

## WILL WRIGHT | CHAPTER 07

# Develop a Game Language

### TERMS

**game language (n.)** A shared system of signs and symbols the designer uses to communicate with their player.

**game nouns (n.)** The interactable objects and persons that populate your game world.

**game verbs (n.)** The actions available to a player in the game world.

**game adjectives (n.)** The subjective character of the game nouns that color the experience of interacting with them.

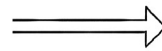


**G**ames use a system of signs and symbols to communicate meaning to the player. Understanding the grammar of game languages can help you better communicate with your player, and is a vital part of educating them about the rules of your game world.

NOUNS



VILLAIN



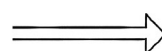
ME



VERBS



ATTACK



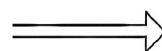
FIGHT



ADJECTIVES



SCARY



STRONG



**1. Use your game language to influence your player's behavior and direct their agency.**

Foreground your game nouns through color saturation, and use animations to show what kind of interactions (verbs) are available. Game adjectives are helpful for directing player behavior and understanding what you want players to feel while interacting with the objects in your game world. A player will probably run away from an angry dog, for example, but might approach a cute one.

**2. Don't be afraid to traffic in common metaphors and reference traditional games.**

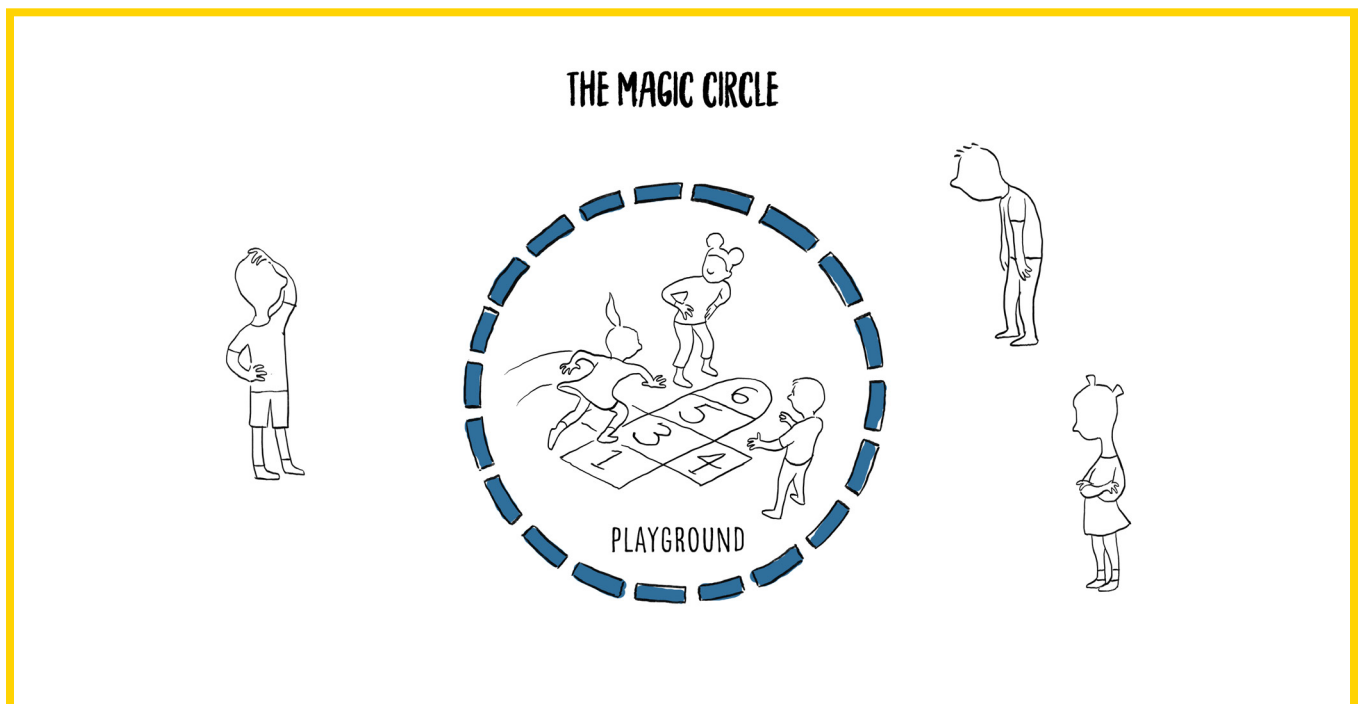
There are basic archetypes of story and play that have been around for centuries, and by referencing them you can bring up a useful set of assumptions. If a dragon swoops

“Metaphors are very, very useful as a tool for designers.”

into your town and makes off with the mayor, for example, you can be pretty sure your player is going to hunt down that dragon and try to kill it.

### LEARN MORE

Play *Grim Fandango* by Tim Schafer or *The Binding of Isaac* by Edmund McMillen. Interpret the game language as you play. What are the nouns of the game? What are the verbs and adjectives? Record these in your Concept Book.



Discover more about the theory of the “magic circle” in the [book](#) *Homo Ludens* by Johan Huizinga (1938). Read through the text with a focus on how vital play is in both nature and culture. Consider how your game designs can appeal to states of play that are ancient or even pre-cultural.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- Use the sheet on the following page to repurpose the core mechanics of a playground in a new video game concept.
- Decide on a game concept for your Capstone Game. Review Chapter 2: Generating Game Concepts for guidance on picking a subject. Review your previous prototypes during this process, and find mechanics from your backlog that may eventually make it into your final design. Record your notes on idea generation in your Concept Book.

## USING MECHANICS FROM PLAYGROUND GAMES

**STEP 1:** Read the descriptions of the following playground games, and then repurpose them as the primary mechanics for a new video game concept.

**Tag example:** A multiplayer game called Vampire Lord is set in an eighteenth-century Gothic village. One player is designated as the powerful, flying vampire lord. All of the other players are slower, walking villagers. If the vampire bites a villager, the villager becomes the vampire lord. Players gain points as villagers for every second they stand in key locations on the map (church, graveyard, town square) but lose points for every second they play as the vampire lord.

**STEP 2:** Prototype one of the game concepts you developed above. Add it to your library.

### TAG

**Mechanics:** All players have to avoid being touched by a single player, designated as “it.” When a player is touched by “it,” they become the new “it.”

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### RED ROVER

**Mechanics:** Two teams of players make walls by lining up and holding hands. Each team then invites one player from the other team to run across the field and break through the wall. If the player is stopped by the wall, they join the team. If they break through, they select one person from the opposing team to join their side.

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### HOT POTATO

**Mechanics:** Players stand in a circle and toss an object back and forth. A song, which could stop at any time, plays in the background. When the song stops, the player who is holding the object is out of the game.

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