MERITOCRACY

The Print-and-Play Game

Players: 2-4
Age Range: 10+
Play Time: 20-40 minutes

A GAME ABOUT MAKING IT

Start from different family backgrounds and compete to build the most wealth. Make strategic decisions about work, education, and investment while navigating economic opportunities and setbacks.

- Will you invest your money for long-term gains or develop new skills to improve your wages?

- Will you choose the safe route with modest rewards or the risky path with potential for greater returns — or devastating losses?

- In the end: which players will prosper — and which will struggle?

COMPONENTS

Included:

Game Board: Branching path with illustrated spaces
Merit Tokens: 12 tokens representing advantages
Learn Tokens: 12 tokens representing knowledge and learned skills
Share Tokens: 24 tokens representing ownership shares
Freedom Dollars: currency in denominations of $1, $5, $10, $20 and $50
Start Cards: 8 cards representing different family backgrounds
Chance Cards: 24 cards with varied economic outcomes
Rule Book: Setup and gameplay instructions with discussion guide

Not Included:

Six-Sided Dice: 1
Character Tokens: 4 distinct player pieces

Setup

1. Place the game board in the center of the play area

2. Each player selects a Character Token*

3. Shuffle the Start cards and deal one to each player

4. Each player receives:
   - The starting money shown on their Start Card
   - The number of Merit Tokens shown

5. Place all player tokens on START

6. Shuffle the Chance cards and place them face down

7. The youngest player goes first, then play continues clockwise

*Not included. Be creative!

Everyone Starts Somewhere!

Gameplay

TURN SEQUENCE

1. Roll one six-sided die
2. Move your token the number of spaces shown
3. Follow the instructions on the space where you land
4. Play passes to the next player

BANKRUPTCY

- A player who cannot pay a debt enters Bankruptcy
- The player loses all money and all Share Tokens
- The player loses one Merit Tokens (if you have any)
- If a debt is owed to another player, that player is paid out
- All other debts are cancelled

After Bankruptcy, continue playing. You can still work and rebuild.

WINNING THE GAME

- The game ends when all players cross the finish line.
- Final scoring:
  - Count all your money
  - Add $4 for each Share Token you own
- The player with the highest total wins.

Board Spaces

WORK
- Collect $3.
- Add $3 for each Merit Token you have.
- Add $3 for each Learn Token you have.

Merit Tokens and Learn Tokens increase your earning power.

CHANCE
- Draw a Chance card and follow its instructions.
- If you run out of cards, reshuffle the deck.

Economic events affect players differently based on their resources.

LEARN
- You may pay $4 to gain a Learn Token.
- Each player may hold up to 3 Learn Tokens.

Learn Tokens represent education, training, and professional development.

INVEST
- You may buy Share Tokens for $5 each.
- Each player may hold up to 5 Share Tokens.
- If any player rolls a 6 or lands on INVEST, all players collect $1 per SHARE.

Shares generate passive income throughout the game.

OPTION
Choose ONE or pass:
- **INVEST**: Buy Share Tokens for $4 each.
- **LEARN**: Pay $3 to gain a Learn Token.

Option spaces are time-sensitive opportunities to invest in your future at a slight discount.

Bonus Rules (Optional)
For Experienced Players

I OWE YOU ONE

- Players with extra money can lend to other players.
- The borrower must pay back the original amount plus $1 interest before the end of the game (or enter Bankruptcy).

BETTER TOGETHER

- Two players agree to combine their money and Merit Tokens for one round.
- They share all gains and losses during that round.

LUCKED OUT

- To begin your turn, roll 2 dice instead of 1.
- Choose 1 die and move that number of spaces.

BREAD AND ROSES

- Once per game, you may use an Option space to join a labor union for $3.
- Gain 1 Merit Token.

Collective bargaining builds power and connections.

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

- For a more competitive game, draw one Start card for all players.
- Everyone begins with the same resources.

Choose a Strategy (Optional)

SKILL INVESTOR

- Prioritize Learn Tokens for consistent work income.
- Requires upfront investment but generates steady returns over time.

WEALTH BUILDER

- Buy Shares early and often.
- Passive income compounds throughout the game.
- Works best with higher starting capital and the ability to weather short-term losses.

RISK TAKER

- Take the risky paths and land on Chance spaces.
- High variance—potential for big payouts or devastating setbacks.
- Easier to recover from losses if you have Merit Tokens as a safety net.

COOPERATIVE PLAY

- Form strategic alliances using "Better Together" and lending.
- Pool resources to overcome initial disadvantages.
- Share both risks and rewards.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Players with more starting resources have more strategic flexibility. Players with fewer resources need to balance risk carefully—a single bad Chance card can be devastating without a financial cushion.

Taking risks has different consequences depending on your safety net. Education and investment cost money upfront but pay off over time.

Discussion Questions (Optional)

AFTER THE GAME: REFLECTION

- How did your starting position shape your choices throughout the game?
- Which mattered more: your decisions or your starting resources?
- Did the wealth gap between players grow or shrink as the game progressed? Why?
- What risks could you afford to take? What risks felt too dangerous?
- Were there moments you couldn't afford to do something you wanted to do?
- If you played again with the same starting position, would you make different choices?
- What does the title "Meritocracy" mean to you after playing this game?

FOR CLASSROOM & GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- If we played this 100 times, which starting positions would consistently end up ahead? Why?
- Which game mechanics felt realistic? Which felt exaggerated or simplified?
- When players say "just work harder" or "make better choices," what does the game suggest about those statements?
- How do the game's systems reflect economic patterns you observe in real life?
- What role did luck play? What role did strategy play? What role did starting position play?
- How do early advantages compound over time in the game? Where do you see similar patterns outside the game?

ABOUT THIS GAME

Meritocracy simulates economic mobility through strategic choices, skill development, investment, and random events. Players start from different family backgrounds—some with significant resources and social capital, others with very little—and compete to build wealth.

The game explores how starting resources, inherited advantages, education costs, passive income, risk tolerance, and economic shocks interact to shape financial outcomes.

MERITOCRACY

The Board Game

START | WORK | LEARN | CHANCE | WORK | INVEST | WORK

CHANCE | LEARN | WORK | OPTION | WORK | CHANCE

WORK | | INVEST | WORK | CHOOSE YOUR PATH | INVEST

INVEST | | OPTION | | OPTION

CHANCE | SAFE PATH | | | WORK | RISKY PATH

WORK | | LEARN | | CHANCE

FINISH | LAND ON OR BEYOND | WORK | OPTION | INVEST | WORK

The Long Game (Optional)

LEARN WORK OPTION INVEST LEARN WORK

CHANCE | CHANCE WORK CHANCE INVEST | **SAFE PATH** | INVEST LEARN WORK INVEST

INVEST | **CHOOSE YOUR PATH** | LEARN

OPTION | **RISKY PATH**

WORK

CHANCE LEARN | WORK CHANCE INVEST CHANCE WORK

CHOOSE YOUR PATH

SAFE PATH

RISKY PATH

Board spaces (clockwise):

LEARN · WORK · CHANCE · WORK · INVEST · OPTION · WORK

LEARN · CHANCE · WORK · CHANCE · INVEST · OPTION · WORK

CHANCE · INVEST · LEARN · WORK · CHANCE · OPTION

WORK · LEARN · WORK · INVEST · LEARN · WORK · INVEST

Golden Ticket Start

$75
3 MERIT TOKENS

Your family has a large house in an exclusive neighborhood with an extensive professional network.

VIP Head Start

$25
2 MERIT TOKENS

Your family is financially comfortable with access to private schools and summer enrichment programs.

Middle Class Start

$12
1 MERIT TOKEN

Your family has stable income, owns a home, and can afford occasional treats and activities.

Working Family Start

$10
0 MERIT TOKENS

Your parents work full-time jobs to cover expenses with little left over for extras.

Uphill Battle Start

$5
0 MERIT TOKENS

Your family struggles to make ends meet and worries about paying bills and buying groceries.

Family Business Start

$15
1 MERIT TOKEN

Your family owns a small business where everyone helps out and learns the trade.

Fresh Chance Start

$6
0 MERIT TOKEN

Your family recently moved to a new city where everything is different and unfamiliar.
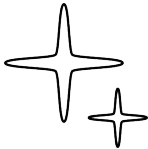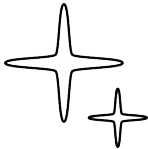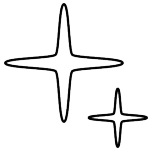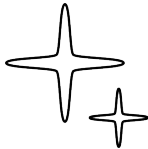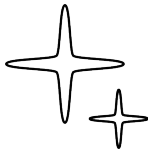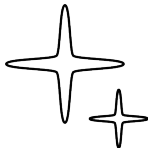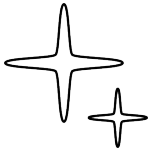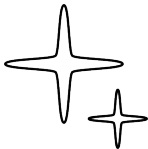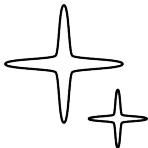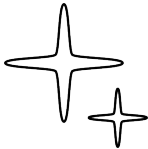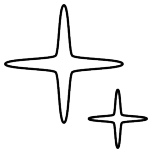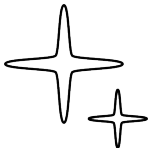
Grow up Fast Start

$7
0 MERIT TOKENS

You help take care of your siblings while your parent works to support the family.

* * Chance * *

Car Repairs
Pay $4.

Broken Laptop
Pay $2.

Wedding Expenses
Pay $3.

Market Crash
All players lose $2 per share.

Side Hustle Success
Collect $5.
Add $2 for each Learn Token.

Economic Recession
Everyone loses half their money. If you have $50, gain $5 instead.

Grandparent Gift
Collect $1.
Add $2 for each Merit Token.

Investment Opportunity
If you have at least $20, collect $5.

Viral Video
Roll again.
If you roll a 1, collect $10.
If you roll a 2, collect $20.

Garage Sale
Collect $3.
If you have $20, collect $6 instead.

Lost Coat
If you have 0 Merit Tokens, pay $1 to replace it (can't borrow from family).

Birthday Party
Collect $2.
Add $1 for each Merit Token.

Community Help
The player with the least money collects $2.

Super Lottery Winner
Roll Again.
If you roll a 5, collect $50.

Academic Scholarship
Gain 1 Learn Token.

Medical Emergency
Pay $6. If you have a Merit Token, pay $2 instead (health insurance).

Family Inheritance
Collect $2.
Add $6 for each Merit Token.

Traffic Ticket
Pay $2. If you have 0-1 Merit Tokens, pay $4 instead (legal fees).

Music Lessons
Pay $2.

Hospital Stay
Pay $10. If you have a Merit Token, pay $3 instead (health insurance).

Networking Event
Gain 1 Merit Token.

Family Friends
Gain 1 Merit Token.

Tech Company Success
Collect $5 per share.

Overdraft Fee
Pay $1. If you have at least $10, pay nothing.

LEARN TOKEN — Public Speaking

LEARN TOKEN — Market Insight

LEARN TOKEN — Business Management

LEARN TOKEN — Healthcare Training

LEARN TOKEN — Technical Certification

LEARN TOKEN — Foreign Language

LEARN TOKEN — Sales Experience

LEARN TOKEN — Legal Expertise

LEARN TOKEN — Financial Literacy

LEARN TOKEN — Higher Education

LEARN TOKEN — Skilled Trade

LEARN TOKEN — STEM Knowledge

MERIT TOKEN — Elite Social Circle

MERIT TOKEN — Private School

MERIT TOKEN — Private Tutoring

MERIT TOKEN — Natural Charisma

MERIT TOKEN — College Fund

MERIT TOKEN — Trust Fund

MERIT TOKEN — Credit History

MERIT TOKEN — Stable Housing

MERIT TOKEN — Family Contacts

MERIT TOKEN — Perfect Health

MERIT TOKEN — Cultural Capital

MERIT TOKEN — Legal Protection

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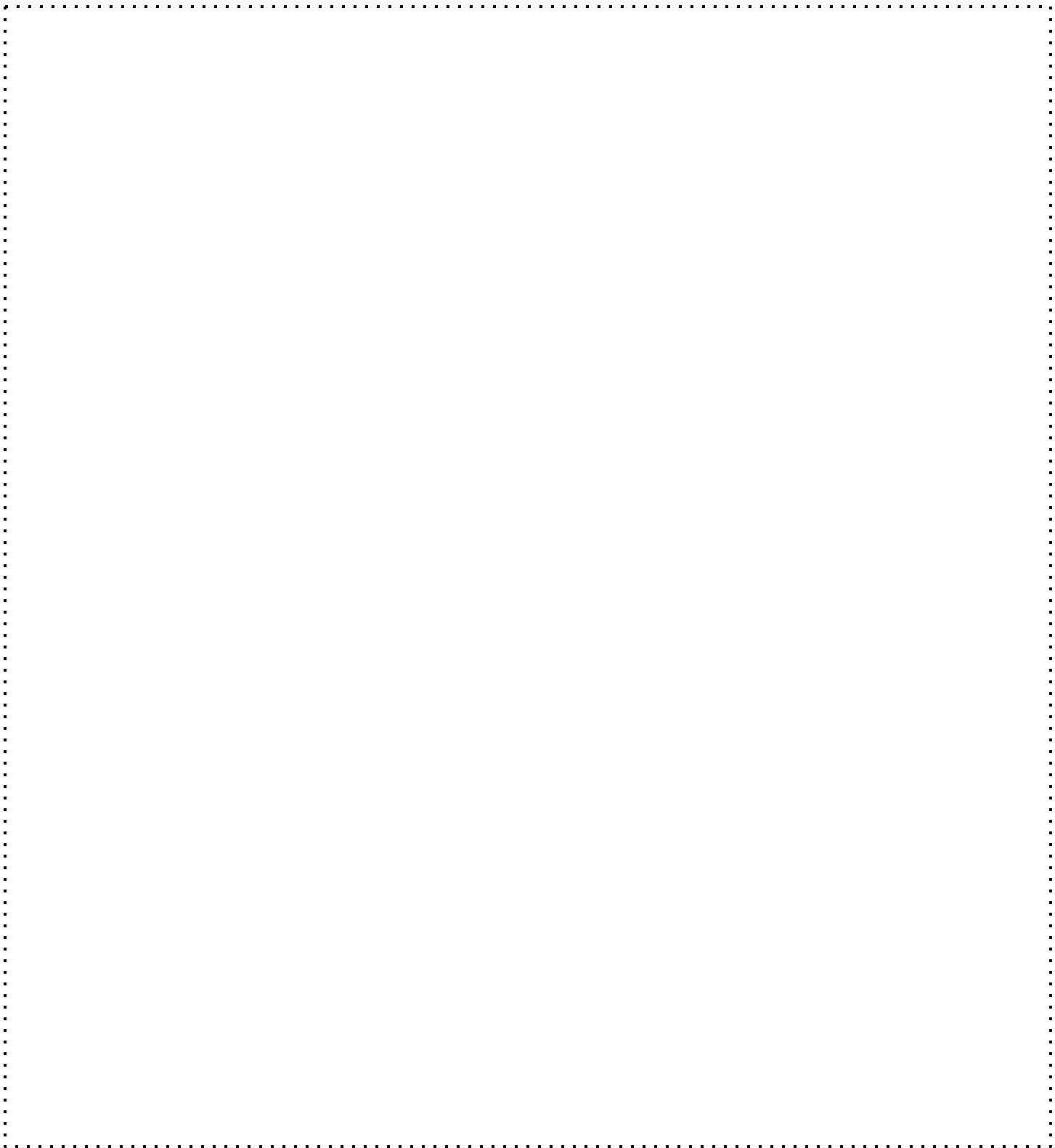
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House Rules