Directions: Sit facing each other, in a circle. To begin, take turns reading aloud, with each participant (there can be 2 or more) reading a chunk of text until a line break. Then, the person on their right will read the next chunk of text. Like so:

[participant 1 reads aloud:] “what you will need:”

[participant 2 reads aloud:] “a **single** 8 1/2 x 11 piece of paper for the entire group to share, or something roughly that size. This could be a blank page, an old takeout flyer, whatever’s handy.”

[participant 3, or back to 1 if you only have 2 people, reads aloud:] “somewhere comfy where everyone can sit, facing each other…a table, the floor, the grass. Again, whatever’s available will do.”

Got it? Good. We’ll ditch the brackets and quotation marks now; but let’s keep going with the read-aloud rotation, switching off at each line break. We will each also want access to our own copy of this play to read along with, either onscreen or printed out. Sharing will make things a little messy down the road.

Lastly, we’ll need a pocket of time to do the play, which is not exactly a “play-play”… whatever that meant—you know, Before. Like many plays (both play-plays and non-play-plays), this one may feel a touch more magical to perform at night. But if the sun is shining and that’s the time we have, that’s cool too.

Okay, have everything ready? Don’t turn the page/scroll the screen until you do.

Seriously, we can wait.

(for real though)

(yes, read parentheticals out loud too)
(oh also this would be a great time to silence our phones and turn off our wifi. i know. it's hard, especially now. but we’re attempting to create a theater space, or the feeling of a theater space. we can unwrap any hard candies now too if that gets us in the mood.)

okay, ready?
here

we

go.
The first thing we’re going to do is make a hat. You may have done this as a kid, or recently, or never. Here’s a reminder (or directions for the first time):

Whoever is closest to the sheet of paper, fold the paper in half, like so: then pass the paper to your right.

Next, take one of the folded corners and fold it toward the center (if it’s hard to guess the exact center, you can give yourself a helpful guide by creasing the folded paper first). Then fold down the other folded corner toward the center. Pass the paper to the right:

We’re almost there. The only thing left is the brims of the hat, which are the extra rectangular flappy bits hanging out under the triangle part. Take one of the flaps and fold it up over the triangle. Then flip the whole thing over and fold up the other flap. Voila! Hat!

It doesn’t matter how big or small the hat is. Whatever size paper we have will result in whatever size hat we get, which also happens to be exactly the right size. And if we suck at origami, and multiple attempts result in nothing that resembles the above, we’ll just fold the piece of paper in half and that’s fine too. There Are No Wrong Hats.

One of us gets to wear the hat first. Whoever can finish spelling the first name of the person to their immediate right, backward. Starting…now.
Nice job! The winner gets to wear the hat…which may just mean holding the hat in place with your hand. That’s cool. It looks jaunter that way.

Everyone take a look at each other. Say “hello.”

Take another look at each other. Make a funny face.

The person wearing the jaunty hat is the **Storyteller**. It could be the person reading this line, or someone else. As long as you’re the person wearing the hat, you’re the **Storyteller**. Hey **Storyteller**, please raise the hat as high as you can and in your most Serious Bad Actor Voice announce to the room “I AM THE STORYTELLER.”

The **Storyteller** is staging a coup! A fundamental restructuring of our outdated and arbitrary system of governance. The rules about who is reading this play are about to change—forever! The **Storyteller** is seizing control! No more rotating readers after each line break. Now, whoever is the **Storyteller** will read each paragraph until there is a new Storyteller. Starting…now!

**I AM THE STORYTELLER!** MWAHAHAAAAA! Just kidding. I am a benevolent Storyteller. My reign consists mostly of asking questions, nicely. Will you play with me?

Person to the right of me, will you name seven things you see in this room?

Thank you. Here’s a neat trick: once the hat touches a person’s head, by the magic of theater that person instantly becomes the new **Storyteller**. I’ll demonstrate. First, I give the hat to the person on my right to put on.
And like magic, there is now a new Storyteller, who is now the person reading this paragraph. Or if that transition didn't go smoothly the first time, is NOW the one reading. Basically hat=reading. And this new Storyteller is going to turn to the person on my right and ask “could you name, out loud, five colors in the room?”

Thank you. Now I'll give the hat to that person.

As the New New Storyteller, I'm going to ask the person to my right to “name, out loud, three shapes you see.”

Then I'll pass the hat to the right.

Quick, everyone make a funny face at someone else.

My arm may be getting tired from holding up this hat, so I don't have to hold it up to my head anymore. Instead I'll just hold it in my hands, however's comfortable. I'm going to ask the person on my right to close their eyes: “and with your eyes closed, take a moment to think about the first time you fell in love…It could be with a person, or a song, or a sweater. Whatever springs to mind first.”

“Open your eyes. Without speaking out loud, imagine you’re whispering the story of the first time you fell in love to the person on your right, who will imagine they can hear you. Maybe the story is beautiful. Or tragic. Or silly. It’s all okay. If ESP were possible you would definitely definitely be doing it right now. Possibly or probably ESP isn’t real, and they can’t hear what you’re beaming at them at all. That’s okay. Try anyway.”

Okay, now I'm going to pass the hat to the right.
It’s already done quite a bit of traveling in its short life, this hat. As the **Storyteller**, I’m now going to ask the person on my right to “close your eyes and take three deep breaths.”

“Think of someone you miss…the person you wish more than anything could be here right now, next to you…If you could send a message to that person right now, what would it be? Open your eyes and look in the eyes of the person on your right. If you feel comfortable, tell that person the message, meant for the far-away person. And if you’d rather not speak it out loud, that’s okay, you can use the imaginary-ESP-whisper instead.”

Now I’m going to pass the hat to the right.

Notice your breathing. Notice the breathing of the people around you. Is it slower than when we started? Faster? The same? Are we breathing together? Apart? There’s nothing to do with this observation other than observe it. No better or worse version of how we’re sitting here right now.

I’m going to place the hat in the center of the space, at the center of us. Delicately, so that if possible, it can stand up on its own. Because the rules are about to change again. I’m relinquishing control, to return to the rules of the beginning. We’ll take turns reading again, passing the baton to the right with each new paragraph. Starting now.

Imagine the hat is a campfire…Stretch out your hands…Imagine the heat of the fire, its flickering flame warming your fingertips. The crackle of the firewood as it’s consumed by flame. The smoke rising high, high, into the sky, beyond where the eye can see.

I’ve heard of a game children play. Where they form a shared thought by speaking one word at a time, stringing those words together like beads until a collective story emerges.
I wonder what it would be like to play this game at the end of the world. Or right now.

…Imagine we’re there, which is here. Or here, which is there. A hundred years from now, or a thousand. Sitting around a campfire at the end of the world. Nowhere to go. Nothing to do. Nothing to see but each other. Nothing to consume but time.

In this space, imagine rising from around the campfire the urge to remember something long lost: the story of a particular group of people who once sat right here, long ago, and in the strangest of times, took a moment to gather together and make a paper hat. Who read together a play that is not a play, for no other reason than to pass the time, or the joy of being together, or the simple curiosity to see What Might Be.

The story begins with one word. And in this particular moment, for this particular story, it will be the person who first put on the paper hat (all those minutes ago!) who speaks that first word. That person, the lucky one who first donned the hat, will be the first Storyteller, who speaks the first word of the story of these people. Raise your hand, first Storyteller…When you hear the word “Go” in a minute, speak a word. Just one. Don’t think or plan, just speak whatever word easily comes to mind. And after you have spoken, the person to your right will speak the next word in the story—again, without planning or thinking, just letting it emerge. And the next word will arise from the person to their right, and so on, and so on, and what will spill out of this sequence will be the story of this group of people, right now. It may be a comedy, or a tragedy. Full of joy, or rage, or something else altogether. There Are No Wrong Hats. Whatever this story is, it will rise up in the air on the living breath of the people telling it, hover there a moment…then be gone.
It will have existed, though. However briefly. That counts for something.

**Storyteller**, are you ready?

Here.

We.

Go.