Writing exercises for interactive fiction

Exercise 1: Gamify it!

Age group: 8 - 14
Skills learned: *Narrative design, structuring, presentation and collaboration.*

Games are made up of 6 core elements:

1. **The Mechanic / Actions** - What you have to do to play the game. Example in hide and seek, the mechanic is either to hide or to seek.
2. **The Goal -** What you must achieve to win the game. Example: In checkers you must capture all your opponents pieces.
3. **The Obstacles** - What could prevent you from winning the game. Example in angry birds, the obstacle is that you run out of birds before you can knock over the pigs fortresses.
4. **The Rules -** What are you allowed to do to achieve the game objective. Example: In the game of basketball you cannot run with the ball in your hands.
5. **The Characters** - Who is this game about ? Example, in Mario Bros. The game is about two brothers who are plumbers.
6. **The setting** - Where does this game take place? Example the setting of the game Plants vs Zombies is a garden. The setting of Farmville is a farm. The setting of Monopoly is a city.

Activity:

Step 1: Hand 6 index cards to each student. Have them write one of each core element with the number next to it on each card. They can decorate the element or add an explanation if they think one is required.

Step 2: Have students put their cards into 6 piles at the front of the room. Shuffle each pile.

Step 3: Put students into groups of 3 or 4. Have one student come up from each group and take one card from each pile.

Step 4: Have students create a game from the 6 cards they have selected.

Step 5: Students must write a description of the game, including an explanation of how to play the game in a document and present that document to the class. The game can be designed as a board game, video game or an 'action game' (ie; soccer, baseball, hide and seek). Students must also talk about how they chose their game format.

Questions for discussion:

1. How is designing a game like writing a story?
2. How is it different?
3. What parts of a game could you turn into a story and how?
4. Why did they choose the format that they did. In what ways is a different game format like the different formats for stories (comic books, chapter books, tv shows etc..)

Alternate activity:

Take a book that the class is reading together and using the six core elements above turn the story into a game. Have the class work individually, or in small teams and compare the different game ideas that came from one story.

For early readers 6 - 8:

Create the cards yourself at home & use a combination of simple words and drawings. Explain the core elements of a game, put students in groups and hand out 6 cards from each of the 6 core elements. Have students create a game using the cards and act it out.

Exercise 2: What if?

Age group: 14 - 17
Skills learned: Creative writing, plot structure, synthesis and resolution.

Summary: Students take an existing story and add a choose your own adventure mechanic to the final sequence.

Activity:

Step 1: Choose 2 or 3 well known stories or a story or novel the class has already read as a group.

Step 2: Students must write a synopsis of the story, including the final conflict and the resolution of the story.

Step 3: Underneath the synopsis, have the students introduce a branch point in the story, that offers at least 2 different options from the one in the original story.

Step 4: Have students outline how the story will end differently depending on the path taken, **or** if you prefer ask the student to loop the branches back to the original end of the story in a way that seems credible and persuasive.

Questions for discussion:

1. What was difficult about branching the story?
2. Which ending did you prefer?
3. Why do you think the author chose the ending they did?

Alternate activity:

Have students work on short stories that do not have an ending. Students trade short stories with each other and must provide an ending. Each student writes one story branch and two endings so that every story has two possible endings. Discuss the pros and cons of each ending.

Exercise 3: Branching dialogue & mood.

Age group: 14 - 17
Skills learned: Dialogue, character, tone & emotion.

Summary: Students use branching dialogue to explore character voice, tone and emotion.

Activity:

Step 1: Choose a scene in which a character arrives at a difficult conversation: Example: An explorer must solve a riddle posed by a mysterious oracle.

Step 2: Choose three approaches to the dialogue: For example, aggressive, admiring, or scared.

Step 3: Have students write three scripts for the dialogue using each of the tones. Have the students outline whether the character achieves their goal and explain why or why not based on their tone and approach.

Step 4: Each script must include no fewer than four exchanges and at least one must end with failure.

Step 5: Have students read scripts together and experiment with jumping from one script to another.

Questions for discussion:

1. What did students write differently to show different emotions in the characters voice for each script
2. What did students write to show the impact of the characters tone of voice in the conversation.
3. How did jumping from script to script impact the believability of the dialogue.

Alternate activity:

Have students work in groups of three and have each student write one script per tone / emotional approach. Students can then compare their scripts and read them aloud to each other.