

Pandora's Box

A Timeless Game of Psychology and Curiosity by Ben Stanley

To Hesiod and the Ancient Greeks, womanhood began with Pandora. Her very name meant she was gifted in every way by the gods: beautiful, wise, musical, persuasive, confident . . . and curious. She was given a jar that contained all of the world's evils, and also one good spirit, Hope. In the end, she chose to open it, and set the course for humanity.



Components and Set-up

Pandora's Box can be played with any number of players greater than two. It requires a box (*Pandora's Box*), three white stones per player, three black stones per player, and one extra white stone (the *Hope Stone*).

Choose a player randomly to begin. One option: place a white stone and several black stones in the box, and have the players draw blindly. Whoever gets the white stone goes first.

Give each player three white stones and three black stones to start. Place *Pandora's Box* in center of the play area. Show the *Hope Stone* to the players, tell them the legend of Pandora, and drop the *Hope Stone* into *Pandora's Box*, as the only stone in the box at the start of the game.

Objective

At the end of the game, players want to have as many white stones (good spirits) and as few black stones (evil spirits) in their hands as possible. White stones are worth points, and each black stone costs the possessing player a point.

Gameplay

Players may look at the stones in their own hands, but should conceal those stones from other players and may never look inside *Pandora's Box* until it opens (at the end of the game).

Play rotates clockwise.

1. On a player's turn, she must first drop one stone from her hand into *Pandora's Box*. This contribution to the box can be either color (black or white), but must come from the player's hand. Do not let the other players see the color!
2. After adding a stone, the player *may* switch her entire hand of remaining stones with the entire hand of remaining stones of any other player. This action is optional, but if she chooses to swap, she gives her entire hand of stones to a different player, and that player *must* give her entire hand of stones in return. Try not to let any other players see the colors of the stones that are swapped in this way.
3. If the stone that a player added to *Pandora's Box* was her last stone, she cannot swap with another player (as she has nothing to swap), and instead she must open *Pandora's Box*, taking all the stones in the box into her hand, and ending the game.

Game End and Scoring

When a player has placed her final stone into *Pandora's Box*, she must open the box, revealing and taking its contents. This ends the game. All players reveal their hands. Each player gets one point for each white stone they have, and loses one point for each black stone. The *Hope Stone* is worth one point per player in the game (e.g. five points in a five player game)! The player with the most points wins the game. If there is a tie, the player who opened *Pandora's Box*, or who is closest to that player in turn order, among those who tied, wins the game. In other words, if multiple players tie for the win, the one among them who just opened the box, or would be next to have a turn had the game not ended, wins the game.

Strategy Tips

Pandora's Box is about psychology. Try to understand the other players in the game. Are they likely to keep white stones and rid themselves of all black stones? If so, they may have a good hand for the end of the game, and you should swap with them when you get a chance. But perhaps they are collecting black stones and adding white stones to *Pandora's Box*? If so, they may be hoping to swap hands at any moment, or they may be trying to plan the game so that they get to open *Pandora's Box*! If a person does not swap her hand, does that mean she is collecting white stones and does not want to give them up, or is she trying to mislead the other players?

Pay attention to people's reactions when they see the stones they receive after a swap. Try to time the ending of the game so that you have an advantage, and the game ends when you have some white stones and no black ones. Use your chances to swap stones to understand other players' strategies and gather information.

Also keep in mind that the tie-breaker condition matters. If you pass a single stone to another player, consider carefully who that will be: someone right after you, and you will get to keep your current hand, but will lose a tie if there is one; someone far away, and you risk having someone take your hand of stones, but you have better position in a tie.

Have fun!

Designer Notes

* *Pandora's Box* is best played with a box that can be opened to reveal its contents, but has a small hole in the top so that players can easily add a stone to the box without accidentally revealing the contents (or the stone they are adding) to any players.

* Go stones are a great option for playing the game. The *Hope Stone* can be marked, or just remembered, or players could place several "hope stones" (one for each player) into the box at the start and count them just like every other white stone.

* *Pandora's Box* is offered as an entry to the Thousand Year Game Design Challenge:
<http://www.thousandyeargame.com>

* *Pandora's Box* is dedicated to my incredible wife, Rebekah, who is, as Pandora of myth, blessed with beauty, wisdom, brilliance, grace, music, humor, confidence, and curiosity.