CURRENTlab
MODULE
Mechanics as Metaphor

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will review strategies and purposes for critiquing artwork, and critique several digital games as works of art.

- Students will critically examine a number of games which use game mechanics to metaphorically evoke an idea or experience, and discuss the metaphoric potential of various interactions.

- Students will create their own metaphorical game, applying the values and concepts derived from critique of exemplar games, and the skills developed in previous Game Maker units.

NATIONAL ARTS SOLs:

NA-VA.5-8.1 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

NA-VA.5-8.2 Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.

NA-VA.5-8.5 Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.

NA-VA.9-12.1 NA-VA.9-12.2 Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.

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VA ARTS SOLs:

5.9, 7.4, AI.6, AII.5 The student will use contemporary media to create works of art.

5.20, 7.15, 8.18, AI.15, AII.17 The student will use specific criteria and criticism processes to evaluate theirs & others' work.

6.19 The student will explain the means by which works of art evoke personal sensory, emotional, and aesthetic responses.

7.14 The student will identify subjects, themes, and symbols as they relate to meaning in works of art.

AI.21 The student will analyze the functions, purposes, and perceived meanings of works of design.

AII.14 The student will describe traditional and nontraditional media and subject matter in works of art in relation to historical and contemporary meaning.

AIII.17 The student will interpret works of art for symbolic and metaphorical meanings.

This module is divided into 5 1-hour lessons. Lessons can be readily combined for longer class periods, taking fewer sessions. If class time is short, the playing and critique of exemplar games could be done as homework. This module also includes worksheets for structuring idea generation and critique, and a quick-reference guide for Game Maker.

CONTENTS

DAY 1: METAPHORS IN ARTMAKING

- Board or project these quotes:

  - "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players They have their exits and their entrances" - William Shakespeare
  - "I bomb atomically, Socrates' philosophies / and hypothesis can't define how I be droppin' these / mockeries, lyrically perform armed robbery" - Inspectah Deck

- Is Shakespeare talking about an actual stage? What *is* he talking about? If the stage is 'life,' then what do the players and their exits and entrances represent?

- Is Inspectah Deck talking about dropping actual bombs and performing actual robberies? What *is* he talking about? Why would he call his words 'bombs' and not just 'words'?

- What is the word for when we use one thing to stand in for another like this? When 'life' is a 'stage' or 'lyrics' are 'bombs'?

  - **METAPHOR**
  - Can only writers use metaphor, or can artists, too? What about a visual metaphor?

- Look at example comic panel by Rumiko Takahashi:

  - Does Ryoga *really* have lines shooting out of his legs in panel 2? Then why are they there? They're a *visual metaphor* for movement! Likewise, do the characters *really* have bubbles floating around their heads with words on them? No - those are a *visual metaphor* for speech.

- Look at painting "Beat the White Army with the Red Wedge" by El Lissitsky

  - Do you see an actual 'white army' in the painting? What visual metaphor is Lissitsky using to depict them?
  - What do you think the 'red wedge' is a metaphor for? (Does it help if I tell you in the Russian revolution there was a 'Red Army' and a 'White Army'?) What story do the two main shapes, and their interaction, tell metaphorically?

- Different media have different tools they can use to convey meaning:

  - What tool(s) does writing have? **Words, punctuation, etc.**
  - What tools do images have? **Shape, line, color, figures, etc.**
  - What tools might a **video game** have, that these don't have? **The way you move, the controls, the behavior of NPCs, the things you avoid, the things you release, etc.**
    - A word game designers use for all of these behaviors and systems is **mechanics**. Just as color and shape can be metaphorical in painting, or words can be metaphorical in writing, **mechanics can be metaphorical in games.**

- We're going to play a metaphorical video game. This game has a **central concept**, and the **mechanics** in the game all metaphorically represent that concept or parts of it. When we play the game, I want you to think about these questions (write these on the board):

  - **What is this game's central concept? (What is this game about?)**
 - **How do the mechanics tell you about the central concept?**

- Students will play the game *Loneliness*, by Jordan Magnuson (see next page for description and discussion questions). The title and some text at the end should make the central concept quite clear, and the simplicity and shortness of the game should make discussing the mechanics and their metaphoric meanings fairly straightforward.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: Loneliness by Jordan Magnuson (2011)

Loneliness is a metaphoric game Magnusson made during a period of time when he was living and teaching in a number of different countries away from his home in the US. As part of his "GameTrekking" project, Magnuson made a short game based on his experience in each country he traveled to, including Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Loneliness is based on his experience teaching children in South Korea, as well as on reported statistics of childhood happiness in the developed world which indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with life among Korean children and which cite "loneliness" as a significant factor.
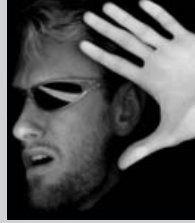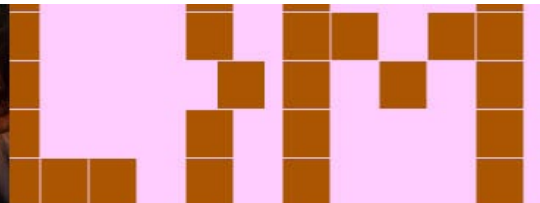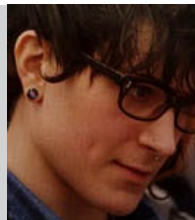
- Elicit to the board: **What is the central concept of this game? Loneliness**.

- Create two columns on the board, like the Metaphor Mapping sheet (Appendix, page 15), with the left one headed **Mechanics**, and the right headed **Meanings.**

  - On the left, elicit mechanics of the game from the students. Things like: how the player moved, how the NPCs reacted, even choices the player could make.
  - On the right, elicit from the students what each of those mechanics might metaphorically mean in the context of the central concept. After the discussion, your chart might look something like this:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'loneliness')
-Player can move a square up, down, left, right.	-The square might represent the player, or another person who is lonely.
-Other squares move away when you approach them.	-Lonely people might feel isolated or abandoned by others. Sometimes people are lonely because others avoid them.
-Other squares often move together in groups before the player approaches.	-Lonely people often feel left out of social groups.
-Player can choose to approach or not approach other squares.	-A lonely person might reach out to others, or they might be too shy, or they might not *want* to interact with other people, especially if those people weren't nice in past.

- After having done this as a class, students will play another metaphorical game, and analyze it similarly, in pairs. Distribute a Metaphor Mapping worksheet (page 15) to each pair. Direct them to play LIM, and to discuss what its central concept might be, and how the mechanics represent that concept. Assure students that there isn't one "right" answer.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: LIM by Merrit Kopas (2012)

LIM is a metaphoric game relating mechanics to social experience of "passing" or "fitting in" and the aggression that can result when someone doesn't "fit in." While the metaphor is autobiographical and stems from the artist's identity as a queer trans-woman, the abstraction of the game has allowed players to draw connections to bullying, social anxiety, and other personal experiences.

- After giving students about five minutes to play, and five-ten minutes to work on their sheet, elicit to the board: **What is the central concept of this game?**

  - There's no single correct answer, but likely responses could include: **bullying, fitting in, being different, social pressure, gang violence**

- On another two-columned chart on the board, elicit **mechanics** from the students.

- Then elicit possible **metaphorical meanings** of these mechanics, related to the central concepts students shared. If several concepts are similar ('bullying' and 'fitting in'), you can probably combine them in the discussion. If students have very different interpretations ('fitting in' and 'gang violence'), it might be useful to explore each interpretation separately and highlight how metaphors often allow for multiple interpretations.

- Your board after discussion might look something like this:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'bullying')
-Player can move a square up, down, left, right.	-The square might represent the player, or another person who is bullied.
-Other squares attack the player if her color is different.	-Bullies often target people who are different or not 'normal', especially if they are in the minority.
-The player can change color to match the other squares and not be attacked.	-Sometimes, people try to 'fit in' so they won't be bullied.
-Changing color for too long makes the screen shake, the player slow down, and an unpleasant noise play.	-Changing yourself, or pretending to be someone you're not, to 'fit in' can be difficult, painful, and unpleasant.
-The game can be made unwinnable; the player can get trapped, or knocked out of the maze forever.	-Sometimes bullying doesn't have a happy ending. Victims of bullying might be bullied all their lives, some might run away or even commit suicide.

- Other possible discussion questions:

  - **Loneliness spelled out its metaphor for us with its title and text. LIM did not. Which game gave us more interesting things to talk about? Which one was harder to find the meaning for? Is it okay if a game isn't totally clear?**
    - One of the strengths of metaphor is that different people can have different experiences and ideas with the same game. It's okay for a game's meaning not to be 100% obvious. In fact, that might be *better*!
  - **Here is something you may not have known about the artist who made LIM: She is a gay (trans-)woman. How does knowing this affect the way we read the mechanics? Does it reveal anything new to us about the game? Does this mean there's only one "right" interpretation, based on the artist's biography, or are our different interpretations still valid?**
    - While the artist's intent/background can tell us new things about an artwork, it doesn't cancel out other ideas about it. Any interpretation is valid, as long as you can back it up with ideas from the artwork, like we did when we filled out the Metaphor Mapping sheets. You can even find new meaning even in very popular games, like Super Mario this way!

- If there is more class time, encourage students in pairs to play another game from the Intro to Game Design as Art module, and subject it to a similar analysis. What metaphorical meanings can they pull from the mechanics of different games?

DAY 2: MORE COMPLEX METAPHORS IN GAMES

- Today, we're going to look at two games by an artist named Jason Rohrer. He has made several games, and posted several on a blog called **Game Design Sketchbook**.

  - **What kind of games do you think might go in a game design "sketchbook"?**
  - **How can sketching in a sketchbook help you in other artforms? How might making smaller, simpler "sketch" games help you when designing a larger game?**

CRITIQUE & PLAY: Passage by Jason Rohrer (2007)

Passage is one of the most widely celebrated 'art games' of the 21st century so far. It is a "memento mori" game in which you control a character over the course of his life from birth to death during a time span of five minutes. The mechanics and systems of the game all map metaphorically onto this core idea in different ways, many of which are detailed in Rohrer's **statement for the piece**.

- Depending on their comfort level or independence, students can fill out a Metaphor Mapping sheet (page 15) after playing the game, or you can simply discuss as a class. Elicit what the central concept of the game might be (likely responses include "life and death," "a person's life," etc.). Possible connections for this game may include:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'life and death')
-Player can move a person up, down, left, right. Points go up with every step taken.	-The person represents the player. The more you do in life, the more fulfilled a life you have (if you care about a 'score,' that is).
-Player can open chests. Some are empty, some contain treasure.	-Sometimes things in life pay off, sometimes they don't.
-Player can team up with a female NPC. This keeps them from getting all of the chests, but each step earns more points.	-Getting married can be limiting in some ways, but rewarding in others.
-Early in the five minute limit, the player is on the left, and the playspace telescopes toward the right, while toward the end, the player is close to the right, and can see more of what was behind.	-Early in life, your whole life is ahead of you, but is indistinct. Later in life, you have more to look back on, but memories are often indistinct, too!
-After 5 minutes, the game always ends.	-Everyone dies someday.

- After discussion, students can read Rohrer's artist statement (included in the Module as a PDF, or online at **http://hcsoftware.sourceforge.net/passage/statement.html**).

  - **Was there anything Rohrer pointed out that we didn't notice? Was there anything *we noticed in the game that Rohrer didn't point out?***
  - **Does knowing Rohrer's intentions mean that our interpretations are 'wrong' if they are different?**
  - **Passage is a short, relatively simple game to play - but after reading Rohrer's statement does it seem like it was very quick and easy to make? Or can working out your ideas take more work than actually making the art?**

- Students will next play another game by Jason Rohrer. Like *Loneliness* in the previous lesson, *Idealism*'s title gives away it's central concept.

  - **What does it mean when a person is 'idealistic'? Would an idealistic person take shortcuts or be happy doing something in a less-than-perfect way? How do people respond when an idealistic person doesn't follow their own ideals?**

  - **What it something you could do that doesn't follow your own ideals or beliefs about how a person should act, but that might make your life easier in the short run? (Cheating on a test, following peer pressure, lying to a friend, running a red light...) Could that choice have negative consequences?**

  - **Can you think of a time when it is good or helpful to compromise your ideals?**

CRITIQUE & PLAY: Idealism by Jason Rohrer (2007)

A metaphoric "sketch" game by artist and game designer Jason Rohrer relating mechanics to loss of ideals and taking shortcuts in life. As the levels become more complex, players can take shortcuts to save time and have a higher score, but taking shortcuts can turn allies into enemies and make the level harder. The game was actually made in Game Maker, and the download includes Rohrer's original Game Maker file.

- Depending on their comfort level or independence, students can fill out a Metaphor Mapping sheet (page 15) after playing the game, or you can simply discuss as a class. Possible connections for this game may include:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'idealism')
-Player must move toward the exit, past enemies and around walls. A time counts down as the player moves.	-You have limited time and resources to accomplish your goals, and often obstacles stand in your way.
-Player can take shortcuts through green walls to save time and avoid enemies.	-You can save time by taking shortcuts to reach your goals, and that can make things easier.
-There are friendly NPCs which will attack the enemies and their projectiles for you.	-Friends and allies can help you achieve your goals.
-But taking shortcuts makes the friendly NPCs stop helping you, and eventually they will start to attack you!	-If you take too many shortcuts in life, or take the easy way out (compromise your ideals), you may lose your friends, or even make enemies out of them.

- After discussion, students can read Rohrer's artist statement (included in the Module as a PDF, or online at http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/gamedesignsketchbook/3560-Game-Design-Sketchbook-Idealism).

  - **Was there anything Rohrer pointed out that we didn't notice? Was there anything *we noticed in the game that Rohrer didn't point out?***

  - **Does knowing Rohrer's intentions mean that our interpretations are 'wrong' if they are different?**

- **TASK:** Creating mechanics from a central concept

  - We've looked at a few games, and use their mechanics and imagery to determine their central concepts. Now, we're going to reverse that process. We'll each look at a central concept, generate ideas from that concept, generate mechanics from those ideas, and sketch ideas for a metaphoric game based on that idea.

  - Tools for this task are the two-sided Metaphor Game Generation sheet (page 16 & page 17), and the Central Concept Prompt cards (page 18). There are a few different ways to frame this activity, based on your student group (see next page).
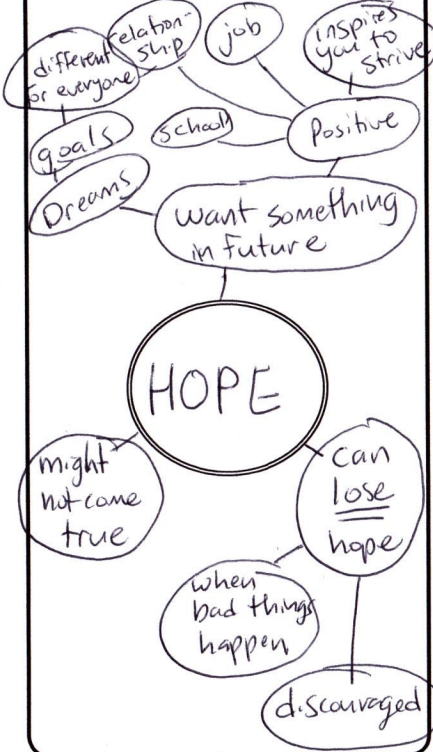
- **TASK:** Creating mechanics from a central concept

  - Tools for this task are the two-sided Metaphor Game Generation sheet (page 7 & page 7), and the Central Concept Prompt cards (page 7). There are a few different ways to frame this activity, based on your student group:

    - Distribute a Central Concept Prompt card to each student. The students then use the Metaphor Game Generation Sheet to brainstorm different aspects or related ideas to that concept, picks some of those to include in the 'Meaning' column of their sheet, then derives game mechanics to list in the 'mechanics' section. Students then flip the sheet and sketch images of what screens of this hypothetical game might look like.

    - If your students need more support in this process, you can do a single Central Concept all together as a class, brainstorming and charting ideas on the board and then letting students individually draw their images of what the game may look like.

    - This process could serve as the basis for the students' actual game project for the class, or, if they can repeat this process individually and want to choose their own Central Concept, they can design their own game from scratch in upcoming class periods.

  - Here are example images of what the results of this process might look like for the central concept *Hope*:
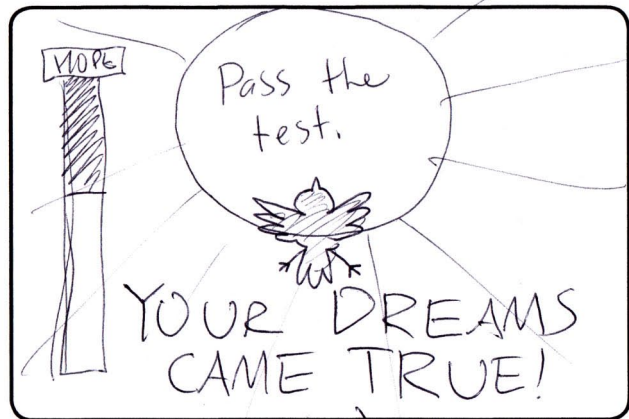
METAPHOR GENERATION SHEET (side 2)

Based on the mechanics you developed on the other side of this sheet, draw four screenshots of what your game might look like in action.

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Panel 1: HOPE — Graduate High School

Panel 2: HOPE — Be a famous comic artist. Hitting cloud makes "hope" drop

Panel 3: HOPE — YOU LOST ALL HOPE! (GAME OVER)

Panel 4: HOPE — Pass the test. YOUR DREAMS CAME TRUE! (WIN)

- The drawn component can be as involved or preliminary as time and materials allow. If this is going to become the plan for their final game, it may be useful to have students resolve their sketches in greater detail and think about their use of color and imagery.

- Depending on available time, students can share their ideas with the class. Another possibility, if this will be the basis for students' game projects in this class would be for students to do peer critiques of each others' game ideas based on the "What is fun or interesting? / What could be improved?" model of critique used in the Intro module.

DAY 3: BEYOND FEELINGS - METAPHORS FOR HISTORY AND POLITICS

- Elicit the central concepts of the metaphorical games played so far in class (Loneliness, Alienation/Bullying/Fitting in, Idealism, Life/Death).

  - What is similar about all of these concepts?
    - They relate to personal feelings or life experiences.
  - Is all art about expressing personal feelings? Can art talk about other things?

- Look at these street art images by Banksy, GILF, and an anonymous street artist (image files of these artworks are included in the module materials). What is each piece about - are they about personal expression, or about something different?

  - Banksy's "Keep your coins I WANT CHANGE" is about the problem of homelessness and how just giving money to homeless people won't stop the problem of homelessness when there are much bigger causes.
  - GILF's polar bears wearing swim fins is a commentary on global warming and the melting polar ice caps.
  - "I Am Trayvon Martin" is a statement of identity with the young murder victim, and takes a side in the discussions of race, gun availability, and the justice system that surrounded his being killed.

- Games can also deal with social, environmental, and political issues.

  - Watch Brenda Romero's TED talk on her game series "The Mechanic is the Message" (viewable at **http://www.ted.com/talks/brenda_brathwaite_gaming_for_understanding**, or in the video file included with the module materials).
  - **What concept was Brenda Romero addressing in her New World game?**
    - Slavery - specifically the Middle Passage
  - **What mechanics did she use to connect to the central concept?**
    - Rolling the die to represent consuming food, limiting the space on the card to represent the limited ship space, coloring the pieces to represent how families were split up by slavery, giving the player the choice to throw people overboard or let them starve to death to represent the same inhuman choice faced by the slave traders.

DISCUSSION: The Mechanic is the Message – Brenda Romero (2008-present)

Brenda Romero (formerly Brenda Brathwaite) is a game designer who has worked on several commerical digital games, but who also personally creates board games as unique art objects which visitors can play at exhibitions. The Mechanic is the Message is a series of six nondigital games dealing with historic tragedies, which use mechanics as a way to force players to re-live or participate in them. The games include The New World, dealing with the Middle Passage of the slave trade, Train, which addresses the Holocaust, and Síochán Leat / The Irish Game, which recreates Cromwell's conquest of Ireland. Three in-progress games in the series include One Falls for Each of Us, a game about the Trail of Tears, Cité Soleil, a game about contemporary violence in shantytowns in Haiti, and Mexican Kitchen Workers, a game about the working conditions of immigrants to the United States.

- **"Complicity" means that you take part in something illegal or 'wrong.' Brenda Romero has said that "Complicity is key" in her games. In The New World, was the player just playing the part of the victims, or also acting out the part of the slavers? How did her daughter feel when she had to make the choice to throw people overboard, like the captain of the slave ship might have had to? Why would Romero make games where the player has to be the villain?**
  - This forces the player to realize the motivations behind these actions, and how oppressors justify the actions to themselves. They show how it is possible for a system to make a 'good' person (like the player) do something 'evil.'

- Next we're actually going to play a game about a cultural/political idea. Board the word "SOCIOECONOMIC." Elicit from that class what they think this word might mean or relate to. Break it down into its roots: "SOCIO" and "ECONOMIC."

  - "Socio-" relates to "social" - the relationships between people in a society. "Economic" means the relationships between people and money in a society. So "socioeconomic" forces are social/cultural forces and monetary forces that shape our lives.
  - Critique and play "Socioeconomic Pong," and in groups or as a class, complete a Metaphor Mapping sheet for the game.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: Socioeconomic Pong – Naomi Rockler-Gladen, Estele Domingos, & Matt Taylor (2014)

In traditional Pong, players are each given equally-sized paddles, and therefore neither has an advantage. In Socioeconomic Pong, the size of a player's paddle, and the amount of points they earn for each score, is determined by socioeconomic factors entered in a survey before playing the game. The purpose of this game is to demonstrate that the socioeconomic advantages and obstacles faced by an individual at birth have a strong impact on the likelihood of that individual's success.
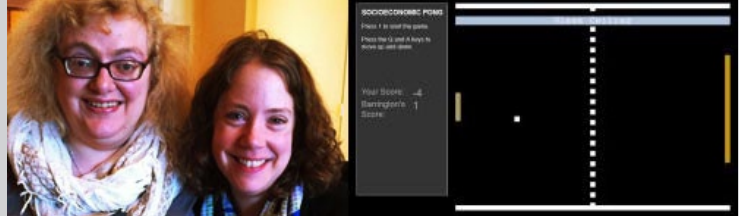
MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'socioecomics')
-Responses related to demographic information (race/ethnicity, level of education achivement in family, etc.) can make paddles larger or smaller.	-Socioeconomic forces outside of your control can make life more easy or difficult for you over the course of your life.
-Female players receive .7 points for each score, and their paddle movement is limited by a "glass ceiling."	-Statisically, women earn on average 78% the wages men are paid, and often face a "glass ceiling" preventing high-level promotions.
-Responses related to childhood factors, such as being raised in a single parent household or having access to healthcare, affect the players' starting scores.	-Socioeconomic forces surrounding your birth and childhood can give you a 'head start,' or leave you at a disadvantage, that can affect you throughout life.

- Next we're going to play a game about another cultural/political idea. Board the word "COPYRIGHT." Elicit from the class what they know about this term. What is a "COPYRIGHT"? What does it do? What is the purpose?

  - This information doesn't need to be explicitly taught to students, but might be useful for you in answering questions or clarifying students' ideas:
    - Copyright is the law which protects an artist's ownership of their creation. Creative works like writing, art, movies, and games can be copyrighted. Copyright is automatically granted to creative work the moment it is made, but artists can register copyrights with the government for extra documentation.
    - When a work's copyright is expired, other artists can use that work in their own artwork (this is why so many movies and cartoons are made from older stories and artworks like Alice in Wonderland). When an artist uses another artist's artwork in their own work, this is called 'appropriation.' Sometimes artwork can be appropriated before copyright expires, which is called "Fair Use." Examples of fair use include parodies (using the artwork to make fun of the artwork), commentary (like using clips of a movie in a YouTube review of it), education (using a movie, text, or image in a lesson), or "transformative" work (like a remix that totally changes the original song into something new). "Transformative" work is the hardest to defend or explain, which means often people who remix or appropriate song or artwork can still be sued, even if they believe their use is "fair use."
    - Current copyright law protects work for the lifetime of the author + 70 years for works made by individuals, or publication date + 120 years for works by corporate authors (like Disney or Warner Bros.). It wasn't always this long. Companies have asked lawmakers to extend copyright law - the current copyright law is sometimes jokingly called

the "Mickey Mouse" law because of Disney's involvement in extending copyright so that Mickey Mouse wouldn't enter the public domain.

- **How do you feel about copyright lasting 70 years after the author's death? Does a work still need to have copyright if the author isn't still alive to benefit from it? How would the world be different if copyright lasted *forever* - what movies or TV shows would never have been made (e.g. Disney retellings of fairy tales, movies made from books, etc.)? How would the world be different with no copyrights - if people could just copy other people's stories and artworks and sell them as their own?**
- **What are the benefits of copyright protecting authors from having their work used by others?**
  - The author/artist gets credit for their artwork. The author/artist can make money from their artwork.
- **What are the benefits of copyright expiring and letting other people appropriate work made by others?**
  - Other artists can use the original work in new ways the original artist never would have (e.g. a hip-hop remix of a classical song, an animated version of a fairy tale, or a version of a novel that tells the story from the perspective of minority or marginal characters).
  - Artists can take inspiration from their favorite works of art without being afraid of being sued. Steve Jobs, Picasso, and T.S. Eliot all have said variations on the phrase "Good artists borrow - great artists steal." (Maybe Picasso and Jobs *stole* that phrase from Eliot!)

- Paolo Pedercini makes games about political and social issues. We're going to play a game he made about copyright - where people create ideas, and those ideas inspire people to make more ideas, but where companies - like those who made the "Mickey Mouse Law" want to copyright those ideas so that people can't use them.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: The Free Culture Game – Paolo Pedercini (2008)

The Free Culture Game is a "playable theory," which uses its mechanics as a metaphor for the way individuals contribute ideas to culture, and how those ideas can be co-opted or claimed by corporate interests. While many of the games discussed in this module use mechanics to express a personal or sentimental experience, The Free Culture Game does so to express a political idea.

- **What mechanics did Paolo use to connect to the central concept of 'Copyright'?**
  - The grey mouths suck up the light bulbs, like Paolo believes companies trap ideas using copyright laws. If the player keeps the light bulbs 'free' in the center, then the people create more of them, connecting to artists being inspired by others' ideas. If people aren't inspired by others' ideas, they turn grey and stop generating new ideas, and the game stops.

- Introduce the project/assignment for this unit:
  - We'll be making a metaphorical video game that uses its mechanics to say something about a central concept. Your game should have:
    - A central concept
    - At least three mechanics that metaphorically relate to your central concept in different ways
    - At least one NPC
    - At least one Player Character
- Students can use the Metaphor Generation Sheet (page 16) to develop ideas for their game - or they can use the one they developed in the previous class as part of the class exercise with that sheet. Students can also make use of the Character Creation Sheet (page 19) or Level Creation Sheet (page 20) to plan out the actual in-game elements that they outlined on the Metaphor Generation Sheet.

DAY 4: VISUALLY RICH METAPHORICAL GAMES

- Most of the games we've looked at so far use very simple shapes (LIM, The Free Culture Game) or pixel graphics (Passage, Idealism) to communicate their metaphors. This strategy can help designers and player to focus on the mechanics and what they mean, rather than being distracted by images. But this isn't the only strategy. Some metaphorical games make use of more detailed imagery, and use that to help convey the message.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: Elude – Doris Rusch and GAMBIT (2010)

From the project's research statement:

For people who have never experienced it before, depression is difficult to understand. It is not simply sadness, as many may think; it is more akin to an all-encompassing hopelessness, a failure to connect to or derive meaning from the outside world. By tapping into the experiential aspects of the video game medium, Elude's metaphorical model for depression serves to bring awareness to the realities of depression by creating empathy with those who live with depression every day.

Elude aims to raise awareness for depression and to inform about this dangerous illness. It is specifically intended to be used in a clinical context as part of a psycho-education package to enhance friends' and relatives' understanding of people suffering from depression about what their loved ones are going through.

Modeling what depression feels like by contrasting it with other mood states (normal and happy), Elude portrays depression metaphorically. The various parts of the game-world represent emotional landscapes that correspond to different moods with the gameplay changing according to mood changes. The core gameplay (i.e. "normal mood") happens in a forest filled with "passion" objects that resonate and act as power ups when one calls out to them. Only when infused with passion is it possible to overcome the obstacles on the way to the tree tops, where one reaches "happiness".

- Depending on their comfort level or independence, students can fill out a Metaphor Mapping sheet (page 15) after playing the game, or you can simply discuss as a class. Elicit what the central concept of the game might be. Possible connections for this game may include:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'depression')
-Player moves up through trees toward higher levels where they jump and fly among flowers, but can then fall to an underground level where they sink into tar/mud.	-Different levels represent different emotional states. The treetops are happiness, the forest is in the middle, and the underground is depression.
-In the middle world, the player can 'resonate' with birds to jump higher.	-Finding activities and objects that 'resonate' with your passions can help you work with or overcome periods of depression.
-Sometimes black tentacles will grow from the bottom of the screen to drag you down.	-When you're in a 'normal' mood, depression can still strike and bring you down.
-The player constantly moves up and down, between 'happy' 'medium' and 'depressed' states.	-Happiness doesn't last forever - you cant' 'cure' depression - but periods of depression don't last forever, either. There are ways to work through both the high points and low points.

- After you discuss the mechanics, discuss what the artwork contributed to the metaphorical meaning as well. How did the art style of each 'level' help you find its meaning? Could you relate more to the more visually-detailed character?

- We're going to play another game, where the imagery is more detailed, but the connection to the central concept is less obvious. There are no human characters, even though this is a game about human emotions.

CRITIQUE & PLAY: The End of Us – Chelsea Howe & Michael Molinari (2011)

From the artists' statement/philosophy:

"The End of Us" was designed to evoke friendship, attachment, and affinity without overt narrative. The orange comet's behaviors – introducing itself with a walloping hello, then running away can-you-catch-me style, circling around you for attention or chasing after the stars (what do those do, anyway? Do you just want them because Orange does?) – are intended to endear. It might not arise directly from the actions (Orange spends a non-trivial amount of time bashing into you after all) but emerges from the familiarity of friendship, good and bad, and the hollow that arises after one-to-one attention vanishes, permanently, for whatever reason.

As you grow and age and eventually start to fade alongside your friend, you come upon an asteroid belt that chips away at both of you. Your final (only?) choice in the game is who will take the fall, and who will have to suffer a solo existence after.

- Depending on their comfort level or independence, students can fill out a Metaphor Mapping sheet (page 15) after playing the game, or you can simply discuss as a class. Elicit what the central concept of the game might be (possible responses might include "friendship," "a relationship," "sacrifice," "competition," "siblings," etc.). Possible connections for this game may include:

MECHANICS	MEANING (related to 'friendship')
-Player controls a purple meteor, which flies by itself until it is accompanied by a second, orange, meteor.	-The purple meteor represents the player, while the orange one represents a friend.
-The orange meteor sometimes follows the purple one, sometimes mirrors the purple one, and sometimes crashes into the purple one.	-Friends communicate and interact in lots of different ways - sometimes they even get on each-others' nerves!
-The meteors can 'collect' stars at one point. The player can try to compete with the other meteor, or let it have all the stars. Either way, the game continues.	-Friendships can be competitive, or not. Friendships can be relaxed, or not. Either way, a friendship can still last a long time.
-At the end, the player can sacrifice their meteor to save the other, or let the other meteor sacrifice itself save the player. The remaining meteor then continues, alone.	-Sometimes friendships can end. Sometimes friends sacrifice things for each other. Sometimes doing the 'right' thing for a friend can be difficult, and can still leave them feeling sad or alone. After playing "with" the other meteor for several minutes, the player may actually feel lonely without it there!

- The remainder of class time can be used for students to continue to develop their personal projects. They can use the worksheets from the Appendix to develop their ideas conceptually, and the skills from previous units to create their game in Game Maker.

- The next lesson describes a critique process, but students should have at least one or two work days before then.

13

# DAY 5 (or later): CRITIQUE

- This is a plan for the final critique of the project. If you have time in your schedule, it would also be helpful to do one of these earlier as a "process critique" while the students' games are still in progress,

- Review with students the **purpose of critique**

  - To **help the artist** make their work stronger by talking about:
    - What their art is already doing well.
    - Parts that they can improve - **and how to improve it**.

- Is it helpful to the artist if you just complain about their game? **NO.**

- Would you like it if someone just complained about your game? **NO.**

- **Critique is not a place to bash other people's work - the point is to be helpful**.

- Remember our two critique questions (rephrased here to encourage more positive criticism):

  - **What is fun/interesting in the game?**
  - **How could the artist improve parts of the game that aren't fun/interesting?**

- Let's modify our questions to relate more to our goals of developing metaphorical games:

  - **What is fun/interesting in the game? How does it successfully use metaphors to communicate its central concept?**
  - **How could the artist improve parts of the game that aren't fun/interesting? How could it better use its central concept?**

- **Critique:**

  - Give each student a critique sheet (page 21).
    - The sheet has two columns reflecting the two critique questions, and three rows representing three games they will play.
  - Ask the students to load their games up on the computers and hit 'run.'
  - Ask the students to rotate seats, and play the game on the computer for five minutes.
  - Then give the students five minutes to record their critique of their peer's game.
    - Written critiques are a good, concrete artifact to assess/grade students' understandings of the underlying concepts. Telling the students they will be graded on their written critiques also helps ensure that they will invest some effort in them.
  - Repeat this process for two more rotations.
  - Afterward, discuss as a class: What were things in general that worked really well in games we played in class? What things could have been improved? Are there any problems/issues that seemed to come up in a lot of games?

METAPHOR MAPPING SHEET

WHAT IS THIS GAME ABOUT?
(What is the central concept?)

MECHANICS
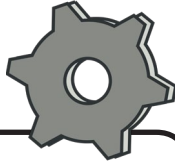
MEANINGS

List the mechanics you notice in the game(The way you move, the controls, the behavior of NPCs, the things you avoid, the things you release, etc.)
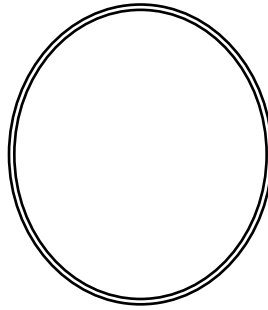
Try to connect mechanics you listed on the left to the central concept above. What might they represent?

METAPHOR GENERATION SHEET [side 1]

MECHANICS

Write a game mechanic for each aspect of your central concept that you listed in the other column.
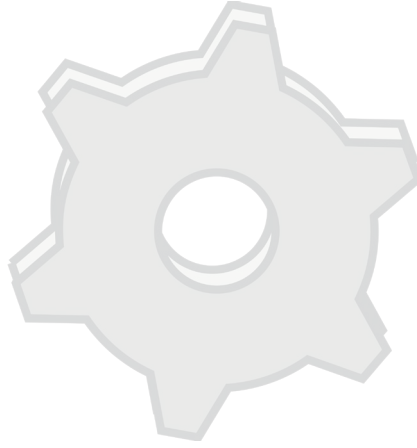
MEANINGS

Choose things you brainstormed about your central concept that might translate into metaphorical game mechanics. List them here.
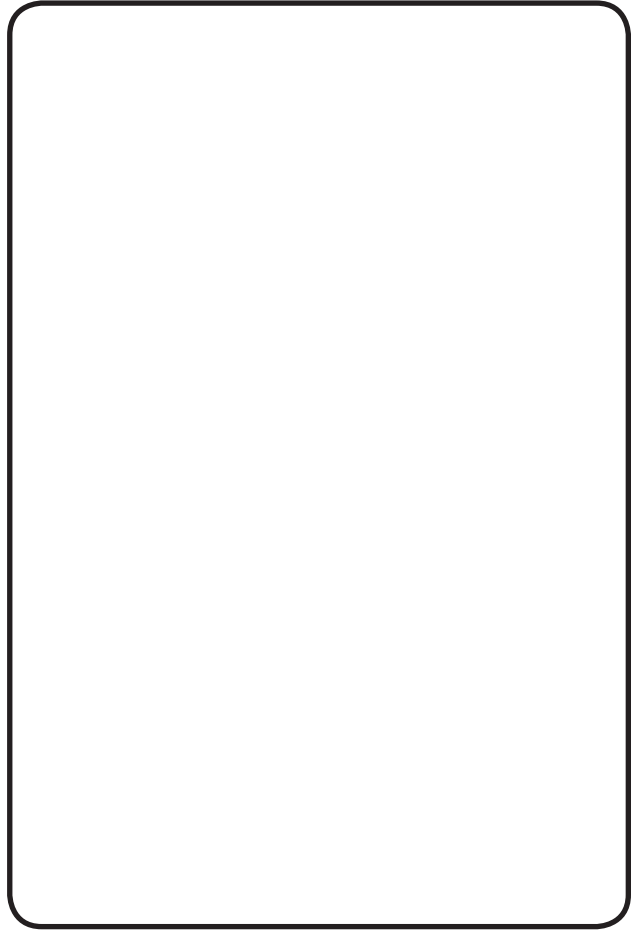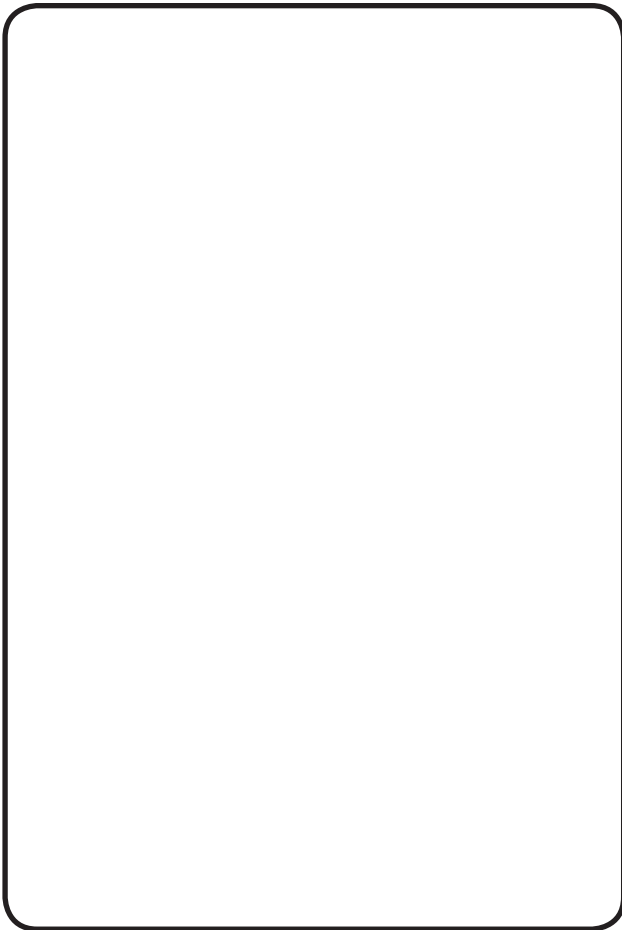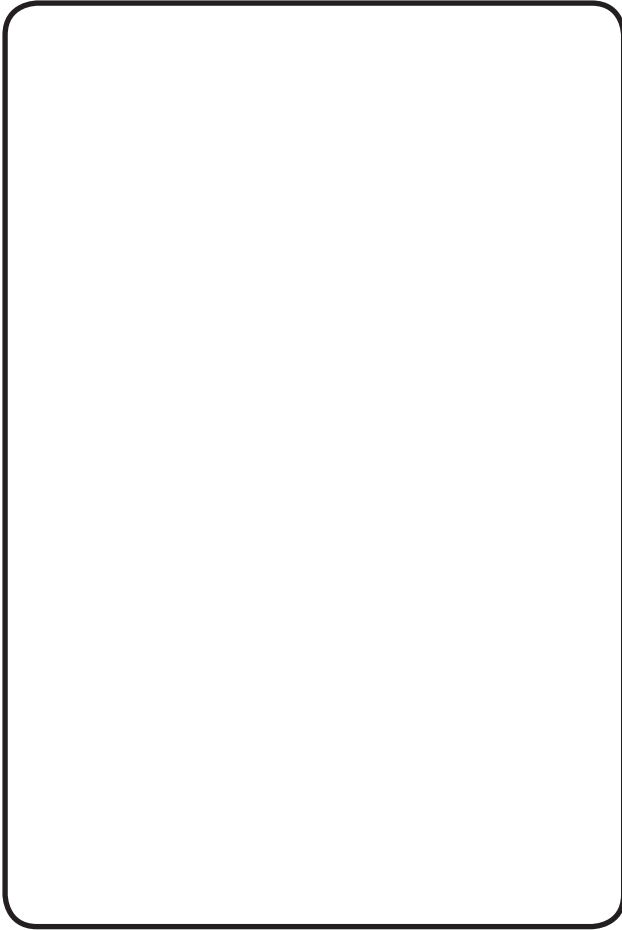
BRAINSTORM

Write your concept in the bubble, and brainstorm ideas related to the concept.

METAPHOR GENERATION SHEET (side 2)

Based on the mechanics you developed on the other side of this sheet, draw four screenshots of what your game might look like in action.
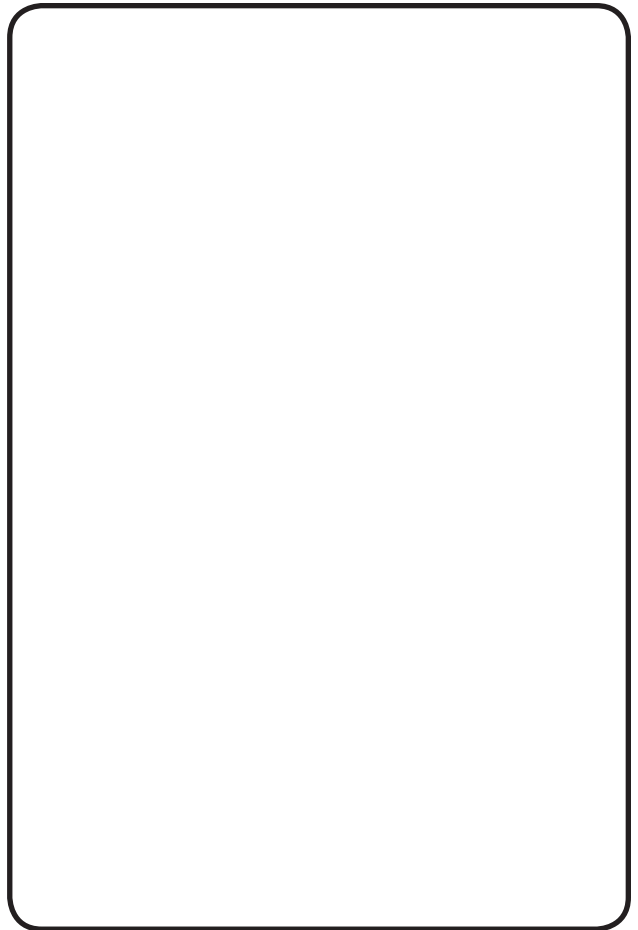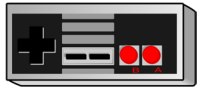
freedom	hope	generosity	bravery
friendship	joy	boredom	embarrass-ment
confusion	patience	panic	fear
greed	hunger	anger	surprise
sadness	frustration	jealousy	shyness

CHARACTER CREATION SHEET

This character is a:

PLAYER CHARACTER

NPC

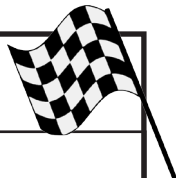(circle one)

This is a sketch of the character:

These are the things the character **can DO:**

These are the things the character **wants to AVOID:**

This is its **GOAL:**

This is how it **MOVES:**

LEVEL CREATION SHEET

NAME: _____

Sketch out the level on the grid below. Plan the path(s) the player will take through it, and what obstacles, NPCs, and other things they might find. Imagine each square is 32 pixels by 32 pixels. This means if your sprite_player is 32x32, it will be the size of one square. If it is 32x64, it will be two squares tall.

DESCRIBE THE SETTING OF THIS LEVEL (WHERE IS IT?)

DESCRIBE THE GOAL OF THIS LEVEL (WHAT DOES THE PLAYER HAVE TO DO?)
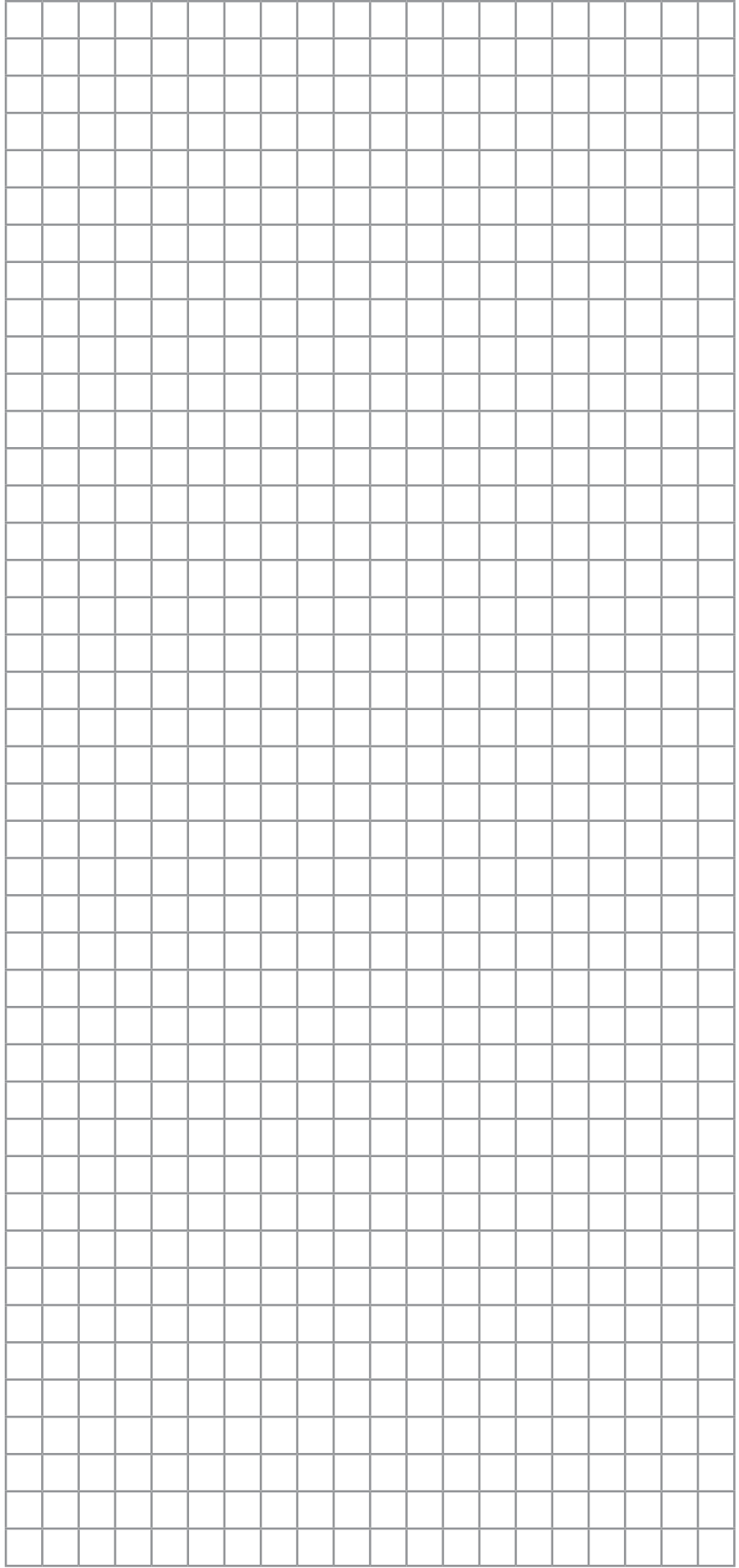
NAME:_____

GAME CRITIQUE

	What is fun or interesting about the game? How does it successfully use metaphors?	How would you fix things about the game? How could it better use its central concept?
GAME #1 Title:_____ Artist:_____		
GAME #2 Title:_____ Artist:_____		
GAME #3 Title:_____ Artist:_____		

Game Maker Short Action Reference (Organized by Tabs)

Move

- **Move Fixed**
- **Move Free**
- **Move Towards**
- Speed Horizontal
- Speed Vertical
- **Set Gravity**
- **Reverse Horizontal**
- **Reverse Vertical**
- **Set Friction**
- **Jump to Position**
- **Jump to Start**
- **Jump to Random**
- **Align to Grid**
- **Wrap Screen**
- Move to Contact
- **Bounce**
- Set Path
- End Path
- Path Position
- Path Speed
- Step Towards
- Step Avoiding

Main1

- **Create Instance**
- **Create Moving**
- **Create Random**
- **Change Instance**
- **Destroy Instance**
- Destroy at Position
- **Change Sprite**
- *Transform Sprite*
- *Color Sprite*
- **Play Sound**
- Stop Sound
- Check Sound
- **Previous Room**
- **Next Room**
- **Restart Room**
- **Different Room**
- Check Previous
- Check Next

Main2

- **Set Alarm**
- **Sleep**
- **Set Time Line**
- Time Line Position
- **Display Message**
- **Show Info**
- Show Video
- **Restart Game**
- **End Game**
- **Save Game**
- **Load Game**
- *Replace Sprite*
- *Replace Sound*
- *Replace Background*

Control

- **Check Empty**
- **Check Collision**
- **Check Object**
- **Test Instance Count**
- **Test Chance**
- Check Question
- Test Expression
- Check Mouse
- **Check Grid**
- **Start Block**

- **End Block**
- **Else**
- **Exit Event**
- **Repeat**
- **Call Parent Event**
- **Execute Code**
- **Execute Script**
- Comment
- **Set Variable**
- **Test Variable**
- **Draw Variable**

Score

- **Set Score**
- Test Score
- **Draw Score**
- **Show Highscore**
- Clear Highscore
- **Set Lives**
- Test Lives
- Draw Lives
- **Draw Life Images**
- **Set Health**
- Test Health
- **Draw Health**
- **Score Caption**

Extra

- *Create Part System*
- *Destroy Part System*
- *Clear Part System*
- *Create Particle*
- *Particle Color*
- *Particle Life*
- *Particle Speed*
- *Particle Gravity*
- *Particle Secondary*
- *Create Emitter*
- *Destroy Emitter*
- *Burst from Emitter*
- *Stream from Emitter*
- *Play CD*
- *Stop CD*
- *Pause CD*
- *Resume CD*
- *Check CD*
- *Check CD Playing*
- *Set Cursor*
- *Open Webpage*

Draw

- **Draw Sprite**
- Draw Background
- **Draw Text**
- *Draw Scaled Text*
- **Draw Rectangle**
- *Horizontal Gradient*
- *Vertical Gradient*
- Draw Ellipse
- *Gradient Ellipse*
- Draw Line
- Draw Arrow
- **Set Color**
- **Set Font**
- Set Full Screen
- *Take Snapshot*
- *Create Effect*

bold = used in book
italic = registered version

Taken from: Jacob Habgood and Mark Overmars. The Game Maker's Apprentice, Game Development for Beginners