Magic tricks for Thanksgiving dinner, at the table

Peabody blog · Games · updated 2026-10-30

Ten magic tricks a child can do sitting at the Thanksgiving table with a spoon, a coin, a napkin, cards or nothing, which need a helper and which are quiet.

These are ten magic tricks a child can do sitting at the Thanksgiving table, with a spoon, a salt shaker, a coin, a napkin and a glass, a deck of cards, crayons or nothing at all. Nine are Apprentice level, which the Peabody Magic Shop defines as working the first try; one takes fifteen minutes of practice. Four need a helper, and the rest can be done to the whole table, or to nobody in particular while the grown-ups talk.

A long dinner is a strange stage. The audience is right there, sitting still, but they are also passing the gravy and catching up with each other. The tricks that suit it are short, small and done sitting down. The Magic Shop marks twenty-seven of its eighty tricks "Sit at a table", and I picked from those and from the ones that need nothing at all.

The ten

- Trick: The Salt Shaker Balance · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · You need: A salt shaker and a pinch of salt · Helper?: No
- Trick: The Bending Spoon · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · You need: A metal spoon · Helper?: No
- Trick: The Glass Vanish · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · You need: A coin, a plastic glass and a cloth napkin · Helper?: No
- Trick: The Forehead Coin · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 2 minutes · You need: A coin · Helper?: Yes
- Trick: Which Hand? · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · You need: A coin · Helper?: Yes
- Trick: The Countdown Card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · You need: A deck of cards · Helper?: No
- Trick: The 21 Card Trick · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 10 minutes · You need: A deck of cards · Helper?: Yes
- Trick: The Crayon Mind Reader · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · You need: A box of crayons · Helper?: Yes
- Trick: The Answer Is Always 3 · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 2 minutes · You need: Nothing · Helper?: No
- Trick: The Knuckle Calendar · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · You need: Nothing · Helper?: No

The ages come from the grades each trick is written for. "Helper" is the shop's own label for a trick that needs one person to come up and take part.

The quiet ones

These can happen while the conversation goes on around them.

The Salt Shaker Balance is the best dinner trick in the shop. A little salt sprinkled on the table, a shaker tipped onto its bottom edge, and it stays there leaning like a tiny tower. The spare grains get blown away and the ones holding it up are too small to see. The trick's own tip is to leave it standing for the rest of dinner, because people keep coming back to look at it. Another tip matters on a holiday: a dark table hides the grains, and a white tablecloth gives them away.

The Knuckle Calendar needs two fists. Somebody names a month and your child says how many days it has, every time, February included. It is a secret worth giving away afterwards, and the page says so.

The Bending Spoon is quiet apart from the groaning, which is the trick: the spoon does nothing, so the face does everything. Sit opposite the person watching, never beside them, because from the side the secret is obvious. At the end your child hands the straight spoon over to be checked.

The Glass Vanish is the one Conjurer trick here, and the reason to start practising a week early. A coin sits under an upside-down glass covered with a napkin. Your child says they will make the coin vanish, and it is the glass that goes instead. It ends up in their lap, so the page is firm on two things: sit square to the table, and use a plastic one, which lands quietly. A real glass does not.

The ones that need a helper

Grandparents make wonderful helpers. They take it seriously.

The Forehead Coin is a coin pressed onto somebody's forehead for ten seconds. They try to wiggle it off with their eyebrows, and the rest of the table can see the coin was taken away long ago. The page says it works brilliantly on grown-ups, and to stop as soon as they've had their laugh.

Which Hand? is honest about itself: it is reading people, so it will sometimes be wrong. The page suggests doing it three times and getting two right, which looks more like mind reading than three out of three.

The 21 Card Trick deals twenty-one cards into three columns, three times. The helper only ever says which column their card is in, and your child spells ABRACADABRA, one card per letter, to land on it. At ten minutes, it is the longest to learn of the nine Apprentice tricks here.

The Crayon Mind Reader suits the children's end of the table, where the crayons already are. A helper puts any crayon in your child's hands behind their back, and they name the colour.

The ones for everybody

The Countdown Card names a card before anybody chooses anything; then somebody picks a number between ten and twenty, and the count lands on it. The Answer Is Always 3 has the whole table doing four sums in their heads, and its page calls it the trick for a dinner table.

What stays off the table

Nothing here is eaten, and none of it involves drinking anything. The shop's ten Potion Lab tricks all carry the line "A potion is for looking at, not for drinking", and six of the ten are marked "A bit messy", so I would save them for the kitchen after dinner, on a tray. If your child wants more ideas between courses, Thanksgiving games for kids has games for the table and after dinner, and Pick me a trick will hand over a trick after four questions. Its second question is "What's on the table in front of you?", and "Cup, spoon or kitchen things" is one of the boxes.

Questions grown-ups ask

Won't magic at dinner be a distraction?

It can be, which is why most of these are quiet and short. One trick between courses works better than a show before the food. The Salt Shaker Balance and the Knuckle Calendar never interrupt anybody, and the Answer Is Always 3 takes two minutes to learn and needs nothing on the table.

Are any of these a problem with little cousins around?

Three use a coin: the Glass Vanish, the Forehead Coin and Which Hand?. Each page carries the shop's line that coins are a choking risk for little ones under four, so keep them off the floor and out of small hands, and pick them up straight after. None of the ten has a step for a grown-up.

What if it goes wrong in front of everybody?

Every trick has an out written on its page. If the Salt Shaker falls, say it got tired, sweep up the salt and move on. If the Glass Vanish clinks, laugh and say "well, now you know", then lift the napkin anyway. A family table is a forgiving audience, and a good out often gets a bigger laugh than the trick.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up. What a child learns stays on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody. For the slow hour after pie, the library

has stories to read aloud.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/thanksgiving-magic-tricks-for-kids