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Dungeon Classroom Guide

Using Tabletop Role-Playing Games
in the Classroom

by Gannon Youakim

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Foreword

I'm writing this booklet to show educators why tabletop role-playing games are a useful academic tool.

I have loved teaching and tabletop role-playing games for a long time. I firmly believe they are both magical. As I've learned and experienced more of teaching and role-playing, I've come to discover their synergies. The goal of a classroom is to gather minds and learn through experience. The goal of a tabletop role-playing game is to gather minds and learn through experience. At first glance, the types of learning associated between the two don't seem to synchronize. Classrooms are formal; games are informal. Classrooms are mandatory; games are recreational. Classrooms are for the future; games are for the now.

With proper understanding, however, you can see these dichotomies as a spectrum. You can see how to blend classroom and game into a uniform artifact of discovery and enjoyment. Furthermore, you can see how each benefits from the other, enriching the experience of either in the absence of its counterpart.

Some of you who are reading this may already be familiar with tabletop role-playing games, and therefore already have an inkling of the connection between them and education. For you, portions of this booklet may seem unnecessary. Hopefully, portions of it are still helpful in formalizing your intuitive connection and presenting possibilities for combining the two. For those of you who are not familiar with tabletop role-playing games, you may find it necessary to pause your reading and look up some information because the things I am saying sound like a foreign language.

Both of these are alright. This is not a summative guide of everything education and everything tabletop role-playing, but one future teacher's understanding of how the two play into each other. It is neither perfect nor complete, nor is it meant to be. It is more of an access point for you to start experimenting with tabletop role-playing games in your classroom. Just like the story created around the table during a tabletop role-playing game, truly harnessing this book will come in the moment of play.

Regardless of where you start when reading this booklet, I hope by its end you see how teaching and tabletop role-playing work together because of their focus on people, imagination, and an unceasing desire to explore.

Introduction: Setting the Table

What Is an RPG?

Before we talk about fantasy tabletop role-playing games being used in the classroom, we need to define them. Fantasy tabletop role-playing game. That’s a lot of words. Mix ‘em, mash ‘em, put ‘em in a stew, and they’re still a mouthful; depending on who makes the stew and whose mouth they reside in, they taste - or mean - something different. Fantasy tabletop role-playing games themselves (hereafter referred to as RPGs) find it necessary to lay out definitions in their rulebooks before they embark on an explanation of the rules, so if we seek to define them, we could start there. For example, the writers of *Dungeons & Dragons* - arguably the most popular RPG of the bunch - describe the game in the most recent edition of the *Player’s Handbook*:

“The Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game is about storytelling in worlds of swords and sorcery. It shares elements with childhood games of make-believe...Unlike a game of make-believe, D&D gives structure to the stories, a way of determining the consequences of the adventurers’ action.”¹

Here, we see a focus on storytelling, genre, and imagination, with a distinction from make-believe with the promise of structure.

Another popular game of the genre, *Pathfinder*, defines itself as “a cooperative storytelling game, where the players play the protagonists and the Game Master acts as the narrator, controlling the rest of the world.”² Storytelling is again the focus of the definition. In addition, there is a delineation between how the story is controlled - in one corner, the players as protagonists; in the other, the “Game Master” as narrator of everything else. Such a delineation highlights the story as one shared by a group of people in a complex manner.

There are a host of other games, each with their own core rulebook, and each core rulebook includes a definition of what the game is. Notably, these games do not define the genre - just themselves. In order to get a definition of the genre as a whole, then, we can turn to academics.

In *The Postmodern Joy of Role-Playing Games: Agency, Ritual, and Meaning in the Medium*, René Reinhold Schallerger also finds the need to define the medium:

“Pen and paper RPGs are communal and cooperative oral storytelling activities of at least two participants with no or only a limited degree of physical acting...Pen and paper RPGs are thus collective efforts of structured, formal play (games) that negotiate and create a communal narrative experience from actions in secondary reality through verbal interaction in primary reality.”³

Schalleger's definition of RPGs is notably general. (He dubs them "pen and paper" RPGs; this is another name for the tabletop RPG we reference.) A lot of aspects of their definition are fundamental to defining RPGs, but I find the description of "collective efforts of structured, formal play (games) that negotiate and create a communal narrative experience" particularly effective.

If you break it down, there are three components RPGs. Tabletop. The game takes place around a "table" - or rather, everyone involved gathers together as a communal unit. Role-playing. Everyone involved takes on roles in a story in order to create a narrative. Game. The end product is created through organized play. When it comes down to it, my definition of a tabletop role-playing game is coming together to make a story through play.

Which RPG to Use?

Now that we have defined our area of interest, we need to specify the fantasy RPG with which we want to work. Most of this booklet can be applied generally to all genres of RPGs; however, it is a bit impractical to try to reference all genres of RPGs, which is why I have narrowed it down to fantasy.

Why fantasy? Fantasy embraces the flexibility of RPGs. In the world of the fantastic, anything is possible. All genres include some modicum of extended possibility; magic, however, can remain unexplained and still be satisfying. Of course, there are magic systems that are very scientific and rigid because some people like things explained. That is still a possibility in fantasy. When it comes down to it, though, the ability to make anything happen is invaluable for enabling the players of the game - in this case, students. Also, many YA novels - which are often targeted at demographics that contain students - incorporate elements of fantasy, which makes it a relatable genre.

Unfortunately - well, fortunately, really - there are a host of fantasy RPGs from which to pick. *Dungeon World*, *Pathfinder*, *Chivalry and Sorcery* - the list continues. I will be using *Dungeons & Dragons: Fifth Edition*. Part of my reason for choosing *Dungeons & Dragons: Fifth Edition* (hereafter referred to as *D&D 5e*) is familiarity. I have played with this system the most, I have played with this system the most recently, and I have played with it enough to know the rules well. I also believe that it is a system that caters to flexibility. It eschews a lot of problematic, rigid rules and patterns in favor of looser ones that let its players explore narrative - which is kind of our goal here, right? Lastly, *D&D* is the progenitor of RPGs as a whole (not just the tabletop variety, but of *all* RPGs.) *D&D 5e* has a long, vetted history in becoming the game it is today.¹

Please note that me using *D&D 5e* does not mean it is the only system that works as an education tool, nor that it is the system that you should or have to use. I prefer this system. I know how it works. I have used it multiple times. I understand how - when used properly - it can enable students to learn. It does not mean it is the only RPG system that does so. If you are more

familiar with another system and can envision its success as a learning tool, please use it. If you are unfamiliar with other systems, though, *D&D 5e* is a great place to start.

Booklet of Magic

Hopefully we are on the same footing. We've defined RPGs, we've explained why we are using fantasy RPGs, we've selected *D&D 5e* as our game system of choice, and we've explained why we are using it. Now let's talk about what we are getting into.

I believe RPGs are an excellent tool for classroom learning because their co-constructed nature brings students together to mix up the classroom in a way that opens new paths of learning while maintaining traditional classroom values. RPGs encourage both intellectual and social flexibility through structured play. By utilizing RPGs and incorporating elements of teaching into them, teachers can encourage a growth in their students that is unique to RPGs. Such learning is possible in all subject areas, but it is especially potent in an English classroom, as a fundamental part of RPGs is the creation of narrative.

Those are a lot of big claims. I can't promise to sway you completely to my beliefs; unlike in a fantasy RPG, I don't have the magic to charm you so. In place of spellcraft, I have done an ample amount of reading and synthesizing what I've read with my personal knowledge of RPGs.¹ I display what I've discovered in the following chapters.

Chapter One: Principles of Use. In this chapter, I elaborate on the reasons I believe RPGs are useful teaching tools in the classroom. I talk about the importance of play, the co-constructed nature of RPGs, the social components of RPGs, and how they mix up the traditional classroom while maintaining education standards.

Chapter Two: In the English Classroom. In this chapter, I connect the principles of use to English-specific subject matter and classrooms. I further elucidate the narrative nature of RPGs and how that narrative nature can be used to help understand components of narrative, engage with texts, and teach creative writing. I also outline some methods of including RPGs in - and out of - the classroom.

Chapter Three: Going on an Adventure. This chapter is comprised of an example scenario that can be run in an English classroom. There are explanations here and there that connect parts of the adventure to Chapter One and Chapter Two, as well as explanations of how to handle certain parts of the scenario given different contexts.

Chapter Four: FAQ. In this chapter, I answer some questions that might pop up during your reading, or others might ask you if you share this booklet with them. Since I do not practice the art of divination, I am not able to predict all your questions. I try to include the ones that are vital to the cohesion of my argument.

Endnotes. This is not a chapter per se, but a necessary inclusion. You will notice that I will reference different sources throughout the booklet. Rather than bog down the text with long explanations and quotes and page numbers, I move all that extra mumbo jumbo to the back. My

goal is to be concise and readable. If you want to know more detailed information about my sources and why I use them in each particular instance, look here.

By the end of this booklet, I hope you come to understand the benefits of using RPGs in the classroom, get a better picture of how it can be done, and are inspired to incorporate RPGs into your curriculum. If you aren't, no offense taken. If you are, be ready for a fantastic experience. You will find that the magic of RPGs and the magic of learning go hand in hand.

Chapter One: Principles of Use

Why RPGs?

Role-playing is not uncommon in classrooms today. In Social Studies classrooms, students may be asked to be a part of a simulation where, given certain information about groups from a historical era, they must replay an important event from history. In classes on leadership or dealing with crisis, students might role-play with actors to practice how they would deal with crisis situations. Even some Math classrooms use role-play through word problems; students have to put themselves in the situation of a person with a problem and use their knowledge of different principles and equations to solve it.

Games are not uncommon either. In fact, I would go as far as to say that games are *common* in classrooms. Competition and challenge are a great way to motivate students while at the same time asking them to perform what they have learned. Kahoot, Jeopardy, and other knowledge-assessment games can be framed as competition amongst peers, or even push students to compete with themselves. Tests, really, are big competitions.

Although RPGs mix role-playing and games, they *are* uncommon. The chances you have seen an RPG in use in the classroom are very slim. (Not to say there aren't instances out there.)¹ Even though RPGs combine elements of role-playing and elements of games that are already in use in the classroom, they lack prevalence in an academic setting. A small part of this may be due to latent discomfort of what RPGs entail.² A larger part, however, is a lack of understanding of how RPGs connect to the values of the classroom.

The contents of this chapter seek to fill those gaps in understanding. I will point out how play, which is core to RPGs, is an important part of learning that predates the classroom. Once I build a baseline for play, I will then go on to explain how the distinct structure of RPGs as co-constructed narratives allows them limitless possibilities. I will also describe the communal and individual social benefits inherent to RPGs. Finally, I will show how RPGs open the classroom to different types of learning while maintaining traditional classroom standards.

The Importance of Play

The term “play” does not necessarily mean “game.” Play is something that is older than human culture, according to Johan Huizinga.¹ It even precedes humans; a look at two puppies playing together shows how primal play can be. Play functions not just as an escapade of enjoyment, but as a symbolic change that proliferates meaning. When the puppies are playing, they are sending all sorts of messages to each other: messages about their relationship, messages about how they behave, messages about how the world work, etc. Both biologically and socially,

play allows for the creation of meaning. Understanding play gives us a good basis for what about games - which include play - are so naturally alluring to students. Knowing about the natural tendency for play and its role in creating meaning also connects the learning fundamental to play to how RPGs - which are games, which include play - can be used in a learning environment.

Huizinga defines play in one of his works, but Roger Caillois furthers his definition of play by filling in the gaps with a more systematic definition. Caillois proposes six aspects of play: it is free, it is separate, it is uncertain, it is unproductive, it is structured, and it is unreal.² Without an explanation, these labels are vague and, at some points, seemingly contradictory. How can something be free and uncertain, but structured? How can play proliferate meaning but be unproductive? It is most important to understand that Caillois' labels try to show that play needs to be an act of joy with some sort of implicit agreement of structure, but without concrete demands.

How, then, can we use RPGs, which are supposed to be about play, in the classroom if we can't get anything out of them? This is because RPGs aren't *just* play; they are games. Games include elements of play, but do not necessarily include all the elements of play, or include them all to their full potential.³ It is still possible to play games and benefit from some of the elements of play while not including others. Although using RPGs just for play in the classroom is a possibility - just like using anything in the classroom just for play is a possibility - the demands of education often make it necessary to put demands on play in games. As I mention above, play does not necessarily mean game, but all games include aspects of play. This means games include some forms of meaning making, which qualifies them as tools for learning. If a game can help communicate meaning through play, educators can manipulate those games to deliver meaning related to what they are trying to teach.

Caillois, coincidentally, categorized games in a similar manner to the way he categorized play. Caillois puts games into four types based on which aspect of the game is most dominant: competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo.⁴ Most games focus on one or two of these aspects. Chess is a game of competition. Craps is a game of chance. Rummy is both competition and chance. RPGs are distinct because they include all four game types at one point or another, which makes them a diverse tool of learning through games.

Another feature of play and the formal nature brought to it by games is something Steven Johnson calls "collateral learning."⁵ We have already established that play is a way of learning fundamental to humans. Even if games do not have learning specifically designed into their structure, the presence of the structure itself leads to learning, which is why "collateral learning" has the "collateral" part: the learning is unintended. As part of being human, we interact with new structures by "probing" and "telescoping." Probing is the ability to explore phenomena, test hypotheses, and adapt those hypotheses based on results. Telescoping is the ability to balance and transition between short-term and long-term goals. These two skills are fundamental to how we interact with the world, and they can be seen when we play games - whether the games are designed to teach or not.

The gamemaster in an RPG might narrate the group of adventurers coming to a fork in the road. The players might have their characters go a little ways down each path to see which one looks more dangerous (probing.) They keep in mind that they want to get to the city on the other side of the forest the forked road goes through (telescoping - long-term goal,) but they know they have to choose the right path and get through it safely (telescoping - short-term goals.) Since games have structures built into them, it is necessary to probe and telescope in regards to these structures and the actions they allow, thereby rehearsing these important skills. Thus, playing games - including RPGs - teach some skills central to being a playful human being, which qualifies them for the classroom.

Play is fundamental to being human. Through play, we learn. Be it through probing, telescoping, or just the act of joy that is play, students can learn from the elements of play inherent in games. Games contain varied aspects of play depending on their type; RPGs, unlike most games, cover all types of games, making them a particular diverse learning tool in association with play. Since play is so inherent to what it means to be human, it is easy to see how RPGs not only allure students, but benefit them.

A Unique Structure: Co-Constructed Games

Play takes place in many games. What makes RPGs special? Unlike other games - chess, cards, *Settlers of Catan* - RPGs are co-constructed. They have a unique structure in that everyone involved in the game has a hand in creating the experience of the game. Only through the act of sitting down and playing the game is the game made whole. Now, you might look at a game of chess and say, “The end result does not happen without two players sitting down at the table together and playing until someone wins.” You’re right. You need two players to win a game of chess. However, RPGs do not have a designated winner. There is no end goal. All of the fun of the game is in the process of playing it. This is what makes RPGs unique; they are systems designed around playing. Rather than focus on an end goal, RPGs focus on the narrative that emerges from play, the process that makes that narrative, and the limitless possibilities involved.

RPGs are all about making narratives. Inherent in the title of the game is “role-playing,” or taking a role in a story. It’s one of the most distinguishing features about RPGs. Henry Jenkins describes RPGs as games with “narrative architecture.”¹ They are spaces where narrative can occur - spaces ripe with narrative possibility. One of the types of narratives RPGs has space for is Jenkins’ emergent narrative: the narrative that is created from gameplay.² This is perhaps the most important narrative because it is entirely created in the process; it is a result of the players sitting down at the table and working together to create a story. Returning to the example of the fork in the road, the gamemaster designs the narrative of the fork and what is on each path, only the party can create the narrative of the how they decide which path to take and how they react to what is on that path. (Who knows; they might even turn around and go back the way they came -

or walk off the road into the woods.) Such a narrative is only possible due to the process involved in RPGs.

Schallegger says games are procedural in nature.³ By being procedural, the importance of the game lies in the process of creating it. A process-oriented definition of the game focuses on how the game functions based on the process of creation. Everything important about RPGs in the classroom occurs in the process of playing them. It's the reason you can't read a transcript of an RPG game session and come close to understanding all the components that go into playing it. Process is all about what takes place in the moment, the action, the procedures involved in creating the actual game experience. Unlike chess, where there are many possibilities to get to an end result, the process-oriented nature of RPGs means that all possibilities are created in the moment of play itself.

In the example of the fork in the road, there are some possibilities that are set out before the process of play by the gamemaster (in the form of the two paths,) but there are countless possibilities that can actually be enacted by the players. Those possibilities are only discovered as the players play the game. The possibilities are unlocked through the process of play. The focus on process is important because it emphasizes having people be a part of the process. In a classroom, these people are students. The process-oriented approach of RPGs enriches students by including them.

The inclusion of students allows for immersion and agency.⁴ Since students are a part of the process, they have the opportunity to be immersed in a role. Immersion allows "theory of mind," or the ability to transport oneself into the shoes of another. It is a fundamental social and cultural tool. It is also vital in making students feel like they are apart of something. Along with immersion, the inclusion of students in the process of RPGs gives them agency: the power to do. Agency empowers students - one of the focuses of education. The players are there at the road in the form of their characters, and they are the ones who get to make the decision. By being allowed to participate in the process of creating narrative in RPGs, students experience immersion and agency, enabling them and empowering them.

The agency in RPGs comes from the ability to affect the narrative. Because all possibilities are created in the moment of play, the most important people to the game are those around the table. Although the rules lay out how the game is played, the game never comes about until the players and gamemaster sit down and interact. This interaction is another way that RPGs are distinct. Unlike traditional narratives where authorship lies in the hands of one, RPGs put this power in the hands of everyone at the table. There is a constant oscillation of power between the players and the gamemaster. Proponents of the Meilahti School of RPG theory argue that any gamemaster must give up some power to the players, be it implicitly or explicitly, in order for meaningful narrative to take place.⁵ This shared power makes RPGs distinct from other narratives. The blurring of lines between producer and recipient is something that is more flexible in RPGs than any other interactive media.⁶

The structure of RPGs allows students to be directly involved in creating understanding, which is one of the tenets of constructivism.⁷ Students get to participate in the process of creating the narrative. As a result, they are active learners in a community. They are learning by taking part and piecing together the narrative bit-by-bit. Their understanding is constructed through the process of playing; they are constantly testing new theories, dealing with new problems, and experimenting with how to combine their actions with the actions of others to create the narrative. Since RPGs are all about process, they are all about doing. Students who play RPGs are learning by doing.

The unique structure of RPGs empowers readers by allowing them to participate in the process of narrative, thereby having them learn by doing. The most important part of the structure, however, is the lack of limitations put on the process creating. Rilstone's definition of RPGs emphasizes the freedom of choice allowed to those involved in the game.⁸ The gamemaster might lay out two paths for the players, but they can really go anywhere. This freedom partially comes because the challenges put forth to players occurs in a secondary reality, so it is unrestricted by the normal laws of primary reality.⁹ It also comes from the fact that RPGs are both narrative and non-narrative games.¹⁰ Although RPGs create space for narrative to occur, they are not fundamentally narrative in nature; the narrative comes from the process of playing them. In these ways - narrative, process, and possibility - the structure of RPGs is unlike any other, and therefore is a flexible tool for teaching in the classroom.

Around the Table

Part of my definition of RPGs is about the “tabletop” experience. RPGs are focused on bringing people together to play the game. This is seen in the co-constructed nature of RPGs, and it makes them distinct from other games. RPGs become social games by bringing people together. An important part of coming together at the table is working together; if the members of the group playing don't work together, the process of playing the game stagnates and becomes ineffective. RPGs encourage students to make a social contract, not only allowing the game to function, but also encouraging individual social growth in students via the social network of learning created in the agreement of the social contract.

Ron Edwards believes the social contract is what makes the experience of RPGs possible.¹ He contends that role-playing is a fundamentally human activity - not about rules. The social contract, then, comes from players sitting down at the table and agreeing to work with each other. Such a contract creates a bond - a social network - and teaches the skills necessary for healthy social living. Negotiating the social network built into the structure of RPGs mirrors real-life social strategies.² The necessity to take action as an “other” with others makes RPGs a space for cultivating empathy.³ RPGs nurture real-life social skills like empathy. These skills allow students to navigate the social web both inside the game and outside the game. The nature of the social contract also develops important intrapersonal skills in students.

Although working with others is an essential experience in RPGs, it also forces students to work with themselves. The social experience of RPGs gives students a chance to better understand their identity, better relate their identity to others, and better see themselves as capable human beings. These skills come from working around the table with others. They also come from trying to be others through role-play. Through these intrapersonal skills, students become competent and confident in their ability to successfully be part of a community like a classroom.

One of the hardest people to get to know is yourself. Sarah Lynne Bowman describes how the role-playing aspect of RPGs lets you do just that through what she calls “identity elasticity.”⁴ Identity elasticity is basically navigating the many identities you are comprised of. No matter how hard you try, some of your character’s aspects when role-playing are going to reflect you as a person. Encountering these qualities and being forced to examine their relation to you can be key for self-examination.

Another way RPGs force you to navigate mindsets is through frame-switching. Frame-switching is navigating your different understandings of the game, of the group, and the narrative produced by RPGs.⁵ These frames - and the ability to navigate between them - parallels the demands of switching between individual, social, and cultural identities in everyday life. By training this skill, RPGs can prepare students to switch in such a manner that benefits their mental health and social success.

Frame-switching is similar to Goffman’s frame analysis.⁶ Frameworks of understanding get built socially, and individuals have to learn how to access and understand these frameworks. Meeting around the table to play an RPG develops all kinds of frameworks - the framework of primary reality, the framework of the secondary reality, the framework of the group, etc. Individuals have to work with both themselves and others to understand which of the frames to understand something. For example, someone might say, “I can’t believe you did that.” An individual then has to reference the context to understand if they are referring to the individual, the character, or the individual in regards to their control of the character. Utilizing these context clues and deducing the framework is a helpful skill for students when they need to adapt to different frameworks of understanding in real life.

Players also have to be able to jump between the understandings of their character and their own personal understandings. Role-playing is fundamentally adopting the role of another person - in the case of RPGs, a character. Frame-switching into game-understanding can help players make decisions in the role of their character. Although characters and players often share some characteristics, they are different identities. Players still need to maintain their own identity to make this separation effective. By practicing maintaining their own identity, they are rehearsing role distance.⁷ An understanding of how to separate and maintain different identities is beneficial for students that often find parts of their identities in conflict, or do not believe an identity/role they must adopt fits them.

Another way that RPGs benefit individuals is by teaching them the four “crucial C’s.”⁸ Through the process of play and working with others, students start to learn four important intrapersonal skills: connecting with others, demonstrating capabilities, believing they count and gaining significance through appropriate means, and exhibiting the courage to take risks and try new things. Connecting with others comes from meeting around the table and has obvious group implications even though the ability to do so is an individual skill. The latter three, though, enable a student to understand what they can do, believe they are important, and gain confidence in their agency. Since enabling students for success is one of the primary goals of education, RPGs contribution to them is a huge benefit to educators.

By putting students at a table together, RPGs encourage the development of social skills that empower individuals. RPGs create a social network of learning that students must navigate as part of the process of the game. Through navigating this web, students are better able to understand both others and themselves. This understanding further enables them to function in their future - be it in school or in their everyday lives. It is clear, then, that having students sit around a table to play RPGs is valuable to educators creating capable students.

Same Values, Different Perspectives

Playing RPGs in the classroom is unconventional. Using them may seem to deviate from many things education holds dear - but that’s wrong. In fact, RPGs implicitly train many of the real-world problem-solving skills that the rules of the classroom implicitly train. RPGs maintain many classroom standards, but they mix up the classroom enough to offer success to students who might be struggling in a traditional classroom. The inclusion of RPGs into a curriculum might offer students who learn differently a chance to succeed while still teaching them the same values of a traditional classroom.

Philosopher of education John Dewey believed in democratic learning: creating a meaningful connection between classroom curriculum and real-world problems students will encounter.¹ RPGs provide a space to learn and exercise the skills necessary to be successful in the real world. Furthermore, RPGs encourage a liberation from the traditional power structure that can be found in education by using “problem-posing” strategies to show students “knowledge is created through ongoing questioning, inquiry, and dialogue.”² RPGs merges real-world problem solving and active critical inquiry of power structures in a way that trains students for real life.³

RPGs cultivate the real-world problem-solving skills that educators try to develop in their students through their teaching. We’ve already discussed how the structure of RPGs leads to collateral learning.⁴ Through collateral learning, students develop “problem solving strategies, conflict management skills, interpersonal skills” - all just by playing the game.⁵ Teachers undoubtedly seek to develop these same skills in their students. Much like collateral learning, connected learning focuses on teaching students valuable skills by taking their personal interests

and transforming them into academic, economic, and political success.⁶ RPGs are connected learning in action. Students are given agency to incorporate what interests them in the game, and the gamemaster transforms these decisions into something relevant to the game. Since these personal decisions are a part of a game that teaches real-world skills, students' personal interests are connected to a process that can enable them to succeed.

RPGs maintain the values at the core of teaching: helping students acquire the skills necessary for the real world. In order to get these skills in the classroom, students need a guide in the role of a teacher. RPGs are no different. In order to reap the benefits of RPGs, students must have a flexible facilitator in the role of a gamemaster.⁷ Teacher and gamemaster are parallel roles; they both enable students/players to achieve by being guides. A teacher acting as a gamemaster already has the requisite skills to help students process what they are learning and give them appropriate feedback.⁸ The many roles of the gamemaster - master of rules, creator of worlds, teacher/advisor, storyteller, role-player, bookkeeper - give teachers the opportunity to provide this aid, in addition to giving them the opportunity to take what they learn from those roles and incorporate it back into their regular teaching.⁹

Even though RPGs maintain the values of a traditional classroom, they are more open to different methods of learning. Not all students approach learning the same way. This is a common concept in the field of education, and many teachers consider it part of their job to find the best way to teach their students. A teacher must ride the line between flexibility and effectiveness. RPGs are certainly a different method of teaching. They are untraditional, but they are effective, and they are flexible in a way that caters to different methods of learning.

Jerome Bruner's narrative construction of reality indicates that one way humans learn is through narrative.¹⁰ RPGs certainly qualify as a narrative, and therefore cater to this type of understanding. They also engage the curricular mode of being, which encourages students through motivation, engagement, and focusing on becoming who they want to be.¹¹ RPGs give students a chance to take their capabilities and connect them to their functionings (what they can become, such as in the mode of being) on two platforms: in primary reality, and in secondary reality.¹² Students get to play a character and see an example of how they can use that character's abilities can be used in a way to lead to a desired future state.¹³ Through the example of the character, students can better understand how their own capabilities can affect who they become - and they are developing their capabilities at the same time.

Students also get to access the RPG experience from multiple different modes of understanding. According to Edwards' GNS theory, they can take different stances - actor, author, or director - as players when making decisions for their character.¹⁴ The structure of the game itself covers multiple different frames of understanding as well.¹⁵ By consisting of all of these frames, the game situates students in a way where regardless of their type of learning, there probably exists a frame of understanding where they feel they can have agency and exercise their knowledge and abilities.

RPGs cater to many students by being open to a variety of methods of understanding, but they cater to almost every student by tapping into the reward system.¹⁶ The joy of playing a game triggers dopamine release in the reward circuitry of the brain. Most students can be encouraged to learn through this system. If students feel like an aspect of the game is not working for them, it is not a big deal. Failure does not have huge consequences in RPGs. It might in the narrative, but at the end of the day, and RPG is just a game. If a student is failing to enjoy the game, they can step away with little consequence.¹⁷ RPGs cater to many students while remaining light and fun.

RPGs may be very different from what occurs in a traditional classroom, but the skills and values they promote are not that different from those of a traditional classroom. RPGs teach real-world skills and enable students to connect their experience to their future selves. If students need to get the real-world skills of a traditional classroom but have trouble learning via the methods of a traditional classroom, RPGs are a good choice for them because RPGs inherently include many different methods of understanding. RPGs are a viable choice for the classroom because they maintain the same values, but do so from different perspectives.

Chapter Two: In the English Classroom

Narrative, Intertextuality, Writing and More

As mentioned in “Chapter One: Principles of Use,” RPGs are narrative in nature. Coincidentally, a large part of what students study in English classrooms is narrative. The narrative focus of RPGs makes them perfect for English classrooms in particular. As a future English teacher, I have thought about ways I can incorporate my two passions, RPGs and teaching. These passions have become the cornerstone of this booklet. In this chapter, I will give a general outline of how RPGs both apply to English classrooms and how I would use them.

I will be discussing some of the ways in which RPGs focus on narratives, and how that focus can better help students understand narratives as a whole. I will also go over how RPGs provide an opportunity to learn about character, plot/tension, and setting. I will discuss the intertextuality of RPGs and how teachers can use that to connect their students to texts in their curriculum. I will show how RPGs can be used as a tool for creative writing in the classroom - once again talking about character, plot/tension, and setting. I will then give short explanations about the different ways RPGs can be worked into a curriculum. Finally, I will go over some rules of thumb that are helpful for designing and running RPGs in the classroom.

Story Time

Well maybe story isn't the best word to use for this header. If you want to get particular, there is a difference between story and narrative. Story is a part of narrative. Narrative is “the representation of a story (an event or a series of events.)”¹ While the stories that evolve out of RPGs as a whole may not make perfect stories all the time, elements of narrative are there from which students can learn.² Jenkins' narrative architecture makes space for different kinds of narratives.³ By being exposed to these different types of narratives, students will have more experience not only reading narrative, but being active participants in it. They will be able to take lessons from exposure and involvement to varied narratives and use them as a tool for understanding narrative structure in other texts.

Both RPG theory and RPGs themselves show they are ready to focus on narrative. One critical theory on RPGs, GNS, takes the dramatic focus of an older RPG theory and changes it to a narrative focus.⁴ Such a step by an academic shows that the narratives offered by RPGs are becoming more pertinent. As RPGs themselves have evolved, they have begun to focus more on the narratives discovered through the games rather than the more gamist aspects.⁵ These games are starting to intentionally focus on the narrative aspects of their systems and encourage their use. It makes sense, then, to utilize the narrative aspects built in these games to help explore

narratives as whole in an engaging, enriching activity of play. By focusing on narrative, RPGs become useful tools to study narrative in English classrooms.

Some of the narrative elements RPGs can help students study are character, plot/tension, and setting. (I group plot and tension together because creating tension in narratives often requires the ability to understand and navigate plot.) Students can experience these elements in books, but by being part of the process of creating them in RPGs, students can get a deeper understanding of how they work. RPGs offer students the chance to engage in the experience of the narrative elements they are learning.

Character

Character is at the base of the player experience in RPGs. With the exception of the gamemaster (which we've kind of established is the role taken by the teacher,) students must create and/or play a character in order to play the game.⁶ The characters they play in the game are their tool of agency in affecting the game. These characters can take many forms, but the best is a self-motivated character - like one you would find in a good narrative.⁷ Many current RPGs include structures that help students understand components of what makes a self-motivated character.⁸ There are also different stances players can take that let them view their characters from either the perspective of the character or the perspective of an author controlling the character.⁹ Furthermore, the characters that students control don't have to be the only ones they understand better through play; by interacting with other players' characters and characters controlled by the gamemaster, students have a chance to engage with the underlying ideas behind those characters as well.

Obviously, one way to teach character to students is by letting them control one in an RPG. What goes around this agency, though, that helps students understand the character better? It helps to give students a preview of what aspects of character we want them to understand: goals and motivations, defining features, roles in the narrative, level of complexity, what they represent, etc. You might want to tie these to a specific character or specific characters you are learning about in class. If you are studying *Beowulf*, ask how a student's character's motivations compare to Beowulf's, or what values Hrothgar and the Empress of your setting share. By doing this, you give your students a good foundation to understand what will be important to pay attention to when it comes to character.

Plot/Tension

By playing the characters of RPGs, students become involved in the plot of the story. They do not have to read about it - they are *creating* it as they play. Having agency over the plot through character decisions can help students understand what is both effective and ineffective in regards to plot. Students can get a glimpse of plot structures in action, especially when asked to reflect on their session. The same goes for tension. Students get to experience the tension of the story as they play. They get to see what works and doesn't work for them in regards to building

tension. One of the stances of Edwards' GNS system - the Director stance - labels the ability of players in RPGs to have agency over small aspects of the environment that affect the narrative.¹⁰ Through this stance, students can develop a knowledge of what is effective in a plot for creating narrative and building tension.

Although students normally only get to control their own characters in RPGs, the beauty of RPGs is that they're flexible. The game - and the narrative - is co-constructed. As a result, sometimes it's ok to let students have a say in what happens. If they want their character to be confronted with something from their past, let them ask for it. If they think the cave would be scarier if their torch suddenly went out, let them ask for it. If they think there should be a secret organization working against their group, let them ask for it. Sharing the discursive power of the narrative lets students experiment with elements of plot and tension in a way that might not be accessible if the students just get to control their character.

Setting

Setting informs many different aspects of narratives. It is also fundamental to many RPGs. *Forgotten Realms*, *Greyhawk*, *Eberron* - the amount of settings created for in the RPG *Dungeons & Dragons* are countless. One of the pillars of the game is exploring these settings.¹¹ RPGs often use maps to explain setting - be they the whole continent on which the game takes place, or just the small grove in which the characters are fighting a band of goblins. Aside from the physical features, the interconnected lore of game settings often play a large factor into narrative. The way RPGs focus on setting makes them an excellent tool to explore how setting can affect narrative. Through playing the game, students get to experience how setting informs their character's decisions, the events of the game, and the overall feeling it provides. They can then use this understanding to examine the settings in the narratives they analyze for class.

Students playing RPGs might not get to experience all the setting created for a game, or they may not be party to the knowledge of how some elements of setting are affecting the game. Even though they might miss out on these elements, they get to utilize other ones. For example, you can ask students to flesh out the household, village, or kingdom their character comes from and connect it to the decisions of their character. Or you can ask them how they think the ability to raise the dead affects attitudes towards death and the value of life. You can even give students the chance to place things into the setting of the scene they are in. The setting does not have to be off limits to the students just because their characters have a limited control of it. The players are still involved, too.

Intertextuality

In a sense, RPGs are metafiction.¹ They are created by borrowing elements from different stories and genres and turning them into something players can interact with. The intertextuality of RPGs parallels their co-constructive nature. They are founded on participatory culture, so it

only makes sense that RPGs are transmedial, and that playing them is actively interacting with prior texts.² The evoked narrative in Jenkins' narrative architecture describes the narratives that are directly or indirectly referenced in the narrative of the game being played.³ It makes sense, then, that texts of the English classroom can be tied into RPG play.

RPGs can be used to explore the texts that students are already studying in their English classroom. Linking the game to class texts can be direct, taking on a flavor that feels like *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* or *Kingdom Hearts*. It does not need to be so obvious, however. Instead, elements of class texts - types of characters, systems in settings, story beats - can be re-skinned and replicated in the context of the game at hand, with either sparing or liberal adjustments. Either way, students will get the opportunity to interact with the very same texts they are learning about. Interaction with these texts not only makes them easier to understand by an increased amount of exposure, but it also can make them feel more approachable.

An example of direct intertextuality in action is a *D&D 5e* campaign run by Professor Josh Johnson.⁴ Josh converted the infinite Library from Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel* into a campaign setting. He then had the students turn one of their favorite literary characters into a character they could play in the game with the premise each character had been excised out of their books. The group of students would have to go around "fixing" the narratives of books by interacting with them. Sometimes, this fixing meant returning the books to their original narrative; other times, it meant changing the narrative in a way that reflected certain critical approaches to the text.⁵ Regardless of the approach, students got to interact with different literary texts. The students were able to learn about texts, familiarize themselves with them, and contemplate the narratives within them from different perspectives.

However you connect class texts to RPGs, your students will benefit. The structures of RPGs thrive on intertextuality. They combine elements the players know with elements they do not to build new narratives from the scraps of old. By interacting with established texts and narratives through RPGs, students are able to familiarize themselves with them and interrogate their components. RPGs are a great tool for connecting students to texts in the classroom.

Getting Creative (Writing)

RPGs are undoubtedly creative, and since they are all about creating new narratives, it is easy to tie them to creative writing. In fact, you can't play an RPG without creating an emergent narrative; all you need to do is harness the power of that creative generation and point it in a new direction.¹ Just like studying different aspects of narrative, students playing RPGs can experience creating content in regards to character, plot/tension, and setting. The same stances for studying these aspects for narrative apply to studying them for creative writing. Tying creative writing and RPGs together is probably the easiest thing to do in the English classroom.

All you have to do to incorporate creative writing into the classroom through RPGs is to ask your students to write. Have them write about their characters: backstory, scenes from their

perspective, scenes from the perspective of someone else seeing their character. Have them write with a focus on plot/tension: write the scene with someone's greatest desire, write the scene in which the climax of the campaign happens, write a scene where the tension is something the party least wants to happen happening. Have them write about setting: write a scene in which the setting is the driving force of the plot, write a scene in which the physical location of the scene is very clear, write the same scene twice with slight alterations to the setting to give it different tones.

A great example of this happening in a classroom is once again in Professor Josh Johnson's class. He asked his Advanced Fiction students to meet every week for an hour outside of class to have role-playing session where they played a rules-light RPG with a focus on narrative. After each session, Josh gave his students a writing prompt which asked them to write about something from the session with a focus on a particular narrative. Dialogue, character, tension, setting, POV, style - all of them were covered in the weekly writing assignment, and all were derived from the RPG session played. Playing the session gave students a foundation for their writing material. It also helped them experience different elements of narrative, write about them with their new understanding, and employ them in future sessions.

Even if you do not ask your students to do extra creative writing activities, playing an RPG is an act of creative writing. Players of an RPG are co-creating a narrative. Through their actions, the players are writing their own story. They are getting the first hand experience of toying with character, plot, setting, and narrative as a whole. RPGs and creative writing go hand-in-hand. If you are teaching creative writing in your English classroom, do not neglect the opportunities that RPGs offer.

Making the Magic Happen

So far, we have talked about how awesome it would be to play RPGs in the classroom, and all the benefits students would get from playing them. However, we can't get to that point unless we actually implement RPGs into our curriculum. In an English classroom, we already know we are operating from a foundation of narrative, intertextuality, and/or creative writing. We have lots of ways to tie RPGs to our material. Now we just need to figure out a way to actually play them. I propose four methods of incorporating RPGs into the classroom: playing in class, playing out of class, playing as an extracurricular, and having students play in student-run sessions. I also give three methods to approach adding school work to these sessions: work during the session, work after the session, and writing assignments. After this section, I hope you have a better picture of how you can actually make the magic of RPGs happen in your classroom.

When to Play

In order to play an RPG, you have to make time for it. If we talk about playing RPGs “in” the classroom, the first instinct is to play it in the classroom. However, that might not be feasible. You might have to run it outside of regular class hours. There also might not be space in your curriculum, but you still want to run an RPG because you think it will be an enriching activity, so you could offer an extracurricular elective that will count in some way towards students’ academics. Finally, an alternate method for any of these situations is to have students run the session. Regardless of the method you chose, what is important is that your students are getting the chance to play RPGs and benefit from them.

Running the game in the classroom is obviously the most appealing option. You have the most control, you can work it directly into the curriculum, and you can monitor progress in class. However, it also offers the most difficulties. For one, class time is limited, and it can be hard to fit an adequate session that tackles all the things you want to during that time - especially if you are operating on a period schedule. Consider making the focus of your sessions small so that it can be covered in the time allotted. Class size is also an obstacle. The larger the group is, the more unmanageable the experience. The ideal size for an RPG like *D&D 5e* is five players. Obviously, there are more than five students in a typical classroom. It might be necessary to split up the classroom and run one small session at a time while the other students work on something else. This also clearly has issues for control and time management. If your class is independent enough and you can incorporate other learning material students can do on their own, it might be a viable option; if not, you might want to make time outside of class.

Asking students to meet outside of class simplifies the issues of too many students and not enough time. Rather than trying to work with the time you have, you can make time to work with. Have students come during study hours, before or after school, or during their lunch period. Obviously, this can also be difficult. (Can you really get students to spend less time with chicken nuggets and more time doing something for class?) It might not be a viable option to ask students to use the resources to come early, and rules at your school might not let you ask students to miss things like lunch or study period. However, if you can make this work, you can still set aside your normal class-time for other things your curriculum demands. You also get to manage smaller groups so students can have a more catered experience while playing their RPG. If you can’t make it work, your best option might be to turn the experience into an extracurricular.

The most feasible option with RPGs - at least, if they are not the focus of a course - is to make them extracurricular.¹ Students have the option of playing RPGs for their enrichment. If you choose this method, you are getting the students who are interested in RPGs because they are making time for them, so you will have higher commitment and engagement levels. You will probably have smaller, more manageable groups as well. Finally, you don’t have to deal with the administrative problems of asking kids to sacrifice class time or time from other parts of school. Obviously, an issue with this is not everyone is playing, so not everyone gets the benefits. You also might not be able to give students credit for it unless you establish something with your

school. Still, this is probably the most feasible option for using RPGs as an education tool - even if it is not technically “in the classroom.”

If you are particularly confident in your students, you can have them run their own RPG sessions. There might be some experienced gamemasters in your class, or you might just want students to see all sides of the table when it comes to an RPG; just like a student can learn from being a player, they can learn from being a gamemaster. In the classroom, this deals with the problem of having too many students. But it also creates the problem that you have less control over the game. Student gamemasters do not have the knowledge you do about narrative, the texts you are trying to connect with, or creative writing (or how to teach any of these things) - so they won't really know how to effectively incorporate those elements in the game. Like I said before, though, many of those elements are inherent in playing RPGs, so this might be a good choice for you.

Including Work

You will probably feel that just playing an RPG is not a sufficient amount of work for students. There should probably be something more - especially if you are incorporating it into a class curriculum. Students can still work and play.² Adding on extra materials for students to connect to the rest of your curriculum is fairly easy. It can happen through questions or statements at important points during the session, a time of reflection immediately after the session, or longer writing exercises assigned as homework.

One way to have students connect RPGs to other class work is by pausing during play. You can stop and ask questions or make statements before game decisions:

How is [name of a non-player character] affecting the story right now? (Narrative)

How can your character's action fit the tone of [scene from class text]? (Intertextuality)

Take thirty seconds to write down what your character thinks when they see [element of setting]. (Creative Writing)

This method demands that students actively think about RPGs in connection to class material. By bringing it up during the game, they will be able to keep these connections in mind in that moment and for the near future of the game. You can also interrupt play and discuss how the choices *you* make pertain to what is learned in class. By doing this, you model the behavior and mindset you want in your students. You also have the expertise to notice more examples. The method of interruption is great if you want student to be actively thinking about the connections during play, if you want your play to be very focused on whatever you are talking about in class, and if you do not want to ask for work outside of the session. It can be problematic in that it interrupts gameplay and students may not have a good answer on the spot.

Another way you can make students connect RPG play to their regular class material is by taking some time after play to reflect on these links between the two. Once again, ask them questions:

How did [obstacle] affect the plot of that session? (Narrative)

What were the similarities between [aspect of setting in RPG] and [aspect of setting from class text]? (Intertextuality)

How would the scene be different if [student's character] tried to achieve [a different goal]? (Creative Writing)

This method allows students to reflect on connections after the session has taken place. It can be done in an informal interview, a short writing exercise, or some kind of journal entry. Students can look back at the session they just played, and maybe ahead if they are going to play more. It is good because it doesn't interrupt play and it gives students a little bit more time to think about their responses. Although it might influence decisions in future sessions, it does not impact the session just played, so the connections might not be presently considered in that session. It is problematic in that it takes place at a time where students might forget about their thought processes from moments of play or be less inclined to care since they are not in the act of play.

You may want to have your students connect RPGs to class material through larger writing projects. These writing projects can have a broader approach because students have more time to work on them. They can be a collection of journal entries based on the RPG sessions, portfolios of creative writing, or argumentative papers. If you want students to write, you should preface the session(s) with a prompt:

Make an argument for which player character best fit the role of a tragic hero. (Narrative)

Would the events of your RPG session(s) better fit the structure of a Shakespearean tragedy, comedy, or tragicomedy? (Intertextuality)

Write the final scene of your RPG from the perspective of your character. Pay special attention to completing that character's overarching goals, but in an unexpected way. (Creative Writing)

Larger writing projects both allow students to rehearse their writing skills and connect to class material at the same time. They also give students an excuse to think critically about their RPG session(s), and they give them a longer time to do so. They can threaten to take the fun out of the game if they seem like too much work, though; and if students aren't keeping records or don't have a good memory, they might miss some of the information they need.

Options Galore

Maybe these methods will work for you. In class, out of class, extracurricular, student-run; moments during play, time to reflect afterwards, or long term writing assignments -

these methods offer a variety of choices for using RPGs as a tool for education. Each of these methods have their benefits and drawbacks. There is no best method. Furthermore, the methods I have given are not the *only* ways to use RPGs to teach. You might find yourself making an amalgam of these varied methods, or stumble across an entirely new one. However you do it, what matters is that RPGs are being used not only as a means of play, but as a tool for learning.

Cantrips and Tricks

You've figured out why RPGs can be used as a tool for learning. You've figured out when to use them in (our outside) your classroom. You've figured out how you're going to connect them to other material in your class. Now you're about to run a game. But you've never run a game before. You know what you're getting yourself into, but you don't know exactly how it's going to look when you're into it. Do not fear. I have run many a game, and I have also read/listened to a lot of material about running games. Over my academic and recreational studies of the game, I have collected a variety of helpful tips for you to keep in mind when you run an RPG in your classroom. The tips below are in no particular order, nor are they hard and fast rules; they are merely useful paradigms from which to run RPGs in the classroom.

Get on the Same Page

A fundamental aspect of RPGs is working together. If people aren't coming into the game under the same impression, it becomes difficult to work together. Debrief your students. Let them know why they are playing an RPG, the kind of experience they are in for, and what you are hoping they get out of it. Answer any questions. Clarify the type of game. A game is going to be rough if one student thinks they are going to be part of a vampire coven setting up the end of a local barony and another student thinks they are a goofy farmer trying to collect magical beans. Make sure all the students have an understanding of how playing the RPG as a group around the table will go.

Plan to Improvise

The beauty of RPGs is their flexibility. Everything is possible. However, it is not possible to plan for *everything* - and that's ok. If we wanted everything possible planned out, we would be playing a video game RPG. Since we aren't, you will need to be ready to improvise. It helps to have a good grasp on what you want your players to experience from playing in abstract. Read some books on improvisation if you have to. Watch some other gamemasters in action. Channel your inner make-believe. Whatever you do, it is okay that you don't have everything prepared. Still prepare, but make space in your preparations for the unexpected - like your players trying to befriend the evil goblin chief by partaking in a wrestling competition with their collective freedom at stake.

Say Yes, and...No

Don't be afraid to say yes. In a game of possibility, no is sometimes the worst thing you can say. Rather than say, "No, that's impossible," utilize a basic improvisational skill and say, "Yes, and..." including the consequences of that action. Being ready to say yes means being ready to be surprised by your students while still enabling them to be as awesome as they can be.

On the other hand, don't be afraid to say no. There are some things that just won't make sense in the context of the narrative, no matter how much your students want to do them. Your job is to enable your students to have fun, but it is also to offer a cohesive, meaningful learning experience. Saying no may be necessary for the sake of the game and other students. In the event you do say no, give a reason other than, "That's dumb." Saying no can be made into a learning experience for everyone involved if it's explained well enough.

Anything is Possible

As I've said many, many, many times, RPGs are about possibility. They are flexible games in which anything can happen. Sometimes, the rules of certain systems might try to convince you otherwise. Screw the rules. They are in place to make sense of the game, but they don't cover everything; for that reason, a lot of systems have open-ended rules for you to remove, add, or change.¹ Sometimes, it is better to reward players for good decisions, hard work, or ingenuity than to adhere strictly to the rules.² Don't work for the rules; make the rules work for you.

Back to Basics

Don't forget: you are using RPGs as a learning tool. Be it for studying narrative, understanding specific texts, making material for creative writing, or more, your goal is to incorporate material from your class into RPGs. Remember the key ideas you are operating from when you make decisions and planning and executing your RPG sessions.

Have Fun

RPGs are play. Learning can be play, too. By mixing your classroom material and RPGs, you are employing fun in your learning. Work can - and probably should - be involved, but that's no reason to ignore the fun of playing a game together. Need I say more?

Chapter Three: Going on an Adventure

So You Want to Be a Hero

More precisely, you want to make your students heroes in an RPG session you are going to run in your classroom. I've given you a lot of information on why and how an RPG session in the classroom could work, but it might help to see an example of what an actual session might look like. That is what this chapter is: an example of the practical use of RPGs in a classroom.

Before we even begin going over the process of planning this session, we must establish the conditions of our classroom. Our session is basically a lesson. Since it is a lesson, we need to make a lesson plan. And it is useless to make a lesson plan if you do not know whom the lesson is for. I have decided we are running this session (i.e. this lesson) for four students in a 10th grade English literature classroom of sixteen students.¹ The class operates off a 45-minute period schedule, so the actual session will be around 30 minutes in length, leaving 15 minutes for work and flexibility.² Now that we know the conditions, let me give you a preview of the chapter.

The first thing you will encounter below is a lesson plan. I choose to show you the lesson plan first so you can refer back to it as you read through the chapter. Next, I will explain the baseline for designing the lesson: the standards and objectives. After that, we will dive into the actual content of the lesson. I will describe the adventure scenario, the characters involved, and the rationale behind creating it all. Next, I will walk you through the components of actually running the session in your classroom. Finally, I will explain what needs to happen at the end of the session.

It is important to keep in mind that creating this lesson plan is not a linear process. Whilst planning, I am bouncing back and forth between my standards, objectives, and the content I am creating to make sure they all align. Whilst running the session, I would be making adjustments on the fly - partially because of the nature of RPGs, but partially because of the students involved. After I have taught the lesson, I would go back and make changes based on what I discovered. Like any good lesson planning, the process is circular and interconnected - not linear.

It is also important to keep in mind that this is just one session based on one set of conditions. There are infinite ways to create the content of this session, and infinite forms the content can take. There are many conditions affecting the creation of the content as well. I would especially like to point out the standards and objectives involved. Although RPGs are a very flexible tool, I am being pretty concrete in my standards and objective. This is the way I believe it should go so you are teaching things from a premeditated, approved paradigm of education in a way you can measure and affect results. You might not have to do the same. Sometimes, it is ok to loosen up and just let everyone learn from play.³

Lesson Plan

Objectives

Abstract

After this lesson, students will better understand narrative elements such as character, plot/tension, and setting by observing their expression in an RPG session and participating in said expression. They will also be able to explain that understanding through writing. Finally, students will better understand creative writing through the verbal and written creation of narrative as a result of the RPG session.

Concrete

- Given a character template, students will create one or two compelling aspects of character that will inform future decisions of that character in a narrative. (9.7.3.3)
- Given a character template, students will role-play that character as appropriate based on their understanding of the character's background, the nuances of complex characters, and their character's resources. (9.4.1.1; 9.4.3.3; 9.7.3.3)
- Given five minutes to write, students will argue the validity of at least two choices they made while role-playing their character based on their understanding of that character's background and resources. (9.4.1.1; 9.4.3.3; 9.7.4.4; 9.7.9.9; 9.7.10.10)
- Given five minutes to write, students will analyze elements of narrative such as plot, tension, and setting in their roleplaying experience and describe at least two instances in which these elements came into play. (9.4.1.1; 9.4.5.5; 9.7.3.3; 9.7.4.4; 9.7.9.9; 9.7.10.10)

Standards

Key Ideas and Details

- 9.4.1.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- 9.4.3.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Craft and Structure

- 9.4.5.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

Text Types and Purposes

- 9.7.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts and develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- 9.7.4.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
- 9.7.9.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range

- 9.7.10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Introduction - 5 minutes

Introduce the students to the academic purpose of the RPG session by situating it within what they have learned about character, plot/tension, and setting in literature.

- The students have learned about the above narrative elements. The goal is for them to both observe and enact these elements within their RPG session.

Give students their materials, explain how I want them to be used, and give them time to review the materials.

- Hand students character sheets and their requisite polyhedral dice.
- Tell students that although there is a lot of information on their sheet, they do not need to know how all of it works. For the purposes of this situation, it is important they know the background and resources of their character.
- Tell students I want them to pretend to be their character. They should describe their actions and what they say, and I will tell them any rules that go along with it.

Introduce students to the premise of the situation, and at which point their RPG session starts.

- Tell students the following: “You are all adventurers for hire contracted by the town council of Rockfall to investigate the strange disappearances of various belongings throughout the town. The council thought the disappearances were caused by fairies, but you all find out that a group of cultists, the Circle of Agaegrus, are at fault. You all uncover a plan by the cultists to perform a ritual on the evening of the full moon using an occult artifact - the Quicksilver Eye - and the stolen objects. The ritual will cast an enchantment on the town and turn them into willing servants for the demon they worship - Agaegrus, the Seventh Horn. You have discovered the site of the ritual and must enter it, prevent the ritual from being completed, and contain the Quicksilver Eye.”

Activity - 30 minutes

Describe “Scene 1: Getting Into Camp” to the students and have them role-play their characters with the goal of getting past the guardian into the ritual site.

- Before describing the scene, have students write down at least one reason their character accepted this quest.
- Describe the evening, full moon, forest location just outside of the clearing where the ritual is taking place, and the chanting they hear.
- Tell the students they know the cultists probably have a guardian around the site while they perform the ritual. (Possessed Mercenary template.)
- Resolve any of the students’ actions.

Describe “Scene 2: Stopping the Ritual” to students and have them role-play their characters with the goal of preventing the ritual from being completed.

- Describe the open clearing, the tents set up in a ring of open space, and the hooded figures around a bonfire - seven of which are chanting. As they get closer, they see the strange symbols on the ground, all the stolen belongings, and a reflective orb the size of a head floating above the bonfire.
- The students can stop the ritual three ways: getting rid of all the chanting cultists, destroying more than half of the runes, or removing the orb. Describe some sort of sensory effect that indicates the power of the ritual is waning if any of these objectives are worked towards.
 - There are seven cultists in the circle chanting. There are six more just observing.
 - There are seven runes on the ground.
 - The orb is seven feet above the fire.
- The ritual is completed when the orb drops into the fire. It will drop a foot every round.
 - Each round will have two players go, two cultists, two players, three cultists.
 - As the orb drops, the players start to see reflection of a half-human, half goat figure with seven horns in the orb. As it gets even closer to the fire, a spectral figure that looks the same starts to appear coming out of the orb.
- The six observing cultists will defend the chanting cultists when the characters get close enough to the circle to be noticed. (Cultist Template.)
- Resolve any of the students’ actions.

Describe “Scene 3: Containing the Artifact” to students and have them role-play their characters with the goal of preventing the latent energies of the occult artifact from causing any lasting effects.

- Once the ritual is stopped, a wave of concussive force shoots out of the Quicksilver Eye and knocks everyone down, making the cultists unconscious. Energy starts to crackle around the orb, taking the spectral form of the creature that was appearing before.

- The orb is still hovering in place. Even though the ritual was incomplete, it set something arcane in motion. The orb needs to be knocked down and contained somehow.
- The energies of the orb will lash out at anyone who gets close. Touching it is also painful. (Quicksilver Eye Template.)
- Resolve any of the students' actions.
- If the students succeed, describe the quiet night, the extinguished fire, and the glowing moon. Their mission is complete.

Closure and Assessment - 10 minutes

Go over what the students ended up achieving in the narrative they created through their RPG session.

- Summarize the events of getting into the camp, stopping the ritual, and containing the artifact.
- Point out some of the narrative aspects they covered through their actions.

Give students five minutes to write about the material covered in objective three.

- Given five minutes to write, students will argue the validity of at least two choices they made while role-playing their character based on their understanding of that character's background and resources. (9.4.1.1; 9.4.3.3; 9.7.4.4; 9.7.9.9; 9.7.10.10)

Give students five minutes to write about the material covered in objective four.

- Given five minutes to write, students will analyze elements of narrative such as plot, tension, and setting in their roleplaying experience and describe at least two instances in which these elements came into play. (9.4.1.1; 9.4.5.5; 9.7.3.3; 9.7.4.4; 9.7.9.9; 9.7.10.10)

Materials¹

Character sheets

Assorted polyhedral dice

Non-player templates

Foundation for Learning

Lessons need standards and objectives. Since I am going to be a licensed teacher in Minnesota, I pull my standards from the Minnesota Department of Education.¹ I know that my RPG session will address standards in literature and writing because of the nature of the activities I am going to do: being able to analyze narrative elements of both the characters and the adventure to make decisions, as well as reflect on these elements and decisions through writing. The standards I chose are seen in the lesson plan above.²

Once the standards are selected, I decide how to maintain these standards through my objectives. My objectives can meet multiple standards at once. I write an abstract objective to establish the purpose of the lesson as a whole; then, I write concrete objectives to establish how exactly I am going to measure my students meeting the standards. You will notice I attach the standards to which each objective is correlated. These objectives tie the standards that guide my teaching to measurable behavior of students. Without this step, it is hard to argue to my school that my students are learning applicable material by playing RPGs. Now that I have established our standards and objectives, I can develop the content of my RPG session.

Making Magic

The adventure. The scenario. The situation. Whatever, you want to call it, the actual content of your RPG session is the platform through which your students will play. The content must manifest the standards and objectives; but it also needs to be compelling, flexible, and fun. This is where you get to exercise your creative juices - or borrow from others.¹ In this section, I will outline both the situation and the characters of the RPG session.

The Situation

The first thing I do is outline the situation of the students' characters. I want to make a situation in which there will be diverse opportunities for action. I also want to make a situation that has clear starting and ending points. Since we only have 30 minutes to play through the RPG session, I need to make the scene of the situation small and manageable. As a result, I will give a background to how the characters got to the starting point of the situation, then describe the actual situation. This can be seen in the very last bullet point of the "Introduction" section of the lesson plan.

You will notice that there are three phases to the situation: getting into the site, stopping the ritual, and containing the artifact.² Each of these will have their own start point, end point, and obstacles. If it helps, think of them as scenes. I do not want to force my students to enact a certain narrative; the point of using RPGs is the flexibility they allow. As a result, I need to lay the groundwork for what appears in the scene, but leave room for flexibility. I should try to anticipate what the students might do and create some story beats accordingly, but I need to be ready to improvise.³ Before I start these scenes, I want to engage my students creatively and encourage them to have power over the narrative throughout the session, which is why I ask them to write down why their characters accepted the task.

The first scene starts at the edge of the ritual site. The characters can see it through the woods and hear chanting, but there needs to be an obstacle preventing them from getting there, and the obstacle needs to have multiple ways to be dealt with. I put an enchanted mercenary in the way. Right away, I will tell my students that they know the cultists will have a guardian. The students can have their characters look for the guardian and avoid it, look for it and convince it to

let the characters through, look for it and eliminate it before it can warn anyone, try to sneak past it, or just march on through. Each situation will have its own consequence. Remember: plan to improvise. I know where the characters are and what they are dealing with, but I can't know *how* they will deal with it. I outline some possibilities and keep them in my head. Whatever happens, I try to resolve it through a combination of narrative and the game system.

The second scene will be the cultists performing the ritual. Once again, I give a description, an obstacle, and some possible ways to solve it. I say there are three ways to stop the ritual, but I am open to other ways. For example, if one of the characters who had access to magic wanted to try to interfere with the ritual using their magic, I might let them try, letting them know it will be a hard roll; if they roll well, I might have them delay the ritual, or the magic short-circuits some of the casting of one of the cultists and knocks them out, thereby unintentionally completing the goal through their own method. I also manufacture tension through the system by having the orb drop every round. It is an aspect of plot that is visible in the setting so characters know they are running out of time, and it is something students can point to in their reflections.

The last scene is containing the occult artifact. Once again, I include description and an obstacle. I do not list ways to deal with the obstacle because I plan to make whatever they do work (within reason.) This last scene is the complication after the climax. The group thought they stopped the problem, but now there are intended consequences and they have to deal with them. It is also a nice element of closure, which is why I need them to be able to contain the artifact no matter how they try. Once they have achieved what they've come to do and their characters can move on - as can the students. Speaking of characters, let's talk about what goes into making the characters that handle the situation.

The Characters⁴

The characters of the adventure are the conduit for the student experience. They are how the students can interact with the narrative and create a narrative of their own. Since I decided on groups of four students, I need four characters. I chose to make characters. I could have the students make their own characters, but I run into two problems: time and experience. Making good characters takes time. Rather than spend that time in class, I chose to do it myself out of class and preserve class time for playing. Making good characters also takes experience. Students who do not have experience playing RPGs - or who aren't quite knowledgeable yet about what makes a good character - might not feel or be competent enough to make quality characters. Once again, I take it into my own hands.

I have the time to make the characters, and I definitely have the experience to make good characters. I also have the experience to balance system and narrative. I know that I need enough rules to encourage the game aspect RPGs and formalize character capabilities, but I also can't have so many rules that the students - especially those unfamiliar to the game - don't know what to do with them. As a result, I strip down races and classes from *D&D 5e* and essentialize their

abilities.⁵ I also know I need enough narrative elements to model the type of narrative and characters the players are dealing with, but I can't have so much that it doesn't leave space for the players to add their own narratives to their characters. I only include a few details in the background and personality characteristics to encourage filling in blanks. I actively encourage this by asking students to clarify the reason their character accepted the job from the town council. Doing so fulfills the first objective from my lesson plan.

As part of making these characters, I make sure they are distinct from each other. They each serve different roles and have abilities that suit those roles.⁶ Hopefully, each student will feel like their character is special, and each student will have time to shine given the situation. I also manufacture some tension into these players backgrounds. Greycloak loves magical secrets, so the student playing them might decide they have ulterior motives for retrieving an occult artifact like the Quicksilver Eye.⁷ Wisp might also be tempted because of their "sticky fingers." Fesselar might have a hard time approaching the Quicksilver Eye because they are so superstitious. Cael might have a hard time with using violence against the natural life of the people they fight - unless they deem the lives of the cultists aren't natural. These tensions can be noticed and/or embraced by the students, then utilized during play or addressed in their written reflections. With all this in place, I've developed my situation, and I've developed the characters involved; now, I must actually run the session.

Casting the Spell

The act of playing is a fundamental part of any RPG. Ironically, it is also the hardest to describe. I cannot really tell you exactly how I would run this session for my students because there is no exact way I would run it; it would ideally change every time based on the students and the choices they make. Instead of telling you how I would handle every situation, I will tell you a few things I try to practice consistently in the context of this session. I try to maintain three things: encourage creativity, connect learning, and make my students awesome.

I encourage my students to be creative because I want them to feel like they control the narrative. Through agency, immersion, and interaction, they better understand the narrative of the session - and narratives as a whole. I want them to engage and create. I give them plenty of opportunities to do so, be it by asking them what they want to do in a situation, pointing out they have an opportunity to act, or reminding them about their abilities. If they ask to do something, I always try to think of a way I can say yes to the choices they make, or say no in a way that opens up more opportunities to act.¹

When I tested this session, the student playing Cael - who had flown up in a tree as an owl then transformed back into an elf - asked to capture the enchanted mercenary with Cael's "Thorn Whip" spell and hoist it into the tree. Technically, "Thorn Whip" only pulls your opponent toward you; but I thought it was a creative way to deal with the problem at hand, and it set up the possibility for teamwork; so I said yes. An example of saying no is when the student

playing Greycloak asked to make the sound of people marching through the woods to scare the cultists using the “Prestidigitation” spell. “Prestidigitation” doesn’t make that much noise. I didn’t say no; I just said they couldn’t do it on that scale, but they could use it in a way that the cultists thought people were sneaking in the woods and came to investigate. The student got what they wanted, but in a more reasonable way. These moments demonstrate how I encouraged my players to be creative and made space for them to do so.

I don’t want my students to forget the practical application of their RPG session to other classroom activities. As a result, I will try to remind them of how their session ties into what they’ve learned. This might take the form of me pausing the session and asking them to make choices based on what would add tension to a scene; maybe I will stop and remind them the basics of internal character conflict right before a hard decision; or I might even take a moment just to congratulate them on making a choice that parallels the theme of the text we are reading in class. I connect students to learning in this example RPG session when I ask them to write down why their character chose to accept the mission from the town council. By doing this, I am subtly pointing out the necessity for motive in a character - something they should know based off their understanding of the narrative element of character.

Finally, I make my students awesome. RPGs are supposed to be fun, and an engaged student is one that learns. By making my students’ awesome, I make them feel special and make the game entertaining at the same time. Making things awesome is easy to do. Whenever a student makes a choice for their character, I narrate that choice in the way they wanted it to come out, *plus* a little spice. For example, the student in the test session playing Fesselar wanted to distract some of the cultists by lighting the tents on fire with Fesselar’s “Dragon’s Breath.” I narrated this as a huge gout of flame blanketing the tents, fire leaping from the canvas, and clouds of smoke into the air. When the student then wanted Fesselar to fight the cultists coming to put out the fires, I narrated Fesselar raising sword and shield, leaping through the flames and smoke, and charging towards the cultists.

Awesome does not always have to be successful. Sometimes, your students’ characters will fail; this is the nature of relying on chance via dice. That’s ok. Failure can still be awesome. I try to find a way for my students failures to look cool, funny, or a mixture of the two - and they always get something out of it. For example, the student playing Wisp’s character wanted Wisp to leap off the wolf form of Cael, over the fire, and grab the Quicksilver Eye out of the air. I told them it would be hard, but because it was a cool idea that used teamwork, they would have an advantage. Even with the advantage, they still failed. I narrated them soaring over the fire, fingers just missing the orb - and getting into a position where they had clear sight of the orb to throw a dagger at it. Wisp’s failure was still awesome; everyone loved it.

As I stated before, there are too many possibilities of what might happen during the run of play for me to tell you everything I would do. Instead, I hope you can see how my mindset of encouraging creativity, connecting learning, and making the students awesome creates a great

framework for handling situations during the RPG session. The examples I give you relate directly to the lesson plan in this chapter, so you can see this mindset in action.

Dismissing the Charm

Now that I have established the contents and the play of the adventure, I can cover what happens afterwards. First, I summarize the events to make sure the students know everything that happens. I take some time to highlight choices from each student and how they either helped the run of play or connected back to our learning from class. After this, I include some closure and assessment to make sure my students are achieving the objectives and fulfilling the standards of education I put into the lesson plan. I set aside some time for reflective writing.¹ I ask two questions: one pertaining to character; and one pertaining to plot, tension, and setting.² I have primed my students to answer these questions throughout play by interrupting and encouraging creativity and/or connecting learning; I have also primed students to answer these questions by going over a summary of the session. By taking time after the RPG session to go over these things, I concretize all the aspects that make using RPGs in the classroom beneficial.

Ritual Ruminations

That's it. I've planned what is going to be in the session. I've prepared myself for what is going to happen when I run the session. I've added some elements for after the session is over. I have the lesson plan created, and I am ready to run it in my classroom. After I run this lesson once, I will do what any good teacher will do: revise, adjust, and run it again. I will make changes based on my observations the first time around and continue to optimize the lesson so I am more prepared to run it in a way that can offer more to my students. I will also carry anything I learn from it forward into other RPG sessions I plan.

Now you've seen how a specific RPG session might work in the classroom. Keep in mind that inventing this all was a non-linear process; I bounced between different stages of development in order to get to the final product - and the final product isn't even really finalized. Don't worry if you do not think you are ready for everything. Also, keep in mind this is just one example. Your story doesn't have to be about cultists, or demons, or an evening in the woods. The beauty of RPGs is the infinite ideas they let you explore. Now that you have a solid example, see how you can use it as a template to go on your own adventure.

Chapter Four: FAQ

Um, Gannon...

Over the course of the text, I have said a lot of things: made claims, put forth evidence, analyzed, etc. Most of the information that goes unexplained is followed by an endnote, which you can find in the “Endnotes” section of the booklet. Hopefully, that section answers any questions you have. But it might not. You might have a few unanswered questions. Here, I try to address those questions, or questions I had myself, or questions I anticipate people might have. I may or may not answer your questions. As this is a working product, maybe I will one day. Until then, try to find the answer you seek in this “Frequently Asked Questions” chapter - which would be more aptly named “Questions Gannon Thinks People Might Have.”

Questions of Theory

Herein lie questions about the fundamentals of play and RPGs. These questions relate to the critical theories and academia around everything that make play and RPGs what they are. Many of the questions in this section will have to do with the material in “Chapter One: Principles of Use.”

When does it stop being play and start being work?

Two of the key elements of Caillois’ categorization of play is that it must be unproductive, and that it must be non-obligatory.¹ No material products are allowed to be produced by play; only the ephemeral experience. No one can be forced to play. By incorporating RPGs into the classroom, aren’t we inherently asking students to create a product from their experience of play, and aren’t we forcing them to play? Yes. And that does violate some of the rules of play. However, almost all RPGs create some kind of material product: maps, character sheets, campaign settings, etc. Beyond the material, RPGs create immaterial cultural artifacts - which are still creations.² They’re not the only games to do so. And they aren’t the only instances of forced play in classrooms (once again, games such as Kahoot and Jeopardy.)

Does this mean “playing” RPGs isn’t really play? I don’t think so. I’m not saying Caillois is wrong - Caillois is probably smarter than me. I just think it might be possible for games to contain some elements of play, but not others. The incorporation of work does not erase elements of play. Keep in mind though: all work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy. Adding *too much* work to the RPG experience can be dangerous. When that is? I have no idea. I’m sorry I took such a long time to say, “I don’t know.”

If RPGs are non-narrative, how can we learn narrative from them?

RPGs are not non-narrative; they're both non-narrative *and* narrative at the same time. They have elements of both. Students can learn from the elements of narrative that exist in the game while still experiencing the non-narrative elements. Furthermore, the non-narrative elements can even serve as an example of what not to do if they are supposed to be narrative elements.

Questions of Class

Herein lie questions about how RPGs are going to work in the classroom. Since I focus mostly on the English classroom, I will not be answering questions on how RPGs can be used in every subject area. (I'm going to be an English teacher, not an Everything teacher.) I will answer questions that have to do with what RPGs will actually look like in class, or situations that arise from RPG use in class. Many of the questions in this section will have to do with the material in "Chapter Two: In the English Classroom."

What do I do if my students don't want to play? Can they still benefit?

What do you do if your students don't want to participate in any class activity? You try your best to get them involved. There are lots of strategies, and they all depend on the student. If none of them work, however, it's a mixed bag. On one hand, if a student is unwilling to participate, they may also be unwilling to learn - so the likelihood they will still benefit is slim. On the other hand, they might just not be comfortable playing the game. In that case, they can still observe and learn, although they will not get the same experience because they are not involved in the process of the game.¹ It is best to get them involved in the game somehow to receive the full benefits.

Can you run a class focused on RPGs?

Of course! You'd need to know a *lot* more about RPGs than the information I include in here to make it viable, and you'd have to convince administration at your school with that information. It has been done before at Lake Washington Girls Middle School in Seattle, Washington.² A teacher at the middle school started using *D&D* as an extracurricular, but eventually got it approved to be an elective. Interestingly enough, the coordinator who approved the course had never played *D&D*; they were convinced of its cross-disciplinary benefits nonetheless. The course being taught is called "Swords, Stories, and Statistics." It is an elective course that combines the humanities and math. It is also important to note that LWGMS is an independent school in Seattle, so it might have a little more liberty when it comes to what classes can be taught. It's possible. Like many good things, it requires work.

How do I improvise?

Improvising is a necessity when running an RPG because you can't plan for everything. Not everyone is uncomfortable with improvising, though. It takes some practice if you are not used to it. Although I've participated in RPGs and improvisational theatre, I am no means an expert. I recommend you look up information on the internet or in books. Here are some good books that I have read that deal with improvisational theatre: *Small Cute Book of Improv* by Jill Bernard; *Improvise* by Mick Napier; *Truth in Comedy* by Charna Halpern, Del Close, and Kim "Howard" Johnson; and *Improv at the Speed of Life* by David Pasquesi, Pamela Victor, and T.J. Jagodowski. These books teach great lessons about improv. They focus on improvisational theatre, but they all address the similarities of improvising and living. It is not a hard leap to adapt the principles of improvisation to the improvisation of running an RPG.

How do I entice reserved students?

Some students may be unwilling to play RPGs. These students might be the quiet, nervous, or embarrassed type. Luckily, there are lots of ways to deal with this, and many of them are worked into the game system of an RPG. RPGs take turns, which means the reserved student has an opportunity to play carved out for them; they do not have to assert themselves. You can also manage the narration to offer the reserved student opportunities to act. You might feel you need to ask them direct questions like, "What do you do?" It might help to offer a suggestion - based on your insight of how they would behave - and follow it up with a yes or no question so they don't have to put themselves out there that much. Finally, you can always encourage them when they do choose to contribute, thereby positively reinforcing their behavior in the hopes they will do it more.

Questions of Systems

Herein lie questions about RPG systems. These questions will have to do with different RPG systems, how the rules work, and what information is required. As I stated in "Introduction: Setting the Table," I prefer *D&D 5e*; however, I did not want this booklet become a guide to playing that game - it is just my main RPG of reference. These questions may involve what to do with systems in *D&D 5e* in a larger context, and maybe even do the same for other systems, but it won't ever be a "How Do I Turn Holden Caulfield into a Bard" kind of section.

What kind of RPGs should I be playing?

As I state in "Introduction: Setting the Table," my RPG of choice is *D&D 5e*. However, you can see in "Chapter Three: Going on an Adventure" that I tweak the rules of that system to fit my needs. You may find that *D&D 5e* does not fit your needs, or you want to do something outside the realm of fantasy, or you just don't like the game. There are lots of other RPGs out

there for you. *Fate* is a flexible, simple system, and its cousin, *Fate Accelerated*, is good for younger ages. Games that use the *Powered by the Apocalypse* system focus a lot on narrative possibility and less on rules, but some of them can contain sensitive materials, so peruse before you choose. *Pathfinder*, *Shadowrun*, *Exalted* - there are plenty of RPGs in plenty of flavors for your classroom. I would err on the side of simplicity when it comes to systems; it makes them easier to learn, and easier to tweak to your needs.

Where do I find out more about this D&D 5e stuff?

If you stick with *D&D 5e* as my per suggestion, neat! Somebody likes what I have to say. I would first recommend reading the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master Guide* if you want to know more. They are very informative and easy to read. The beginning sections of the books are especially helpful for understanding what the game is about. The latter sections are more about mechanics of the systems.

There are also a wide variety of sources on the internet that are informative, interesting, and helpful. You can do a Google search on the particular information you are looking for and choose whatever piques your interest. There are also quite a few internet personalities - Matt Colville, Matt Mercer, Satine Phoenix - who create excellent, engaging content. Some of their philosophies are a foundation for my beliefs about RPGs.

Where can I see examples of RPGs being played?

Live-play RPGs are becoming extremely popular both inside and outside of the RPG community. As a result, there are a host of live-play podcasts, Twitch streams, and YouTube channels where you can witness RPGs being played firsthand. *Critical Role* is probably the most famous due to its production quality; you can find it in podcast form, YouTube form, or watch it live on Twitch. *The Chain* is also another popular one, and its gamemaster - Matt Colville - is very transparent about his decisions for each session. It comes in YouTube, Twitch, and podcast form as well. Both of these use *D&D 5e* as a system.

Some shows with other systems are *The Adventure Zone* and *Critical Hit*. *The Adventure Zone* features experienced podcasters that happen to be family members. They use multiple systems and focus a lot on being flexible and catering to narrative. (They are also very, very funny.) *Critical Hit* is the first RPG podcast I ever listened to. I put it on here partially out of loyalty, but also because it uses *D&D 4e* (an earlier system of *D&D*), it features more examples of mechanics, and it has excellent worldbuilding and storytelling. It is available in podcast form from the comic book/pop culture organization *Major Spoilers*.

How much "system" should I be using?

An RPG "system" is a ruleset that governs the simulation of the secondary reality in which you role-play. By using a system, you are using its rules. Sometimes, it might make sense to use all the rules a system offers; other times, it might make sense to do away with some of

those rules - or scrap them altogether. I think there are four ways of looking at how much of the “system” to use: use it all, summarize it, use the barebones, or don’t use it at all.

If you use all of the system, you are not changing any of the rules (or changing few enough that it does not alter the game in a large way, which is called “homebrewing.”) Using all the system means you do not have to do a lot of work; all of the rules are set out for you. However, there are a lot of rules to learn, which can be overwhelming for anyone new to the system. Additionally, the system you use might be specific with the kind of stories it offers. *D&D 5e*, for example, offers a fantasy setting where you can be a wizard or a fighter or a cleric. But what if you want to play something from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*? You might be better off summarizing a system.

Summarizing a system means taking the essential parts of its rules - the rolls, the character sheets, the statistics, whatever - and essentializing them. You only take what you need, and you get rid of extra details. Doing this helps lighten up the learning curve on the rules, and it might open more story options for you. You can see this in action in my example lesson plan’s characters. They do not use the complete rules for characters, but rules about character types that I’ve deemed important and reformatted so they are easier to read and work with. A problem with summarizing a system is you need to understand it enough to manage all the changes. If you aren’t familiar with a system, it might be better to just learn its barebones material and work from there.

Using the barebones rules of a system means only taking its most fundamental mechanics and utilizing them to your purposes. This method is great if you want a lot of freedom in what type of story you address and not a lot of rules getting in the way. It is troublesome because without rules, sometimes abilities and narratives within the secondary reality can become inconsistent and ruin verisimilitude. If you were to barebones *D&D 5e*, you could just take the core mechanic - rolling a d20 and adding any relevant modifiers - and do that whenever chance might come into the mix. The modifiers can be decided based on your best judgement. For example, if you wanted to work in the world of the novel *Of Mice and Men* - a story very much not like the fantasy of *D&D 5e* - and you had a student playing Lenny, he would probably have a high modifier for strength, but a low one for intelligence. Maybe, though, you don’t want to use rules at all. In that case, you can get rid of them altogether.

Using no rules is just role-playing. It’s not really a game at that point; you’re doing make-believe. It can be fun. It can be helpful. But since there are no rules to govern anything, you lose some of the benefits that rules structure into the narrative: conflict, tension, verisimilitude, etc. You might not need rules to create those things, though; if you feel confident in your abilities to dump the rules and just role-play, go for it.

Does my game have to be violent?

No. Violence is not a necessity of any RPG. Although I pick *D&D 5e* as my system, it does have the problem of focusing a lot on combat, which is one of its pillars of play. However,

there are ways around this within the game, such as focusing on exploration and social encounters. Combat in *D&D 5e* is a source of conflict and tension. The conflict and tension are the important narrative elements - not combat itself. As long as you find ways to use the system to evoke conflict and tension, you will be fine.

Is there a system designed for the classroom?

Not yet; or at least, not that I know of. But there will be one day. The research for this project is not finished. I plan on continuing it as I get more experience in the field of education, especially using RPGs within the field of education. One day, I am going to create an RPG system designed specifically for the classroom.

Conclusion: Wish

We've done it. We've set the table at which we will play. We've walked through the corridors of thought, argument, evidence, analysis, and synthesis in regards to RPGs. We've examined RPGs in the context of the English classroom, as well as methods of including them therein. We've explored an example of what an RPG in the classroom would look like if we were to plan and play it. If we had any questions along the way, we've tried to answer them.

Now that we've done all these things together, I hope I've shown the values of RPGs in a classroom setting: how their co-constructed nature connects students in a way that varies traditional classroom methods while upholding traditional classroom standards; how they engage students around a table to help them grow both intellectually and socially; how particularly suited they are for English classrooms given their narrative nature; and how unique they are as a game and a learning experience.

You may have doubts about some of the claims I've made. You may be unsure how well RPGs can work as an educational tool. That's understandable. RPGs are not perfect for the classroom, and this isn't a perfect account of how they could work - but there is no perfect tool for teaching. Part of teaching is learning. There is a lot of learning to do about RPGs, but they are distinct in that they can't *really* be understood until you play them. No amount of critical theory or explanation is going to help you appreciate RPGs as much as sitting down at the table and playing. So go play.

One of the most powerful spells in *D&D 5e* is called "Wish." It lets the caster make a wish that can alter the fabric of the universe. You must be extremely powerful to cast it. Although this booklet attempts to describe the magic of RPGs, it is far from magical, and I am no wizard.

But I wish for you to give RPGs a chance. Try them yourself. Try them as a tool for teaching. Through trying, maybe my wish will come true. Maybe you will experience the magic of RPGs in your very own classroom.

Endnotes

Introduction: Setting the Table

What is an RPG?

1. Crawford, p. 5.
2. Bulmahn et al, p. 8.
3. Schalleger, p. 70.

Which One to Use?

1. *D&D* was the first role-playing game. It was released in 1974 by TSR Hobbies, Inc. Schalleger, p. 2.

Booklet of Magic

1. Much of my personal knowledge is built on the shoulders of giants. I have read countless forums, listened to numerous podcasts, and absorbed information from *D&D* personalities like Matt Colville and Matt Mercer.

Chapter One: Setting the Table

Why RPGs?

1. I reference an interesting article about RPGs being used at a Seattle middle school in “Chapter Four: FAQ” under “Questions of Class.” I have also played a simplified RPG in a class with one of my English professors, Joshua Johnson, and played in an extracurricular *D&D 5e* game he ran based off the text “The Library of Babel” by Jorge Luis Borges. See the “Intertextuality” in “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.”
2. There was a period of time some people believed RPGs like *D&D* were used for devil worship, and that playing the game turned you into a murderer. Some called it the “Satanic Panic.” It caused a lot of trouble for the reputation of RPGs.

The Importance of Play

1. Huizinga qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 45-46.
2. The characteristic “free” means play has to be a joyful, non-obligatory action. The characteristic “separate” means play has to have its own separate space and time. The characteristic “uncertain” means the results of play must be determined by player agency. The characteristic “unproductive” means play cannot produce anything material for the gain of those involved. The characteristic “structured” means play must be governed by rules. The characteristic “unreal” means play has to be a situation of make-believe. If any of these seem like they would cause problems, check out the section “Questions of Theory” in “Chapter Four: FAQ.” Caillois, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 51-53.

3. Are RPGs play still? I think so. I do not think all elements of play are necessary for RPGs to be considered playful. Huizinga describes this in his term “absorption,” as does Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi with his related term, “flow.” Both of these terms talk about an intrinsic motivation derived from what you could call “getting in the zone.” Schalleger connects these ideas to the fact this can still be experienced when RPGs are producing something and/or obligatory: “Play does not have to fulfill a purpose in primary reality, it generates its own meanings, value systems and relational frameworks. However, it *can* do so, if the players engaged in the activity agree upon such a motivation and participate accordingly.” Schalleger, p. 46.
4. Games of “competition” are where players are pitted against each other under ideal conditions to test their skill and see who will win. Games of “chance” are “based on decisions independent of the player,” where the thrill is not knowing what is going to happen. Games of “mimicry” are games of simulation. Games of “vertigo” are about chaos and entropy, or the destruction of perception. Caillois, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 53-56.
5. Johnson, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 65-66.

A Unique Structure: Co-Constructed Games

1. Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 184-185.
2. Jenkins says emergent narratives “are not prestructured or preprogrammed, taking shape through gameplay, yet they are not unstructured, chaotic, and frustrating as life itself.” Emergent narratives are the “holistic experience of the secondary reality.” Jenkins qtd. in Schalleger, and Schalleger, p. 187.
3. Schalleger, p. 163.
4. Michael Mateas, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 63-4.
5. Meilahti School, qtd. In Schalleger, p. 156.
6. Andrew Rilstone praised the unique nature of RPGs to do this when he says, “Role-playing games, like other forms of interactive narrative, represent a fundamental blurring of the distinction between creator and consumer, between story-teller and listener. Unlike other forms of interactive narrative, they can, in theory, be played with no tools and virtually no financial outlay: all that is necessary is that there be interaction between a player and a referee.” RPGs are unique interactive media because of their flexibility. Rilstone, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 85-86.
7. “Constructivism is defined variously as teaching that emphasizes the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information.” “Constructivist Teaching and Learning: Problem Solving under Teacher Guidance,” p. 278.
8. “What is essential in [my definition of RPGs] is the freedom of choice allowed to a player’s character, compared with the very limited range of choices available in most computer or boardgames.” Rilstone emphasizes the freedom of choice offered by RPGs. Rilstone, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 96.

9. Interestingly, challenging the players in the secondary reality of the game was not the primary role of the “referee” - the Dungeon Master - in early iterations of *D&D*; instead, the Dungeon Master was supposed to challenge players in primary reality. A distinction was made by later RPGs with the creation of the Game Master, whose role *was* to challenge their players in secondary reality. Schalleger, p. 77.
10. Eric Zimmerman, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 61.

Around the Table

1. “It all comes back to the social situation, eventually, because role-playing is a human activity and not a set of rules or text,” says Edwards, founder of the GNS theory. He also believes playing RPGs becomes untenable when players do not create or fulfill the terms of the social contract. Edwards, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 151-152.
2. Gary Alan Fine, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 93.
3. Schalleger, p. 177.
4. Bowman, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 178.
5. Fine, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 93.
6. Erving Goffman, qtd. in Rosselet, pp. 179-180.
7. “Role distance” is when an individual refuses total identification with a role and the meanings society associates with it. Goffman, qtd. in Rosselet, pp. 178-179.
8. G. Enfield, qtd. In Rosselet, p. 185.

Same Values, Different Perspectives

1. Dewey, qtd. In Garcia, pp. 170-171.
2. Paulo Freire, qtd. in Garcia, p. 171.
3. An example of this can be seen in how the creators of *Chivalry & Sorcery* - Edward Simbalist and Wilf Backhaus - fundamentally disagreed with the founder of RPGs - Gary Gygax - on how RPGs could be used to challenge players. Gygax focused on challenging players in primary reality, while Simbalist and Backhaus focused on challenging players in secondary reality. The disagreement, and the solving of the disagreement by creating a new RPG, is a whole other level of a real-world example in the context of RPGs. Schalleger, pp. 72-73.
4. See endnote 4 in the section “The Importance of Play” in “Chapter One: Principles of Use.”
5. Bowman, qtd. In Schalleger, p. 178.
6. Ito et. al, qtd. in Garcia, p. 168.
7. Garcia, p. 170.
8. Rosselet, p. 183.
9. Simbalist and Backhaus, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 74.
10. Bruner, qtd. In Cheville, p. 808.
11. Cheville describes J. Muller’s three modes of curriculum: knowing, acting, and being. The mode of “knowing” focuses on the intrinsic, societal value of knowledge and how to

manipulate it. The mode of “acting” focuses on acquiring skills. The mode of “being” - the mode Cheville holds in highest regard - focuses on motivation, engagement, and character; having students commit to being someone; and connecting student capabilities to student-desired functioning. Muller, qtd. in Cheville, p. 806.

12. “Capabilities are what one can do [the modes of knowing and acting] while functionings are what a person chooses to become [mode of being.]” Cheville, p. 807.
13. Character defines one’s “ability to act in the present in a way that leads to desired future state.” It is mode of being related because the desired future state and the agency to create it is the individual choosing a path and following it. The ability to do the same with a character in a narrative combines with Bruner’s narrative conception of reality, giving students a foil of their agency in primary reality through the agency of their character in secondary reality. Cheville, p. 808.
14. “In Actor stance, a person determines a character’s decisions and actions using only knowledge and perceptions that the character would have...In Author stance, a person determines a character’s decisions and actions based on the real person’s priorities, then retroactively ‘motivates’ the character to perform them. (Without that second, retroactive step, this is fairly called Pawn stance)...In Director stance, a person determines aspects of the environment relative to the character in some fashion, entirely separately from the character’s knowledge or ability to influence events. Therefore, the [player has not only determined the character’s actions, but the context, timing, and spatial circumstances of those actions, or even features of the world separate from the characters.” Edwards, qtd. In Schalleger, pp. 149-150.
15. Daniel Mackay outlines a nest of different frames that RPGs hold:
“[Performance[Theater[Script[Drama]]]]” These different contexts cover narrative, performative, ludic, and social frames of understanding. Mackay, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 101-103.
16. Steven Johnson, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 65.
17. Fine, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 94.

Chapter Two: In the English Classroom

Story Time

1. “The representation of a story (an event or a series of events)...Narratives consist of two main components: the story and the narrative discourse.” “Glossary and Topical Index,” pp. 237-238.
2. See endnote 10 in the section “A Unique Structure: Co-Constructed Games” in Chapter One: Principles of Use.”
3. Henry Jenkins’ narrative architecture views games as spaces that create room for narrative. There are four types of narratives in Jenkins’ structure: evoked, enacted,

embedded, and emergent. “Evoked” narratives are the intermedial and intertextual connections that rework the stories associated in the minds of the participants. “Enacted” narratives, which “stand at the heart of all spatial storytelling,” is the process of “making choices within a designed environment.” They are the small vignettes of narrative structured into the game and solidified by character choice. “Embedded” narrative is “the seeding of narrative of information in the game space.” It is the trail of breadcrumbs that can be discovered through play. Finally, the “emergent” narrative is what is created through play - unplanned, impromptu, and discovered. Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 184-187.

4. “The renaming and the redefinition [of Dramatism to Narrativism] both show that Edwards is changing his medial point of reference, switching from theatre and drama to literature and literary criticism.” Narrativism is the “N” in the theoretical perspective titled “GNS,” which stands for Gamism, Narrativism, and Simulationism. Schalleger, and Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 148.
5. “From the competitive DM [Dungeon Master] and the administrating GM [Game Master,] there is a move toward a Storyteller: from game to simulation to narrative...” Here, Schalleger references RPG *Vampire: The Masquerade* and the words of its author, Rein●Hagen. (That’s seriously how he spells his name - dot and all.) Interestingly enough, the *Player’s Handbook* of *D&D 5e* emphasizes the flexible storytelling aspect in their game, but maintains the game’s original term of Dungeon Master. Schalleger, p. 79.
6. View the question on the same topic in the section “Questions of Class” in “Chapter Four: FAQ.”
7. Rein●Hagen, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 83.
8. *D&D 5e* uses “personality characteristics” to “bring your character to life as you play the game.” The four characteristics are personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. “Personality traits” are small, simple details that are supposed to distinguish your character from other characters. “Ideals” are the “fundamental moral and ethical principles” of your character that drive their decisions and ways of life. “Bonds” are the character’s connections to the world. “Flaws” are the “vice[s], compulsion[s], fear[s], and weakness[es]” of your character that can be exploited. These different aspects show how the game system is designed to flesh out and understand characters. Crawford et al, pp. 123-124.
9. These particular stances are the “Actor” and “Author” stances of Henry Jenkins. See endnote 14 in the section “Same Values, Different Perspectives” in “Chapter One: Principles of Use.” Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 149-150.
10. See endnote 14 in the section “Same Values, Different Perspectives” in “Chapter One: Principles of Use.” Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 150.
11. “Exploration” is one of the three pillars of adventure in *D&D 5e*. Crawford et al, p. 8.

Intertextuality

1. “RPGs are not only fiction contextualized in awareness of their sociocultural setting, they are also, by necessity, metafiction in Hutcheon’s sense, fiction about fiction, texts that not only reveal their own textuality, but processes and mechanisms of textuality in general.” Schalleger, p. 226.
2. “Building off of familiar cultural and storytelling tropes, the foundations of tabletop RPGs are built upon an active participation with the threads of pre-existing media.” Garcia, p. 166.
3. See endnote 3 in the section “Story Time” in “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.” Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 184-185.
4. Professor Joshua Johnson, Lecturer/Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota, Morris.
5. One instance of this was exploring the idea of guilt in *Beowulf*. The players (if you haven’t picked it up yet, I was one of them) had to fix the conflict between Beowulf and Grendel’s Mother by having Beowulf give himself up to Grendel’s mother to pay the blood debt of murdering Grendel.

Getting Creative (Writing)

1. See endnote 3 in the section “Story Time” in “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.” Jenkins, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 184-185.

Making the Magic Happen

1. Check out the case of Lake Washington Girls Middle School in the section “Questions of Class” in Chapter Four: FAQ.”
2. Look at the related question in the section “Questions of Theory” in “Chapter Four: FAQ.”

Cantrips and Tricks

1. “Go forth now. Read the rules of the game and the story of its worlds, but always remember that you are the one who brings them to life. They are nothing without the spark of life you give them.” Mearls et al, p. 4.
2. “Don’t let luck rule the plot. Characters should get to win on the basis of their own skill and ingenuity, not on unrelated dice rolls.” Rein•Hagen, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 83.

Chapter Three: Going on an Adventure

So You Want to Be a Hero

1. You will note three things about this condition. Firstly, I am running this session for a 10th grade classroom because the standards align well with the capabilities of RPGs, and I imagine students at that grade level will be both independent and confident enough to make decisions in an RPG session. Secondly, I am running it for a classroom of 16 students. That is an unconventional classroom, but it works well with the third thing you will notice, which is the lesson is designed for four students. I am using my “In Class”

method from “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.” I am taking the approach of dividing up the class, so the rest of the students will be doing some sort of work in the background: reading a book for class, writing the outline of a paper, gathering research for a project, etc.

2. If you are wondering why I chose this length, it is partially due to the constraints of a presentation for which I made this scenario. It is also a handy time frame for mapping out the three “phases” of the adventure. Each phase can take around ten minutes.
3. I acknowledge that it is very rare that a school would let a teacher just do something and see what they get out of it. Still, one can dream.

Lesson Plan

1. All character sheets and non-player templates are included in “Appendix: Lesson Plan Materials.”

Foundation for Learning

1. “Minnesota Academic Standards: English Language Arts K-12 2010,” pp. 48-65.
2. You might notice that these standards are missing parts. I chose to remove parts of the standards both to save space and because there are some parts that might not be relevant. If you would like to see the whole standard, you can go see them in the above citation.
3. These are the narrative elements from the section “Story Time” in “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.” I am using all three so you can see an example of all of them in action.
4. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the standards the objective fulfills.

Making Magic

1. It is okay to borrow from other people. RPGs are multimedial and intertextual by nature. As long as you do not publish this material and claim it as all your own, borrowing is just fine. Borrow narrative beats. Borrow settings. Borrow characters. Feel free to take things and make them your own.
2. Three phases is helpful because we have thirty minutes to play. We can allot each section ten minutes so we have a good sense of how to complete everything by the end of class. Some sections might take longer or shorter than others, so we will have to adjust material as we go.
3. Notice how I am following some of my rules of thumb from the section “Cantrips and Tricks” in “Chapter Two: In the English Classroom.” Also, there is a chance your students chose not to engage with any of the material you lay out in your scenes. They might try to make their character run off to go look for gold. Give them example from a familiar text to show how this might not make narrative sense - like what if Harry Potter decided to leave Hogwarts in the middle of one of the books and go start a thrash metal band. Harry has the angst for it, but there is more pressing narrative material going on, so a reader would be disappointed.
4. All character sheets are included in “Appendix: Lesson Plan Materials.”

5. If you are familiar with *D&D 5e*, you will notice I get rid of some important rules for classes, mix up when characters get them, and add some of my own. I operate under the mindset that these are 1st-2nd level characters, but I want to include abilities that make the characters distinct, so I take a few liberties. I do the same for the non-player templates.
6. I follow the traditional party composition from *D&D* of having a wizard, a fighter, a rogue, and a cleric; but I substitute a druid for a cleric because it makes more sense in the context of the setting. I also think a cleric - someone with holy, divine magic - is a little too obvious of a pick for dealing with a cursed ritual. Finally, I knew there was a player in the group that I was going to test this on that might enjoy playing someone so in tune with nature.
7. I use gender neutral pronouns for all the characters so students don't feel like they have to pick a character because of their gender identity, and because I believe in accessibility.

Casting the Spell

1. This is from the section "Cantrips and Tricks" in "Chapter Two: In the English Classroom."

Dismissing the Charm

1. I cover this method in the section "Making the Magic Happen" in "Chapter Two: In the English Classroom."
2. These cover the narrative elements in the section "Story Time" in "Chapter Two: In the English Classroom." I do not cover intertextuality because I did not want the lesson to become too cluttered with the small time frame I allotted.

Chapter Four: FAQ

Questions of Theory

1. Caillois, qtd. in Schalleger, pp. 51-52.
2. Fine says RPGs are not just escapism, but systems for producing cultural artifacts. Fine, qtd. in Schalleger, p. 61.

Questions of Class

1. "In order to experience agency and immersion, to understand [RPGs] and the immense power they hold over the individual, one has to *participate* in an RPG." Schalleger, p. 8.
2. Baume.

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Appendix: Lesson Plan Materials

Greycloak, *Human Wizard*

Greycloak is a mysterious traveling wizard who likes to uncover hidden secrets. They were in Rockfall studying local ley lines when they were contacted by the council.

Personal Characteristics

Greycloak thinks sharing knowledge is important.

Greycloak has a flair for the dramatic.

Statistics

Intelligence +2 : Wisdom +1 : Strength -1

HP 6 : AC 10 (robes)

Arcana +4 : History +4

Abilities

Well Traveled. Greycloak has seen the world and its many different peoples. They have +1 on all Charisma ability checks.

Shield. Greycloak summons a shield of force. Once per day, when an enemy hits Greycloak with an attack, they can turn their AC to 16 until their next turn. All projectiles will miss them while this is activated.

Spellbook. Greycloak's knowledge of arcane lore allows them to cast many spells.

- Greycloak can cast the following spells as many times as they want per day.
 - *Blade Ward.* Greycloak has damage resistance until the start of their next turn.
 - *Firebolt.* Greycloak shoots a bolt of fire. Attack +4 : 1d10 fire damage.
 - *Prestidigitation.* Greycloak performs small feats of magic like harmless sensory effects, light or snuff small flames, and make small illusions.
- Greycloak can cast the following spells for a total of two castings per day.
 - *Charm Person.* Greycloak magically charms a person. The target must make a DC 13 Wisdom save or treat Greycloak as a friendly acquaintance for an hour.
 - *Magic Missile.* Greycloak fires three missiles of force. Each automatically hits its target for 1d4+1 force damage.
 - *Sleep.* Greycloak puts creatures into a mystic slumber. Roll 5d8 to make an HP pool. Starting with the lowest HP creature, targeted creatures fall asleep until the HP pool is used up.

Equipment

Staff. +1 attack :1d6-1 damage

Sight Crystal. A magic crystal that gives Greycloak supernatural sight and allows them to divine the future. When Greycloak looks through the crystal and focuses, anything magical glows to their eye. In addition, twice per day, they can make anyone reroll a d20 roll; that person must take the second roll.

Cael, *Elf Druid*

Cael has been a hermit all of their life, serving the people of Rockfall in consulting with nature and dealing with sickness and injury. They were helping a farmer's lame horse when they were contacted by the council.

Personal Characteristics

Cael values all natural life.

Cael doesn't have many friends that aren't animals.

Statistics

Wisdom +2 : Dexterity +1 : Cha -1

HP 8 : AC 13 (hide armor)

Nature +4 : Medicine +4

Abilities

Elven Senses. Cael has supernaturally keen senses. Advantage on all Perception checks.

Beast Shape. Cael is invested with primal power, giving them the ability to transform into any of the follow animals. They can transform into each animal once per day.

- Owl. Owls have the ability to fly. HP 1 : AC 11
- Squirrel. Squirrels have +4 on Stealth checks. HP 2 : AC 13
- Wolf. Wolves can bite (+4 attack, 2d4+2 damage.) HP 11 : AC 13

Druidic Magic. Cael's primal connections allows them to wield nature magic.

- Cael can cast the following spells as many times as they want.
 - *Druidcraft.* Cael can predict weather, make plants grow, snuff out small flames, and create harmless sensory effects.
 - *Thornwhip.* Cael whips out a thorny vine within 30 feet. Attack +4 : 1d6 damage and the creature is pulled 10 feet closer to Cael.
- Cael can cast the either of these spells for a total of two castings per day.
 - *Cure Wounds.* Cael touches a creature and heals it for 1d8+2 HP.
 - *Speak with Animals.* For the next 10 minutes, Cael can speak with animals.

Equipment

Shortbow. +3 attack : 1d6+1 damage

Bird Seed. Advantage on Nature checks for working with animals.

Fesselar, *Dragonborn Fighter*

Fesselar has served as a caravan guard since they were old enough to hold a sword. They were waiting in Rockfall for a new position when they were approached by the town council.

Personal Characteristics

Fesselar never leaves a teammate behind.

Fesselar is very superstitious.

Statistics

Strength +2 : Constitution +1 : Dexterity -1

HP 13 : AC 18 (chainmail + shield)

Athletics +4 : Intimidate +2

Abilities

Dragon's Breath. Once per day, Fesselar can shoot a blast of fire out of their mouth like the dragons of their heritage. Dexterity save DC 11 : 2d6 damage on a failed save, half on a success.

Action Surge. When the going gets tough, Fesselar gets going. Once per day, they can take another action.

Shield Master. Fesselar is trained to fight with a shield. They have advantage on Athletics checks to knock opponents down with their shield. Any teammate standing directly beside Fesselar gets +1 AC.

Equipment

Longsword. +4 attack : 1d8+2 damage

Shield. Make an opposed Athletics check to knock someone down. If you succeed, the target takes 1d4+2 damage and is prone.

Wisp, *Halfling Rogue*

Wisp makes a living off tracking down stolen goods and apprehending the criminals. They were working with the Rockfall guard to find some criminals when they were contacted by the council.

Personal Characteristics

Wisp thinks laughter is the best medicine.

Wisp sometimes has “sticky fingers” - especially for shiny things.

Statistics

Dexterity +2 : Charisma +1 : Constitution -1

HP 7 : AC 14 (studded leather)

Stealth +4 : Thievery +4 : Persuasion +3

Abilities

Halfling Luck. Halflings tend to land on their feet. Whenever Wisp rolls a natural 1 on the d20, they can reroll it. They must use the second roll.

Sneak Attack. Wisp knows how to hit them where it hurts. Add 1d6 damage to any attack Wisp makes on an enemy when Wisp is undetected or when one of Wisp’s teammates is within 5 feet of the enemy.

Expert Sleuth. Wisp follows their hunches. Wisp has advantage on all Investigation checks.

Equipment

Dagger. +4 attack : 1d4+2 damage (can attack a second time for 1d4 damage.) Range 20/60

Thieves’ Tools. The gear necessary for breaking and entering.

Charmed Mercenary

This human mercenary has been brainwashed by dark magics into obeying the will of the Cult of Agaegrus, as denoted by their glowing red eyes. The taint of the Seventh Horn gives them supernatural speed and strength.

Statistics

Strength +2 : Dexterity +2 : Wisdom -2

HP 44 : AC 13

Perception +1

Abilities

Multiattack. The Charmed Mercenary attacks twice with its spear. Attack +4 : 1d6+2 damage. Range 20/60.

Resilient. The influence of the Seventh Horn gives the Charmed Mercenary supernatural resilience. Once per day, they can reroll one failed save.

Cultist

The cultists of the Circle of Agaegrus have been driven insane by the influence of their demon lord. They will stop at nothing to spread his influence over the world.

Statistics

Charisma +1 : Dexterity +1 : Wisdom -2

HP 9: AC 12

Abilities

Dagger. The Cultist attacks with its dagger. Attack +3 : 1d4+1 damage.

Entrance. The Cultist can channel the infernal influence of the Seventh Horn to daze its opponent. They can make a target make a DC 11 Wisdom save. If the target fails, their next action has a 50% chance of failure.

Quicksilver Eye

This floating, silvery orb is an occult artifact invested with the power of the demon Agaegrus, the Seventh Horn. Its latent energy from the ritual takes the shape of spectral horns.

Statistics

None.

Abilities

Latent Power. The Quicksilver Eye is charged with latent energy from the ritual. Any creature that enters within 10 feet of the orb must make a DC 13 Dexterity save. If they fail, they take 1d8 force damage.

Burning Touch. The infernal magics of the Seventh Horn make this orb hot as flame. If a creature touches the orb, they must make a DC 13 Constitution save. On a failure, they take 1d4 damage; on a success, half that.