

**"ARE YOU LOOKING AT THE FIRE?" - A MATERIAL  
PACKAGE FOR EXAMINING VIDEO GAME  
NARRATIVES TOLD USING GAMEPLAY MECHANICS**

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Title “Are you looking at the fire?” – A Material Package for Examining Video Game Narratives Told Using Gameplay Mechanics	
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Abstract <p>Monet taiteenalat, kuten elokuvat ja romaanit, voivat kertoa tarinoita rajoituksiensa mukaan, mutta videopelit pystyvät tehostamaan tarinoankerrontaansa pelimekaniikoidensa avulla tavalla, mihin mikään muu media ei pysty. Tämä materiaalipaketti pyrki luomaan kokoelman tehtäviä, joiden avulla yli 16-vuotiaat oppilaat pystyvät käsittelemään viiden eri pelin erilaisia tapoja käyttää pelimekaniikoitaan tarinankerronnan tehostamiseen. Nämä viisi peliä ovat <i>Gone Home</i>, <i>Firewatch</i>, <i>The Wolf Among Us</i>, <i>What Remains of Edith Finch</i> ja <i>The Stanley Parable</i>. Kyseiset pelit valittiin monien kriteereiden pohjalta, mutta pääasiassa koska ne ovat lyhyitä, tarinapohjaisia ja antavat tarpeeksi vaihtelua erilaisten pelimekaniikoidensa avulla.</p> <p>Materiaalipaketteja on monenlaisia, mutta yksikään Jyväskylän yliopistossa ei ole vielä keskittynyt videopelien tarinankerrantaan. Videopelejä on käytetty aiemmin materiaalipakettien luomiseen, mutta ne ovat usein kohdistettu nuoremmille oppilaille, jotka ovat vielä oppimassa englantia. Tämä materiaalipaketti on kohdistettu yli 16-vuotiaille oppilaille, jotka ovat kiinnostuneet videopeleistä ja niiden ainutlaatuisesta tarinankerronnan muodosta. Tätä materiaalipakettia voi käyttää lukiossa, yliopistossa tai missä tahansa muussa oppilaitoksessa.</p> <p>Tämä materiaalipaketti on suunniteltu täysin ryhmäpohjaisen työskentelyn pohjalle. Materiaalipaketti on suunniteltu niin, että sitä pystyy käyttämään opetuksessa kuka tahansa englannin opettaja, joka pelaa kyseiset pelit läpi ja lukee ohjeistukset jokaiseen tehtävään. Materiaalipaketin ensisijainen tavoite on saada oppilaat tunnistamaan minkälaisia pelimekaanisia tapoja videopelit voivat hyödyntää tarinankerrontaansa. Toissijainen tavoite on käyttää autenttisia materiaaleja, tässä tapauksessa videopelejä, aidon keskustelun syöttämiseen, minkä johdosta monet materiaalipaketin tehtävät ovat keskustelupohjaisia.</p> <p>Materiaalipaketti koostuu kymmenestä oppitunnista, kaksi jokaiselle pelille. Ensimmäisen oppitunnin aikana oppilaat keskustelevat pelaamistaan peleistä ja tekevät erinäisiä tehtäviä aiheen mukaisen videopelin pohjalta. Toisen oppitunnin aikana he käyttävät kaikkea edellisen oppitunnin aikana oppimaansa ja suunnittelevat uuden osan kyseiselle videopelille, imitoiden sen tarinankerrontaa ja pelimekaniikoita.</p>	
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## APPENDICES

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This is a material package goal of which is to use narrative based commercial video games and learn how they use their gameplay mechanics to convey their narratives in a way that no other media can. While there are already some material packages that use video games to teach English, there are only a few that examine the video games themselves, and possibly none that examine their narratives. This gap is the starting point from which the creation of this material package started. As video games become more mainstream with each year that passes, it becomes increasingly important to learn how video games and their narratives differ from other forms of media, especially for students who may wish to write their own video games in the future.

Video games can use the gameplay mechanics unique to them as an art form to tell their stories in ways that other media simply cannot, such as using dialogue mechanics to let the player choose the next piece of dialogue and environmental storytelling to convey a story without directly pointing it out. The main aim of this material package is to get students to examine and understand some of the many ways that video games can use gameplay to enhance and tell a story. Not only will their general understanding of narratives increase, but by finishing the material package they will have a better understanding into how much potential video games have as a narrative art form. Video games are, after all, a narrative form of art just as any other, and should therefore be used in teaching.

The secondary aim of the material package is to use video games as authentic materials. The main reason for this is the unique language learning opportunities that commercial narrative-based video games offer. These include gameplay mechanics such as dialogue systems, environmental storytelling, and player choice, all of which are described in further detail later in this thesis. The tasks in the material package have been designed to examine these mechanics in such a way that it created genuine conversations about authentic materials.

The material package itself uses five short video games and tasks related to them. These tasks are all group work and mostly based in discussion, with larger group projects attached to each of the games. The games are *Gone Home*, *Firewatch*, *The Wolf*

*Among Us*, *What Remains of Edith Finch* and *The Stanley Parable*. These games were selected because of their heavy focus on their narratives, among other criteria which are explained later in this thesis.

After this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into four more chapters. The second chapter focuses on the background of the material package. This chapter looks at how authentic materials have been used in the past and how commercial video games can be used as well. The third chapter shifts focus on the five video games chosen for this material package and gives short descriptions of all of them. The fourth chapter details the framework of the material package and gives a detailed description of how the package was designed, how the games were selected and with what criteria as well as points out possible difficulties, requirements and challenges that come with the use of the material package. The final chapter discusses the material package as a whole and points out some further possibilities that could be used to create additional material packages in the future. At the end of the thesis is the material package itself.

## 2 BACKGROUND FOR THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

The background chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will look at authentic materials that have been used in the past. The second part then goes deeper into how video games, both educational and commercial, have been used as authentic materials in teaching. The last part will look over the unique ways video games can deliver their plots through traditional storytelling and gameplay unique to video games.

### Authentic materials

The definition of authentic teaching materials is a contested issue. For example, Cook (1981) claims any language produced by native speakers to be authentic materials and Kilickaya (2004) defends that the materials that are used by native speakers in their everyday life are authentic materials, also Umirova (2020: 129) argues that “authentic materials are print, video and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives”. While the specific definitions vary, when it comes to teaching, authentic materials are any materials used in teaching that were not originally created for that specific purpose, as opposed to prefabricated samples (Umirova, 2020). Authentic materials are one solution to motivational problems, as authentic materials are often more interesting to students than regular textbooks and other traditional means of teaching (Peacock, 1997). One reason for this is how authentic materials are seen by students as something that is from the world outside the classroom. By examining something that is familiar from students’ daily life, it creates a connection between the subject that is being studied and the world the students live in. Many different types of authentic materials have been used in the past to motivate students and bring variation to teaching techniques.

Movies are one of the more versatile authentic materials, giving opportunities for students to improve many of their language skills, such as listening comprehension, writing and cultural knowledge (Sun, 2019). Movies as authentic material are popular with students and teachers alike because of their interesting and real features, which makes them able to attract students to learn new things autonomously (Umirova, 2020). Despite their pedagogical opportunities, sometimes movies and educational videos are used as rewards for doing well in class or to fill in time. This can happen especially if the teacher does not give proper guidance (Sun, 2019). While movies can be used as supportive materials in teaching, they are sometimes used as crutches when the teacher must do something else during class time and needs to keep students occupied. There are of course exceptions to the rule, as occasionally movies are at the center of lessons where the themes and other aspects of the movie are inspected by the class in further detail rather than simply viewing it and moving on.

Due to their almost symbiotic relationship with education, books are a common authentic material used in schools. Most schools even have a school library filled with books waiting to be read by students. Regular textbooks cannot be described as authentic materials since they were created for the explicit reason of being used for teaching purposes in a classroom, but novels and other literature that have not been written for educational purposes can (Umirova, 2020). However, the use of novels as authentic materials creates an exception to the rule that they are more interesting to students. Reading a novel is not much different from reading a textbook, and because of this what is often considered to be a pleasant hobby outside of school is perceived to be unpleasant when students are compelled to do so. This is especially true when it comes to boys, who are on average less interested in reading than girls (Scholes, 2017).

Poems are another form of literature that can be used in teaching as authentic materials. The use of this classic authentic material is examined by Aladini and Farahbod (2020). In their paper they argue that poems are ideal for teaching ESL because of their brevity. Poems are usually used specifically in literature classes when poems are the subject of study. Where poems differ from other authentic materials is in the way they are perceived by most of the students and even teachers. Research shows that most students prefer prose over poems because of the wrong assumption that poems are too difficult to read and understand (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020). This can lessen the motivational effect that authentic materials usually have on students, making poems a poor motivator to some when it comes to authentic materials. Of course, this is not the case for all students, they could also become emotionally involved in learning through poems and thus more eager to participate in class activities (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020).

Newspapers are a classic form of authentic materials. They are cheap, immediately available when needed, especially digitally, and an important part of most many peoples' daily life. On top of all that, they provide excellent opportunities for broadening students' worldviews through various types of articles of current issues. Newspapers are also excellent for enhancing students' reading comprehension, expanding their vocabulary as well as practicing their critical and analytical thinking skills (Umirova, 2020). Therefore, it is no surprise that newspapers have been used as authentic materials extensively in the past. In Finland there is even a national newspaper week during which schools across the country utilize newspapers in teaching.

Music in a classroom can be either produced specifically for teaching purposes, for example to explain grammar rules with a catchy song, or it can be authentic if the music was never intended to be used in a classroom. Songs can be a very useful tool in teaching something very specific because music can be listened to repeatedly without getting too bored of it and songs are easier to remember than traditional teaching techniques, plain paragraphs of text or sets of grammatical rules (Legg, 2009). Beyond easy memorization, the use of music as authentic materials has other options as well. For example, a song can be listened to in class and its meaning and lyrics can be analyzed. Music lessons by themselves are another matter with many more possibilities because their specific purpose is to study music and so music can be utilized in more flexible ways.

Sculptures, paintings, photographs, and other forms of visual arts can also be used in teaching English. Unlike many other forms of authentic materials, visual arts often do not incorporate words at all and are instead, as the name would suggest, visual. Because of this they cannot be listened to, read, or linguistically analyzed. Despite this, it is within the realm of possibilities to use visual arts in teaching English. In fact, a material package has been created with the purpose of putting photography at the center of it. Hämäläinen (2017), combines photography and language teaching in his Master's Thesis to create a material package which is intended to be used in conjunction with two high school classes, one an Arts course and one an English course. This is an excellent way to introduce a material package into an existing curriculum, but because so far there has not been such thing as a video game course in high school it is impossible for this type of joint course to be created for the material package created for this master's thesis.

One of the more recent additions to the repertoire of authentic materials is the Internet itself. While any and all of the previously mentioned authentic materials can be found online, there are websites unique to our screens that can be used as authentic materials. Examples include blogs, homepages, social media sites, online forums, online shopping sites and portfolio websites to name a few. All of these different types



of websites offer a world of opportunities for learning when used as authentic materials.

## Video games used in teaching

This part is divided into two sections, which will briefly examine how video games have been used as educational tools in the past. The first section will look at educational video games and how they have been used and perceived in teaching and the second section will focus on how the same has been done with commercial video games and what is their connection to this material package.

### 2.2.1 Educational video games

Using video games in education is not exactly a new innovation. Many video games have been created for the sole purpose of teaching something to their players, such as simple math or geography. These so-called educational games have been in use in schools around the world for decades, the first one being *Logo Programming* in 1967 (Needleman, 2017). It was a simple gamified way of teaching the Logo programming language to its players. Years later in 1973, *Lemonade Stand* was released, teaching players simple economics (Needleman, 2017). Regardless of its predecessors, possibly the most well-known educational video game ever, *Oregon Trail* is what really cemented video games as an educational tool in schools after its debut in 1982 (Needleman, 2017). Since then, educational video games have been used more or less in teaching virtually every school subject imaginable. However, when compared to commercial video games there are some drastic differences.

The focus of an educational video game, as their name suggests, is to educate. Because of this their gameplay can be very lacking, at worst case being simply answering math problems by clicking one of a few options given and getting points based on correct or wrong answers. If they have simplistic gameplay, they can be viewed as being dull and not grasping the students' attention for long periods. Once the rules and gameplay become familiar, the game becomes repetitive and uninteresting. This is not to say that they all possess poor gameplay, but these are exceptions to the rule.

The narratives of educational games take an even bigger hit as they are sometimes entirely non-existent. If the purpose of a game is to teach about, for example, odds and probabilities, there is little need or space for a compelling narrative. The ones that do have a story mostly use it as a vehicle for explaining whatever

educational content the game focuses on, making the stories barebones or otherwise uninteresting.

Because of these reasons, educational video games are unsuitable for the purposes of this material package. While the unimaginative gameplay would not be a problem, quite the opposite in fact, the lacking narratives would make for very uninteresting tasks when the focus is on the narratives and students' experiences with them.

### **2.2.2 Commercial video games**

The difference between a commercial video game and an educational one is that commercial video games were never created with the intention of being used for educational purposes. Instead, their main purpose is to be entertaining its players and always to make a profit for its developers and publishers. As with any other media and art, these goals are not always met, but when they are the games in question grasp the attention of its players tightly. This is one reason why commercial video games should be included in the classroom more.

Often in academia when discussing video games as tools for teaching English the first thing that comes to mind is communication during Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), as is the case with examples such as in Horowitz' study (2019). In his study, Horowitz examines how Puerto Rican college students communicate while playing an MMORPG, the results showing that the students had less anxiety and were more comfortable speaking English. Another study conducted by Harteveld and Bekebrede (2011) investigated the difference between using single-player games and multiplayer games for educational purposes. Amongst other findings they found out that multiplayer games were better suited over single player games if the learning objectives are socially oriented, as is the case with language studies.

One indisputable advantage that commercial video games have for teaching is the wide variety of different situations and environments that the players can find themselves in. Much like any other form of creative media, video games can take place in space, in the past, in different countries and any other environment one can think of, with the difference being that in video games the player is an active part of the world around them. This variety of settings brings with it opportunities to learn new words and expand one's vocabulary. Räsänen (2019) found in his study, through interviews with young adults, that the main area of linguistics they imagined could learned from video games was vocabulary.

While these are worthwhile endeavors into representing video games in the classroom, this material package focuses more on single player story-based games.

The reasoning behind this is that narratives in video games have gone through a sort of renaissance when it comes to their quality. Despite being a half a century old artform, it was not until around a few decades ago that the stories in video games started being taken seriously with games such as *Metal Gear Solid* (1998). Decades after its release we are getting games like *The Last of Us* (2013) and *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018), both of which have been compared to cinema, both favorably and not. It is high time that these kinds of resources are being used in the classroom, which is one aim of this material package.

While there is not an overabundance of teaching material centered around video game narratives, some do exist, making this material package a successor to their previous work. One example of this is Jonathan Ostenson's paper (2013). In it Ostenson describes his experiences with teaching a high school class using video game narratives, the reason behind the use being "because they represent some of the most important storytelling in the 21st century" (Ostenson, 2013: 71). Ostenson gave his students lessons about the history of video game narrative and they talked about the many ways a video game can tell a story. Much of the discussions described are similar to the tasks created for this material package, such as discussing how player choices create branching plots and unique stories for different players and how "real" character felt in video games compared to those in books and movies (Ostenson, 2013). These similarities are encouraging, showing a precursor which suggests some amount of success for the efficacy of this material package and its tasks.

## **The unique language learning opportunities of commercial video games**

There are many reasons to create a material package that is centered around video game narratives, some of which are completely unique to video games. While video games, both educational and commercial, have been used in teaching English before (Ostenson, 2013, Palola, 2018, Horowitz, 2019), they have not been used not as much as they could have been. It is especially rare for an entire material package to be constructed around studying video game narratives, which is a gap in educational materials that this material package seeks to fill. At the core of this material package are the unique language learning opportunities that commercial video games provide. These include environmental storytelling, dialogue systems and the possibility of controlling multiple characters from multiple perspectives to name a few. Each of the games chosen for this material package has some unique way of delivering its story

and they will be explained along with a short description of the games themselves in Chapter 3.

The use of authentic materials is a teaching technique that is often more interesting than using standard teaching materials as they may increase concentration and involvement more than artificial materials (Peacock, 1997). This applies to teachers and students alike, who are both used to the same kinds of textbooks and lectures that create similar classes year after year. Authentic materials are a method that teachers can use to break the monotony, and video games specifically are authentic materials that have been under-utilized in the past. They have not been nearly as common as books or movies, partly because teachers are unaware of their benefits (Alsuhayami & Alzebidi, 2019), partly because video games are a much younger form of media and art and partly because they are a difficult medium to include into an inflexible curriculum (Baek, 2008). These are not the only reasons why video games are not being used in teaching as much as they could, others exist as well.

Often when video games have been used in teaching, they have been a supplemental tool to assist in teaching, for example, mathematics (Lee et al., 2004). This material package aims to create a set of tasks that look at some commercial video game narratives the same way that a course based on the works of William Shakespeare would look at his plays in greater detail than a single lesson in a course about literature would, or how a course based on movies would examine a few select films for a deeper understanding of them.

There are unique aspects that only video games as a narrative medium have and they are one of the biggest reasons to examine video game narratives more closely. Unlike in linear media, the player in video games is allowed to experience the story on their own pace and sometimes on their own way. Environmental storytelling, the act of conveying a story through in-game environments, is one of the unique ways that video games can tell their narratives. By giving the player the opportunity to explore the game world for themselves, they can piece together what has happened in any given location, much like a detective investigating a crime scene to figure out what has happened. The players can find and read notes, notice that an object is not where it is supposed to be, find a secret button or any other of a myriad of things that the developers of the games have placed in the environment. Environmental storytelling reinforces the players connection to the game world and its story, letting them be a part of it instead of merely a passive audience member. This, of course, is dependent on the players themselves. If they do not look around the environment or simply do not care about it, they will have a different experience than someone who will take the effort to investigate their surroundings more carefully. The differing experiences of the students is one of the many topics of conversation present in the tasks of the material package.

Another unique aspect of video game narratives are dialogue systems. While in most video games the player is not given a choice in what the player character says during a cutscene, in some games the choice in dialogue is given. This allows players to decide what their response will be, mimicking a real-life conversation. While the options are often limited to select prewritten dialogue options, they are also telling of what kinds of decisions the player wants to make and how they wish to treat the characters they are having an imagined conversation with. Of course, this is only true if the game is written with this in mind. The results of different ways a conversation plays out will also create differing stories among the students of this material package, which is another topic for some of the tasks in the material package.

Some choices in video games are clearly laid out, sometimes with hard to miss prompts appearing on screen urging the player to make a decision, clearly conveying to the players that their choice will have consequences later in the narrative. However, most choices are made by the players without the game explicitly telling them to do so. Given the interactivity of the medium, video games allow players to do or not do a wide variety of actions in the game environment, sometimes with consequences they cannot be aware of. For example, a player can choose to pick up an item that is seemingly worthless but turns out later to be of some importance, or they can choose to help a character in need or not. These small and seemingly inconsequential decisions are another factor that creates differing experiences among the students of this material package and will be yet another theme for the tasks of the material package.

One clear advantage that video game narratives have over other media is their interactivity. While someone may have an emotional connection with a character from a book or a tv-show, that connection is much easier and faster to create when the player is in charge of the main character's actions. When players are given the choice in how to respond and interact with a character, even if it is an illusion created by clever writing and game design, it creates a deeper connection than being a mere voyeur would. Not everyone will have the same level of connection with the non-existent characters in a video game, and this will be another subject of study in the material package.

Lastly, at least when it comes to this material package, the possibility of having multiple characters in a single game and a single story is another unique possibility that video games offer. Of course, different points of view are present in other forms of media as well, but in those the audience is still only observing, not having an active part in the story. In video games the player gets to be the character and if done well, gets to see their story from their unique perspective. Some of these possessions of these characters may be more effective in telling their story than others, which will be part of the material package tasks.

The past five paragraphs detail some of the unique ways that video games can use their blend of story and gaming to explore a narrative. This is the main language learning opportunity that this material package utilizes. Many of the tasks will have the students talk about their experiences with the games, creating opportunities for them to have authentic conversations about something that they, ideally, truly care about. Beyond discussions the material package will have other kinds of tasks the help students to further dissect their experiences, more about these in part 4.3 Structure and content.

## **Fun at home, dull at school**

An unlikely problem that could come up is how things we do in our free time become dull and cumbersome when we are forced to do it for school or work. This can be seen when students have mandatory reading in classes and find the literature difficult to get through simply because it is something they must do, not something they want to do. Scholes (2017) interviewed 297 boys, aged 8-12 years old, about their views on reading. The ones who were not interested in reading gave reasons such as “I don’t read anything because some books are boring” and “The nerdy kids, they like reading”. While the underlying reasons to their attitudes towards reading were attributed to low socioeconomic backgrounds by Scholes, the way that the interviewed boys described reading, a usually enjoyable pastime, is the issue which relates to this material package.

This can be a problem with younger students who do not necessarily choose to be in school studying instead of doing something they consider more enjoyable, like playing outside, which was an alternative that the interviewed boys would rather have been doing instead of reading (Scholes, 2017). With older students who learn to appreciate education more this problem becomes less likely. This is especially true with adult students who have chosen to pursue further education of their own volition, and so should have sufficient motivation to do the work required. Nevertheless, it is practically impossible for every course to be interesting for every student. This is one of the reasons why this material package is designed to be elective instead of mandatory.

Yet the threat remains that the students will find the games to be boring or a slough to go through due to them being an assignment to complete. To alleviate this the games chosen were selected to offer a variety of gameplay and narratives to keep them from being too repetitive. Additionally, the games are relatively short, each completable in a few hours at a leisurely pace. It should be mentioned that even

though these features do help keep things interesting it is only their secondary purpose. Their primary purpose and detailed reasons for selecting the games can be found later in this paper in part 4.8 and its subsequent sections.

## ■ Video game literacy

While interest in video games would be beneficial for this material package, it is not vital for the students. Unlike most other medias, with video games the players are required to actively participate in the process instead of passively watching and listening. There are some necessary skills that are needed in order to actually play the games required, but none of these are too difficult to learn through the material package. These skills can be described as basic video game literacy. Just like how ordinary literacy refers to one's ability to read and write any given language, video game literacy refers to one's ability to play and understand video games. Some video games include problem solving tasks, require navigational skills and require co-operation with others (Kurt, 2008), but none of the games chosen for this material package are complex enough for these advanced video game literacy skills to be necessary. Anyone who is capable of normal day-to-day life should be able to translate those skills into the playable games.

Understanding of controls of video games is the bare minimum of video games. This does not only mean understanding what the character the player is controlling is capable of doing in the video game, but also understanding what buttons on a keyboard or a controller correspond with what action in-game. All of the games included in this material package have their controls explained inside the games' menus, which means that any player who is having difficulty can simply refer to these for help. The more pressing issue could be if the player is not used to video game controls at all. Anyone who has even rudimentary experience in video games will not have any problem with basic controls, but an inexperienced player might not even have the skills to move the character and the camera at the same time. Luckily for these players, the games in this material package are all very slow paced and thanks to this they have a virtually unlimited amount of time to get used to the controls. Furthermore, the controls could be looked at in class before the games are played outside class.

Another basic aspect of video game literacy is the Head Up Display (HUD). This is something that almost every video game uses to display information to the player about the game world. Common HUD elements include hit points, navigational information, character progression information, interactable elements etc.

Understanding the HUD should not be a huge obstacle, even for people new to video games. However, it can be disorienting if the player has no idea what these elements are supposed to be. This can be remedied by having the teacher explain them shortly before the games are played by the students.

Possibly the most vital part of video game literacy, and the most complicated to understand, is the in-game rules that differ from real life. Some of these rules apply to many video games while some of them apply to only specific video games. These rules are usually learned over time and become accepted despite them often being illogical. An example of this are doors in video games. In real life, if we see a door, we can assume that it can be opened. On the other hand, in video games the large majority of doors are completely un-interactable because it would be a ridiculous amount of work to make all of the openable and have something behind them. The same applies to any object the player might see in the game, some of them can be interacted with while others cannot. The only real way to combat player assumptions is to tell them to assume that they cannot do anything the game does not implicitly tell them they can do.



### 3 COMMERCIAL GAMES SELECTED FOR THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

This chapter will describe all the games that were selected for the material package. The story of each game will be briefly explained without going too much into detail for the sake of brevity. Four out of five of the games are from a genre called ‘walking simulators’, meaning that the primary gameplay element will be traversing the in-game world by walking. Because of this, there will not be an in-depth description of their game mechanics. Each of these games were chosen to offer a different element that none of the other games chosen had, and an explanation will be given as to what makes these games stand out amongst themselves. After the descriptions of the games, their selection criteria will be revealed as well.

#### Gone Home

*Gone Home* was developed and published by *The Fullbright Company* in 2013. The game is set in 1985, where a young woman returns home from college to find an empty house. The story unfolds as the player explores more of the house and uncovers what has happened in her absence.

In *Gone Home*, the player is tasked with understanding the narrative and uncovering past events almost entirely through environmental storytelling, with some assistance from the voiceover of the player character’s sister. This happens mostly by examining hundreds of different items that the player can pick up around the house, some of which are more useful in understanding the story than others. *Gone Home* provides an excellent opportunity for the students to compare the kind of mental

picture they had of the sister's character and how it changed as they uncovered more of the story.

## ■ The Wolf Among Us

*Fables* is a long running series of comic books which was later adapted into a video game by now defunct *Telltale Games* in 2013. The adaptation is called *The Wolf Among Us*, referring to the game's main character, Bigby Wolf. The whole game is separated into five episodes around two hours long each. For this material package playing only the first one is required. In the first episode, Bigby, controlled by the player, investigates a murder of another resident of Fabletown, a fictional area of the New York City inhabited by characters from classic European fables. The investigation is conducted through interrogations and conversations via a dialogue system as well as investigating crime scenes.

*The Wolf Among Us* is the only one of the games that provides the players with multiple conversation choices, leading to different interactions with the character in the game. It is also the only game among all of them that is not played from a first-person perspective, giving the student a quite literal change in perspective. In all of the other games the player is inhabiting the body of the player character, whereas in *The Wolf Among Us* they are controlling a character that has existed for years on the pages of the comic book that the game is based on.

## ■ Firewatch

*Firewatch* was developed by *Campo Santo* in 2016. The game is played through the perspective of Henry, a 39-year-old man who decides to become a fire lookout in Shoshone National Forest in 1989. The story starts with Henry doing typical fire lookout duties until it evolves into a mystery centering around the previous fire lookout and his son as well as a shady government experiment. During all this Henry is completely isolated save for Delilah, his supervisor who is located at the next mountain over and is contactable only through a walkie-talkie.

In *Firewatch* the main narrative hook is the relationship that the player builds throughout the game with the only other character in the game, Delilah. This happens entirely through a walkie-talkie that Henry, the player character, uses to communicate

with her. *Firewatch* is written and designed in a way that is supposed to make the player start caring about Delilah, a non-existent person who is just a voice on the radio.

## ■ What Remains of Edith Finch

*What Remains of Edith Finch* was developed by *Giant Sparrow* in 2017. The main story follows the titular character Edith Finch, the last surviving member of the Finch family. She returns home to the Finch estate, an architectural oddity that has been expanded by the family over generations. While she is there, Edith reminisces of her various family members and their individual and unique demises. These parts are played through the family members' point of view and are feature varying gameplay types that fit their individual personalities and untimely deaths.

*What Remains of Edith Finch* has the player take control of multiple characters, giving the player a wide variety of different types of storytelling through gameplay. One of the vignettes has them play the role of a teenage girl who is being stalked by a serial killer in the Finch estate, presented as if it is from the pages of a comic book that was written based on the story of her death. Another vignette is played from the perspective of a baby who drowned in a bathtub. There are toys that are seemingly alive jumping around with classical music playing in the background supported by that baby's father's narration, which is from a letter that he wrote to the baby's mother. Each section has its unique gameplay designed support the equally unique story being told, giving the players a deeper understanding and connection to the narrative.

## ■ The Stanley Parable

*The Stanley Parable* is a free mod created by Davey Wreden in 2011 for *Half-Life 2* which was later adapted into a full game by Davey Wreden and William Pugh under the *Galactic Café* studio name in 2013. The game is played through the perspective of Stanley, an office worker who is being guided through the game by an all-knowing narrator. Throughout the game the narrator is describing the events in the game, either as the player is doing something or even before it. The narrative hook of *The Stanley Parable* is that the player is allowed to obey or disobey the narrator, leading to dozens of varied outcomes in the story.

The last game that should be played during the material package ought to be *The Stanley Parable*. The reason for this is that subverts expectations of traditional

narratives, especially ones that have an all-knowing narrator. While in most stories the narrator is always right, in *The Stanley Parable* the player is allowed to test the limitations of the game and its narrative structure, often leading to some unexpected results. The results are also highly dependent on the decisions individual players make and everyone will have a different experience with the game.

## **4 FRAMEWORK OF THE MATERIAL PACKAGE**

This chapter focuses on the framework of the material package. The first part explains the starting points of the material package and why these were chosen. The second part discusses the target group of the material package and why they are the target group. The third part looks into the structure and content of the material package itself. The fourth part gives some suggestions as to how the students who use the material package should be assessed. The last parts describe the many difficulties, challenges and requirements that had to be considered while designing the material package as well as the specific criteria that went into the decision process of selecting the five games that ended up being used in the material package.

### **Starting points / Aims**

The main starting point was to choose video games for this material package is to make the students explore the unique ways that video games can tell a story using both narratives and gameplay to support it. More about these can be read in more detail in part 2.3 The unique language learning opportunities of commercial video games. To summarize, one of the goals is to get students to look at video game narratives more closely and realize the many unique ways they can deliver a story through traditional storytelling and gameplay that enhances it. These unique opportunities in hand give some much-desired variation to students' language learning experience, variation that is possible only through the interactive medium of video games.

The secondary starting point for this material package is the use of authentic materials in teaching, in this case the materials being commercial narrative-based video games. Authentic materials are a good source of motivation for students due to their nature as being something from outside the classroom, instead of materials

created specifically for learning purposes and when students are sufficiently motivated, they are more receptive to learning, creating a pleasant learning environment for both teachers and students alike.

## **Target group**

The target group for this material package is mature English students, at least 16 years old, who are interested in learning more about video game narratives. The reason for the age limit is that four of the five games used in this material package are rated for ages 16 and up and the fifth is rated 17 and up. However, this is not the main reason for this target group. For the majority of the tasks in the material package to succeed a certain level of mastery over the English language as well as a developed interest in the subject matter is required from the students. This means that this material package can be used for advanced high school students or adult students, in college or another place of study as an elective course. Students who are not interested in video game narratives should not be forced to study them, as the teaching goals would surely not be met with insufficient motivation to meet them.

The most important aspect of the target group is for them to be interested in learning about video game narratives. Their history with video games and their level of video game literacy is irrelevant as the games chosen are relatively simple mechanically and the focus is on the narratives, both in the games themselves and in the material package.

## **Structure and content**

The material package is divided into five parts, one for each game. The five parts are further divided into two lessons, the first one including tasks that have the students discuss and examine the game they had just played, and the second lesson focusing on a larger group project.

Some of the tasks require the use of notes that are written in a journal during gameplay sessions. These journals are also used to refresh students' memories during class. Specific instructions are given before playing each of the games as to what the students should make notes of while they are playing.

The first lessons contain a variety of tasks, all of them requiring a group. These tasks include discussions based on provided discussion questions, creating relationship maps and character profiles based on what they learn through playing

the games, debates about specific topics related to the games and comparisons of the different decisions each student made when given choices.

The second lesson is focused on the larger group project and presenting it to the rest of the class. The group projects always have the students use what they have learned during the first lesson and while playing to emulate the way each game uses gameplay to convey their narratives. For example, in *Gone Home* most of the story can be found in the environment and so the group project has the students create a new room for the game that utilizes environmental storytelling the same way that the game does. The group projects are the best way to ascertain how well the students have learned how the games use their mechanics to tell a story and serves as the main way to assess the students. More about assessment in the next part.

At the end of every second lesson for each game, there is a wrap-up task. This is a way for the students to voice any questions or comments they might have and have a free discussion with the entire class about the games in general.

## **Assessment**

Assessment should be decided by whoever decides to use this material package, but here are a few suggestions as to how to assess different parts of the material package. Many of the tasks are based on conversations that the students will have based on the games they played and the different experiences they had. Because it is impossible, or at least very difficult, to assess individual experiences the assessment criterion must be participation in the conversations themselves. It is up to the teacher to decide how much any single student must participate, but it is recommended that everybody participates at least a little in order to gain as much from the conversations as they can.

Discussions are not the only tasks in the material package. For all of the games, there is a larger group project in which the students have to use what they have learned from the games to create a new addition to the games, emulating their unique styles of conveying a narrative. These group tasks can be graded based on how much effort the small groups put in them, but it would be difficult to give them strict requirements as they are largely based on the students' creativity.

These assessment types are just examples and are not set in stone, the teacher should decide how to proceed. They are here merely to give an idea of how students could be assessed throughout the use of this material package.

## Multiple copies of the same game

Since this material package relies on the students being able to play the games, it would be for the best to attain individual copies of the games for all students. This can be quite costly, which is looked at more closely in section 4.3.3. This challenge could be circumvented by asking the developers or publishers of the games directly for free digital copies. Often free copies are given to streamers, YouTubers, and other influencers shortly before a game is released to get low-cost advertising in form of views from the content creators' audiences. However, without asking all of them individually, it is impossible to know whether they would be interested in the idea, especially since it has already been years since the even newest of the games chosen for this material package was released. It would be especially difficult to ask developers that may not exist anymore, such as *Telltale Games*, the developer of *The Wolf Among Us*, which went bankrupt in 2018.

Purchasing video games in bulk is not easy either. Unlike books or magazines, there are not any wholesale sellers of video games, at least ones that would give a discounted price if multiple copies of the same game were to be bought. The reason for this is that most video games are bought for private use, not to be used for anything other than entertainment, so there is not a significant enough market gap for this. Instead, the games would have to be bought individually, especially if they are bought from a digital marketplace where every account can only buy one copy of a game.

Another source of receiving multiple copies of the same games would be an organization that would sponsor such endeavors. There are already some organizations that do work similar to this, such as *Varsity Esports Foundation*, which gives out scholarships and grants to help students and schools in low-income areas to create Esports teams ([www.varsityesportsfoundation.org](http://www.varsityesportsfoundation.org)). Some developers even offer free digital copies of their games through sponsorships. One of these is *Paradox Interactive*, which offers free digital copies of their historically based strategy games through *Steam* to be used as teaching aids in history classes ([paradoxinteractive.com](http://paradoxinteractive.com)).

## Teacher's skill requirements

Much like any course taught anywhere at any time about any subject, this material package requires specialized knowledge from the teacher. Not only should the teacher be qualified to teach English, but they should also be interested, or at least knowledgeable, in video games. In case they are not but are still interested in using



this material package there will be instructions for the teacher in the material package itself. This part of the paper will detail some of the shortcomings a teacher could have and possible ways to overcome them.

Understanding the narratives on some level is necessary for the teacher. With some of the games, a single playthrough will be enough, as the story does not have much variation no matter what the player does. On the other hand, some of the games are based on player choice and the story shifts with the player's actions and decisions. The teacher needs to play the five games at least once to have specific knowledge about the narratives in each game, what happens in the games, why and how things could have gone differently. This is not much different from reading a book to understand what it is about before teaching a class about it, except that many of the video games chosen have branching narratives and all of them have some level of interactivity that the player can choose to interact with or not. Despite this, the teacher should familiarize themselves with at least some of the different ways a story can differ depending on the choices that the students may make. This does not mean that the teacher would have to know all of the games through and through, just enough to not be completely lost when different students have different experiences with the video games.

It would be beneficial for the teacher to know something about game design to better understand the way these games work. Nothing in depth is necessary, as the tasks of this material package focus on the narratives in the games, not the gameplay mechanics or other aspects. Still, knowing about simple mechanics such as triggers, checkpoints and QTE's can only help. Still, as it is unrealistic to assume that everyone who wishes to use this material package is knowledgeable in this field, any game mechanics or in-game terminology is required to teach or complete any of the tasks in the material package they will be explained as they are needed.

All of the potential challenges mentioned in this part when it comes to teacher competence are easily remedied with extensive instructions provided to the teacher in the material package itself. The aim is to create a material package that is just as easily accessible to the teachers as it would be to students.

## **Accessibility**

In recent years accessibility has become a more prevalent issue in video games. As their popularity increases, so does the diversity of their audience. More people with disabilities are interested in playing video games, and to accommodate them in recent years there have been efforts to accommodate them in software and hardware levels.

In many games these days it is possible to map custom button inputs or obtain a specially made controller that allows players to play games that would be impossible with ordinary controllers.

Despite these advancements the accessibility of the games chosen for this material package cannot be guaranteed to be playable by any student who wishes to participate in using this material package. Many games yet remain inaccessible to people with physical disabilities who, for example, cannot grip a controller or hold a button for long periods of time. While this material package would ideally have the students play the games themselves, there are workarounds for this.

Playing the games with a friend is one solution to this problem. Since the games chosen were done so due to their excellent narratives, not complicated gameplay, the student would not miss on critical aspects of the games even if they are not the one in control of the playable character. It is completely possible to sit next to an able-bodied friend or classmate who will do whatever the student in charge wants them to do, say or perform any other action in the games. A few notable problems could arise during Quick Time Events (QTE), in which the player must make quick decision within a short time limit. Thankfully these QTEs are present in only one of the games chosen, *The Wolf Among Us*, and so would not be an everlasting problem throughout the material package.

Another solution, far worse in every way, would be to watch a playthrough of the games in question. This would work better for some games than others, such as *Gone Home*, where the story remains the same no matter what choices the player makes. Despite this, the only way the material package would work is if the student is in control of the player characters, directly or through another person, otherwise the games might as well be movies with no choices to be made.

## **Criteria for the games chosen for this material package**

This part will detail the many criteria, which were used for selecting the five games for this material package. The criteria are presented in no particular order of importance and their importance is explained in their own sections.

### **4.8.1 Length**

The first criterion that had to be considered was the length of the video games chosen. The lengths of video games can range from anywhere between couple of seconds to several weeks. Unlike some forms of media, such as movies or music, video games are not always played in an exact amount of time, instead varying due to different factors.

These factors include but are not limited to the player's skill, optional side content and the pace the player decides for themselves. Regardless of this, the length of most video games can be quantified by looking at the median game time taken from as many playthroughs as possible. In fact, there is a website dedicated to this called [howlongtobeat.com](http://howlongtobeat.com). Using this website, the appropriate video games were chosen.

Because this is a material package with a limited amount of time, any game that would take hundreds of hours to complete was out of the question. Not only would it be unrealistic to expect students to commit this amount of time to what would be schoolwork, but also because the amount of content from a single game would not be sufficiently diverse for the purposes of this aims of this material package.

While a game that is only ten to twenty hours long would be reasonably short for this material package, the issue of diversity comes up again. Too many classes would have to be dedicated to only this one game, which could work, but not for the aims of this material package.

Finally, we get to the shorter video games, ones that are only a few hours long each. Their short duration solves many problems while providing unique opportunities as well. Because the games are shorter, more of them can be played in the same amount of time it would take to play one longer game. This brings diversity to the gameplay and narratives, as long as the games are chosen carefully not to be too similar. Due to their short nature, these games are developed to be enjoyed much like movies, in one sitting. This allows the players to experience the full experience without breaks, making sure that nothing of importance can be forgotten in a long hiatus between play sessions. Finally, the length of a video game often correlates with its price, which will be looked at in more detail in the next section.

#### **4.8.2 System requirements**

When it comes to playing video games there are three distinct options: personal computers, video game consoles and smartphones. Smartphones and consoles are immediately cut from consideration because while some of the games are available for smartphones, all of them are not. This leaves us with just PCs, which includes most laptops.

Unlike with consoles, PCs are not built equally. Some of them have more powerful components than others. For most people, the components are mostly irrelevant because they do not use their PCs for anything that requires much computing power. This is not the case if the user wishes to play video games, especially new ones. The demands of a video game scale with its graphics and complexity of calculations that go on in the background. Fortunately for this material package, the system requirements are low enough for all of the games chosen that a

simple laptop, which the students are likely to own already, is powerful enough for playing them. Even if this is not the case, the computers located in any campus computer room will be up to date enough to run these games.

### 4.8.3 Price

Another important criterion for choosing the games is their price. This has to be considered in the likely case that any of the developers or publishers do not wish to donate the games for educational purposes. While most AAA games are sold at around 60 euros at launch, there are also smaller games that are sold for less than that. There are other factors that come into the price of a video game, which will be looked at in this part.

In the games industry, games can be divided into two distinct categories: triple-A games (AAA) and independent games (indie). The main distinction between these two types of games is the developers and publishers attached to them. A small indie studio of a few developers can create a video game, but it will likely be smaller in size and scope than a video game developed by a studio of hundreds of developers. With a shorter length comes a smaller price. While being an indie game is not a criterion for choosing the games for this material package, due to the length requirements it happens to be that all of the games happen to be indie games.

There has been much conversation into how much gameplay a video game should have in relation to its price, but for the purposes of this material package this will be irrelevant. The more important part is the length itself, which should be limited to a few hours per game. Because of the relative shortness of the video games chosen for this material package, the original prices for each individual game will have been around 20 euros at launch, but much like other forms of media, with time the price has come down over the years.

The oldest of the games chosen is *The Stanley Parable*, which was released in 2011 as a free mod for *Half-Life 2* and later in 2012 as a standalone product. The newest of the games chosen is *What Remains of Edith Finch*, released in 2017. Even though the newest release is relatively new, three years in the games industry is enough to lower the price of a video game significantly, especially since it is an indie game and not a big AAA title. The exact prices of each of these video games are in constant flux, but at the time of writing this in December of 2020, the average price on Steam of the five video games chosen is 15.89 euros.

The video games suitable for this material package can be played on two different platforms, personal computers (PC) or consoles. For multiple reasons, these games will be played on PCs instead of consoles, one of them being the price difference between them. For one, it cannot be expected for the students to either have

or purchase an entire gaming console for just this one material package. These could be bought by the school where the material package is being taught, but this would add too much unnecessary financial and logistical stress. Instead, it would be a more cost-effective solution to install these games on pre-existing hardware in computer rooms on campus. Furthermore, most students already have laptops or other PCs for their schoolwork, which should be powerful enough to comply with the minimal system requirements of these games.

For the students of this material package, the price of the video games is irrelevant since they cannot be expected to buy the games themselves. Instead, it should be the school that uses the material package that purchase the games for the students to play and analyze. This would work much like how books that are often required for some courses, but since video games are digital, borrowing them to students is a bit more complex. One way to do this would be to install them on computers located on campus and give students the option to book a certain amount of time on these computers to play through the games. This would be feasible, since the games chosen are not that long and so do not require the students to spend large amounts of time in computer rooms.

The second way to give students access to these games is to create a number of Steam accounts that the students could log into with their own computers. This would be initially time consuming to create dozens of accounts, but these accounts could then be used multiple times for different classes. After the material package is done being used, the students would log out of their borrowed accounts and their passwords would be changed. The same accounts could even be used for the computer located on campus, providing two options for the students.

The best solution would be to offer both solutions, allowing the students to pick whichever fits them better. It could be possible that a student does not have access to a computer at home, so their pick would be to go to a computer class to play the games. Another student who lived too far away to make any extra trips to campus or simply did not have an opening in their schedule would choose to borrow an account from and play the games at home.

Everything that has to be taken into account when it comes to the price of these video games would be pointless if the developers or publishers of the games could be convinced to donate free copies of their games for the school. This would not be completely inconceivable, as it would give good PR for them and give their games the bragging right of being chosen for an educational material package. The fact that these games are not new and thus their sales have stagnated makes this even more likely, since they would not be giving out copies of games, they would make a bigger profit from. Then again, the opposite could be true as well if they desperately wanted to make a few dozen more sales.

#### 4.8.4 Content

The content of a video games includes everything that can be found inside the game itself and includes the gameplay, the narrative, age restrictions and other factors. Out of all of the criteria this is the most crucial one for the viability of the material package and the ability for it to fulfill the goals set for it.

If this material package were designed for younger students, the age restrictions would have to be considered more closely, but since the primary target group of this material package is adult students, it can be safely assumed that they are all at least eighteen years old. If this were not the case, any game with a PEGI 18 rating would not be legally usable for in this material package. The PEGI rating is assigned by the Pan-European Game Information to a game based on its content, which are Violence, Bad Language, Drugs, Discrimination, Fear, Gambling, Sex, In-Game Purchases and Online (pegi.info). Despite these considerations the games selected happen to all be suitable for ages 16 and under, with the only exception being *The Wolf Among Us*, which has an age rating of 17+. This means that the material package could be used for high school students as well if *The Wolf Among Us* were omitted from the use of the material package.

The legality of the ratings aside, the content still needs to be considered because different people have differing sensibilities, and students are no different. The point of this material package is to incite conversation about video game narratives, not offend and create conflict. The games chosen should therefore mirror this criterion, while not compromising other criteria, such as variety in the narratives. Some of the games have certain content that might be offensive to some, such as violence in *The Wolf Among Us* or depictions of suicidal thoughts in *What Remains of Edith Finch*. The presence of potentially offending content is not a weakness, but a strength. In the best-case scenario, differing values between the students will spark fascinating conversations among the students, fulfilling the goal of the material package.

Accessibility of content is important as well, meaning that the narrative must be understandable without prior knowledge from sources other than the games itself. This means that sequels to prior games are put of the question, at least the ones that have direct narrative links to the games. It would not be impossible to play sequels and understand them, but it would leave the students wondering if there is any additional information that could have helped them understand the narrative better. Cultural accessibility must be considered as well. Some games rely heavily on cultural context that some students might not be familiar enough with. Western games are a safe choice when it comes to this, because that is the context that the target group of this material package, which is students in Finland, is familiar with.

When it comes to gameplay, four of the five games chosen are so-called walking simulators, a somewhat derogatory title given to games where their design focus was not on exciting and varied gameplay but rather on the narrative and experience of immersing the player in it, which is done mostly by walking around, hence the name. The one game that is not a walking simulator, *The Wolf Among Us*, is a third person point and click style game where the player controls a character tasked with solving a murder. Despite the literal change in perspective, the gameplay itself is similar enough to the walking simulators that it might as well be. One absolute upside from these kinds of games is the ease of access. Everyone with legs is familiar with walking, and so even someone who has never played a video game before can understand the gameplay with ease.

#### 4.8.5 Narrative variety

There is a massive amount of variety when it comes to video games and gameplay, but for the purpose of this material package the only variety that matters are in the narratives of the games. There is an equally expansive selection of different stories and narratives in video games, but unfortunately a large majority of them need to be ignored due to their length. This leaves us with a smaller, but still varied enough pool of choices from which the video games for this material package were selected.

The narratives and how they are interacted with are quite different from each other. In *Gone Home* the player assumes the role of a college student, who comes home to find an empty house. The player is then tasked with exploring the house in order to find out what has happened in the player character's absence. In *Firewatch* the player character is a fire lookout tasked with looking out for fires in a national park, and eventually with uncovering a mystery with the help of another fire lookout via conversations through a walkie talkie. In *The Stanley Parable* the player controls Stanley, an office worker who is being guided by an all knowing narrator. Of course, this being a video game the player is allowed to disobey the narrator, leading to different reactions and branching pathways in the narrative. Finally, in *What Remains of Edith Finch* the player is Edith, the last surviving member of the Finch family who has come home and recalls how the different members of the family died over the years in different ways.

Overall, these games offer a good variety of narratives that use gameplay to tell them in different ways. Due to the time limitations of a single material package, all of the narratives are relatively short and no long-form narratives can be explored. They could be studied in another material package with similar goals but with a focus on longer games.

## **5 DISCUSSION OF SUCCESSES, FAILURES AND FURTHER POSSIBILITIES**

Overall, I believe this material package to be a success. The goal was to create a set of tasks that would get the students to think about and discuss the relationship between gameplay and narrative, which is a goal I think I reached. The material package is not perfect, by any means, but it can definitely act as the next step between now and a time when the full potential of commercial narrative based video games will be used to teach English in classrooms across the planet.

While working on this material package I found it to be surprisingly hard to come up with a variety of tasks. Most of the time I could only think of interesting questions to have discussions about. Some of the games inspired some more creative tasks, but it was never easy to come up with a task that examined gameplay mechanics and narratives without it devolving into a conversation. This may be because of the ambitious nature of creating tasks that are made for mature audiences who already know the language and need not tasks that would teach them more of it. It could also be that I overestimated my own creativity and the fault is my own.

The group projects were a good way to activate students while staying on topic. These projects require the students to use what they have learned through the previous tasks instead of regurgitating what they might have already known. Of course, it is impossible to fully predict the efficiency of the projects, as the material package would have to be actually taught to a classroom full of students. That is something that can only be discovered in practice, perhaps in the form of a bachelor's thesis or another type of study that aims to find out how efficient this material package really is.

Through playing the five games selected I did get slightly fed up with walking simulators, since four of the five were of that category. It probably would have served this material package better to choose a wider variety of games that were mechanically different from each other. Perhaps in the future someone will use this material



package as an inspiration and creates one like it but with more variety. The varied gameplay could even lead to additional variety in the tasks, although that is largely dependent on the writer's creativity.

Throughout the process of designing and creating this material package, many further possibilities came to mind. One of them was the disappointingly short amount of time that can be used for a single video game in this material package. Not only is there a limited amount of time that can be allotted to a single game as there are multiple to go through, but the games selected were also relatively short, the longest among them only around four hours if played at a leisurely pace. Because of this it would be worthwhile to create another material package that focuses on a single, much longer game for the duration of many more lessons, perhaps even an entire course. A few games come to mind that could be use for such a material package.

*The Last of Us* and its sequel *The Last of Us: Part II* have been critically and commercially claimed to be some of the best that video games can offer in terms of story. These could be used in greater detail to create tasks, especially since it is around 20-30 hours long, giving many opportunities for discussing and analyzing them. Even longer games exist, such as *Fallout: New Vegas*, which can take close to 60 hours to fully complete. Being an open-world role playing game with side missions all over the map and many ways to create a character would give students vastly different experiences from each other to compare and discuss. This combined with the dialogue system, different factions to interact with and environmental storytelling all over the place could be the basis for a fascinating material package, as long as enough time and effort are put into it.

Another possibility that became painfully clear was the advantage of younger students. Because younger students are still learning English, the tasks that could be created for a material package are much more varied and less restrictive than the ones that mature students would benefit from. For this material package, nearly all the tasks are based on conversations and discussions, with group projects and occasional unique tasks when creativity allowed it. For younger target audiences the number of tasks that could be created based on video games is less limited. Video games could be used to teach grammar, vocabulary and other linguistic skills that older students have already learned.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1 - THE MATERIAL PACKAGE**

# INTRODUCTION

This is a material package whose aim is to teach the students how video games can use their gameplay mechanics to tell a story in a way that no other media can. This is achieved by having the students play through the games chosen and doing the tasks in this material package.

This material package consists of five video games with two lessons worth of tasks for all the games. These games are *Gone Home*, *Firewatch*, *The Wolf Among Us*, *What Remains of Edith Finch* and *The Stanley Parable*. The first lesson contains tasks that will help your students to talk about the games and their unique methods of storytelling. The second lesson contains a larger group project in which the students will emulate the way each individual game constructs a narrative, as if to design an additional section for the games.

The group projects can be done either in class or outside of it before the presentations, this is dependent on how much class time is available.

The games should be played in the order they are presented in the material package, but it is not absolutely crucial. It is highly recommended to leave *The Stanley Parable* for last because its narrative requires the player to be somewhat familiar with how video games work.

The students need to always play the games before doing the tasks in class. Some of the tasks require additional instructions for the students to know while playing. Students should also keep a journal and write notes in it about all the games. Specific instructions will be given before each game as to what they should be thinking and making notes of with each game.

The tasks have two parts: STUDENT and TEACHER. STUDENT is the part that is for the student and instructs them in how to complete the task. TEACHER is information for the teacher and should not be shown to the

students, as it often includes information and answers that they will arrive at during the task.

All the tasks in this material package are designed to be done in groups, even if it is not explicitly told in the instructions for each task. Your students should be divided into groups of four and kept in these groups for the duration of the material package. Many tasks require discussion and teamwork, especially the group projects, and keeping the same group for all the tasks is helpful.

The material package is not very stylized or pretty, because it is not designed to be. These tasks work better if they are copied onto a presentation form for the whole class, such as PowerPoint, Google Slides or any other alternative of your choosing.

The teacher also needs to play the games, otherwise most of the tasks will not make any sense and the material package will be very difficult to use.

# Gone Home

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER BEFORE PLAYING:

This game was chosen because it exemplifies environmental storytelling. Most of the story of *Gone Home* can be found only if the player chooses to engage with the environment by reading messages and generally snooping around the house. The crux of this whole game is environmental storytelling and so most of the tasks are centered around that. The students should be instructed to read tasks 1 and 2 before playing, as they require them to write down their thoughts and observations while playing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS BEFORE PLAYING:

Keep a journal with you as you play and write down notes about anything you find interesting in *Gone Home*. Pay special attention to the instructions of the first two tasks for *Gone Home* as they require you to make notes while you are playing the game.

## LESSON 1

### TASK 1

### PLAYER EXPECTATIONS

**STUDENT:** After the first five minutes of playing the game, write down in your journal what do you think is going on and what you think will happen in the game. Discuss in class what your expectations were and if they were met.

**TEACHER:** *Gone Home* plays with the player's expectations that something typical to video games will happen. The setting is an empty, dark house with the family mysteriously absent. What the player is likely to expect is for there to be some sort of enemy lurking in shadows or a murder-mystery to be solved. Instead, the player will simply look around a house reading and listening to Sam, the narrator and sister of the playable character Katie. Students may write down that they were expecting *Gone Home* to be a horror game or that they would be fighting some enemies or any other common actions in video games. The goal of this task is to get the students to acknowledge their presumptions of video games, if they have any to begin with.

### TASK 2

### CHARACTER PROFILES

**STUDENT:** While playing, write down the name of everyone you hear in your journal. Write down also what you learn of them, where and how you learn it. After finishing the game write down short descriptions of all the family members based on your notes. In class,

compare your notes with others and see if there is something you missed that others did not.

TEACHER: *Gone Home* gives little in way of traditional storytelling. Throughout the game Sam gives narration, but beyond that the player is on their own. The only way players can learn more about the various residents of the house is by investigating objects that can be found throughout the house. Some of them are more obvious than others, a few even being locked away. This means that different students will have different pieces of information regarding the characters. This task will show the students how their perceptions of the character can be different based on their own investigative nature. Large chunks of the story can be missed if not enough attention is paid.

### TASK 3

### RELATIONSHIP MAP

STUDENT: Create a relationship map of all the characters and their relationships with each other. Use your notes from the previous task to help you. Are there any gaps in your map?

TEACHER: This task is meant to show your students how much they can learn about the characters and their relationships with each other without ever meeting them, instead learning everything through environmental storytelling.

### TASK 4

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### DQ1

STUDENT: What can you tell about Katie, the character you play as? Where did you find any of this information?

TEACHER: Information about Katie can be found like information of any other character, through environmental storytelling. The difference with Katie is that she has unique 'interaction texts' when the player is hovering on different items. She is also the only character who has a voice in the game, albeit only a short message on the answering machine. It is also possible that different students have different perceptions on Katie because of their own actions. Especially the message "Sam: Stop leaving every damn light in the house on! You're as bad as your sister!" can have an effect on the students who decide to leave all of the lights on after leaving rooms.

#### DQ2

STUDENT: How did you find the codes for the three combination locks in the game? Did you even bother to find them?



TEACHER: The code that opens the file cabinet can be found in the adjoining library, but only if the player bothers to look for it at all. The code, 0451, is also a common first code in many video games and can be figured out if this is known to the player. The code for the safe in the basement is not explicitly told in a note or anything but can instead be seen as the year 1963 next to the safe. The code for Sam's locker is torn in two pieces of paper in different locations but can be brute forced with just one piece with some guesswork. It is also possible to guess the codes for all three combination locks of the players have enough patience to try every combination possible. This task would get students to see if they had different approaches to finding the codes or if they bothered with them at all.

#### DQ3

STUDENT: Did you at any point think you were not alone in the house? Why? Did the feeling ever go away?

TEACHER: Throughout the game, the house's floors can be heard creaking and other noises can be also heard. These noises can sound like there are other people in the house, possibly making the player paranoid about danger that does not exist. An experienced player may know that the noises were ambient and not real ones, discernible by their repeating nature. The feeling can also go away as the players realize they are never going to be attacked. This task should get the students to think about how the game uses their own paranoia to create a tense atmosphere.

#### DQ4

STUDENT: When Sam started speaking, did you stop and listen or continue exploring?

TEACHER: Some students may find Sam's narration to be unpleasant, possibly because they do not care much about her story or because she 'interrupts' the game. On the other hand, some students may find her narration to be a good way to convey her story and break the gameplay that would otherwise be just exploring and reading.

#### DQ5

STUDENT: Did you close doors behind you? Turn lights on and off again? Did you put items back in place after picking them up or did you throw them around? What informed your decisions? Did the fact that you were playing as someone who lives in the house affect your actions? Did the fact that none of it was real and there were no consequences? If you have any, did your earlier game experiences inform your decisions?

TEACHER: These questions will have the students think about their own behavior in this particular video game. They are playing as someone who lives in this house and might act accordingly, or they might throw items without a second thought and leave the lights on in every room.

## TASK 5

## DEBATE

STUDENT: Who is the main character of *Gone Home*? Sam or Kaitlin? Divide your group into two pairs and come up with arguments for both characters. After the first round of debating come up with counterarguments. After the second round try to come to an agreement as to who is the main character of *Gone Home*.

TEACHER: This is a debate task about who is really the main character in *Gone Home*. Kaitlin is the character who the player controls, but she has little to do with the story. Kaitlin is the both the narrator and the central character of the story. This debate is supposed to get the students to think about what makes the main character in a story where one of the characters is being controlled by the player.

## LESSON 2

### TASK 6

### GROUP PROJECT

STUDENT: In small groups, write a new room for the house using environmental storytelling. Describe what items are in the room, what information do they convey, who are they connected to etc. Draw the layout of the room and place the items in it. Write a piece of narration in Sam's style from the main game. Prepare to present your room to the rest of the class.

TEACHER: This is a longer group task with a small presentation at the end. The students will have to use what they learned from playing *Gone Home* and the previous tasks to create a new room that fits the style game. They will have to write notes from the characters' perspectives, fill the room with objects and write a narration that relates to the room. This task is the culmination of what the students will learn about environmental storytelling from *Gone Home* and will give them an opportunity to show what they have learned.

## TASK 7

## WRAP-UP

STUDENT: Overall, did you enjoy the game? Were you engaged in the story or did you find it boring? Do you think the game conveyed its story effectively? Anything else you want to talk about before moving on?

TEACHER: There is some controversy surrounding *Gone Home*, as it was perceived by some to be more of an interactive movie than a video game due to its lack of gameplay mechanics. This task is meant to be a way to wrap up *Gone Home* for the class and get some idea of how the game was received by your students.

# Firewatch

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER BEFORE PLAYING:

This game was chosen because it explores how the player creates an emotional connection to a character that is not only not real but whom you never even meet face to face.

*Firewatch* also attempts to create paranoia in the players mind by making events in the game seem like a conspiracy against Henry, when in fact there is nothing extraordinary going on. Tell your students to read the instructions for task 1 before playing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS BEFORE PLAYING:

Before playing, read the instructions for task 1. While making decisions in *Firewatch*, think about whether you are making choices as yourself or as Henry. After playing the game, go to the website from the main menu where you can find the pictures you took throughout the game. Save them and bring to class, they will be used in a task later. Write a journal entry at the end of each day in-game. Record your current understanding of events and your thoughts on Henry and Delilah. What were your initial impressions of them? Did you start to care more about their relationship? Were you suspicious of Delilah at any point? Did you think she was lying?

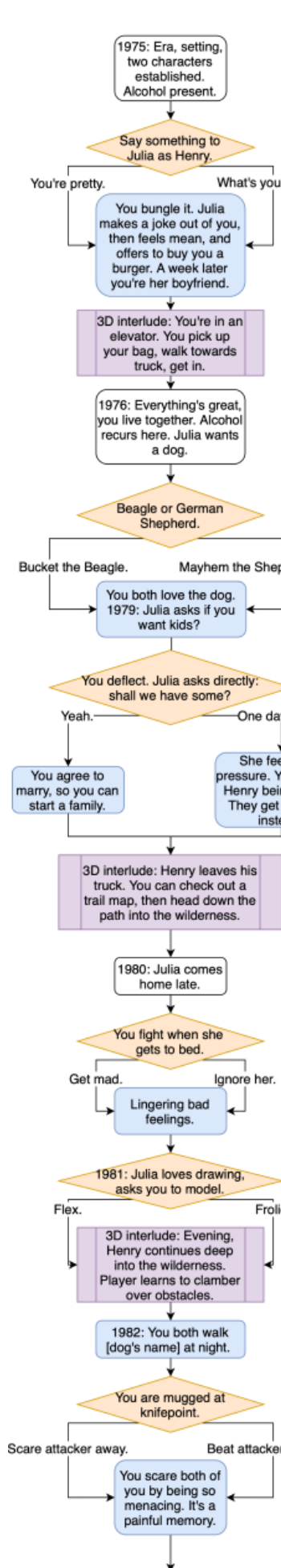
## LESSON 1

### TASK 1

### STARTING CHOICES

**STUDENT:** At the beginning of the game, you are required to make some decisions that affect Henry's backstory. Write down the choices you made and a summary of Henry's backstory once you are done. In class, compare your choices and backstories with other members of your group. Are your perceptions of Henry much different from each other because of his backstory? Did you give the choices much thought? Do you feel responsible for what happened in Henry's past because of the choices you made?

**TEACHER:** Depending on the choices your students make Henry's backstory will be slightly different. This task is meant to get your students to realize how their choices make them feel more responsible for Henry's past actions when in fact they would end up in the same situation regardless of what options they picked. You can use the attached flowchart to show your students the choices they made and their consequences. (Flowchart taken from [Firewatch's Henry and tutorialising narrative — Wireframe Magazine \(raspberrypi.org\)](http://www.wireframemagazine.com/2015/07/20/firewatch-henry-and-tutorialising-narrative/))



### Choice 1

Slightly variant text down each path, no lasting consequence. Meaningless practice choice showing mechanic.

### Interlude 1

Interludes are present-day (relative to Henry), and lead into the start of proper 3D gameplay.

### Choice 2

Slightly variant text immediately, plus slight variance later in intro and game proper when dog comes up.

### Choice 3

Variant text only. Interestingly, the left route *feels* like marriage was a direct consequence of your choice, as if it were a true branching point. One path will later feel tragic, the other regretful.

### Choice 4

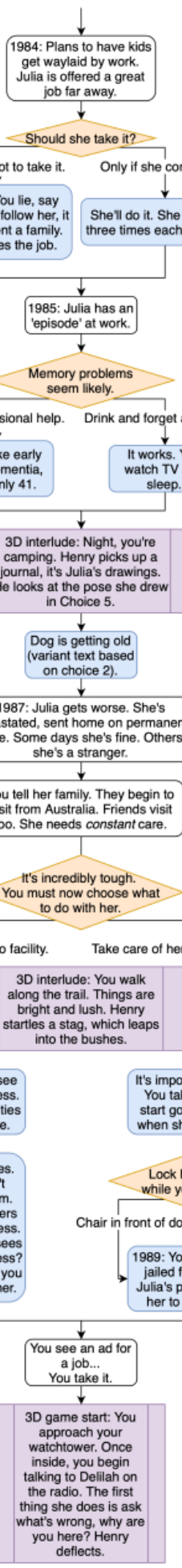
Variant text only. Once again, one path sets you up for tragedy, the other for regret.

### Choice 5

Variant text, plus a variant image of Henry flexing or frolicking in Julia's drawing in later 3D interlude.

### Choice 6

Reasonable amount of variant text, but reaching the same conclusion. Never mentioned again.



### Choice 7

Slight branch. It feels impactful in the moment (she takes the job or doesn't), but due to her illness it quickly becomes irrelevant. Either way the player is made to feel selfish.

### Choice 8

Slight branch. Again, feels impactful in the moment, but quickly becomes irrelevant and isn't remembered.

### Interlude 4

A crucial gameplay moment. Here's the player learns for the first time that their choices now effect Henry's present. This is reinforced again by being followed by a variant passage recalling your choice of dog earlier. It's clear: choices matter.

### Choice 9

The big one. It doesn't seem like it at the time, but this is the choice that most effects Henry's present. Interlude 4 has just taught you that these choices matter. This choice determines Julia's location for the duration of *Firewatch*, something that occasionally impacts dialogue throughout the game.

### Choice 9.5

No consequence at all. Here due to break up an otherwise long branch.

### Key

- Unchanging text
- Varied text based on prior choice
- 3D interlude
- Choice point

## TASK 2

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### DQ1

STUDENT: When you were choosing what to say to Delilah, were you saying them as Henry or yourself? Did you imagine what Henry would say or what you would say in his shoes?

TEACHER: Unlike in many games, in *Firewatch* your students play as an established character. This may make your students play as how they would behave themselves in the situation or roleplays what they think Henry would do. This question will make your students realize which way they played the game.

### DQ2

STUDENT: Did you ever feel guilty about being there because Henry left his wife behind? When you had the opportunity, did you tell Delilah that Henry is married or not? Why?

TEACHER: This question relates to the strength of the connection your students felt with Henry and his connection to his wife. This question is supposed to get your students to think about how much they related to Henry.

### DQ3

STUDENT: Did you put the wedding ring back on? Why? Did you even notice that it was off and on the desk?

TEACHER: This question answers one of the two questions for the students, whether they cared enough to put the ring back on or if they noticed that it was even gone. The ring is not hidden but put in plain sight on Henry's desk and it

### DQ4

STUDENT: Throughout the game, you were given opportunities to reveal more about Henry's past and about current events. Did you decide to be completely open, or did you decide to keep secrets from Delilah?

TEACHER: This question will get your students to talk about how much they trusted Delilah and how much they chose to reveal to someone who they barely knew and had never met face to face.

## DQ5

STUDENT: What did it feel like when Delilah was not in the fire tower at the end?

TEACHER: Your students may feel disappointed, angry, confused or any other feeling when at the end they do not get to meet Delilah face to face. This question allows your students to compare their reactions between each other.

## TASK 3

### BUILDING PARANOIA

STUDENT: Did *Firewatch* ever make you feel paranoid? What parts of the game did you notice built tension and paranoia? What were your original thoughts about these events and what ended up being the actual explanation? Use your journal entries for help.

TEACHER: A few examples of situations where *Firewatch* builds up paranoia was when Delilah was having a private conversation with someone else with Henry accidentally listening in, the tent full of scientific equipment and when Henry gets knocked out and some of his stuff gets stolen. This task is meant to show your students how their mindset affected their perceptions of the events. They likely thought there was a conspiracy going on but really it was just a hermit messing with Henry and Delilah.

## TASK 4

### SHUTTERBUG

STUDENT: Throughout the game, you presumably took some pictures with the disposable camera. Did you take a whole lot of pictures or ignored the camera completely? What kinds of things did you take pictures of? What can they tell of your version of Henry? What kind of story could your pictures tell if someone saw them without any context? Share your pictures with your group and discuss these questions. Did any of you take pictures of the same things?

TEACHER: Your students will find a disposable camera with nineteen shots left that they can use for whatever they want in the game. The limited number of shots will make them use them sparingly, taking photos of what is important to them, whether it is plot-related evidence or beautiful vistas. The point of this task is to get your students to realize how through these photos they can see how different their playthroughs were even though they went through the same story.

## TASK 5

### DEBATE

STUDENT: Can Delilah be trusted? Divide your group into two pairs and come up with arguments for both sides of the debate. After the first round of debating come up with

counterarguments. After the second round try to come to an agreement whether or not Delilah could be trusted.

TEACHER: Throughout the game, Delilah presents some suspicious behavior that can make your students feel like she is not being truthful with Henry. This debate will get your students to think about Delilah from the other point of view depending on if they trusted her in the first place.

## LESSON 2

### TASK 6

### GROUP WORK

STUDENT: In your small groups, create a new area with conversations between Henry and Delilah. Provide options and branching paths in the conversation. Describe the area and the items and events that can be found there and the conversation options that are available about the items. Draw a map of the area to help with your design. Prepare to present your area to the rest of the class.

TEACHER: This is the longer group project for *Firewatch*. Your students will have to design a new area for the game that fits the style of the original. The most important part of this is the dialogue between Henry and Delilah, so make sure that it gets the attention it deserves. After the groups have designed their areas, they should present them to the rest of the class. This task will let your students use everything they have learned from playing and discussing *Firewatch*.

### TASK 7

### WRAP-UP

STUDENT: What did you think of the game? Was the navigation using the map difficult? Did you find Delilah endearing or suspicious? Did the game make you feel surprising feelings? Anything else you would like to talk about before moving on?

TEACHER: Your students may have had some experiences that were not addressed by the tasks before. This task is meant to give them the opportunity to talk about whatever comes up and to wrap up *Firewatch* for this class.

# The Wolf Among Us

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER BEFORE PLAYING:

*The Wolf Among Us* is a point & click style detective game. This game was chosen because it offers a dialogue system that many video games use to let the player have some control over the story and main character that they control. Many of the tasks focus on the dialogue system. This game should be played twice because the story changes depending on the players' actions. Tell your students to read the instructions for tasks 1 and 2 before playing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS BEFORE PLAYING:

The first time you play *TWAU*, choose whatever dialogue options you like and make the choices that feel right to you. At the end you are shown a results screen of some of your choices, take a screenshot, a picture or write them down and bring them to class. After you have played through episode one once, play it again but this time choose different options. Make notes in your journal about how the story changes and how characters react differently to Bigby. Read the instructions for tasks 1 and 2 before playing.

## LESSON 1

### TASK 1

### WRONG CHOICES

STUDENT: Were any of your dialogue options or choices not what you thought they were? Write down in your journal what you thought Bigby was going to say, or you thought was going to happen and what ended up happening. Discuss these with your group and try to come up with better dialogue choices so that they are not misleading.

TEACHER: There are a few times when the options given to you students are too vague to know what exactly is going to happen. One example is when they are given an option to "Glass Him" in a bar, which sounds like offering a drink but actually means smashing a glass against someone's head. This task is meant to get your students to realize how carefully dialogue options need to be written so that they convey what will happen in the story.

### TASK 2

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TEACHER: The end results will help your students remember what choices they made in the game, make sure they have them with them.



#### DQ1

STUDENT: Did you ever choose to be silent? When and why? What were the effects of this?

TEACHER: Your students are always given four dialogue options, one of which is always being silent. This can have different outcomes depending on context, it can be seen as being rude, unsure or something else. This question is meant to convey to your students how even silence can be a way to let the player communicate.

#### DQ2

STUDENT: Do you think the investigation of Toad's apartment was done effectively? Is there anything you wanted to do but the game did not allow you to? What would you have wanted to do that you could not?

TEACHER: During the investigation, your students are allowed to only look at certain things in the apartment and ask certain questions from Toad. Your students may feel that their options were limited and thus they could not investigate the way they wanted to. This question is meant to get your students to realize how limited options can make a game feel constrained.

#### DQ3

STUDENT: Did you give Faith your money? Why?

TEACHER: This choice will not have large consequences, the only one in this Episode 1 being that Bigby cannot buy cigarettes later in a bar. This question will make your students think about how they behaved as Bigby.

#### DQ4

STUDENT: Did you decide to go to Toad's apartment or Prince Lawrence's apartment first? How did you decide that?

TEACHER: Your students will have a branching choice to make, and it is another way to get your students to think how they behaved as Bigby, did they decide to answer Toad's call for help or continue with the investigation on Prince Lawrence's apartment.

#### DQ5

STUDENT: What happened to Prince Lawrence? Did you feel responsible for his fate?

TEACHER: Depending on their previous choice, your students might have arrived at Prince Lawrence's apartment before he died. Even if they arrived on time, they could let him die if they hide in the closet for too long. This question is meant to get your student to think about the unforeseen consequences of their actions.

#### DQ6

STUDENT: Who did you name as your prime suspect in the cab when Snow asked? Why did you suspect this person? Was there someone you would have liked to name but could not?

TEACHER: Your students are given a number of suspects to choose from and they can name any one of them for any reason. It is also possible for them to name nobody. This question is supposed to get your students to think about the reasons for their accusations.

DQ7

STUDENT: Who did you arrest in the bar? Tweedle Dee or Woodsman? Why did you make this choice?

TEACHER: This is a split-second decision your students will have to make. There will not be any immediate consequences as Episode 1 ends shortly after this. The reasoning behind their choice will be telling of who they think is more important to the case.

TASK 3

DEBATE

STUDENT: Having played both *Firewatch* and *TWAU*, which has the better dialogue system? Divide your group into two pairs and come up with arguments for both sides of the debate. After the first round of debating come up with counterarguments. After the second round try to come to an agreement as to which game has the better dialogue system.

TEACHER: In this debate, your students will have to come up with arguments from two different games, so make sure that they have already played *Firewatch*. Some students may prefer to always have four options instead of a varied amount, whereas some may prefer to be able to instigate conversations based on what they see in the game world.

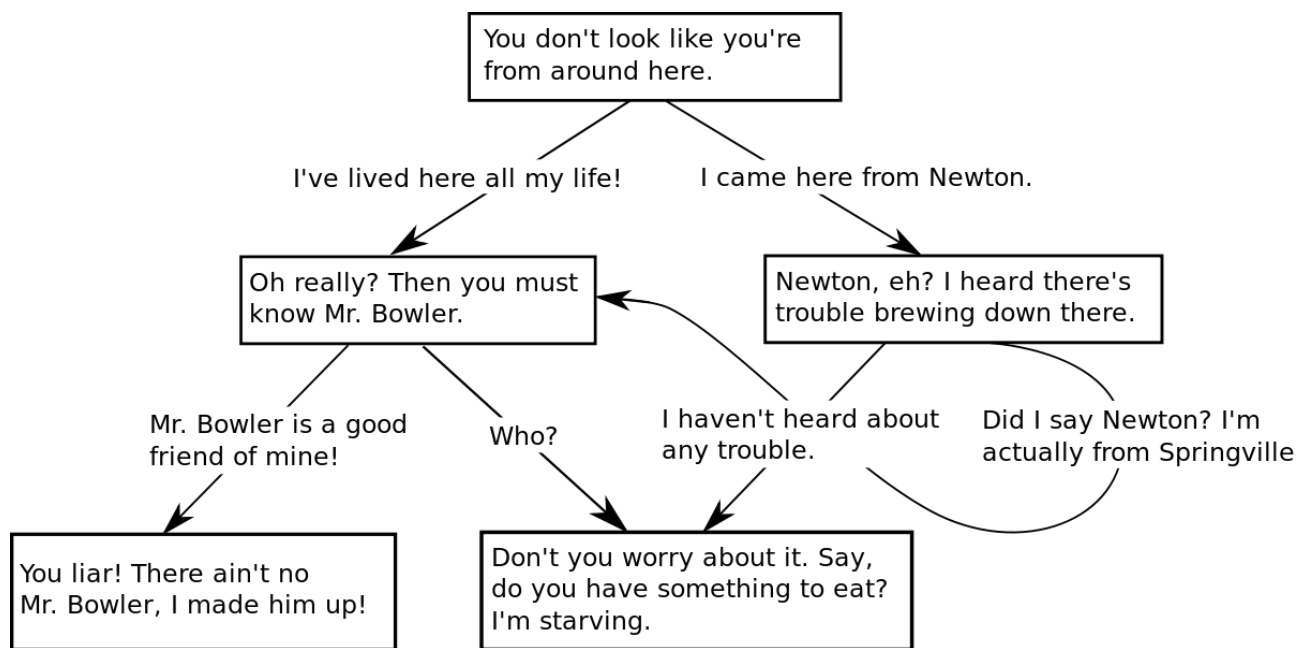
LESSON 2

TASK 4

GROUP PROJECT

STUDENT: Write a new area with a conversation with Bigby and a new character for the game. The new character could be any fairy tale character you are familiar with, or a character you have already seen in the game. Remember to write multiple choices and branching conversation paths. Write down the different conclusions that the conversation can have. Write it in a dialogue tree model. Prepare to present your design for the rest of the class.

TEACHER: In this group project, your students have to make use of what they learned about dialogue systems from *TWAU*. You can use the attached dialogue tree example to assist your student. (Example taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue\\_tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue_tree))



#### TASK 5

#### WRAP-UP

STUDENT: What did you think of *The Wolf Among Us*? Was the dialogue system effective? Were the quick time events a hindrance to the narrative? Would the story have worked if it had not been in a video game? Did Episode 1 make you want to play the rest of the episodes? Is there anything else you would like to talk about before moving on from *The Wolf Among Us*?

TEACHER: This task is meant to wrap up *TWAWU* and give your students an option to talk about something that was not brought up before.

# What Remains of Edith Finch

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER BEFORE PLAYING:

This game was chosen because it offers multiple perspectives from multiple characters which were in turn enhanced by their unique gameplay sections. Much of the game is open for interpretation, but it seems to be about how people perceive events through their own eyes, not necessarily how things actually happened. These events are always told as stories from someone else's point of view, making every narrator an unreliable one. Tell your students to read the instructions for task 1 before playing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS BEFORE PLAYING:

In *What Remains of Edith Finch*, you will play through varied gameplay segments that tell the stories of different members of the Finch family. Write notes in your journal after each segment about how you think the gameplay enhances the story being told. Read the instructions for task 1 before playing.

## LESSON 1

### TASK 1

### CHARACTER PROFILES

STUDENT: As you play through the different segments of the game, write in your journal a short description of the characters and what you learned from their gameplay segment. After their segment, write down everything you can learn of them from the environment, meaning everything that is not explicitly told to you. In class, compare your notes and discuss what you can learn from the environment that you cannot from the stories.

TEACHER: Slightly different than *Gone Home*, this time some of the story is told directly to your students but environmental storytelling is still used. This task will get your students to familiarize themselves with the Finch family members and think about how much they can learn of them either directly through narration or indirectly through environmental storytelling.

### TASK 2

### LUDONARRATIVE HARMONY

STUDENT: Play through the entire game and after each of the gameplay segments write down notes about how their unique gameplay mechanics are connected to their lives and eventual deaths. The segments you need to write notes about are Molly, Calvin, Barbara,

Walter, Sam, Gregory, Gus and Lewis, other members of the Finch family have no gameplay segments. In class, answer the following questions with your group.

1. How was the gameplay linked to the life of each character?
2. How was the gameplay linked to the death of each character?
3. Each gameplay segment shows how the characters themselves perceive their deaths. Is there a more believable, grounded explanation for each of their deaths?

TEACHER: The characters' individual gameplay segments relate to how they lived their lives and how they perceived their own deaths. The gameplay of each segment is uniquely tied to them, here are likely answers to each of the questions your students have to answer. Their interpretations might be different as the narrative is vague enough to allow other explanations.

#### MOLLY

1. Molly was fond of animals, which is evident by looking at her room, which is decorated with an animal theme. Her gameplay segment has her imagining she is all kinds of animals.
2. In her gameplay segment, Molly eats everything she sees as different animals, possibly because she imagined herself as a cat when she was climbing a tree, an owl as she fell from a tree and a shark when she fell into the sea. How exactly she died is unclear.
3. It is likely that she was poisoned by eating the berries and toothpaste and hallucinated her animal experiences. This would explain how she wrote her final diary entry.

#### CALVIN

1. Calvin wanted to become an astronaut and in his gameplay segment he tried to go as fast as possible on the swing set to go around the branch, showing how daring he was. He also had a broken leg, meaning he had injured himself in the past, maybe because of some other dangerous thing he was doing.
2. In the gameplay segment, his twin brother Sam narrates how he imagined that Calvin learned to fly as he always wanted to.
3. In reality Calvin presumably lost control while swinging and fell to his death.

#### BARBARA

1. The comic book that exploits her death for profit conveys her the way the world had seen her as a celebrity, as a commodity to be profited from rather than as a person. She is controlled by the player through a fictionalized tale, not from her own perspective.
2. Barbara was a former child star who wanted to become famous again and, ironically, her death made her so.
3. The comic book makes it look like she was killed by a gang of monsters, but it is more likely that it was either a serial killer or her boyfriend who went the same night.

#### WALTER

1. Walter was traumatized from witnessing Barbara's murder and secluded himself in the bunker. The repetitive gameplay reflects Walter's repetitive, monotonous life.
2. Walter thought the rumbling was the monster who killed his sister, waiting to get him. The rumbling turned out to be a train which ran over Walter, meaning that ironically, he was right about it waiting to kill him.
3. Another explanation is that the outside world was too much for Walter after decades of the same routine and he died from shock as he leaves his bunker. It is unlikely that a train would have run under the house in any case since it is the only house on the island and the tracks are broken.

#### SAM

1. Sam was a photographer and in his gameplay segment the player takes photos.
2. Sam was also a war photographer, meaning he took pictures of people either killing or dying. The final photo he took was of his own death.
3. There is not much room for interpretation in this one since there is photo evidence of what happened

#### GREGORY

1. Gregory, as a baby, sees things through a child's eyes and so the toys he is playing with seem alive to him, jumping and dancing with music. In his gameplay segment, Gregory plays and swims with his toys into the drainpipe, a situation that seems to him like a fun game because he doesn't understand the danger he is in.

2. It looks to Gregory like the frog jumps on the faucet and started the water flow again, possibly because that is how a baby sees the world, as a magical place where even his toys are alive.

3. What probably happened was that Gregory threw the frog toy at the faucet, which caused the water level to rise, which led to his drowning.

## GUS

1. Gus was a rebellious child, which is conveyed through his gameplay as he refuses to join the part and instead flies his kite alone, even as the storm appears.

2. During his gameplay segment, Gus controls the kite to the parts of the poem that his sister Dawn wrote after his death, meaning that this is what Dawn thinks happened.

3. It looks like the wedding tent got picked up by the storm and attacked Gus. What happened more likely was that Gus was the totem pole fell on him, which can be found lying on the beach where Gus was standing. Dawn then imagines that he was killed by the tent that covered his body and wrote a poem describing the event.

## LEWIS

1. Lewis was bored with his job at the cannery and started daydreaming. Just as his attention was divided, so are the controls, the left stick controls the daydream and the right controls the hand cutting the fish. As the fantasy becomes more complex, it gets harder to control but doing the fish cutting becomes almost autonomous, just like it became for Lewis. The abrupt cut to first person view and the grimy fish cannery creates the same disconnect for the player that Lewis was feeling.

2. Eventually Lewis' daydream became more real than his reality, to the point where he did not even realize he stuck his head through the fish cutter.

3. To Lewis it looks like he is being coronated, when in reality he decapitated himself on with the fish cutter.

## TASK 3

## DEBATE

STUDENT: Having played both *Gone Home* and *What Remains of Edith Finch*, which do you think uses its gameplay to convey its narrative better? Divide your group into two pairs and come up with arguments for both sides of the debate. After the first round of debating

come up with counterarguments. After the second round try to come to an agreement as to which game uses its gameplay better to tell a story.

TEACHER: Both games have their strengths and weaknesses, *Gone Home* utilizes exploration and environmental storytelling more strongly, but has very simple gameplay to the point of it being difficult for some to call it a game at all. *What Remains of Edith Finch* uses varied gameplay mechanics to support the individual stories within but does not allow the player to examine their environment in much detail.

## LESSON 2

### TASK 4

### GROUP PROJECT

STUDENT: Design a gameplay segment for the death of one of the members of the Finch family who did not have their own segment in the game. These are Odin, Dawn, Milton, Edie, Sven and Sanjay. Write the segment based on what you know of them and how they died and write down how their gameplay segment reflect the way they lived their lives. Hints of each character can be found in the house, but not necessarily how they died. Prepare to present your gameplay segment to the rest of the class.

TEACHER: This group project is an opportunity for your students to show what they have learned about how gameplay can enhance a story told in a video game.

### TASK 5

### WRAP-UP

STUDENT: How did you like the game? Are you sick of walking simulators yet? Anything else you wish to talk about?

TEACHER: Much like the other wrap-ups, this is a way to conclude *What Remains of Edith Finch* for this class and give your students an opportunity to voice their final thoughts.



# The Stanley Parable

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER BEFORE PLAYING:

*The Stanley Parable* is about the relationship between the narrator and the player. The narrator reacts to what the player does, and the player can react to what the narrator says, creating different paths in the narrative. *TSP* should be the last game played so that your students will have at least some experience with video games. Your students can find an ending for the game within a few minutes of starting it, so tell your students to play for at least two hours or until they run out of ideas. Tell your students to read the instructions for task 1 before playing.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS BEFORE PLAYING:

Write down in your journal everything that happens in *The Stanley Parable* that you would not expect to normally happen in a video game. Read the instructions for task 1 before playing.

## LESSON 1

### TASK 1

### DEFYING PLAYER EXPECTATIONS

STUDENT: As you play through *The Stanley Parable*, make notes of situations you found funny, unexpected, or otherwise surprising. In class, compile a list of your notes with your group and write down what you thought was going to happen and what happened instead. What were the effects that these events had on you?

TEACHER: This task is supposed to get your students to think about the different ways that *The Stanley Parable* defies player expectations and reacts to the player's actions. One example is how at one point the game turns into *Minecraft*, a completely different game, and another example is if the player refuses to put in a code to open a hidden code, the narrator gets frustrated and opens it himself.

### TASK 2

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### DQ1

STUDENT: How did the narrator's narration guide your decisions? Did you initially choose to follow or disobey his instructions? Did you take the door to the left or right at the start? Why did you choose that one?

TEACHER: The player can either follow the narrator's guidance or choose to disobey him, leading to different outcomes in the narrative. This question is meant to get your students to think about how the player can test the boundaries of *The Stanley Parable* and why a player might choose to do that.

#### DQ2

STUDENT: Did your previous experiences with video games affect your decisions? Were you more or less willing to obey the narrator? Why?

TEACHER: If some of your students have more experience with video games, they are more familiar with basic rules of gameplay and might be more willing to push the boundaries of the game. This question is meant to compare an experienced player's decisions to an inexperienced player's decisions and see if they are any different.

#### TASK 3

#### HUMOR IN VIDEO GAMES

STUDENT: Based on what you played in *The Stanley Parable*, how can video games create humor through player actions? How does this humor contrast to other forms of media where the person is just passively watching or reading the comedy unfold? Using your notes, take one example from the game and explain how the joke works and why it would not work in any other media other than a video game.

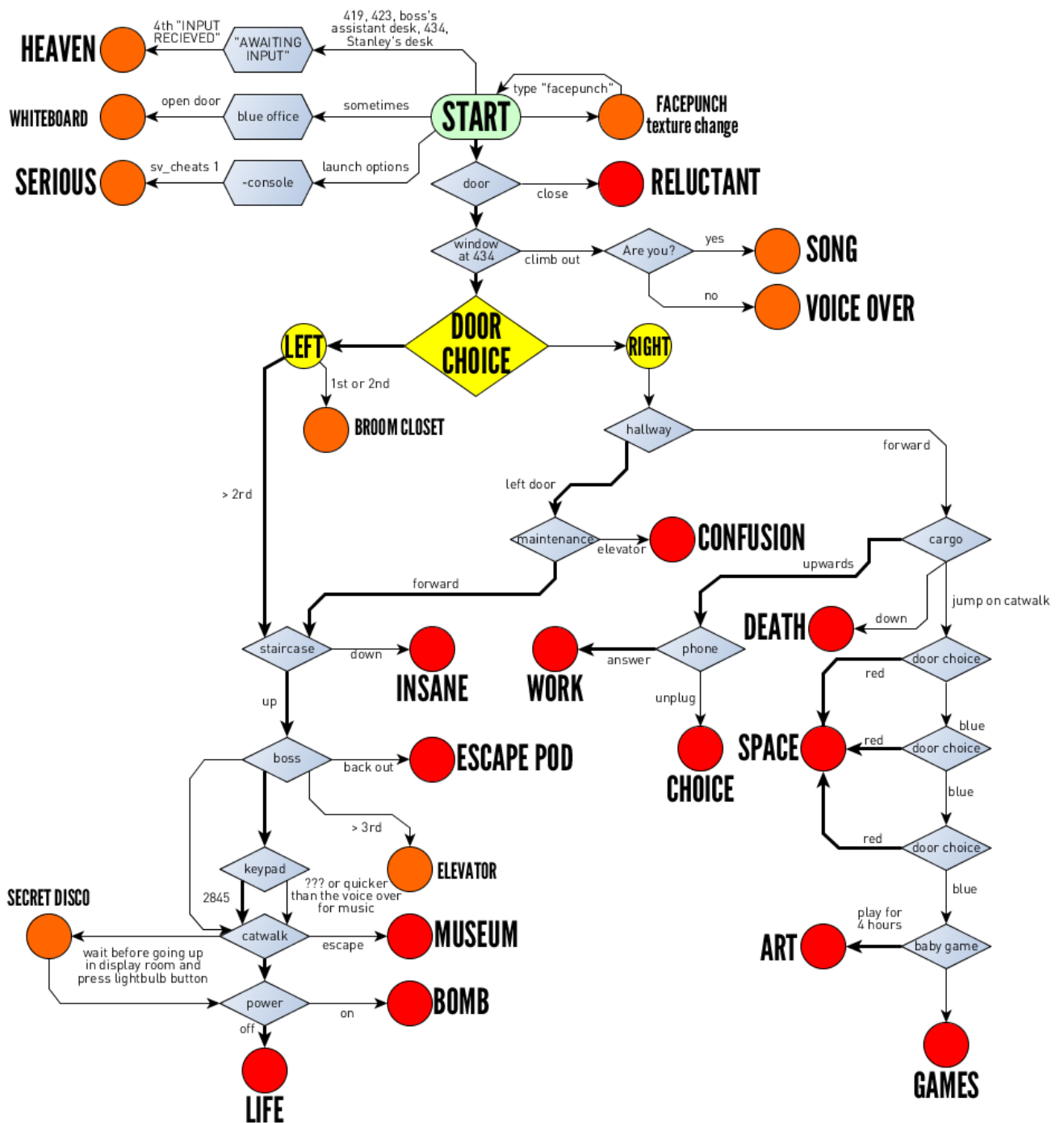
TEACHER: Unlike in linear media, in video games the player is in control of the pace and because of this humor is more difficult to achieve. This task is meant to get your students to think about how *TSP* performed its jokes and why they worked.

#### TASK 4

#### FLOW CHART OF CHOICES

STUDENT: Using the attached flowchart, discuss with your group what endings you got in the game. Were there any endings that all of you got? Were there any that only one of you did? Were there any that none of you did?

TEACHER: Many of the endings in *TSP* require some creative thinking, such as jumping down from the cargo lift to a catwalk below and continuing that way or unplugging the telephone. This task is meant to show your students how there were many endings they never even thought of. Use the attached flowchart to show your students all the different paths and be ready to explain how they could have gotten to each of them. (Flowchart taken from <https://thestanleyparable.fandom.com/wiki/Endings>)



## LESSON 2

### TASK 5

### GROUP PROJECT

STUDENT: Write a new ending for the game that defies expectations of what should happen in a video game narrative. Draw inspiration from what you have learned from the previous

games played and what you have come to expect based on their rules. Remember to write dialogue for the narrator. Prepare to present your ending to the rest of the class.

TEACHER: This task is meant to give your students an opportunity to draw from all the experience with video games and their narratives that they have accrued over the course of this material package.

#### TASK 6

#### WRAP-UP FOR THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

STUDENT: Which game did you like the most? Which one did you like the least? Anything you want to talk about before the course ends? Is there anything that could have been done better? Which tasks did you like the most? Was there too much of some type of tasks?

TEACHER: This is the final task for this material package and the course you are teaching and is mostly used to get feedback on the material package. If you choose to use this material package again in the future the feedback could be used to improve any shortcomings.