

MONSTER RECESS

An interactive performance on childhood, play, and shame
resilience

By Jacob Buttry

Set the Environment: There's a hidden courtyard sandwiched between two buildings. It forms sort of a right angle-shaped space with concrete/stone ground. There is a fountain with blue water in the NE portion of the space. There are bushes and greenery around the fountain and on other portions of the space. There is a set of doors at the north entrance of the space and to the side of the east entrance into the space. At the south end of the space there is an archway that leads out of the space. Under the archway is two ramps with a raised a landing area with a few benches on each side (and stairs at the south end).

Around the fountain is scattered a number of toys and playful objects. There are about a dozen balls, ranging from large rubber bouncing balls, to a medium robber ball, to smaller spiky and smooth balls. There are jump ropes, hula hoops, Playdoh bottles, hard candy, a skip it, and several "noodle" elastic toys. Several toys (particularly balls, jump ropes, and candy) sit inside small boxes without tops. Leaning on one of the boxes is a bright blue and yellow sign that has "PLAY!" painted on it.

The trees that run along the building behind the fountain have caution tape between them. The performer playing the Shame Monster has a few broken toys (deflated ball, bent butterfly net), a few larger foam dice, and (out of view) a bag of ring pop candies.

There are three actors in the space. Two who perform as Play Monsters, dressed in street clothes with blue loopy yarn around their face and clothes. The Play Monsters are always playing with toys or objects in the space. They have a younger-sounding voice (open to interpretation), a lack of embarrassment or shame in what they play with, and an openness about them. The third actor plays a Shame Monster with a red shirt, red mask, and the blue loopy yarn.

There is a book with the title "Book of Monster" on the cover in one area of the space. It is hidden away from plain view but accessible to find if looking intentionally. Around the book are some fruit snacks and some of the blue loopy yarn.

Section 1 - Recess Begins

The area is set. Shame Monster is hiding in his lair under the caution tape with his broken toys. The Play Monsters run in from the south entrance.

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

Recess time!!! Woohoo!!!

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Yay recess! Time to play!

The play monsters begin to play with the items, perhaps the ball perhaps the hula loop, etc. They play with one another for a bit

Emotion Design: This introduction intends to draw **attention** to the engagement through movement and sound. It intends to preview fun and playfulness, and open the door to playfulness for participants.

Section 2 - Play Monster Interactions

The Play Monsters have freedom to interact with any of the objects in the space however they see fit within the realm of "playfulness" and childhood. Some "go to" play lazzi could include tossing or bouncing around one of the big rubber balls, passing a smaller ball back and forth, throwing a ball against the wall, or skipping around with a hula loop.

While playing, the Play Monsters encourage each other, laugh, cheer for one another, and comfort each other if something "negative" happens (such as someone feeling bad about how they "well" they threw the ball). Sample lines include:

PLAY MONSTER Boop / SQRP

Great catch! / I'm having so much fun! / This is awesome! / That's okay-this is fun!

Emotion Design: This intends to increase feelings of **safety** in the space and dispel any feelings of shame or inferiority. It should make people feel a **desire to be included or to join** the play.

Section 3 - Invitation to Play

Begin Pathway #3A:

Play Monster BOOP sits near the fountain, perhaps playing with some of the toys. As people come by, he asks if they want to play and offers them various toys.

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Do you want to play with us? / Do you want to play with the hula hoop or the jump room? / We're having a great time playing, do you want to join?

[Play Monster SQRP will do this as well]

//INTERACTIVITY: People can select any toy and begin playing with it.//

End Pathway #3A.

Begin Pathway #3B:

//INTERACTIVITY: People can pass by the space and pick up items from the fountain uninvited. They might also join with existing play or games happening in the space.//

End Pathway #3B.

Begin Pathway #3C:

The Play Monsters BOOP and SQRP and/or other players have already begun to play with the toys in the space. Someone walks by. The Play Monsters keep playing but invite people to join:

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Do you want to play with us? / Do you want to join us? /
Want to toss the ball around with us?

End Pathway #3C.

Begin Pathway #3D:

Play Monster BOOP and/or SQRP goes slightly outside of the open play area to the curved part of the building to invite people to come play. They bring a ball or item to play.

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Do you want to play with me?

//*INTERACTIVITY*: People can choose to play or to pass. They might choose to play right there with just the play monster or the people nearby.//

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Do you want to join us over there? [pointing to the play area]

End Pathway #3D.

Emotion Design: All of these pathways have the emotion design goal for the player to feel **welcomed** and **included** when invited. To feel a sense of **belonging** when joining a group. To feel **playful** and **safely vulnerable** when engaging in public play with the colorful toys often associated with childhood and freedom to play.

Section 4 - Shame Monster Lazzi w/ Play Monsters

The Shame Monster interrupts the activities of the play monsters. The following are examples the Shame Monster can riff on, combine, etc.

Example 1 - Shame Dice

The Shame Monster runs in the middle of the play and throws down the colored dice in front of the Play Monster and other players nearby.

SHAME MONSTER

Shame dice! / Let's play the shame dice game! / It's time for shame dice! (*throws the dice down, counts the numbers aloud*) [x number] shames! Shame! Shame! Shame! Etc.

Possible *triggers*: This one is best during another moment of chaos/regrouping or with a less movement based game (such as Playdoh or hula hooping)

Example 2 - Net of Shame

The Shame Monster goes up to a Play Monster and puts the bent butterfly net on their shoulder.

SHAME MONSTER

I got you with my net of shame! Hahaha! Shame! / You have been captured by shame!

Possible **triggers**: This works best when people are standing in a circle passing around a ball or otherwise up and part of a group.

Example 3 - Taking & Shaming

The Shame Monster snatches a ball or other toy from one of the Play Monsters while they are using it.

SHAME MONSTER

You don't play right! You're bad at playing. This is my toy now.

Possible **triggers**: When there are multiple types of play happening in the space at once and taking a ball from a Play Monster will not greatly disrupt the other play happenin gin the space.

Example 4 - Yelling & Name Calling

The Shame Monster gets to a visible point (on the edge of the fountain, center of the play area) and starts saying things loudly at Play Monsters

SHAME MONSTER

You're not cool! / You're bad at playing! / You're a nerd!
/ You don't know what you're doing! / Shame! Shame! Shame!

Possible **triggers**: When none of the other options work well.

Example 5 - Shame Toys

The Shame Monster brings one of the deflated balls or other toys and gives it to a Play Monster, possibly taking the toy they are already playing with.

SHAME MONSTER

Here—you must play with the shame ball. That's how you play correctly! (*Shame Monster demonstrates "how to play" with the ball*)

PLAY MONSTER

(tries to play with the ball "correctly") Is this right? / I don't want to play that way, I want to play a different way. / Why do I have to play this way

SHAME MONSTER

No, that's not right! (the Shame Monster demonstrates again how to play or gets frustrated and leaves) / But you have to play the shame way! / Because it's the shame way and that's the only good way to play!

Possible **triggers**: When the Play Monster is using a ball or is doing something in view of others but perhaps not directly with others.

Emotion Design: All of these examples have the emotion design of creating **curiosity** about the shame monster, **concern** for the play monsters, **distanced discomfort** to the playful utopia, and **interest** in a possible challenge.

Section 5 - Play Monster Recovery Lazzi

Trigger: After one Play Monster (here, Play Monster SQRP) is shamed by the Shame Monster, another Play Monster (here Shame Monster Boop) models some of the shame resilience and comfort techniques.

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

The Shame Monster made me feel really bad / Am I bad at playing? / I'm really sad now / I feel really weird—I don't know what it is but I don't like it and it feels bad

PLAY MONSTER Boop

I think maybe you also feel shame

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

Oh no, I think I do feel shame! That's what this is! I'm feeling shame and it doesn't feel good, Play Monster boop

PLAY MONSTER Boop

That must feel really bad! I'm sorry Play Monster. It really hurts to be made fun of for the way you play

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

Yes, it really does.

PLAY MONSTER Boop

Do you want to keep playing together?

While the specifics might change, this should reflect at least one of the following: (1) identifying feelings of shame, (2) giving or receiving empathy, or (3) sharing shame feelings with someone else.

Emotion Design: Players should sense **hope**.

Section 6 - Shame Monster Lazzi w/ Players

The Shame Monster might also interrupt activities/play of the players more directly. These interruptions will not involve physical contact and will be much more diluted for shame. Examples for riffing include:

Example 1 - Sneering

The Shame Monster passes players playing with the toys / objects and looks at them judgmentally and makes a (somewhat funny) sneering sound, and then walks away.

Example 2 - Don't Play Like That

The Shame Monster goes up to someone playing and says

SHAME MONSTER

You're not playing right! / That's not the right way to play. / Let's play the shame way!

The Shame Monster might riff on Example 5 in Section 4 for this lazzi as well.

Example 3 - Wind Noise Maker of Shame

The Shame Monster emerges while swinging around a tube that makes wind noises.

SHAME MONSTER

Shame! Shame! Shame!

Possible **triggers**: Suitable for busy times in the space when play monsters are engaged.

Emotion Design: Players should experience **distanced (and recognizably absurd) whispers of shame**. They should also feel a bit **uncomfortable** but with a sense of **silliness** about the situation.

Section 7 - Shame Monster Makes Play Monster Cry

The Shame Monster repeats lazzi from Section 4 repeatedly. After 3 instances of direct attacks (preferably ones that build a bit in intensity) directed at one of the play monsters (starting with Play Monster SQRP), the Play Monster falls to the ground and becomes upset and begins to cry.

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

The Shame Monster keeps shaming me! (*upset on the ground*) / I feel really upset. / This is starting to make me feel shame. / I don't feel like I can keep playing here as much. / I want the shame monster to stop shaming me.

//**INTERACTIVITY**: Players can choose to comfort the play monster.//

IF players comfort the play monster:

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

Thanks for helping me feel better. The Shame Monster makes playing hard for me. Do you want to hear about something I heard could help make the Shame Monster stop being so mean?

//**INTERACTIVITY**: Players can choose yes or no.//

Begin **Pathway #7A**:

Trigger: Player says "yes"

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

Well, there's a Book of Monster around here somewhere that talks all about the Shame Monster and how we can make him stop shaming people. But, the Shame Monster hid it, and

only humans can open it. Do you want to help me find it and open it?

//*INTERACTIVITY*: Players can choose yes or no. If no, skip to Pathway #7B. If yes, Play Monster encourages them to look for it or fields any follow-up questions. Players then look for Book of Monster.//

End Pathway #7A.

Begin Pathway #7B:

Trigger: Player says "no"

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

That's okay. What to keep playing?

End Pathway #7B.

Emotion Design: Player should feel **empathic concern** for the Play Monsters. They should feel **motivated** to help them and **curious** about the mystical or fantastical idea of a "Book of Monster." They should also now feel **invested** in the narrative of the world and the fate of the Play Monsters.

Section 8 - Shame Monster Book Hiding

Trigger for this section: If a player asks the Shame Monster where the Book of Monster is.

PLAYER

Do you know where a "Book of Monster" is? I heard you hid it somewhere around here.

Shame Monster can respond to this with one of three options.

Example 1 - Deny, Deny, Deny

SHAME MONSTER

What? No! I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know about any Book of Monster.

Example 2 - It's Not Over There

SHAME MONSTER

Book of Monster? Hmm. I don't know. I don't think I know much. But if I did, it's definitely *not* over there! (*Shame Monster points in the direction of the Book of Monster*)

Example 3 - Shame Dice

SHAME MONSTER

I may or may not know where a Book of Monster is. But, I'd only tell you if you win a game of Shame Dice with me. I roll a dice, and you roll a dice (*hands player one of the shame dice*). If the total is even, I tell you where the Book of Monster is. If it's odd, I shame you with the shame dice. You wanna do shame dice?

//*INTERACTIVITY*: Players can choose yes or no.//

Emotion Design: The player should feel **challenged** appropriately.

Section 9 - Book & Play Monster

Begin *Pathway #9A*:

Trigger: If the player returns with the book of monster or tells a Play Monster that they found it, the Play Monster pulls them to the side to somewhere more "private" and gives them the key to open it:

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

This key will open the book of Monster. Take one item from inside, lock it back up and hide it before the shame Monster can get to it! Then bring the key back to me!

End *Pathway #9A*.

Begin *Pathway #9B*:

Trigger: If the player asks for more information about the Book of Monster either because they cannot find it or have not yet gone through Section 7:

PLAY MONSTER SQRP

The Shame Monster hid it around here somewhere, but I don't know where it is. / It has a lot of information about the origins of the Shame Monster. / You could ask the Shame Monster, but I don't think he can help you all that much because he's not very nice. /

End Pathway #9B.

Emotion Design: For Pathway #9A, players should feel **accomplished** and **excited** to continue forward in anticipating opening the Book of Monster. For Pathway #9B, players should feel **challenged** but **supported**.

Section 10 - Shame Monster & Book Players Part 1

Once the player, gets the Book of Monster, they see the pamphlet "The Legend of the Shame Monster" (Appendix A).

//*INTERACTIVITY*: Players to take the challenge or not. If not, skip to section 13 or to a previous section (such as section 3).//

PLAYER

"I feel shame sometimes too"

SHAME MONSTER

Interesting. I'm listening.

Begin Pathway #10a

Trigger: If the participant engages the shame monster with an *unsuccessful* tactic.

These unsuccessful tactics and Shame Monster responses include:

Example 1 - Direct Sharing of Clues

PLAYER

You can trust me / Your shame monster was lying to you

Example 2 - Shaming the Shame Monster

This includes the player using name calling, saying "shame" back to the Shame Monster, making a lot of fun of the shame monster, etc. This does NOT necessarily include telling the shame monster

they are being mean or hurting people or their feelings, unless this is coated in shame-based language or “you’re a bad person” statements.

Example 3 - Bribing the Shame Monster

This includes players trying to get the Shame Monster to feel better by giving them things or distracting them without engaging the material.

Example 4 - Forcing Vulnerability

Players who coerce the shame monster into telling them things or start a type of interrogation do not meet the level of success.

Example 5 - Overly Centering Personal Experiences

Players who lecture the shame monster about shame too deeply or who center their own personal experiences so extensively that they do not listen to the shame monster do not “level up.”

End Pathway #10a.

Begin Pathway #10b

Trigger: If the participant engages the shame monster with a *successful* tactic. Successful tactics include:

Requirement #1: Earn Trust of Shame Monster

After using the password (“I feel shame sometimes too”), the player uses tactics such as talking about their own experiences, emphasizing non-judgment of the shame monster, listening to what the Shame Monster says, and using nonverbal body language (eye contact, focused body attention) to indicate human treatment of the shame monster.

If they achieve this, the Shame Monster will give the more information about their shame experiences with Falcon.

SHAME MONSTER

Falcon made me feel really bad because he said I didn’t play right. And now I don’t like playing anymore.

Requirement #2: Empathize with Shame Monster

Player might use tactics such as:

- Listening
- Reflecting feelings back to the shame monster

- Offering support or a sense of understanding or affirmation

Requirement #3: Help Shame Monster Know Falcon Lied

Tactics might include:

- Encourage Shame Monster that however they want to play is cool and great
- Encourage Shame Monster that they can be a great play monster
- Tell Shame Monster that any specific things they share about what Falcon said is not true and then affirm something in opposition to that statement

Shame Monster includes some of the following resistances to increase the challenge for the player.

Resistance 1 - Doubting that Falcon Lied

SHAME MONSTER

Well how do you know that's true? I think Falcon knows what he's talking about. I'm probably not good at playing.

Resistance 2 - Mistrust

SHAME MONSTER

Why should I talk to you about this? You don't know me and I don't know you.

Resistance 3 - Feeling Overwhelm

SHAME MONSTER

This feeling stuff is too much. Shame is much easier so I just want to feel that!

When players successfully counter the resistances, skip to Section 12.

End Pathway #10b.

Emotion Design: Players should feel **empathy**. They should also feel **growth** in their skills in listening, connecting, and critical thinking.

Section 11 - Shame Monster & Book Obstacles

Trigger: There is a big line of people wanting to talk to the Shame Monster.

The Shame Monster may throw in obstacles to a successful achievement to using the Book of Monster to rid the playground of shame. This offers an opportunity for the Shame Monster to get out of long conversations to interact with other people or it can add difficulty for people who may enter more 'skilled' and might want an extra challenge.

Example 1 - Ask the Play Monster

SHAME MONSTER

This doesn't make any sense to me. I don't get play / friendship / kindness / empathy. Could you ask a Play Monster to tell me what "[insert selected word]" means in our monster language?

//INTERACTIVITY: Players chooses to do this or not. If they approach play monster and ask://

PLAY MONSTER

Oh! That's "doodledorf." Shame Monster will know what that means. Thanks for asking!

//INTERACTIVITY: Players can choose whether to return to the Shame Monster or not. If they do, the password will allow them to pick back up.//

Example 2 - Get Me a Picture

SHAME MONSTER

I don't buy what you're saying. It's confusing to me! And I won't talk to you any more unless you can get me a picture of what it looks like when people are playing together / are friends.

//INTERACTIVITY: Players can choose whether to pursue this task. If they do it, they can return to the Shame Monster, and showing them the photo will allow them to pick back up.//

Emotion Design: To add additional **challenge** and interaction with other people in the space. It widens **connection** with others in the space, increases **investment**, and makes people feel **helpful**.

Section 12 - Cracks in Shame

Trigger: Once the player has successfully completed all 3 requirements in Pathway #10B, the Shame Monster gives some sort of affirmation that they have taken what the player as said to heart (even though the Shame Monster has not given a radical transformation).

SHAME MONSTER

Okay, maybe I can think more about frieeendship /
plaaaaying. / This has given me a lot to think about. /
Maybe I can play. / Maybe I don't have to listen to Falcon.
/ Maybe I can be friends with the Play Monsters.

The Shame Monster offers the reward of a ring pop to the players.

SHAME MONSTER

I want to give you this Shame Friendship Ring. Thanks for talking to me. Maybe we can be shame friends.

//**INTERACTIVITY:** Players can finish their conversation with the Shame Monster. From here, players either go back to playing or leave the experience (Section 13).//

Emotion Design: Players feel **victory** and **satisfaction**. They feel **joy** for having aided the Shame Monster. They might feel **introspection** by indirectly tying this or associating it with some of their own experiences.

Section 13 - Exit Items

Trigger: When someone leaves the experience or performance site.

PLAY MONSTER

Thanks for playing with us! Have a good day!

Emotion Design: Players feel **unconditional acceptance**.

APPENDIX A: THE LEGEND OF THE SHAME MONSTER

THE LEGEND OF THE SHAME MONSTER

Once upon a time, all the play monsters lived together in harmony. They played fun games and spread their playfulness around the world. Then, one day, one of the play monsters started making fun of the other play monsters. This monster called them names, told them their ways of playing were dumb, and heaped shame upon them. This play monster became the original and supreme SHAME monster named Falcon.

Since this fateful day, Falcon has preyed on vulnerable play monsters—those who haven't learned the tools to be resilient to shame.

The ASU Shame Monster was once a play monster, but Falcon shamed them for their playing so much that they became a shame monster, too. But, the ASU Shame Monster can become a play monster again, but he needs the help of humans like you.

Here is your task to rid recess of shame: First, tell the shame monster "I feel shame sometimes, too." This is the password to get them to listen to you. Then, you must:

1. In your own way, show the shame monster that they can trust you to share about their shame experiences
2. Empathize with the shame monster
3. Help the shame monster know that Falcon lied to him

Then, the shame monster will give you an Anti-Shame Ring (he often calls it a Shame Ring, but it's really an Anti-Shame Ring) and he might play with you! Ask a Play Monster if you have any questions!