

Ikigai : One Tiny Life



*This game by Alessandro Piroddi is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
Art by Dou-Hong*

Ikigai is a feelgood game of one-shot duration and gmLess persuasion about the joys and sorrows of life, and how even the smallest of creatures can have a meaningful existence.

What you need to play

Ikigai can be played by two or more people, but I suggest a maximum of five participants. You will need eight six-sided dice (10d6); four black Pebbles and four red Berries. You can make do with less as long as you keep clear track of what's what during play. You will also need something to write on, to record the passing of the day, and the tiny chronicle of a tiny life.

What you know initially

You all tell cooperatively the story of Iki.

Iki is the name of a person, a minuscule humanoid creature. This kind of creature is so small that their babies are the size of a bean, just like the one on the cover of this book.

They are born, grow up, grow old and lead a full lifetime in the span of a single day.

Leave any questions you might have to be answered through active play, don't waste time now pre-narrating the details of a tiny civilization.

This is the exact order for Iki's life moments:

- 1. Childhood*
- 2. Teenage*
- 3. Teenage*
- 4. Adulthood*
- 5. Adulthood*
- 6. Adulthood*
- 7. Maturity*
- 8. Maturity*
- 9. Elderness*

Playing a Moment

Start by selecting a player to open a moment.

Keeping in mind "what they know initially" and what previous moments have already established, they will answer a few questions about *TIME* and *SITUATION* and *FOCUS*.

The questions are not strict, they can be used as a guideline to offer a more natural brief narration; but their topics should all be addressed before moving on.

- *TIME*

Can you see the sky? How does it look? Can you see the sun, or the moon and stars?

- *SITUATION*

What is this moment about? Has Iki...

...seen / heard / tasted / touched a thing ?

...met a person met / encountered a creature ?

...taken an action / attempted a goal ?

- *FOCUS*

Is this moment challenging, difficult, painful? Then grab a Pebble!

Or is this moment comforting, hearthwarming, joyous? Then grab a Berry!

Once everything has been answered, briefly describe how it all looks like, add some finishing touches to your narration, fill in the blanks. Be sure to stick close to the questions; don't tell a whole story all on your own. **Keep your die visible.**

Someone has to write down this stuff. Not everything word by word, just a few cardinal elements. A printable Chronicle-Sheet at the end of this book will help in this task. You need to write:

- the *TIME* of the day, expressed in any way that is not a number (ex.. midday, the dead of night, when the moon leaves the sky, etc)
- the *SITUATION* of the moment, in a nutshell (ex.. meeting the soft lady, finding the river-desert, facing the big spider, etc)
- *LESSON* or *MEMORY* expressed by the moment (all explained shortly)

Now a **different** player will expand this moment by describing one new detail about how things around Iki look, feel, behave and evolve. Then they too grab a Black or White die, depending on how they feel their contribution influences the moment.

Only when **ALL** players have the **SAME** amount of dice can they go for a second round. If at any time two or more players would like to be the one opening or expanding a moment, have them all grab a die and roll: the highest score wins, and ties reroll. Keep expanding the moment until **five dice** are taken.

Alex opens a moment, grabbing the 1st die.

Now only Claudia can expand it, so she does and then grabs the 2nd die.

They both have one die each, so any of them could be the next to expand the moment.

Claudia decides to go next, grabbing the 3rd die.

Then Alex has to go, because he only has 1 die and Claudia has already 2, then grabbing the 4th die.

Finally both have two dice each... and both want to go!

So they each grab a new die, roll it, and compete for highest score. Alex got a 3 and Claudia only a 2, so Alex gets to expand the moment and grab the 5th and last die.

If Matt, Julian and Clemens were also playing with Claudia and Alex (5 players total) each would get to grab exactly 1 die, and then the moment would be resolved.

If Dirk was also with them (6 players total) during each moment only 5 players would get to participate in any current moment. This is doable, as chronicled in the extended example at the end of this book, but is also the reason why I suggest a max of 5 players total.

Resolving a Moment

After the 5th die is taken, the whole pool is rolled...

The highest die is a Pebble: describe an important **lesson** that Iki learned thanks to what has been seen in this Moment.

The highest die is a Berry: describe an element from the Moment we just played that will become one of Iki's most treasured **memories**.

In case of a tie, the next highest die wins.

Finally the opening player will describe how the situation ends, keeping in mind the final result of the dice roll. **This ends the moment.**

Play continues by opening a new moment. Every player must have opened one moment before anyone can open a second one, and so on.

Once a moment ends, take an instant to reflect on the people and creatures Iki met. Was anyone standing out? Was anyone memorable? Did anyone had a proper name? Was anyone important to the moment? If so, **write them down** somewhere. This will be important in the final phase of the game.

Ending the Day

After Iki's ninth life moment the game ends with a simple chat where the players give answers to a list of questions. All questions must receive an answer, but players don't need to agree on them. Each player can express how they imagine things to be.

- How did Iki die? Was it a peaceful or dramatic end? Was Iki alone?
- For which Quality will people remember Iki?
- What do you think was Iki's most treasured Memory?
- How did Iki's existence change the life of other people? Can you name someone in particular?
- What has been left behind by Iki's existence? Is there a mark or a token that attests Iki's passage?
- At the end of it all, would you say that Iki's life had worth and meaning? Why?

Example Chronicle

This is the true chronicle of a game I played. Use it as example and guideline for yours.

1) Childhood - at dawn - Iki plays in the river

Memory : cold and bright river water

2) Adolescence - the sun is bright - Iki meets a spider

Quality : courageous

3) Adolescence - early noon - Iki meets a soft lady

Memory : getting big (like a pufferfish) feels good

4) Adulthood - high noon - Iki becomes a dad

Quality : nurturing

5) Adulthood - the sun is still high and strong - Iki visits a burrow

Memory : the Ancestral Home

6) Adulthood - clouds hide the sun - Iki faces the spider again

Memory : fighting to defend his home

7) Maturity - the sun is starting to go down - Iki explores the "river-desert"

Quality : greatness

8) Maturity - the sky is red and orange - Iki tells stories around a bonfire

Memory : letting go of the new community he built

9) Decline - the night sky is full of stars - Iki sails back home

Memory : waiting for the young ones to take his wings

Actual Play

This is a summary record of the same game, but with more info about what was said and done at the table. I won't write every detail of our story; just what was particularly significant in every moment, and the player actions and reactions surrounding it.

We were six players. This meant that during each moment only five of us would participate and grab a die, but because each contribution was small no one had to wait, get bored or feel excluded. Instead, this helped one player to "get" the game by giving him the opportunity to watch silently while a couple of moments were played; he then became a (very) active participant.

1) Childhood - at dawn - Iki plays in the river

Memory : cold and bright river water

We had no idea how to start, so we just went with the obvious beginning of the day (dawn) and added to it something vague suggested by the SITUATION questions: Iki sees something... the... light of a new sun... reflected on the water of a river.

Slowly, four more details got added, portraying Iki trying the cold water, falling into it, learning to swim, and finally getting called home to be present at "the end" of their mother.

2) Adolescence - the sun is bright - Iki explores the forest

Quality : courageous

A young Iki explores the forest surrounding their home. When the meeting with a big spider turns unpleasant, Iki displays firefly-like wings and flies around the hostile arachnid.

3) Adolescence - early noon - Iki meets a soft lady

Memory : getting big feels good

Iki is flying towards a gathering of their people, when their eyes fall on a gorgeous tiny-she... soft and round and double Iki's size.

Iki gets closer and tries to impress her, getting bigger and bigger, like a pufferfish. She seems to appreciate and starts rubbing against Iki's body, while

another tiny humanoid gets close to them, puffs up, and rubs on both of them. Iki feels kind of awkward, but enjoys it.

4) Adulthood - high noon - Iki becomes a parent

Quality : nurturing

After the rubbing and a relaxed deflation, the soft lady (now smaller and less round) presents Iki with a small ball... or a round-ish bean... and with a smile goes away.

Iki takes his child (we finally settle for Iki to be male, as we notice how we all refer to him as a "dad" now) to the forest, hunts down a fly, uses a rose-thorn dagger to break the bean-shell of his child and feeds it the fly.

5) Adulthood - the sun is still high and strong - Iki visits a burrow

Memory : the Ancestral Home

The child is now out of the bean-shell and rests in Iki's arms. Iki flies to a burrow hidden beneath the roots of a big tree. The walls are decorated with delicate multi colored drapes, that turn out to be the wings of his ancestors.

He leaves the child in this home, and goes back daylight yelling "Freedom! I'm a bachelor again!"

6) Adulthood - clouds hide the sun - Iki faces the spider again

Memory : fighting to defend his home

Already flying away Iki wonders if his parental duties have been properly fulfilled, so he turn back and finds the big spider threatening his ancestral home. Iki attacks the beast with his rose-thorn dagger and slays it, fashioning a spider-mask from its head.

The tiny people gather to celebrate his victory, and his child comes out the burrow to declare their pride. But another tiny person emerges from the crowd, clad in a mantis-mask, challenging Iki. They fight is lost, leaving Iki lame by a leg and a wing.

7) Maturity - the sun is starting to go down - Iki explores the "river-desert"

Quality : greatness

Using a stalk of grass to fashion a crutch, Iki decides to embark in a new adventure, exploring the sandy riverside... err... the "river-desert" to go where no tiny person had gone before.

His child joins the quest, along with other tiny people. The journey is long and hard and many travellers perish along the way. This is sad, but Iki forges on.

8) Maturity - the sky is red and orange - Iki tells stories around a bonfire

Memory : letting go of the new community he built

Sitting at a bonfire made of dry grass in a place shielded by the wind between three stones, Iki is re-telling the stories of his youth to the people in his nomadic tribe. His daughter (we finally gave an identity to Iki's child) has been in her arms. She steps forward to introduce Iki to a young man. Iki looks at them, and solemnly bestows his dagger to the young fellow. The Mantis-slayer is present, and approves. Then the whole community moves away from the fire, and Iki stays behind, melancholic but at peace, satisfied by a life's work becoming mature and independent of him.

9) Decline - the night sky is full of stars - Iki sails back home

Memory : waiting for the young ones to take his wings

Iki reaches the river and uses a leaf to start his journey back towards his native forest.

Before sailing he looks on the horizon and sees something incredible... a human pissing in the river... but he does not know that... to him, he just witnessed how the Gods give origin to the river!

He then sails, and as time passes he starts to dry up and, bit by bit, fall down to pieces. As the end nears he sees familiar trees dark against the moon, and feels the young members of his people coming flying to get his wings, to be added to the walls of his ancestral home.

He closes his eyes... darkness... then the sound of something breaking a bean-shell... then a bright light, and a smiling face pushing food in Iki's newborn mouth.

The final chat found us speculating on the nature of this tiny people. We never got around to give them a proper name, often referring to them as "Ikis". Are they born knowing what to do? Is it instinct or teaching? Do they have a super-specialised society structure? But then how could Iki break out of it like he did in our story? Was he aberrant or exceptional or... what?

Surely people remember him for his courage as explorer, and as slayer of spiders. We even started referring to him as the "Ikinator" at some point of the game.

To us, Iki's most fond memory was that first childish moment of bliss in the river water at dawn. But yeah, also the Ancestral Home full of wings. That image stayed with him (and with us) until the end!

Also, witnessing a God pee is quite remarkable in and of itself...

Iki was relevant. He literally broke new ground, he broadened the horizons of his people, he founded a new nomadic tribe, he touched a lot of lives.

And he left ample trace of his existence: his daughter, his grandchild, his legendary rose-thorn dagger, his wings.

At the end of it all, his 24h life was extraordinary. We were surprised and amazed at how full it had been, and how much we cared.

The whole game lasted no more than one hour.

Printable Chronicle Sheet

1. **Childhood**

Time :
Situation :
L / M :

2. **Adolescence**

Time :
Situation :
L / M ::

3. **Adolescence**

Time :
Situation :
L / M :

4. **Adulthood**

Time :
Situation :
L / M ::

5. **Adulthood**

Time :
Situation :
L / M :

6. **Adulthood**

Time :
Situation :
L / M ::

7. **Maturity**

Time :
Situation :
L / M :

8. **Maturity**

Time :
Situation :
L / M ::

9. **Decline**

Time :
Situation :
L / M :