



WordTrails: A campfire story

Once upon a time in the long, long ago, when people were first emerging as self-aware animals, they grew curious about a new thing they were doing. A new kind of thinking. Thinking about themselves thinking. It was different than anything they had done before, and they wanted a way to understand.

Curious conversation developed. People came together around the fire to wonder about things and talk together, asking each other questions about what they were thinking, sharing ideas in interesting ways.

Through conversation, understanding grew.

Through understanding, care and compassion grew.

People became closer, in the opening up.

As things do, over centuries, over millenia, over timeless time, the practice of conversation changed. Its very nature transformed.

What had once been a desire to understand and a safe place to open up, explore and wonder together, conversation gradually became something else.

Interactions slipped into being contests between who was right and who was wrong, or about who had the loudest voice and the biggest push. Conversations became battles, and dangerous territory of judgment, blame and shame that created contraction and self protection.

Places where people could be curious and wander in conversation together began to disappear.

The understandings and connections that had emerged out of conversation on the trail and around the campfire began to unravel as people took sides and hurled weapons at one another, in the not understanding.

It was heartbreaking and terrifying.

Then one day, in the very early morning, in the time when the veil between dreams and daylight is at its most thin, a new entity dipped a little toe into the waters of this world, wondering if it might have a place here now. It appeared as one single blank chip, floating in midair above Scout's head.

Her hands reached up to welcome it in, and when her hands came down there was a chip in each hand. And each chip had a word.

In her left hand was the word "CAN"

In her right hand, the words, "HAVE TO"

There was a moment of great stillness as what had clearly been one thing became two.

Over the four years since that morning, this being has continued to emerge and grow into its current form, as WordTrails. WordTrails placed itself in the world and said,

“Can I offer an idea?

I’m not a judge, and I’m not taking any side here. I’m just here to help.

People debate what I am, whether I am a game, or a tool, or a puzzle, but like most things what I am called is far less important than what I do.

What I do is offer a way to get back into conversation. I offer a space where you can remember how it feels to relax and not have to know anything in particular. Where you can wonder about things together.

What I do specifically is take away explanation. You all have big backpacks just chock full of explanations for everything. You don’t even realize how often you reach into your pack to get an old explanation when a new one, based on what’s true here and now, is far more likely to be useful.

So, leave your packs with me, and step into conversation together. Use these words to build trails together, letting the conversation emerge and evolve organically. Give yourself and one another space and time to consider what you mean, and what you want, together.

WordTrails said,

“Here’s the set up. I offer a reset, where everything is back on the table.

These 300 chips, 50 action cards, 17 organizing questions, 12 trinkets - they represent infinite possibility. If there’s ever a word or action you need that isn’t here, just add your own.

As you stand on the threshold of this game space, here’s what will happen when you enter.

Someone lays a first chip or card down, and you respond with what feels right to you. You take turns, and trails begin to emerge. As you build these trails, keep these things in mind: Once played, a chip or card stays on the table. Everything is based on free choice, no obligation to explain. Look for what you want to trinket.

When another player plays a chip or card and you feel a powerful “Me too!”, place a trinket on the resonant piece. When all the trinkets have been placed, you will take turns each building your own individual S’more using these 12 special pieces.

In this space it is equally OK to know or to not know. You are free to step in and give things a try, as you like.

No harm, no foul, no judgment, no shame. Everything is back on the table. It’s a new day, and anything is possible. Which can be intimidating! If you’re hesitating, that’s normal. The first step into an adventure is generally the hardest.

Here’s the thing about adventure: **Once you take that first step, you’re in it. The adventure will rise to meet you and carry you along. As you begin to let go and flow with it, it keeps getting better.**

So wander, explore and discover. Eventually when the game is over and you get to the campfire, you’ll all have all the time you like to be curious and ask.

May you enjoy yourselves, learn a little something, and remember to have one another’s backs in a pinch.