



The Secret Winker

One secret player sends the others to sleep with a wink, while a detective in the middle tries to catch them at it.

Players 6–20 (best with 8–14)

Play time 10–20 min

Materials Paper and pen

Movement Seated

QUICK RULES

1. Everyone draws a folded slip; one slip carries a dot — that player is the secret winker.
2. A detective sits in the middle and watches.
3. Anyone the winker winks at counts to three, then "falls asleep" with a flourish.
4. The detective has three accusations to name the winker before the circle is asleep.

SET UP

1. Choose a detective, who moves their chair into the middle of the circle.
2. Fold one slip of paper for each remaining player, mark a dot inside exactly one, and shuffle them in a bowl or a hat.
3. Each player takes a slip, looks at it without showing anyone and puts it away. Whoever has the dot is the winker.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone looks around the circle, meeting one another's eyes as naturally as they can.
2. The winker winks at one player at a time, choosing moments when the detective is looking elsewhere.
3. A player who is winked at silently counts to three, then falls asleep as theatrically as they like and stays out of the round.
4. The detective may accuse a player at any time by saying their name. A wrongly accused player says "not me" and stays in.
5. The detective wins by naming the winker within three accusations. The winker wins if three accusations fail, or if only two players are still awake.
6. Sleeping players keep their eyes closed and give nothing away.

HOW THE GAME ENDS

A round ends when the winker is named, when the detective has used all three accusations, or when only two players remain awake. Play as many rounds as there are willing detectives — five or six is usually plenty — with the previous winker taking the middle chair.

PLAYING SEATED

Played seated in a circle by default. The detective sits in the middle and simply turns in their chair.

TIPS FOR THE HOST

- Insist on the count of three before anyone falls asleep; without it the detective simply watches where each sleeper was looking.
- Encourage grand exits. The falling asleep is half the fun, and it covers the winker's tracks.
- Some people cannot wink. Agree another signal before the slips go round, such as a slow double blink.
- Collect every slip after each round so that the marked one cannot be recognised.

VARIATIONS

No detective. Play without the middle chair. Any player who is awake may raise a hand and accuse; if a second player backs the accusation, the accused must show their slip. Two wrong backers fall asleep themselves, so nobody accuses lightly.

Two winkers. In a circle of twelve or more, mark two slips. The winkers do not know each other and may send each other to sleep by accident. The detective gets four accusations and must name both.

STARTER IDEAS: SLOW AND SLEEPY

- A yawn so wide it needs both arms
- Slide slowly down your chair like melting ice cream
- Announce "five more minutes" and drop your head
- Stretch like a cat and curl up
- Wilt like a flower without water
- Tuck yourself in with an invisible blanket
- Hug an imaginary pillow
- Wave goodnight to everyone

STARTER IDEAS: SUDDEN

- Fall asleep in the middle of a sentence
- Count three sheep out loud and stop
- Rest your cheek on your hand and miss
- Snore once, politely
- Nod off, jolt awake, nod off again
- Blow out an invisible candle
- Freeze like a statue with your eyes shut
- Read an invisible book until it lands on your face

Times are editorial estimates, not test results. Editorially checked for clarity and consistency. We do not claim group playtesting for this page.