



Chrononauts Lesson Plans

By David Millians

Chrononauts is a fascinating, whimsical exploration of time travel, causality, and possibility covering many fascinating and significant events of the last century or so. The rules of the game are quickly learned, but even experienced players can meet new challenges in every session. Teachers new to the game ought to at least play the Solonauts solo game before using Chrononauts in the classroom.

[editor's note: Solonauts rules can be found at the end of this document.]

CLASSROOM SET-UP

Chrononauts takes about an hour and a half to play, especially with a large group engaged in team play, so it is reasonable to set aside three class periods to complete the game with the teacher serving as Time Keeper, maintaining the Time Line, and keeping the game going smoothly.

The game plays best with about six players or teams of students. For team play each student has a role. Ideas are listed below in order of decreasing probable need and allow for a about thirty students. The teacher can always create more teams, especially using more than one deck.

Leader - This student makes sure that everyone has a chance to speak and coordinates the activities of the other team members.

Time Watcher - This student may approach the Time Line at any time, monitoring the activities of other teams and bringing back information for the rest of the team to plan its own actions.

Researcher - This student has access to the reference materials provided by the teacher.

Speaker - This student may approach other teams to discuss plans, alliances, trades, or intentions.

Recorder - This student keeps a record of the team's actions and can also keep a record of each team mate's opinion.

DAILY LESSON PLANS

Day One:

- Announce the game, tell the students their groups, and hand out ID cards (5 minutes). Each group should take a few minutes to choose a team name, based on their ID cards.
- Students can also produce a banner, compose a chant or song, or craft any other props which will make the game more meaningful to them or which the teacher considers important (5 minutes or more).
- Give a quick overview of the game's simple rules, pointing out to them that they will learn more as they go and that a few mistakes early in the game are unlikely to affect its outcome (5 minutes), and allow time for questions (5 minutes or more, depending on the group).
- Hand each team its Mission card and three other cards from the main deck (5 minutes).
- Use the remainder of the class period to begin play. At the end of the period, set aside the game and each team's hand of cards.

Day Two:

Continue to rotate through each team's turn. Play can end at any time, with the team closest to its victory conditions being declared winner. At the end of the period, if play is to continue, set aside the game and each team's hand of cards.

Day Three:

Continue to rotate through each team's turn. At the end of the class period, if not before, determine the winner of the game. Allow time to give them any written assignment (5 minutes) and to locate all of the game components and clean up (5 minutes).

Day Four:

The teacher should lead a debriefing of the game, using some of the questions provided below.

ACTIVITIES

There are many ways this game can be applied in a classroom. All of the activities described below are appropriate for any age, though the game itself is best for students ten years of age and older.

In all of the ideas presented below, teacher-led debriefing is vital to getting the most out of the game activity. Chrononauts presents the students with a variety of sometimes humorous turning points in history, and guiding them through the questions this creates is an excellent examination of the stuff of history itself. Debriefing itself requires another class period, or it can be accomplished as a writing assignment.

In the Beginning

Play the game at the beginning of a unit or course on the Twentieth Century. Students will receive an overview of the period of study and begin to question its trends and and surprises. As they encounter these same events in their texts, lectures, formal discussions, and so forth, they will already be familiar with them and their connections to other events or outcomes.

Debriefing:

- How probable are the changes brought about by the cards?
- What did you learn about the Twentieth Century?
- Do you think the game gives an accurate overview of the century?

This is the End

Play the game at the conclusion of a unit or course on the Twentieth Century. The students can then more powerfully examine the cards and events of the game. The debriefing after a game at the end of a unit of study is especially valuable.

Debriefing:

- How probable are events in the game?
- What do they consider the most important events in the Twentieth Century?
- How important are people, beliefs, and trends?
- What has been crucial to the direction of history?
- Is history inevitable, or would events occur differently were we to rewind the clock and start again?
- What parts of history are not represented in the game?

It's in the Cards

Students familiar with the game can make their own cards, modifying and expanding the game. They can make new artifacts and patches. They can write new ID for time travelers and new missions, based on their knowledge of history. They can create new cards for the Time Line or even make a whole new set of Time Line cards to set the game in another period of history.

Debriefing:

- How did your new cards change the game?
- What are the crucial events in a different century or in another age of history?
- What did you have to leave out in making your cards?

Yarn Spinners

Players are normally encouraged to narrate their actions to alter the flow of history, not simply play a card for its game effect. Any one of these could form the basis for a substantial story. A story describing a full game would be still more elaborate and would be an interesting exercise in verb tenses. The Time Line cards, Linchpins, Patch cards, and even ID and Mission cards can inspire stories without even playing the game.

Debriefing:

- What is your time traveler doing to bring about the effect the card? What are his challenges to accomplish the action on the cards?
- Where is she? What does it look like?
- What does he look like in this time? Does she stand out from the local people? Who does he meet?
- How does the change in history look to her or effect her?
- How is it experienced by the regular inhabitants of history? Do they even have to notice?



How to Play Solonauts

(from: <http://wunderland.com/LooneyLabs/Chrononauts/Rules.html#How2PlaySolonauts>)

Overview: Solonauts is a solitaire game in which the challenge is to get eight Chrononauts home on a single pass through the deck. It's a great way to experience the fascination and humor of the TimeLine when you don't have any opponents on hand, and it's also a great way to really learn the ins and outs of the TimeLine.

Number of Players: one (although two or more can play together as a team)

Setup: Remove and set aside all the Artifacts, Actions, Timewarp, and Mission cards. Shuffle the Patches and Inverters together, and set up the TimeLine, configured for True History. Then deal out eight random ID cards, and arrange them face-up underneath the TimeLine. Finally, deal out five cards from the reduced play deck, and line them up under the characters, or hold them in your hand.

How to Play: Choose one of your five cards and play it just as you would in the full game, except without drawing an extra card after playing a Patch. Feel free to discard any Patches you know you aren't going to need. Draw back to five cards and keep playing until one of the characters can get home. Move that character up to the space above the TimeLine, and carry on. Remember, you only get one pass through the deck, so plan each move carefully!

How to Win: To win, you must get all eight of your characters home before you run out of cards.

To Adjust the Challenge: Once you've won a few times, you might want to increase the number of IDs you start with to make things more difficult. On the other hand, if you're finding it too difficult to win with eight characters, you can start with six or seven.