thoughtful conversations in the playground, or scrap over interpretations of sources?
6	Technology	Workshops and computer labs. Pupils tend to have practical skills and ingenuity. Wannabe hackers, game designers, the clash of nerds and tech-lovers. Someone here can make you just about anything, for the right price.
7	None	A very generic school. Does everything, none of it particularly well. Offers a well-rounded education, or at least one that suits everyone equally poorly.
8	Science	Labs, science competitions and links to nearby universities. Instils an empirical approach. You can get away with a lot if it's “an experiment”.
9	Performing Arts	Lots of practice rooms and performance space. Good posture and well-projected voices. Usually working up to one show or another. Lenient attitude to self-expression.

10	Business	“Instilling entrepreneurship!” Expect suits, business cards and a highly competitive ethos. Start-ups and networking all over the place.
11	Sports Academy	Focus on exercise, nutrition and health. Sports every day. Links to local teams and the media. Competition. “If it hurts, it’s doing you good”.
12	Farm School	Actual fields and animals. Emphasises biology, business, geography and practical skills. Farm kids mix with landed gentry and horse lovers.

School Reputation

Schools have their stereotypes – the posh private school, for example – but each school also makes its own impression on the locals.

2d6 Reputation		
2	Mysterious	No matter how ordinary the school is, people are intrigued. They’ve always heard something they can’t quite remember, and don’t quite buy your reassurances.
3	Weird	Oh, <i>that</i> place. Something(s) about the school is distinctly odd. Do the pupils make all the rules? Do they exclusively teach via mesmerism? Was it previously a zoo?
4	Old-Fashioned	You’re behind the times. Is it blackboards, mortarboards and methods that went out in the early 1900s? Elaborate Latin rituals for every mealtime? Silly uniforms?
5	Disorderly	Everyone knows the kids at that school are unruly and nothing runs smoothly. Is the head losing their grip, or is it the untamed pupils that are the root of the problem?
6	Dangerous	It’s not considered a safe place to be. It might be the crumbling buildings, the gang culture, the total lack of health and safety rules, or its proximity to the firing range.
7	Boring	As far as everyone’s concerned, there’s nothing noteworthy about your school, except how bland it is. Is it

		really that dull? Does it just have bad (or <i>good</i>) PR? Are the pupils deliberately keeping quiet about what's really going on there?
8	Impressive	For whatever reason, attending your school is an achievement. Even if it's a violent hellhole, people respect you for that, somehow.
9	The Event	Everyone remembers that what happened there, no matter how long ago. What was it?
10	Pitiable	"You go to- oh, you poor child." Is it too strict? Under-resourced? Academically dismal?
11	Cutting Edge	It could be the facilities, the teaching methods, or the entire ethos of the school. Are you just guinea pigs for educational fads, or is there something to it?
12	Anonymous	School, what school? Nobody's <i>ever</i> heard of it. It's almost creepy. You can almost hear eyes glazing over when you mention it.

Aesthetic

Architecture and décor can influence a school's mood, or reflect its aspirations.

d6	Aesthetic	
2-3	Academe	The old public school style. Neo-classical, with marble, busts, and wood panelling. Aims for an atmosphere of refined intellectualism. Ample places to hide and snoop.
4-5	Gothic	Gargoyles. Arches. Spikes. The high ceilings and long hallways breed shadows and mystery. May inspire territorial bullying, or huddling together for reassurance.
6	Brutalist	The bare concrete and stark lines emphasise function. They also subconsciously evoke car parks and prisons – perhaps deliberately. Likely to feel unwelcoming and

		authoritarian, though some have an unexpectedly cosy interior, creating a strong contrast.
7	Institutional	Faint green paint, washable tile floors and a wire-like carpet. Huge iron radiators with a will of their own. Huge sash windows let in all the fresh, frigid air you can eat.
8	Corporate	A single unified colour scheme, plastic signs, and plate glass. Decimal room numbers. This is straight-up inoffensive-décor-by-focus-group.
9	Ramshackle	The brickwork is crumbling, the paint peeling, and the school fences are more of a vague suggestion. The odd classroom is out of use because the roof fell in. Windows rattle in the wind, and desks wobble.
10-11	Dated Modern	Cutting-edge design a mere thirty years ago. Brick cubes with rows of single-glazed windows and coloured panels. Cold in winter and a greenhouse in summer.
12	Eco	Built from sustainable timber, rammed earth, and recycled glass. Solar panels and grass roofs, and probably a garden. Eco-projects dotted around the grounds – the odd windmill, composting bins, maybe some chickens.



An academe-style school



A corporate-style school



An eco-style school



An institutional-style school

Location

What's near the school? What part does it play in the local community?

2d6	Location	
2	The Middle of Nowhere	A remote, desolate place: an island, in a deep forest, or out on the moors. There's not much sign of life that isn't the school itself – a farm or two, some fishing boats or travellers. Why is it so isolated? Is it an old monastery? Is it for your protection, and if so, who are you?
3-4	Industrial Town	Brick terraces, converted warehouses, and the lingering skeletons of chimneys. In the modern day, the local economy isn't great. School may be a crucial chance for disadvantaged kids, or a dumping-ground. Boarded-up buildings and waste ground to play on.
5-6	Inner City	Terraces and tower blocks, but also parks, shops, cafes and so on. You're never far from something to do. Very little peace and quiet to be found.
7	The Suburbs	Mostly distinctive for being dull. Might be rows of identical houses, or pavementless modern commuter estates of 4-bed, 2-garage Wimpey homes. Leafy if you're lucky. A few shops but hard to get anywhere fun. Bike and bus.
8-9	The Old Quarter	The interesting part of town! Full of alleys, peculiar shops and cafés, historic buildings and odd wares. Hard to buy new trainers. Lots of hiding places.
10-11	Market Town	A smallish, <i>respectable</i> town. Countryside enough to avoid the rat race, but an easy commute for managers driving overpriced 4x4s. Has markets, obviously. Cafes and little art galleries (expensive), fields and hills (not).
12	Village	Just a few dozen houses (if that) in the countryside. The social circle is small, and the school makes a big impression. Maybe one shop that's also the post office. Probably a pub or two.

Atmosphere

Every school has its own character that persists independent of the staff and pupils, in a way that almost makes it seem alive. Like most vast and long-lived organisms, it's resistant to change. A new head or fresh coat of paint rarely makes much impact.

2d6 Atmosphere		
2	Solemn	This is a serious school, for serious students. Assemblies are grave occasions, and teachers look sombre. It isn't necessarily orderly, but when people break rules, it's to have a Serious Talk in private or to Resolve An Issue. Black uniforms are in.
3	Energetic	<i>Mens sana in corpore sano</i> , right? This school is active, whether that means sports days and matches, preparing for end-of-term events, or simply getting up to athletic mischief.
4	Chaotic	It all works... somehow? Last-minute changes. Unruly pupils. Excessively-creative teachers. Impromptu pantomimes at 24 hours' notice. Uniforms are probably optional.
5	Disciplined	Everyone has their duties, and fulfils them. Teachers are prompt and efficient. Pupils report incidents and refrain from idly breaking the toilets. If there's a crisis, heads are kept. You might get up to hijinks – but they'll be <i>organized</i> hijinks, dammit.
6	Intellectual	The school is a haven of scholarship. Teachers pepper their lessons with quotes from great literature. Pupils read Foucault over lunch, and get told off for arguing about Shakespeare during Assembly.
7	Mixed	The school doesn't have an overriding atmosphere; it may be split into two or three distinct blocs with their own character, or just a hodgepodge of influences. <i>Either roll three times on the chart for different blocs, or move on.</i>

2d6 Atmosphere

8	Familial	When push comes to shove, schoolmates and teachers alike have your back. You honestly can have a heart-to-heart with the Head over tea and biscuits. You might squabble and dispute, but in the face of calamity you will all stand together, and turn as one to face an enemy.
9	Cut-Throat	Life is about coming out on top. Are you earning House Points, or simply staying on track for Oxbridge? Winners are lauded, losers are pitied, and the uncompetitive are either invisible or subject to constant pushing from everyone. May be a place of honourable battle, or a hive of treachery and toxic politicking.
10	Laid-Back	It's hard to get too worked up in this school. Teachers are generally tolerant – they might intervene, but it doesn't have to mean punishment. The chill might be aided by a remote location surrounded by nature, by meditation, or an informal and exploratory approach to teaching.
11	Eccentric	The school is a hotbed of peculiarity. Attempts to model education on the principles of alchemy. Ferret-racing as school sport. Byzantine tradition, even though the school no longer <i>needs</i> to watch for Viking raiders and there is little demand for pavane. Leaves plenty of room for students to get up to hijinks, since they can be hard to distinguish from the other odd goings-on.
12	Antagonistic	Every day is a battle for dominance between the staff and the students. Yield no ground. Accept no quarter. Could be an elaborate dance to exploit rules and technicalities in your favour, or a brutal psychological war where nobody plays fair.

Distinctive Features

The thing that strikes visitors and new pupils first (other than a stray cricket ball or remote-controlled plane) is...

2d6	Feature
2	The outdoor swimming pool. Chilly in summer; frigid the rest of the year. Is it overgrown with weeds and frogspawn? Dry and full of rubbish? Abandoned since a tragic drowning / hilarious diplomatic incident decades ago?
3	The soot-blackened evidence of the Great Fire, and the ruins of those buildings it destroyed.
4	The abandoned Arts Block standing stark against the setting sun. It looks haunted, or a magnet for delinquents – or both.



2d6	Feature
5	The eternally-unfinished New Building, under construction from time immemorial, whose original purpose nobody recalls.
6	The sweeping expanse of the Playing Fields.
7	The imposing presence of the Main Building, where students gather for assemblies and teachers for meetings. The beating heart of the school, or perhaps the spider at the centre of its web.
8	The tall Iron Railings that surround the site, as though to cage reluctant students, or warn outsiders not to intrude on hallowed ground.
9	The ancient trees clustering in the Copse, older by far than the school.
10	The crows (seagulls, pigeons) that gather in multitudes on the rooftops, and swagger about the grounds with the confidence of apex predators.
11	A distinctive aroma that pervades the site. Wild garlic? School dinners? Indescribable products of chemistry lessons that linger perpetually? The smoke blowing in from the factories across the valley?
12	The peculiar architecture of a prominent building: a Sponsored Sports Hall, an Old Mill, a Founder's House, an Innovative Classroom, or some other unusual edifice. Was it an innovation that never got any further, or a Grade I listed building? Did wealthy patrons insist on a bizarre design, or was it hastily adapted from a wildly unsuitable building that the school somehow acquired?

Weird Features

The thing that really stands out about the school is...

2d6	Weird Feature
2	The Graveyard. Might belong to the school, or the church that became a school chapel, or perhaps it's simply right next door.
3	The row of Statues lining the path from the front gate. Are they imposing, magnificent, bizarre, a crumbling mark of decay?
4	The genuine Steam Engine (Spitfire, fire engine...) parked on the lawn.
5	The Aviary, butterfly house, aquariums, greyhound kennels...
6	The peculiar draughts and eddies of the Wind around the school, no matter how still the day is. Stiff breezes sweep across the playground, and dust devils send crisp-packets spinning into the air. There is no lee.
7	The Silence. Is it a strict school rule dating back decades, or just a shared instinctive response to the solemnity (ominousness, eeriness, oppressiveness) of your surroundings?
8	The way the Fog (smog, rain, sunlight) clings to it longer than anywhere else nearby.
9	The Gothic folly on the rugby pitch (hermit no longer in residence). If it's a very old school, perhaps this was built while it was still a little private institution run by Lady Someoneorother. Maybe accepting this weird bit of land was the only way your school could get some playing fields.



2d6 Weird Feature

- | | |
|----|--|
| 10 | The abandoned WW2 Facilities (hospital, church, fairground) you are strictly not allowed to go in. What might you find there? Who might be interested in trespassing on school grounds to access them? |
| 11 | The Eerie Noises that rarely stop echoing around the grounds. Is it the wind? Vibrations in some poorly-chosen building material? The ancient central heating? The sound of nearby industry? The Head? |
| 12 | The Forge, taxidermy workshop, preserved railway maintenance shed or similar specialist creative facility. |

Personalities

“There is usually one house in every school of the black sheep sort, and, if you go to the root of the matter, you will generally find that the fault is with the master of that house.” – PG Wodehouse, The Gold Bat

“It would seem that you have no useful skill or talent whatsoever,” he said. “Have you thought of going into teaching?” — Terry Pratchett, Mort

Schools are often shaped by the personalities (and personal magnetism) of a few influential staff. The Head and Deputy Head(s) are usually amongst them, at least because they control the school rules. A school nurse or counsellor, if there is one, is usually another. Beyond that, a cook, caretaker, or dinner lady can be as influential as a teacher, though in different ways.

Heads of house can be important figures at schools that have them – especially boarding schools where they have more of a parental role.

Think about the character and charisma of different figures within the school. The domineering Head with a fondness for sport will give the school a very different atmosphere from the laid-back intellectual. Are there kindly staff who take struggling pupils under their wings? Sadistic bullies? Broad-minded people who avoid noticing what the students are up to if it isn't doing any harm? Cowards who steer clear of confrontation?

In the same way, think about the other pupils the PCs may encounter. Who has social clout and a following? What snitches and goody-goodies are likely to betray your plans? Are there bullies likely to muscle in on your plans? Team captains who press-gang likely athletes regardless of their protests? Prefects and house captains who may interfere (or try to work their own angle)?

Character generation

When making a player character, you'll want to know what your group is like as a whole, and how your character fits in with them. We recommend using the steps below (but feel free to switch things round if that works better for you).

1. Choose a Theme for your group

Decide what your group has in common, and what brings them together. You might be an actual 'gang', but you could equally share hobbies, bus routes, attitudes, backgrounds, and almost anything else. See *Themes*.

2. Choose your character's Quirk

All your group have something in common, but something makes you distinctive amongst them. Are you the planner, the gung-ho one, the clown? See *Quirks*.

3. Decide what your Motivations are

What do you all want? What motivates you to do things together? You don't need to be completely united, but you need reasons to:

- Do things...
- ...with the rest of your group...
- ...that are interesting to do in a game.

See *Motivations*.

4. Assign your Subject Skills

What are your strengths and weaknesses? Are you a specialist or an all-rounder? Assign grades to the subjects you're studying. These will be your main way of interacting with challenging situations.

Choose your grades (see *Subject Skills*). For quick characters, allocate grades using one of the following patterns:

- **12 Cs** – a completely average score. You are academically unremarkable.
- **3As, 2Bs, 2Cs, 2Ds and 3Es** – you have an average range of good, average and poor subjects.
- **6Bs and 6Ds** – you have distinct strengths and weaknesses, but nothing dramatic.

You can take other combinations, providing that the total number of dice adds up to 36.

5. Establish your Social Image

Consider how the rest of the school, and the world in general, perceive you. Are you a reliable and responsible teenager? A trusted friend to all? A leader of fashion and attitude? See *Social Image*.

6. Flesh out your character

You may want to scribble down a line about how you relate to each other member of your gang, to help flesh out your characters and their relationships. However, you may prefer to do this during the session, at the end, or not at all. Do what works for you.

Choose a name, decide what your friends call you, and describe yourself. You may want to flesh out your character using the questions on the character sheet – or come up with your own.

Themes

Any group of friends has some kind of common tie. A group can pick a theme to mechanically represent this. A theme can relate to your interests, hobbies, social position, background or relationship to the school.

- Goths
- Rugby players
- A-level French class
- Smokers-behind-the-bike-sheds
- It Girls
- Dossers
- Lads With Cars
- Orchestra members
- We Have a Rock Band
- Prefects
- The Kids From That Sink Estate
- The Rich Kids
- Exchange students
- Magic: the Gathering fans
- Budding Politicians
- Always In Trouble
- Playground Mafia
- Inhabitants of the Computer Room
- Acolytes of That One Teacher Who Is Pretty Cool

Your theme can affect the difficulty of particular tasks, offering a +1/-1 modifier when dealing with situations where your background will be particularly helpful or disadvantageous. It should also affect the kind of Social Obligations you're likely to encounter. For example, Prefects may be assigned a lot of supervisory duties or things to sort out, whereas the Orchestra might be expected to practice a lot, or play for an unexpected

VIP. Meanwhile, the Dossers just get ordered to clean up after a riot in 12B.

Quirks

“Sorry I’m late, Miss, I was thinking about hagfish in the gym. But I think you need a license. What page are we on, Miss?” – Darren, 9 North

Pupils aren’t distinguished just by their grades. Within any group of friends, people take on different roles. Choose one of the following traits, or agree on new ones.

Baby Spice – you always seem young, fresh-faced and vaguely innocent. You can roll 2 additional dice when you use this to your advantage, but lose 1 die when it would be a disadvantage.

Brainy Spice – you gain 4 additional subject dice to allocate, but you lose 2 dice from any rolls where your intellect and learning **can’t** be applied.

Flaky Spice – you’re a bit erratic, and everyone’s used to it. Forgotten homework, missed appointments, bringing the wrong book, staying out hours after curfew, just *being weird*... you tend to get rolled eyes and a sigh instead of serious trouble, and people hesitate to ask you for explanations. You can use your flakiness to your advantage, granting you 2 additional dice on appropriate rolls.

Lonely Spice – you don’t really do social. Order, structure, conformity, those don’t work out for you; you belong on the outside. Your gang are essentially the only people you connect with. You have only 5 Reputation to spend, making it much harder to achieve things through social status, but giving you minimal obligations. Being alone doesn’t bother you.

Scary Spice – you tend to freak people out, even adults. The details don’t matter – you might have a thousand-mile stare, a reputation for violence, or a very polite manner that somehow promises vengeance in

fire. You gain 2 additional dice to cow, scare or deter people, and a +2 bonus on Social Obligation rolls if this trait would help. You lose 1 die on any rolls where this trait would hinder you.

Sporty Spice – who doesn't love running around getting sweaty? You gain 1 additional die on tasks involving athletic prowess.

Techy Spice – you're really good with technology. You get 1 additional die on tasks based on using gadgets or computers, and can invoke a flashy gadget to increase your effective Cool by 1 – in the right circumstances, of course.

Motivations

Every character needs motivations to get them to do anything interesting. You are a group of friends, so you need some **shared** motivations so you'll go off doing things together (otherwise this game is rather redundant). Decide between yourselves on the sort of things you'll want to do. This may relate to your theme, or to the genre of school story you want, or something else entirely.

Some suggestions:

- **Money.** Who doesn't want money? You might devise hare-brained schemes to make money in school, look out for opportunities to get rich outside school, or just be an international gang of teenaged thieves.
- **Chaos.** Life at school is boring. You yearn to enliven it by wreaking havoc.
- **Fame and glory.** You wanna live forever. School doesn't offer many opportunities for that. You need to look elsewhere.
- **The old ultravi.** There's nothing like a reign of terror over the neighbourhood to make you feel alive.
- **Power.** Only amateurs go around bullying. You want to be the spider at the centre of the web, everything around you dancing as you tug on their strings. They won't even know it.

Subject Skills

“All skools make some sort of show at teaching the pupils things and the headmaster pin up a huge timetable of lessons etc which make the heart sink when you look at it.” – Nigel, 3b

You don't have time for much outside school, so all your skills come from the classroom. What you make of them is up to you.

These are the default subjects in a British school setting; adapt as necessary.

- **Physical Education (PE)**
Balancing, climbing, swimming, flexibility, running and so on.
- **Games**
Teamwork, general fitness, brawling, actual sports.
- **Maths**
Numeracy, algebra, manual codebreaking, statistics, gambling.
- **Science**
How things work, experiments, identifying materials and species, natural and physical forces, health and safety, first aid, illness.
- **History**
What happened when, who's who, social and economic forces, technological development, basic strategy, antiques and historic sites.
- **Geography**
Places, geographical processes, cartography, navigation, urban development, trade, landforms.
- **Language & Literature**
Writing skill, oratory, acting, knowledge of literary canon, quotations etc. in your native language(s).

- **Modern Languages**
Knowledge of other languages, cultures, international media.
- **ICT & Computing**
Using software, troubleshooting, working with digital records and information, coding, repairs and building hardware.
- **Art & Design**
Creative arts, architecture, art history, technical drawing, CAD software, factors influencing design, ergonomics, symbolism in art, workshop skills, materials.
- **Home Economics**
Budgeting, cooking, hygiene, nutrition, childcare, family dynamics, socioeconomic influences on home life.
- **Personal & Social Education (PSE)**
Politics, human rights, ethics, law, religion, discrimination, sex and relationships, volunteering, addiction, careers, environmentalism, personal responsibility, diversity.

All subjects also include **whatever you'd actually learn in the classroom!** Particular genres might call for variations in these skills – for example, in an occult mystery game, Maths might also cover psionic skill and PSE might include contracts with otherworldly spirits.

Rating your skills

Subjects are graded on the player's report card from A-E. An A-grade provides 5 dice, a B provides 4, down to a single die for a grade E.

You can just use numbers if that's more convenient. It's a little less authentic, but this is a game – if it isn't fun to stop and calculate how many dice you should get, feel free not to do that!

Using skills

There are no hard and fast rules for using skills. Choose what seems like a suitable skill. In true classroom style, we encourage players to plead the case for using their preferred skill even if it isn't the most appropriate one.

Skills are used to resolve most actions in the game. The most immediate application is, of course, to determine performance at school. Subject knowledge can also be applied widely to handle almost any task the characters face: characters might use Science to rewire a machine, History to search a ruined castle, or Games to fend off a gang of crooks.

Reputation

“You have a tendency to veer off course, don’t you, Kendall, like a defective supermarket trolley.” – Mr Bronson, Grange Hill

Brit School Hijinks has a three-axis model of how you fit into society. This applies to your interactions with classmates and teachers, but also the wider world outside the school. The axes are:

- **Approval:** This measures what responsible adults think of you. It’s used for getting perks, dealing with school bureaucracy, invoking school rules and procedures, and getting away with stuff because you’re such a good kid. A high-Approval character finds it hard to break rules or disobey adults.
- **Trust:** This measures what your peers think of you. Do you fit in? Are you tuned into the social sphere? Can you get favours, get other kids onside, pick up gossip and tips? A high-Trust character has a lot of social obligations and finds it hard to turn them down.
- **Cool:** This measures your independence and *je ne sais quois*. Do people admire you? Can you drop a few words and change things? Do you make an awesome first impression? A high-Cool character’s main difficulty is maintaining that rarefied status. People look to them for guidance, even if they only ever give a few dismissive words. They go to *just the right number* of parties.

A character cannot excel at all three; they compete.

- High **Approval and Trust** means both the kids and the adults have confidence in you. You’re a rock in the storm, reliable no matter what you’re asked to do. Running a club, dealing with social tensions, reconciling enemies or finishing a major project, it’s all grist to your mill. Still,

familiarity breeds contempt; you can't be a good kid, a shoulder to cry on, *and* an idol. Better to be loved than feared?

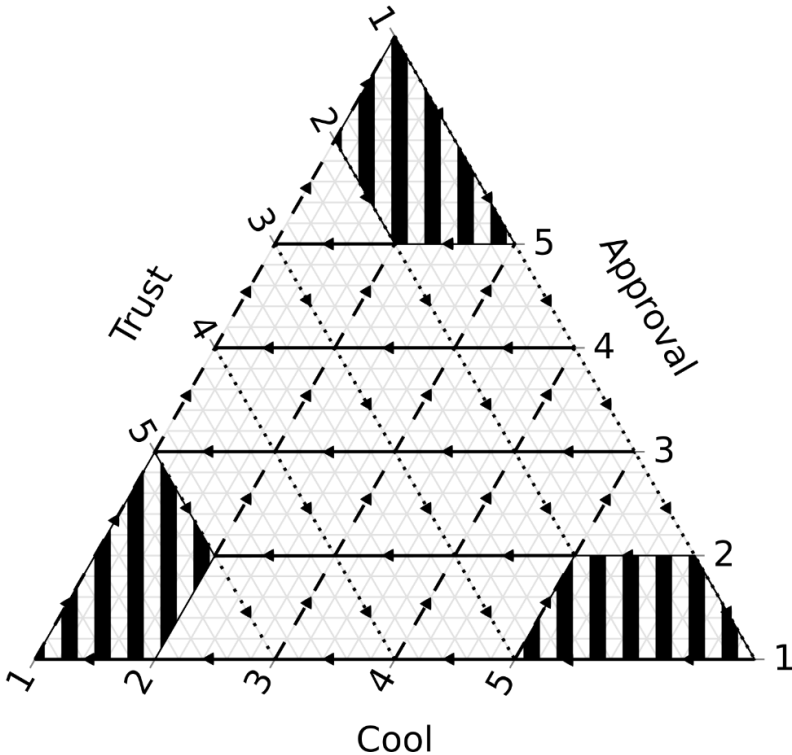
- High **Trust and Cool** means you're popular and admired amongst the kids, both a good mate and a hero, but you don't get to be that way by conforming. You may or may not be a troublemaker, but teachers don't ask you for help, take you seriously or let you in on any secrets. And hey, who wants them to?
- High **Approval and Cool** means you pulled off a nifty trick: the teachers like you, but the other kids still admire you. Nobody thinks you're a swot, even if you kind of are. You do what you're supposed to, but you make obedience cool, like an honourable knight of old; no sense of knuckling under to the Man for you. At the same time, maintaining that air of awesome requires a certain distance. Even if you go to all the right parties, you don't make connections; you might lead the dancing or lay down the law, but you won't be hearing many confidences. After all, nobody wants to embarrass themselves in front of you. But that's okay; you're just fine as you are.

You receive 9 dice to allocate between these three axes. Each axis is rated from 1-5. For example, you could be Trust 5 Cool 3 Approval 1, or Trust 3 Cool 3 Approval 3. All points must be allocated (but see the Lonely Spice Quirk).

Reputation represents your general relationships in society and the school. It has no mechanical effect on your relationship with **other player characters**.

The Social Pyramid

One way of representing reputations is with a three-sided chart like the one below.



Each side represents one of the three axes of reputation. If you increase one, another naturally decreases. The arrows leading from each labelled side show you which value to use.

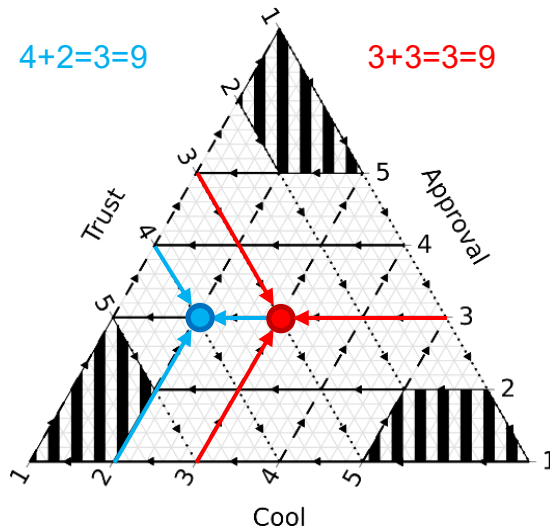
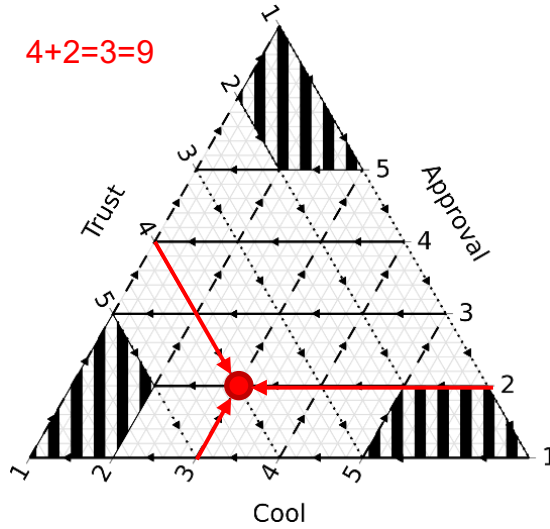
For example, if we take the value Trust 4 on the left-hand side, we can see that it passes through these points:

- Trust 4, Cool 1 (along the bottom), Approval 4 (on the right)
- Trust 4, Cool 2, Approval 3
- Trust 4, Cool 3, Approval 2
- Trust 4, Cool 4, Approval 1

All of these add up to a total of 9.

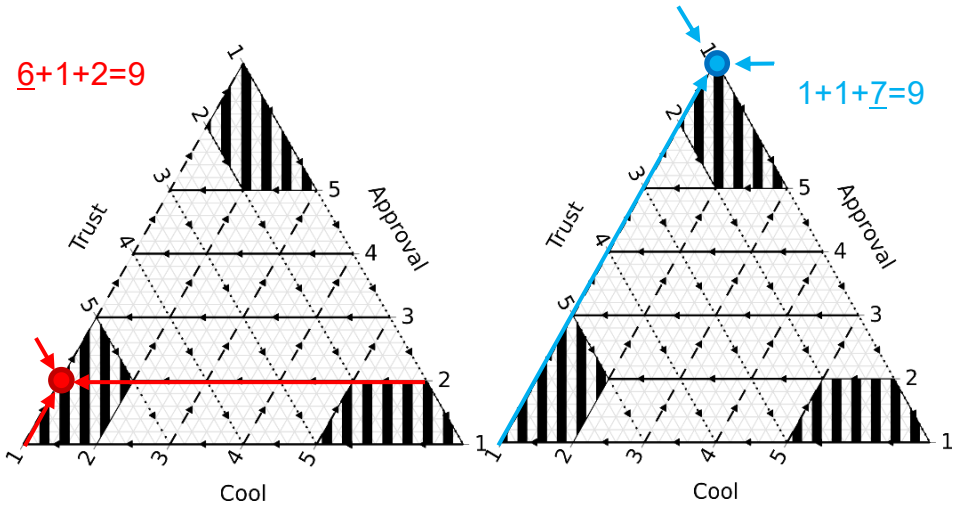
For example:

Jiachen has the reputation shown right. Reading along the arrows, he has a Trust of 4, a Cool of 3, and an Approval of 2.



He impresses some teachers and improves his Approval to 3 (right). Reading along that arrow, he has to either reduce his Trust by 1 (red, 3+3+3=9) or reduce his Cool by 1 (blue, 4+2+3=9). There's no option to increase Approval without decreasing another value. They always add up to 9.

The corners are blocked out, because in those areas, one value would be higher than 5.



If that all seems too complicated, feel free to just use three numbers instead. Just make sure the total always adds up to 9!

We just thought it was cool, honestly.

Using Reputation

You roll Reputation when you want to use it to achieve something or avoid consequences. Trust might be rolled to find out gossip about another pupil, or to get away with suspicious behaviour in front of classmates.

These rolls are made using a dicepool in the same way as skills. Successes are on a 5+ as usual.

Stuff

Assume your character has access to anything a normal kid would have. The school, genre and character you've chosen will affect this – pupils at an elite chalet school will probably have different stuff from those at a sink school in inner London.

Richer isn't necessarily better (for the purposes of a game, at least); it depends what you need. Personality matters too: outgoing characters are more likely to have the right outfit to crash an event, and nerdy characters are more likely to have an actual broadsword and a chemistry set.

A lot of items exist in the school but don't belong to pupils. Getting hold of those requires in-game planning and can be a fun session in itself.

Game Mechanics

“If you’re not getting into trouble, you’re not really trying.” – anon.

Dicepools and Rolls

Brit School Hijinks uses **dicepools**. You roll a number of 6-sided dice (“d6” for short), and each roll of 5+ counts as one **success**. To succeed at a simple task, you just need one success; harder tasks require more successes.

The number of dice you roll depends what you’re trying to do. If you’re using one of your **subject skills**, you roll dice equal to your rating in that skill. If you’re using **social status**, you roll dice equal to the appropriate kind of status. A dicepool can never be reduced below 1 die.

Difficulty

Most tasks have a fixed difficulty, ranging from 1-5 (but see **Not everything needs a roll**, below).

- **Difficulty 1** tasks need some knowledge and practice. Identify Jane Austen quotes; calculate the angles of a triangle; swing across the monkey bars; introduce yourself in French.
- **Difficulty 3** tasks are challenging for a typical teen. Perform well in a school match; build a functional shelter; eavesdrop on a French conversation; sabotage a car without making it obvious; compromise the school network;
- **Difficulty 5** tasks are at the absolute limit of what a talented high school student could accomplish *in the genre you have chosen for the game*. Make an accurate copy of a painting that’ll fool anyone who lacks professional expertise; decrypt a major company’s data; synthesise medicines in the chemistry lab; scale a sheer cliff without equipment, in the rain.

Failing

When you fail at a roll, the GM determines what that means. Sometimes you just don't manage to pull off what you were aiming for. You might achieve what you wanted, but not as quickly as you hoped. You might arouse suspicion or leave clues.

Opposed Rolls

An **opposed roll** happens when you're working directly against another person. It might be a tug-of-war, an argument, or competing for the Mrs Joyful Prize for Raffia Work. When making an opposed roll, both characters roll and compare the number of successes they have. If the result is a tie, compare the number of 6s; if those also match, the result really **is** a tie. If a tied result makes no sense, reroll until someone wins.



Helping Out

Sometimes you don't have the skills you need for a task, but your friends might. If a friend could plausibly give useful advice in that situation, you can ask for help. In this case, both characters make a skill roll. The GM determines whether more than one person can advise on the task (sometimes it just causes confusion).

If the advisor rolls one or more successes, they can give these to you. However! Advice is only as good as our capacity to follow it, so the

maximum number of successes you can gain this way is equal to your rating in the appropriate skill.

For example:

Hildegard has found strange animals in an abandoned lorry. Her Science is only 2, and she struggles to identify them. Instead, she calls up her friend Em, who gets A*s in Science every year. Em rolls 3 successes, but she can only give 2 to Hildegard. Luckily, that's enough to identify the wombats in the lorry.

Not Everything Needs a Roll

How do you know when to roll for a skill, and when just to let something happen? Try imagining the game is a school story in a book. Authors have page count to worry about, so they tend to focus on important things (TV shows have more latitude, because lots of trivial things can be shown in passing without slowing down). Think about the following questions.

- Does the action appear in the novelisation? If not, it's probably not important.
- If it does appear, is the action a challenge to the character? Is uncertainty over the outcome a cause of tension? Are there interesting consequences if/when they fail? If none of these are true, it's probably not worth rolling.
- Is the character very good at this, and failure doesn't offer anything interesting? It's probably not worth rolling. You're risking undermining a character's concept, without anything much to gain.
- Is it implausible that the attempt as described would succeed? If so, it's okay to just rule that it's not possible. However, encourage players to come up with alternatives. Many physical challenges can be tackled in multiple ways, or made easier by taking a new tack. Characters have their own personalities, and limits on how far they can be manipulated, but there may be other ways to achieve your aim.

Social Obligation

Reputation is great, but you can also be inconvenienced by it. Sometimes there will be social demands on you that you want to avoid, or other obligations imposed by them. In these cases, you must roll the appropriate Reputation to determine whether you can avoid the obligation.

Social Obligation rolls are made **using a single die**. If you roll equal to or less than your Reputation, you must comply with the obligation. If you roll more than your Reputation, you can avoid it.

A single die is used because this is more unpredictable than the dicepool. It means that obligations are a serious problem for high-Reputation characters, but not overwhelmingly difficult.

Selling Out

Even if you fail a Social Obligation roll, you can still choose to reject the obligation. However, this behaviour damages your status. An obedient pupil who shirks helping is not obedient; a trusted confidant who won't listen to your woes isn't much of a confidant; a cool icon who acts uncoolly isn't cool. Refusing a roll immediately reduces your Reputation by 1.

At the end of the session, you must reinvest the point in whichever of the other two Reputations is **least inappropriate** to your actions this session.

Examples

Social Obligation for **Approval** includes being given errands, having to help with school activities, having to lend an ear to talkative teachers, feeling obliged to do homework, and intense reluctance to go against school rules and procedures. Approval isn't limited to teachers: all school staff, visitors, and basically any Responsible Adult™ uses Approval.

Social Obligation for **Trust** includes having to provide advice, listen to friends' woes, take part in leisure activities, sort out quarrels, help with homework, look after people's bags, keep secrets and ask people out for your mate. Betraying confidences, Letting People Down™ and shirking socials are also Social Obligation issues.

Social Obligation for **Cool** includes not losing your head, being reliable, giving judgements on issues of style or fashion, ending non-cool situations, being seen, being stylish, coming out on top, being magnanimous, or handling things just fine by yourself. Most Cool issues centre around simply staying Cool and not being unCool.

Getting Hurt

A lot of the mischief kids get up to can get them hurt. When you try anything like that, roll 2 dice and consult the chart below. Note that in most cases, there should be some kind of roll before an injury. For example, you roll to see whether you spot the falling statue, sprint between the speeding cars, roll with the punch, or realise the circuit board is live before touching it. A failure means you roll for injury.

2: *Urk!* Everything goes black. You won't be doing anything until you get some medical attention.

3-4: *That didn't sound good.* You're Dazed and Injured.

5-6: *That's going to hurt tomorrow.* You're Dazed and Sore.

7-8: *Oof!* You're Dazed.

9-10: *Whoops!* You take a -1 dice penalty on your next roll.

11-12: *Danger, what danger?* Nothing happens.

These injury rolls can be modified by the degree of danger. Think "what's the worst that's likely to happen?"

- Something that's only mildly reckless (scrambling down a steep slope, vaulting a gate) might have a +5 modifier, so unless you're in a desperate hurry there's nothing to worry about.
- A schoolyard scrap is normally a +3. Someone could get hurt, especially if it keeps on, but it's mostly dust and bruises.
- Leaping downstairs might be a +1 because you're risking a twisted ankle.
- Dropping from a tree or 2nd-storey window is a normal risk; get it wrong and you might be out for the count, but it's not super dangerous. So is getting hit by a bike, clocked with a cricket ball or bitten by a smallish dog.

- Sticking your hand in a fire to grab something, or getting hit with a cricket bat, is a -2 – that’s going to hurt, but you might get lucky.
- Going through some rapids without a boat, or jumping off a moderately-high roof, or getting bitten by an Alsatian, will be a -3 or -4. This goes badly for you.
- Jumping through a window without opening it, or getting hit by a car, or charged by a bull, is a -5. You might walk away, but you’re going to be a mess.

Injuries

Dazed: You need a few moments to recover. You can’t do anything for ten seconds or so.

Sore: You suffer a -2 penalty on all Injury rolls until you get some rest. The penalty is cumulative if you roll this result again.

Injured: You’ve sprained, twisted or otherwise hurt something. The GM decides exactly what your injury is: maybe a twisted ankle from a jump, bitten hand from that Alsatian, or “everything hurts” after the bull incident. You lose 1 die any time that injury is relevant, and suffer whatever other consequences make sense. If your Injury roll was particularly unlucky, you might lose 2 or more dice!

The GM decides exactly how long a rest is needed to recover from these injuries. If someone has been Injured several times, a short rest shouldn’t clear them all up, but an overnight rest normally does the trick.

The pace of your game will influence how long a rest should be. In a fast-paced game about a single day of mayhem, a minute might be enough to recover. In a slower game looking at the events of a whole term, it’s reasonable for an injury to need at least a night’s rest, or even a week in hospital!

Dog Bites Schoolboy:

Liam is found guilty (by a hasty and dubious trial of his peers) of kicking the football over the fence, and sentenced to retrieve it. In the process, he runs afoul of a temperamental Alsatian. Failing to pacify or dodge the dog, he ends up rolling for Injury with a -3 penalty (it's cross, but not out for blood). He rolls a 6, which the penalty brings down to a 3, leaving him Dazed and Injured.

The GM decides Liam did make it back over the fence, and the Alsatian got hold of his ankle at the last minute. He falls off and needs a few seconds to recover from the shock. He'll also suffer a -1 dice penalty when he does something involving walking, running, kicking and so on. In addition to the mechanical penalty, it makes sense that Liam is now limping, which slows him down and may attract attention. On the other hand, it might earn him sympathy in some circumstances.

Death By Misadventure?

There's no way to die from the game mechanics. However, that doesn't mean characters should go around doing things that are clearly fatal, purely because they can't mechanically die.

The game's assumption is that characters have enough self-preservation not to do those things. In more comical genres, 'fatal' accidents might leave you scorched from head to foot or in a full-body cast for just long enough to teach you a lesson.

The easiest approach is to and agree not to do things that would clearly get you killed. If you **really want** to run a game where the characters can die, agree that anything that would just get you killed does so.

Agree on this before beginning the game; it will make a significant difference to the genre if player characters can die!

Other People

As well as the player characters, the game will require non-player characters (NPCs) – the other students, teachers, bystanders, ghosts, school cats, and so on.

NPC pupils can be designed using the Skill and Social lists. This is best for important pupils you intend to interact with a lot.

Most other characters can be designed simply inventing general skills. Allocate 5 dice to the character's main strengths, 1 to their weakest points, and 3 to everything else. You can change the strength of a character by making these groups broader or narrower, or choosing more or less valuable groups.

Example skills: burglary, natural history, fishing, driving, cake decorating, lion taming, archery, history, machines, medicine...

There's always going to be gaps. If a skill becomes important that hasn't been allocated, just assign it based on the character and genre you're using. For example, almost all characters will be terrible at fighting.⁶ That means if combat does ensue, most characters will have a 1 or 2, unless they're particularly beefy.

Motivation

Players decide when their own characters would keep going or give up. For non-player characters, there's a value called Motivation. Motivation represents an NPC's capacity to pursue their goals in the face of difficulty, and resist whatever it is the player characters have planned.

All non-player characters begin with 1-5 Motivation. This simply represents how much of an obstacle to the PCs they are expected to

⁶Unless, of course, you're doing an over-the-top thriller game where all the teachers are ex-SAS and the kids have weapons training every Wednesday in case of invasion by the Belgians.

present. Whenever something happens to affect their motivation, they roll one dice. If the score exceeds their current Motivation, they lose one. If Motivation reaches 0, they give up.

Things that might damage Motivation include:

- Getting badly hurt (an Injury)
- Being humiliated
- The abject failure of a plan
- Complete inability to make progress
- Immense boredom

A particularly discouraging experience (being humiliated on live TV; following a suspect for nine hours, only to discover it was actually your own boss, who forgot to tell you to cancel the surveillance) may cost 2 points of Motivation, or even more.

It's useful to describe the NPC's motivation rather than just assigning a number. Think about their primary motivation **that's likely to be relevant to the game**. Are they yearning to Impress Their Parents, or keen to Make Some Money? An inspector might want to Shut Down The School because of its failings. A chip shop owner who's been antagonised by pupils would like to See Them Brought To Justice. On the other hand, a bored security guard may simply hope Nothing Goes Wrong On My Watch.

Sample NPCs

School Staff

Nell Barnes

Catering 5; Everyday Life 1; Motivation 2 (*They've all got to be fed*).

Nell is a dinner lady. She's great at catering and everything associated with it, a true professional. Sadly, those skills don't transfer to the rest of her life. She forgets all her errands, loses track of her paperwork, misses appointments, accidentally annoys her family, takes the bus to Edinburgh instead of Birmingham, and gets the dog's meal mixed up with the one for her father-in-law.

Mr. Śmigielski

DIY 5; Talking 1; Humbling 3; Motivation 4 (*Keep this place shipshape*).

Teachers come and go, but a good caretaker is eternal. Even the head wouldn't dream of using his first name. Mr. Śmigielski wanders the building purposefully, always knowing what needs doing. While he rarely opens his mouth, his mere presence tends to calm a situation – scuffles come to a halt, teachers trail off from remonstrations, and boisterousness in general deflates. He thinks of the school as his domain, and himself as its caretaker. When there's no work to be done, he settles comfortably in his lair – a tiny room crammed with shelves of junk, with an ancient radio playing jazz.

Discount Di

Pickpocket 5; Act Innocent 3, Thinking 1; Motivation 1 (*Easy money*).

A casual shoplifter and pickpocket, Di's named for her love of the "five-finger discount". She's an opportunistic criminal rather than a pro, and prefers to take the easy way out rather than risk serious trouble.

Camomile Pete

Thuggery 4, Burglary 5; People Skills 1, Thinking 1; Motivation 3 (*Impress the Boss*).

Pete isn't good at dealing with people (except by threatening them), understanding people, or anything that requires the use of his brain. But he's aggressive, tough, good at hurting people, breaking into places, blowing safes, and other professional skills. He's basically average at everything else. Fan of vegetarian food and herbal tea.

Reggie Haversham-Ffawkes

Posh Mastermind 5; Action 3; Dealing With Kids 1; Motivation 5 (*Secure the diamonds*).

Reggie is a suave upper-class gang leader: he plans meticulously, runs his mob with an iron fist, sees every betrayal coming and plans for it, moves in society, runs a swell dinner-party and is generally in control. He's hopeless with kids and teenagers though; he has no idea how they tick and finds them annoying to be around. Physical work? He has people for that.

Longer-Term Play

If you want to play the same characters over a period of time – several sessions, or several adventures – it makes sense for them to learn from what's happened before.

At the end of a session, write down one thing you did, learned or experienced during the session. There's a section labelled "**What I did on my holidays**" for this, though if your games are mostly focused on schooldays you might want to rename it. Try to make it something specific: "let down the tyres of a police car" or "fell out of a helicopter".

If a similar situation crops up in a future session, you can bring up that experience to reroll any dice that didn't roll successes. Falling out of that helicopter gave you some idea how to avoid falling out of another one! However, you can only use each of your experiences once per session.

Adventures at School

Rules are all very well, but what do you actually do?

In most cases, it will be the GM's job to come up with the situations that PCs can react to. Once the players have built up steam, they may well not need any more prompting.

This is partly because we assume you'll be playing this game as a one-shot adventure, where players don't have much background information to dream up their own ideas initially. If your group works together to flesh out the school's personalities and locations, and what's going on around them (or if you can convince them to read a setting you've written yourself) it's far more likely they will be inspired with their own goals and plans, and you'll be able to run a game that's driven by the players as active protagonists, rather than reacting to events.

School hijinks tend to fall into broad categories. **Getting away with it** involves the PCs (or someone else) trying to get out of trouble, usually by concocting an alibi, retrieving evidence, placating an authority, or throwing suspicion on someone else. **Having a lark** is doing something for sheer fun, with the challenge focused on getting into position to actually do it – buying supplies, sneaking into somewhere, evading the authorities, and so on. **We are the champions** involves winning some kind of contest, whether it's a competition, a turf war or a clash of wills with the staff. **Hidden treasure** has students finding a secret of some kind, usually in a race against at least one other faction or time pressure of another source (say, the school is about to be demolished). Finally, the **Maltese Falcon** is about getting your hands on something desirable, whether that's simple cash, a feast, or tickets to Australia.

Adventure Seeds

If you're stuck for inspiration, try grabbing some ideas from this list. For proper hijinks, it's usually best to mash two or three things together until you have the right balance of conflicting goals, confusion, and chaos.

Mundane Events

A film company wants to film in the school, and is looking for extras. Both students and staff are eager to get some screen time.

It's time for the Ofsted inspection. Will pupils rally together to save the school from closure, or sabotage the Head's attempts to cover up all the problems?

The tax man cometh! A stressful time for any institution undergoing an audit, and potentially disastrous for a private school. Can be played straight, or as slapstick melodrama – forged documents, hiding students to pretend enrolment is lower, and so forth. Opportunities for PCs and others to abscond with ill-gotten gains.

Exam time.

The school is undergoing a transformation – private to comprehensive, ordinary to faith school, single-sex to mixed, or vice versa.

A struggling school is selected for a radical intervention, with new teaching methodologies, funding, hotshot teachers and other innovations.

Your private school is amalgamated with the local comprehensive (or vice versa), leading to tension and a culture clash.

The very rich parents of a potential future student come to visit.

Someone proposes a fundraising event to support refurbishment (school trips, a new building, new gym equipment, new musical instruments)

Melodramatic Events

Immediately after the school trip arrives overseas, war is declared.

The plunder from a bank robbery, pirate treasure, or something similar is hidden on school grounds. See *Blue Streak* (1999) for inspiration.

A royal has just enrolled. Well, they've got to study somewhere... but this brings everything from paparazzi to kidnapers, forbidden suitors, and diplomatic minefields.

Students make a remarkable scientific discovery. How dangerous is it? Who wants it, and how can it be misused?

Where have all the first years gone?

There is a secret base underneath the gym. Who's there, and why?

Criminals infiltrate the school, taking jobs as staff or enrolling as new students. What do they want and why does it bring them here?

Your comprehensive is amalgamated with the local private school (or vice versa), leading to dramatic misunderstandings.

The Head, Ministry of Education, or Board of Governors introduces new and bizarre rules.

A unique prize is up for grabs, and the Head is determined your school must win it, no matter what.

As above, but it's a prize for an individual teacher, leading to skulduggery and treachery.

As above, but it's a prize for a class – maybe a trip somewhere exotic or special privileges.

As above, but it's a prize for an individual student! Carnage undoubtedly ensues.

A torrential flood or snowstorm leaves the school isolated for weeks on end.

Fantastical Events

A prince or princess has just enrolled... from Hell. Now what?

Aliens hide out in the school.

Renovations disturb the dead, and the school is now haunted.

The demonology club are a bit too efficient, and actually summon something. Also works with the robotics club.

Something begins replacing teachers with pod people.

One of the teachers is a vampire. What kind?

A grimoire turns up in the school library, and soon someone – or several people – are experimenting with magic.

Someone is performing strange experiments in the school, leading to space-time weirdness, disappearances, monsters or mutations.

Someone develops psychic powers, lycanthropy, or another bizarre condition the English Lit teacher will insist is a metaphor for puberty.

The computing club accidentally makes contact with an AI. Does it start spilling dark secrets, or trying to take over the world?

Silly Events

It's worth bearing in mind that most of the ideas above can be made silly, especially if you stick them together in unusual ways.

A new young teacher arrives, who actually wants to *teach*. Something Must be Done.

Your comprehensive is amalgamated with the local private school (or vice versa), and a small-scale war breaks out between the squabbling factions – complete with barbed wire, trapdoors, and kidnappings.

After a series of unacceptable exam years (not to mention the attempt at high treason), the school has been taken over by the Army. Soldiers have replaced the teachers, fortified walls surround the site, and brutal discipline will be enforced.

A small zoo or private menagerie has to be closed in a hurry, but where will all the animals go? Students can begin a rescue appeal, or simply steal everything and let leopards run riot in the canteen.

Something begins replacing teachers with pod people... but grades are going way up, so the Head strenuously objects to anyone interfering.

The demonology club are a bit too efficient, and actually summon something. Ba'xkr'edzleb turns out to be great at hockey, and the team haven't had a win for ages...

References and Credits

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