The Relationship Between Story and Games

TERMS

emotional palette (n.) The range of potential feelings a given medium can produce within its audience.

agency (n.) The power to control your own actions accompanied by the knowledge that you are able to do so.

linear storytelling (n.) A traditional narrative structure in which the audience follows a story in the order of beginning, middle, and end.

nonlinear storytelling (n.) A less traditional narrative structure in which the beats of the story are presented out of order, or discovered by the audience in the order of their choice.

machinima (n.) A medium of communal art in which fans use computer graphics engines from proprietary softwares to create original cinematic narratives.

Many designers begin making games to become storytellers. But stories and games are very different mediums, each with distinct challenges in design. Knowing what games can and can't do with a story is the first step to integrating a compelling narrative into your design.

As a storytelling medium, games are capable of producing emotions that other media cannot. Because the player is responsible for the actions within the game, they can experience feelings like guilt, accomplishment, pride, and self-expression. When developing a story for your game, focus on the sense of agency and responsibility you can create in your player and the stories that emerge from those emotions.

Enable your players to tell their own stories within your games. Offer them expressive tools. Think of the player as a collaborator in the production of your narrative and rely on them to complete the story.
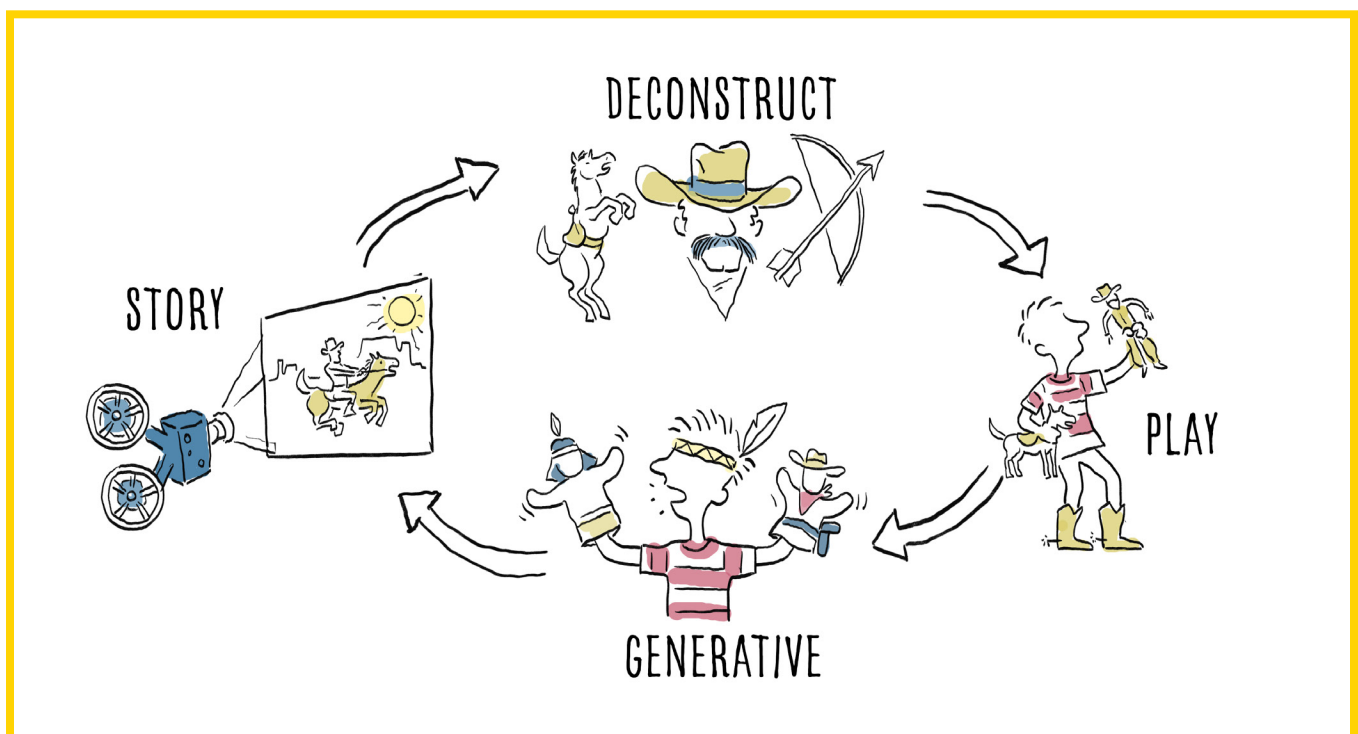
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Play *Papers, Please* by Lucas Pope at 3909 or *The Banner Saga* by Stoic Studio. Focus on how the game mechanics interact with the story to produce a sort of participatory narrative. Notice moments where you feel guilt, pride, or a sense of accomplishment. How did the game designer provoke these feelings? Record your observations in your Concept Book.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Generate a game concept in your Concept Book based on one of these four emotions: 1) **guilt**, 2) **pride**, 3) **a sense of accomplishment**, or 4) **the feeling of being part of a team**. Next, build a prototype with mechanics that produce your chosen emotion within the players. Add the prototype to your library.

PLAY

MY EXPERIENCE

STORY

TOY EXPERIENCES

OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES
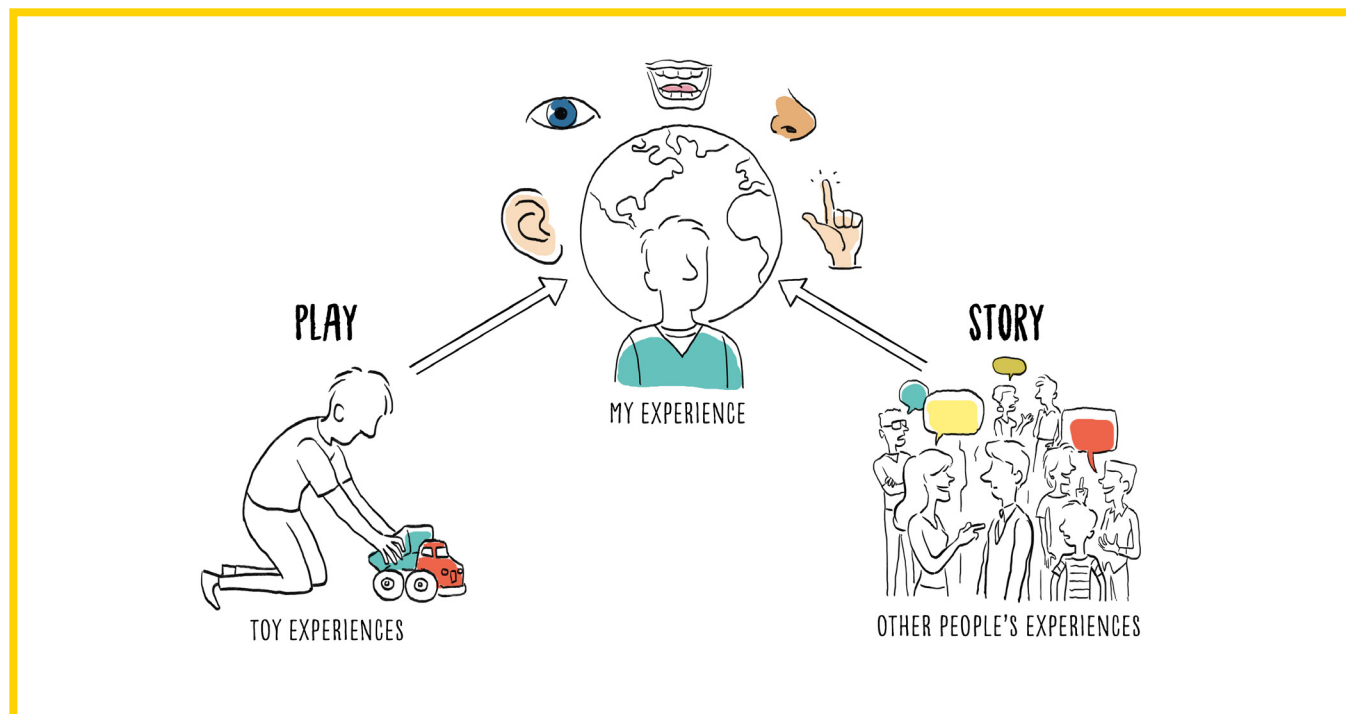
• Prototype an interactive experience that is a tool of self-expression for your players, such as a character creator (like *Spore*), a drawing system (like *Pictionary*), or even a directed writing environment (like magnetic poetry). Strive to create something structured, with rules and limitations, but not a game. Avoid win and lose conditions and instead focus on creating goal states and positive feedback for your players. Add it to your Prototype Library.

• Choose one of your favorite game concepts from your Concept Book, and take a few notes about possible stories it could tell. Then, go to twinery.org and use the tool there to create a narrative for the game with branching paths that the player can choose from. Create a story with at least three possible endings. Write a cover sheet for your interactive narrative and add it to your Prototype Library.