

The Ouija Board

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The study of folklore has three categories which include oral, customary and material. The Ouija Board is an object that fits these three categories and has been the topic of many a midnight ghost telling session.

Almost everyone has seen or played with a ouija board, and if they haven't encountered one they have at least heard stories about them. The word ouija comes from the French and German words "oui" and "ja" which mean "yes". There are two pieces to the game. The board is around eighteen by twelve inches and contains the alphabet spelled out in two lines formed in a crescent shape. The letters run horizontally across the board. Sometimes a row of numbers from zero to nine are placed under the alphabet. The words YES and NO are printed at the top of most boards in the corners.

The other piece of the board is a moving piece which is shaped like a heart. It is supported on three legs with felt covered bottoms. This piece often has a circular window with a needle in the middle. The window stops above the symbols on the board which enable it to convey a message.

The ouija board has many stories behind it. Some stories tell of how and when to use it and others are of what it has told the players. I have played with a ouija board several times and each experience has been different. When I was about twelve years old my sister and I found my aunts old ouija board and tried to play with it one afternoon. We were unable to get any kind of a response.

The next time I saw a ouija board I was fourteen years old and one of my friends was having a slumber party. We put two people on the board and the rest of us sat in a circle around them. We tried to summon up spirits of dead movie stars.

We called on the spirit of Elvis and dramatized the whole production. We had rigged the rocking chair to rock, the closet door to swing open and a poster of Elvis to unfold down a window shade. Everything we spelled out was premeditated. Although we had arranged quite a show for our friends we had also managed to spook ourselves. We only played with the ouija board that one night.

I have not seen or thought of a ouija board until about two months ago. A girl across the hall from me bought one to use as an illustration for a speech. The girl next door saw it lying on her bed and ask if she could play with it. Within fifteen minutes six girls had gathered into her dorm room to discover their futures. Everyone seemed to be able to contribute a "rule" to the game. These "rules" were different ways that the girls had been taught by watching friends or older siblings play the game.

Some of these "rules" include: The room must be completely dark; the only exception is a small candle. Only two people can play with the board at a time. All other people that want to contribute to the game must sit in a circle around the players. The two people playing must sit

in the floor with their legs crossed indian style in front of them. You must rest the board on your knees and place your fingers lightly on the moving piece. One person is the speaker and addresses the board when the players are ready. The speaker must ask the board all the questions asked during that game.

When everyone is ready to begin the game the speaker asks the board to go to YES when it is ready. During my observances I have seen the moving piece sit still for several seconds and then begin to move slowly up to the YES and I have seen it zoom up to the YES. Sometimes the piece never does move.

My roommate and I decided that we wanted to play with the board. We borrowed the game and went into the room next door. For some reason we were afraid to play in our room. We decided that I would be the speaker. I asked it to go to YES when it was ready. The piece sat still for about twenty seconds and then it began to slowly move toward the YES. When it began to move it scared us both and we both removed our hands from the piece. The piece continued to move for about six inches and rested on the YES. I then asked it a series of questions about who we would marry and where we would live. It answered me in initials.

My response for my future mate was KBZ and I am to live in NYNY some day. I asked for the first name of my husband and it spelled out KEITH. I know no one with those initials so I just laughed about my response. My roommates answers were a little more sensible. She is to marry someone named JEFF and live in MAPLEWOOD, ALASKA. Her boyfriends name is Jeff so

her response made sense to us. Neither of us had ever heard of Maplewood, Alaska and we were totally confused about the answer. Later on that night Jeff called Misty and said he had been thinking about moving to Alaska after he graduates because he thought he could get a job there.

I sat in on several other groups while they played the game that same week. Most of the questions they asked were about marriage, school, careers and their future families. These are subjects that are very important to girls my age. Although most of the girls that played with the ouija board said they didn't believe in its responses they continued to ask it questions that no one else could answer.

After the first night we played with the ouija board up on our sorority floor the craze spread throughout the rest of our dorm. Three more girls bought boards and they were continually in use. Conversations at night usually consisted of what someone had found out from the board about who they would marry and how many children they would have.

The fad of the ouija board lasted for only a few weeks and finally everyone got tired of playing and put their boards away. The ouija board is an interesting piece of folklore because it has all three qualities of oral, material, and customary. The board itself is a material piece that is passed down from siblings and aunts or cousins. It has been around since the time of witch trials in Salem and is still

used today. The face of the vboard has changed very little over the years.

The customary aspects of the ouija board include its rich history of being a popular conversation piece as well as a strong supernatural experience. Many people search for explanations to the reason why the moving piece moves. It is generally thought that the subconscious leads the players to move the piece to the answers that they really want to hear.

The ouija board mostly contains oral folklore. The game has many different stories about how to play and what the board tells people. Many tales of futures and spirits are the subjects of most ouija board folklore.

The ouija board is a game that serves as an outlet for the the unexplained and the unknown. Many people believe exactly what the board tells them while other are skeptical of its responses. However, no matter what people believe they continue to use ouija boards either as a game or to predict their future and answer questions about the unknown. Often the unknown turns out to be something that they always knew but never really wanted to think about or admit.