

Well Played Session: *Monumental Consequence*

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Abstract: *Monumental Consequence* is a single-session, live action game for classrooms, team building, and social gatherings that asks players if art is ever worth dying for. Players take on the role of villagers in the fictional town of La Ville where an army has just taken possession of their centuries old church. The villagers must come together to decide whether they risk the lives of their friends and family by attacking the church to save the precious art inside or whether they simply bomb the church and sacrifice the art to save lives. The game blends card mechanics with live action roleplaying to create a vibrant conversation about the cultural value of art and antiquities along with a seamless introduction to classroom roleplaying. This Well Played session will take participants through the entire game with an opportunity for dialogue afterward about the game's themes, mechanics, and supporting materials.

Game Background

Monumental Consequence arose from Professor Looney's goal to get students talking about the value of art: the value that has nothing to do with money. In her classes, Looney tries to provide content about art's significance to humanity every day they teach, but often winds up telling students why art is important. We need to understand our connections to art and dig into why it matters so much to us. The truth is, much of art's value for us is embedded in what we bring to it.

Our emotional and cultural investment in art is huge, but could we ever be like Syrian archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad (1932-2015) in how we stake that claim? He refused to tell ISIS interrogators where important Syrian artifacts were located and died because of that decision. (Hubbard, 2015) He died to protect art.

Monumental Consequence asks that same question of a town that must decide whether to risk the lives of its civic military to save their church. Players are everyday citizens – including the militia – with various goals and motivations. They must convince one another to vote on this important matter and use their best reasons for saving art or saving life. The game is set in an Early Modern town with European names and Christian artifacts, but the publisher provides resources to alter that context if desired (see "Accessibility" section for more details.)

Game Mechanics

In *Monumental Consequence*, players are randomly assigned roles printed on cards (Figure 1). They play out those roles in different locations throughout the room (Figure 2). The art under debate is also represented on cards (Figure 3), which gives a more tangible impression of what is at stake.

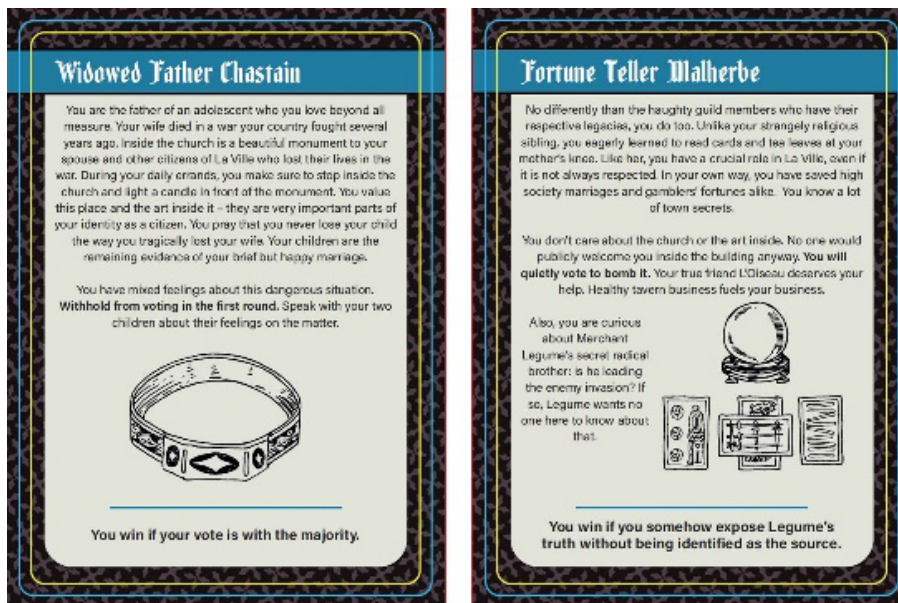


Figure 1
Role Cards

Commented [RK1]: Made the card pictures significantly larger in response to reviewer feedback.

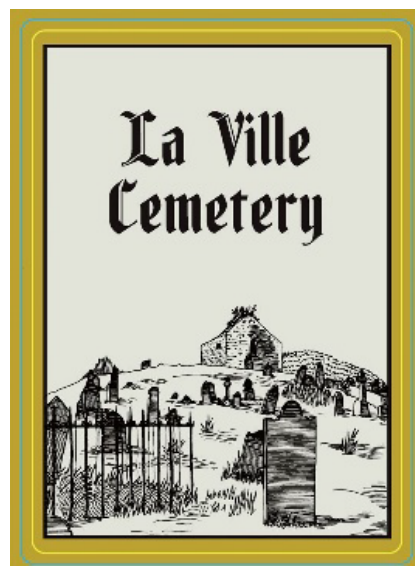


Figure 2
Location Card



Figure 3
Treasure Cards

Players interact with one another to determine their positions on the central question: **do we save the art or bomb the church?** A short round of interactions, discussion, and debate culminates in an initial vote. If that vote is inconclusive, a dice mechanic generates complications to alter the scenario and the next round begins. Play continues until one side or the other has convinced enough players to vote for their preferred outcome. A final dice mechanic then determines the consequential outcomes of the vote. Those outcomes can range from the church and its contents emerging unscathed to complete destruction of the building and its artifacts, with several intermediate options. Likewise, the loss of life may range from mass death to none at all.

Number of Players/Accessibility

The game can be played with 9-38 players and is appropriate for players aged 14 and up. As player numbers increase, there are more opportunities for subversive play, which in turn can enhance the follow-on classroom discussion. The game does not require significant physical exertion or mobility. Sight-impaired participants will require initial assistance to read their character description from a card, but should be able to fully participate in the game and subsequent discussion. Hearing-impaired participants may have a degraded game experience due to missing sidebar conversations when characters are debating amongst themselves.

In addition to the game itself, the publisher (Central Michigan University's Center for Learning through Games and Simulations) also offers a curriculum guide to help adapt the game to numerous educational contexts. Among the resources provided in the guide are:

- How to Talk About Art and Architecture: A Brief Guide to the Basics
- Lesson Plan #1: Describing a Work of Art or Architecture
- Lesson Plan #2: Exploring the Concept of Value for a Work of Art or Architecture

- Lesson Plan #3: A Hail of Questions About Art
- Lesson Plan #4: Researching to Learn About Works of Art
- Lesson Plan #5: Stocking the “Church” (this section is especially helpful for instructors who wish to move the game out of a Western Christian-centric focus)
- Lesson Plan #6: Life WithOUT Art
- Lesson Plan #7: Designing and/or Creating Art and Architecture for an Early Modern Town
- Additional Media and Reading for Further Study

Themes/Topics

This Well Played session will take participants through the entire game, with opportunities to discuss the game mechanics and additional resources for instructors. This session is ideally suited for participants who wish to explore:

- Encouragement of players’ appreciation for the cultural value of antiquities, historical objects, and monumental structures.
- Development and use of persuasive skills.
- Introductions or warm-ups for longer classroom role-playing sessions (such as *Reacting to the Past* games).

Acknowledgements

From Professor Looney: This game was inspired by semesters of college-level teaching and my fervent hope that on some level, the reasons why art matters enough to go to extreme lengths to preserve it were evident (but fearing that often, they weren’t). Many thanks to the current and former students who I know got the message because they live and breathe it in their lives and careers, and also, they still tell me that this debate topic lingers for them. My heartfelt gratitude goes to the folks of the Scholarship and Lore: Games for Learning Series at Central Michigan University Press and at CMU’s Center for Learning through Games and Simulations. Thank you for believing in this! I am additionally grateful to the playtesters of *Reacting to the Past* and beyond.

From Dr. Kimball: My sincere thanks to CMU’s Center for Learning through Games and Simulations for providing early access to this game that facilitated submission on the GLS timeline. I am incredibly excited to share this amazing game, which I originally experienced through the *Reacting to the Past* Community.

References

- Looney, M.B. (2022). *Monumental Consequence* [Role-playing game]. Mount Pleasant, MI: Scholarship and Lore: Games For Learning from Central Michigan University Press.
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