A first tabletop adventure for kids: how to run one in 45 minutes

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How to run a kid's first tabletop role-playing adventure in 45 minutes, with free hero cards, a d20 dice roller, three gentle challenges and a happy ending.

A first tabletop adventure needs a hero for each player, one game master to describe the world, three challenges solved by talking and rolling a d20, and a happy ending. It fits in 45 minutes. Peabody's First Adventure has quests ready to run, a Hero Maker, a name shelf and an adventure dice roller, free through the end of 2026.

Before you play

1. Each player makes a hero with the Hero Maker: a name, something they're good at, something they carry.
2. Pick a quest: one from the hub, or one of the ten gentle adventure ideas, like finding a dragon's missing egg.
3. Get a d20, or open the dice roller.

The only rule you need

The game master says what the heroes see. A player says what their hero does. If it's easy, it happens. If it might go wrong, roll the d20: 10 or more and it works; under 10 and something funny goes wrong instead. A 20 is a natural 20: something amazing happens.

Three challenges

- Something to figure out: a locked door, a riddle, a torn map.
- Someone to talk to: a grumpy troll, a talking tree. Talking can solve anything.
- Something exciting: a river to cross, a storm, a chase.

Then the ending: the egg is found, the village cheers, and each player says what their hero does with the reward.

Tips for a young game master

Say "yes, and..." to clever ideas; give every player a moment to shine; describe what the heroes hear and smell; make failures funny, not sad. The game master tips for kids has ten. When the adventure ends, the story can go on: Peabody's library is full of them.

A sample scene

Here's how the first challenge of "the dragon's missing egg" might go:

Game master: "You reach the river. The bridge is broken in the middle; there's a gap as long as a car. A beaver is sitting on the bank, looking grumpy. What do you do?"

Player 1: "I ask the beaver what's wrong!"

Game master: "The beaver says someone stole the logs he was saving for his dam. He's too upset to help anyone."

Player 2: "We'll help him find the logs if he helps us fix the bridge!"

Game master: "Roll the d20 to see if he believes you." (A 14.) "He sniffs, wipes his nose and says: deal."

No fighting, no rules book, just a problem, a conversation and a roll. That's the heart of every tabletop adventure, and children pick it up within minutes of sitting down.

Making heroes matter

Give each hero something only they can do. The one who's good at climbing gets a tree; the one who carries rope gets a gap to cross; the one who talks to animals gets the beaver. Children light up when their choice on the Hero Maker turns out to be exactly what the story needs.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is this Dungeons & Dragons?

It uses a few ideas from the free System Reference Document that many tabletop games share, credited on the First Adventure page, with Peabody's own quests and words. No books to buy.

What age is it for?

About six and up as a player, with a grown-up as game master; by nine or ten, many children can run it themselves.

Is it scary?

Peabody's quests have no blood and nothing ends sadly. If a scene is too much for someone, change it: the shadow turns out to be a very big, very friendly cat.

How many players work best?

Two to four players and a game master. With more, split into two groups or let players team up on one hero.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/first-tabletop-adventure-for-kids