INTERACTIVE FICTION & GAME DESIGN

IDEAS FOR EDUCATORS
NICE TO MEET YOU :) 

My name is Miriam Verburg, I am a digital strategist and game designer.

My background: I come from a long line of dairy farmers.
KEY INFLUENCES:

Kid culture

Design as learning
Long Story progressive and queer-positive dating game that helps tweens sandbox healthy relationships and sexuality.

Platforms: IOS & Android tablets
Audience: Tweens
This is Hanniferjane - or that's what I call them, at least.
You sure you didn’t just want to hang out alone with me?

Sasse

Since I’m already here, I might as well stay for lunch.

You wish.
Abby: I... Sorry, am I making it weird?
How to combine game design with learning language arts?
ALL GAMES HAVE 5 CORE ELEMENTS

- **Mechanic / Actions** – What you have to do to advance the game.
- **The Goal** – What you must achieve to win the game.
- **Obstacles** – What could prevent you from winning the game.
- **Rules** – What are you allowed to do to achieve the game objective.
- **Characters** – Who is this game about?
- **Setting** – Where does this game take place?
GAMES ARE LIKE STORIES EXCEPT..

In games the story is ‘emergent’ – it happens as you play.
GAMES HINGE ON ‘FLEXIBILITY’

How much input the players actions have on the sequence of events in the game.
RULE OF THUMB:

The amount of narrative in a game is inversely proportional to the amount of flexibility.
The more words it needs, the less flexible your game is.
EXAMPLE: CHESS VS. ZELDA

There are 1000s of ways to win a game of chess.
There is really only one way to win at Zelda.
PROVISO:

That being said, designers like myself are hard at work trying to create engines and models that will allow designers to create ‘flexible’ story engines so players can experience non-linear narratives, with a degree of freedom to move as they wish and build out the narrative according to their preferences.
EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE GAME TYPES:

- **Competitive Sports** – Multiple ways to win – strategically intense – extremely re-playable.

- **Builder simulations** – Example: Minecraft. Game is called a ‘sandbox’ because player has control over look & feel of their game. Random events drive action, but each game experience is different.

- **Farmville type games** – Similar to above, each ‘farm’ looks different, relies on players goal orientation to define what the ‘farm’ will contain.

- **Card & board games** – Not universally true but many card and board games are flexible to encourage multiple plays.
INFLEXIBLE GAMES INCORPORATE WRITING IN SIMPLE WAYS:

• **Rules & boundaries** – How is this played? What can I do and not do?

• **Labeling items** – What is this piece or that & what can I do with it.

• **Status updates** – Where am I in the game? how much longer is there? What did I just gain or lose?
WAYS TO USE ‘FLEXIBLE GAMES’ IN LANGUAGE ARTS:

**Game announcer** – Have students ‘narrate’ a game played by another student or students. Create the story of the game as it is played. This is the technique used by sportswriters.

**What’s the back story?** – Even chess can have a back story. Have students write a story about the pieces in a game of chess. Why are the king and queen fighting? What is the perspective of the pawn? Do this for any game that has lots of action but no story.
RULE OF THUMB:

When teaching with flexible games use creativity to describe the experience of play, or extend the game out into imaginative space.
EXAMPLES OF INFLEXIBLE GAME TYPES:

• **Adventure and quest games** – E.G. King’s Quest series, Mass Effect games. Final Fantasy et al.

• **Visual Novels** – Like Choose your own adventure books played on your computer or mobile device. Example: Digital a Love Story. Genre is much more popular in Japan.

• **Mystery or puzzle games** – LA noire, Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego.
INFLEXIBLE GAMES INCORPORATE WRITING IN COMPLEX WAYS:

• **Setting the stage** – How does the game world look? What is the objective? How did the player get here?

• **Character development** – Who is the player supposed to be? What is the back-story of other characters?

• **Story-building** – What are the consequences of choices? How do choices stack one on top of each other?

• **Dialogue** – What characters say to each other, what the player can say.

• **Reveals** – What new information did the player just get? How does that information change their understanding and ability to complete the game?
RULE OF THUMB:

When teaching with inflexible games do deep dives into creative writing and story development, focus on game design instead of play.
WRITING INTERACTIVE FICTION WITH TWINE

Twine – Free application for Mac or PC that gives authors a visual interface for creating branching stories

- Download Link – http://www.gimcrackd.com/etc/src/
- How to use Twine video – http://vimeo.com/5010370
- A tutorial on Twine made in Twine – http://ryanscasey.com/twine/

Here is a small sample I made
How to play twine games - Twine publishes games as native files and as html so students can play games on each others computers in the web browser.

Collaborative - Students can also trade twine files and work on each others stories to create collaborative interactive stories.

Low tech version - If access to tech is a problem, Twine creates nothing more than linked text sequences. Your students can just as easily collaborate on choose your own adventures written with paper and pen, or word processing software.
SAMPLE INTERACTIVE FICTION

These samples are available online for free:

The Message: A short story about space and the stuff in it.
Link: http://ludonaut.de/the-message/

The Matter of the Monster:
Link: http://eblong.com/zarf/zweb/matter/
SAMPLE ACTIVITIES:

Thank you very much for listening. I’d like to do a sample activity now, and as we work on this I will answer any questions.
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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