

Story for performance #657  
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Source: Steve Holland, 'Cut out bullying over Iraq, Democrats tell defiant Bush', *The Sun-Herald* in Sydney Morning Herald online, 08/04/07.

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Do you remember the story about the Japanese businessman who used the children's game Scissors, Paper, Rock to decide which fine art auction house he'd ask to sell his \$20 million art collection?

You know the game—you and another person clench a fist and in unison shake it three times saying 'scissors, paper, rock'. On the third shake, 'rock', you either leave your hand in a fist shape, which is a rock, open your fingers and snip them like scissors, or open your palm flat, like a piece of paper.

The rock can break the scissors, so wins. However, the scissors can cut the paper, but the paper can wrap the rock.

Apparently the Japanese businessman used this game to help him make many difficult business decisions. Where selling his art was concerned, he thought the auction houses of Sotheby's and Christie's were equally good, so he asked them to play Scissors, Paper, Rock and the winner would get the job.

According to reports Sotheby's didn't prepare for the meet and took a chance, whereas Christie's did a little research, asking an employee's female children about the psychology of the game. 'Everyone starts with scissors,' they were reported as saying, 'because rock was too obvious and scissors beat paper.'

I thought the research a little narrow, and felt the study sample needed to be broadened to include boys. So I asked a 10—and 12-year-old boy who happened to be close at hand.

Like the Japanese businessman, they said they never played it as a game, but to make a decision—who would be in charge of the shared football for the day or who would get to go on the computer first, for instance.

The boys said rock or scissors were the most popular choices. They said lazier children tended to choose rock because having shaken their hand in the shape of a fist three times at the start of the game, they couldn't be bothered to change the shape of their hand on the third shake.

They said cleverer children chose scissors—they couldn't tell me why, other than that they 'thought about the game'. So when these two boys played, if they perceived their opposition as lazy and most likely to do 'rock', they'd finish their third shake on 'paper' to wrap up the opposition's 'rock'. If the opposition was perceived as smart and so most likely do 'scissors', these two boys would do 'rock' to smash the scissors.

Anyway, the boys said, they didn't play Scissors, Paper, Rock anymore—they preferred to play knuckles, whereby they each held one hand in a fist shape, their knuckles touching, and tried to hit each other with their knuckles.

The winner was the one who didn't 'woos out' first.

But back to the Japanese businessman's art collection. Christie's won—they chose 'scissors', while Sotheby's chose 'paper'. Scissors cuts paper. Who really knows why they chose either—but the innocent game clearly has far-reaching consequences.

It's not only employed by kids and Japanese businessmen, but also by lawyers and politicians, and who knows who else? A federal court judge, his gown flapping with frustration, apparently ordered opposing barristers, who couldn't agree on the merest detail in a lawsuit, to settle their dispute by playing the game.

And today, on Easter Sunday, as children groan, stuffed with chocolate eggs, and Christians leave church after celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, from what I understand in an article in the *Sun-Herald* newspaper, Professor Stephen Hess, an academic from George Washington University in the US, likens the Democrats and the Republicans, in their stance on American troops in Iraq, to playing a game of Scissors, Paper, Rock.

The Republicans are pressuring the Democrats to approve more money—100 billion US dollars—to fund the Iraq war without attaching a troop pullout timetable. Rock.

The Democrats say it's time the president showed respect to the American people who voted overwhelmingly to leave Iraq. Paper.

The Republicans say if the Democrats don't approve the money to fund the war, the resulting delay could lead to longer tours of duty for the troops in Iraq. Scissors.

The Democrats want to stand up for their troops, and say the best way to do that is to get them out of the middle of a civil war in Iraq. Rock.

White House officials reckon the public will side with the president. Paper. The Democrats believe they have the upper hand because Congressional elections last November that catapulted them to power were seen as a referendum on the Iraq war. Scissors.

But Professor Hess, as reported in the *Sun-Herald*, says he sees a scenario in which the Democrats will ultimately have to compromise because Americans will want to support the troops.

He says, 'Assuming that neither side overplays its hand, in the game of scissors cuts paper, support the troops cuts Iraq dateline.'

Do the children of Iraq play this game, I wonder?

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Diana Prichard.*