

Spot

Overview

Theme / Setting / Genre

- Coping with Grief / Home of a Middle-class American Family / Storytelling Game

The Elevator Pitch

Something terrible has happened to the Smith family; it is up to you, their loyal dog Spot, to comfort each family member through this crisis and to discover in your own way what has happened.

Influences

- **To the Moon**
 - Game – Mac/Windows/Linux/Android/iOS
 - The game has the player play as Dr. Watts and Dr. Rosalene to experience the life events of Johnny Wyles from an outsider's point of view, causing them to piece together on their own what exactly happened and what led to Johnny's obsession with going to the moon. In Spot, I want to expand on this idea of having an outsider trying to learn about these types of events by limiting their understanding of what they are witnessing, removing the ability to understand complex human language and expressions.
- **Gone Home**
 - Game – Mac/Windows/Linux/PS4/XboxOne
 - In this game, the player tries to discover why their character's family home is deserted. Again, this involves the outsider looking in, trying to piece together what is happening motif I am going for. It also has extra storyline options, that if discovered by the player, adds to the player's understanding of what happened, but are not necessary to understand the main plot and progress through the game. This is a feature of the game that I would like to incorporate into Spot.

Core Gameplay Mechanics (High-Level)

- Selecting story options
- Performing tricks

Targeted platform

- Windows/Mac

What sets this project apart?

- You play as a dog – Millennials are super into dogs right now[1], so they will probably get excited over playing as one

- Like other games, you learn the story as it goes; unlike other games, you can't understand human language – added challenge to discovering the plot

Player Interaction Patterns and Modes

- **Single Player**
 - One player plays as Spot, and chooses from a number of options to progress the story
- **Player Modes**
 - Choosing action
 - The game gives the player a number of choices to choose from in order to determine how the story progresses – use the mouse to click highlighted items (dialogue tree options, object icons)
 - Performing Tricks
 - The player presses one of the number buttons corresponding with the tricks being called out by a character

Objectives

- **Keep Spot's happiness meter full to keep him happy**
 - Maintaining Spot's happiness meter will keep him energetic, making his actions more effective – happiness meter will increase more when he does something good, happiness meter won't decrease as much if he does something wrong
 - Game events will cause the meter to fluctuate
 - Ex) Chris comes home crying, and Spot cannot figure out how to make her happy -> Spot's happiness meter drops
 - Ex) Leah is getting healthier because treatment is working -> Spot's happiness meter goes up
- **Keep each Smith family member's happiness meter full to keep them happy**
 - Like Spot, each Smith family member has a happiness meter
 - Game events cause the meter to fluctuate
 - Ex) Leah comes back from the doctor for the first time, telling the family the bad news -> each family member's meter drops
 - Ex) James comes home drunk -> each family member's meter drops
 - Ex) Leah goes into remission -> each family member's meter goes up
 - Spot's actions throughout the day can help increase their meters
 - Ex) giving James the newspaper
 - Ex) giving Chris a toy so they can play together
 - At the end the game, the happiness meter levels of each family member (and Spot) will determine the ending
 - Different endings depending these states
- **Learn why the Smith family is so sad so Spot can help**

- Spot works to figure out what is bothering his family through context clues throughout the game
 - He doesn't understand human language, with the exception of some words like "food," "sit," and "no," so he must try to figure out the mystery in his own way

Procedures/Actions

- The player selects the dialogue tree option they wish to pick by hovering over the option with the mouse and clicking on it
 - clicking on dialogue tree options
 - clicking on game object icons that are highlighted to show they can be clicked on
- Performing tricks on command
 - number keys correspond to different tricks
 - 1 = sit, 2 = lie down, 3 = roll over, 4 = beg, 5 = play dead, 6 = left paw shake, 7 = right paw shake, 8 = spin

Rules

- Bringing objects to characters will result in dialogue and may increase or decrease their happiness meter depending on the object and circumstances
 - ex) bringing someone garbage -> their happiness meter will drop
 - ex) bringing James the newspaper -> his happiness meter will increase
- Performing tricks in front of characters will award Spot treats
- in order to win the treats, he must perform a specific trick the character calls out
 - Ex) Chris says "Roll Over" -> player presses 3 on the keypad -> Spot performs the correct trick and gets a treat
- Game events cause characters' happiness meters to fluctuate, indicating if they are dealing with their grief in healthy or unhealthy ways
 - the meters, which will not be called happiness meters within the game, will be shown at the bottom of the screen - this way the player can casually refer to them as they are playing
 - at no point will the game refer the player's attention to the meters other than the meters moving to indicate how each character is doing mentally
 - don't want to draw too much attention to the meters because want to emphasize focusing on the story and empathising with the characters - focusing on the meters may be too distracting and take away from the emotional meaning we are trying to get across
 - Ex) Leah comes back from the doctor for the first time, telling the family the bad news -> each family member's meter drops
 - Ex) James comes home drunk -> each family member's meter drops
 - Ex) Chris comes home crying, and Spot cannot figure out how to make her happy -> Spot's happiness meter drops
 - Ex) Leah is getting healthier because treatment is working -> Spot's happiness meter goes up
- The player must select a choice when given one in order to progress the story
 - non-action is not an option
 - game does not progress without the player making their choice/clicking on a dialogue tree option
- Time passes with each level
 - each level is meant to be a single day

- there are a few weeks (3-4) between each level, so each level will start with dialogue explaining how much time has passed
- the representations of each characters will also show how the time has passed, especially Leah
 - mother/leah: gets thinner, paler, shaved head
 - father/james: becomes disheveled, looks drunk, carries a bottle around
 - daughter/chris: looks angrier, moody
 - son/ben: looks sadder, becomes more quiet

Resources

- interacting with each resource will result in dialogue appearing, explaining the results that occur upon interaction
 - Ex) Picking up a newspaper will tell the player “James loves that newspaper!”
 - Ex) Picking up a tennis ball: “Oh, that’s Spot’s favorite! Well, other than the Frisbee, the rope toy, the bunny with the squeaker, and the bone. Spot is sure that Chris just has to have that toy.”
- dog toys – found throughout the house and yards
 - picking up increases Spot’s happiness meter
 - bringing to a Smith family member can increase their happiness meter, as they will play with Spot
- dog biscuits – collect to increase Spot’s happiness meter
 - requires performing a trick to receive from one of the Smiths

Objects/Entities

- James (father)
- Leah (mother)
- Chris (daughter)
- Ben (son)
- Meg (friend of Chris)
- Dog treats
- Dog toys (tennis ball, squeaky toy, rope toy, stuffed rabbit, bone)
- Box of tissues
- Newspaper
- Leash
- Blanket
- Scarf
- First aid kit
- Cellphone

Core Gameplay Mechanics (Detailed)

- **Selecting a game option**
 - The game prints on screen the dialogue, and shows the action options below the dialogue or as clickable icons on the screen
 - Current selected option is highlighted, making it obvious which option was chosen. The choices the player makes determines how the story ends, which can be shown in each character’s happiness meter, which are shown at the bottom of the screen at all times (so the player is not forced

- to try to remember; they can just refer to the bottom of the screen to see how they are progressing)
 - Use the mouse to click on an option
 - The player, when presented with the choices, must press the up and down arrow keys to scroll through the options. The story will not progress until the player makes a choice. To lock in a choice, the player must click on the item.
- **Performing Tricks (if we have time)**
 - The player must perform the corresponding tricks to the ones being called out by a character
 - Successfully performing the correct trick will award Spot treats, which increase his happiness meter. Not performing the correct trick makes the character frown and call out a new trick.
 - Press one of the number keys to perform a trick
 - The player presses 1 to make Spot sit. Spot sits on the ground. The player presses 2 to make Spot lie down. Spot lies down on the ground. The player presses 3 to make Spot roll over. Spot lies down on the ground then rolls onto his back then back onto his belly, ending the trick by laying down. The player presses 4 to make Spot beg. Spot sits on his hind legs and holds his front paws out in front of him. The player presses 5 to make Spot play dead. Spot lies down on the ground, then rolls onto his back, sticks his legs out, and stays still for a few seconds, then returns back onto his belly. The player presses 6 to make Spot shake with his left paw. Spot sits on the ground and holds out his left paw, and the character grabs it and shakes it. The player presses 7 to make Spot shake with his right paw. Spot sits on the ground and holds out his right paw, and the character grabs it and shakes it. The player presses 8 to make Spot spin. Spot spins in a circle and sits down, once more facing the character.
 - This mechanic will only be added into the game if we actually have the time to make it - our main point of focus will be getting the story to where it needs to be, ensuring that the player is drawn in emotionally and gets the message of the game about how to handle grief

Story and Gameplay

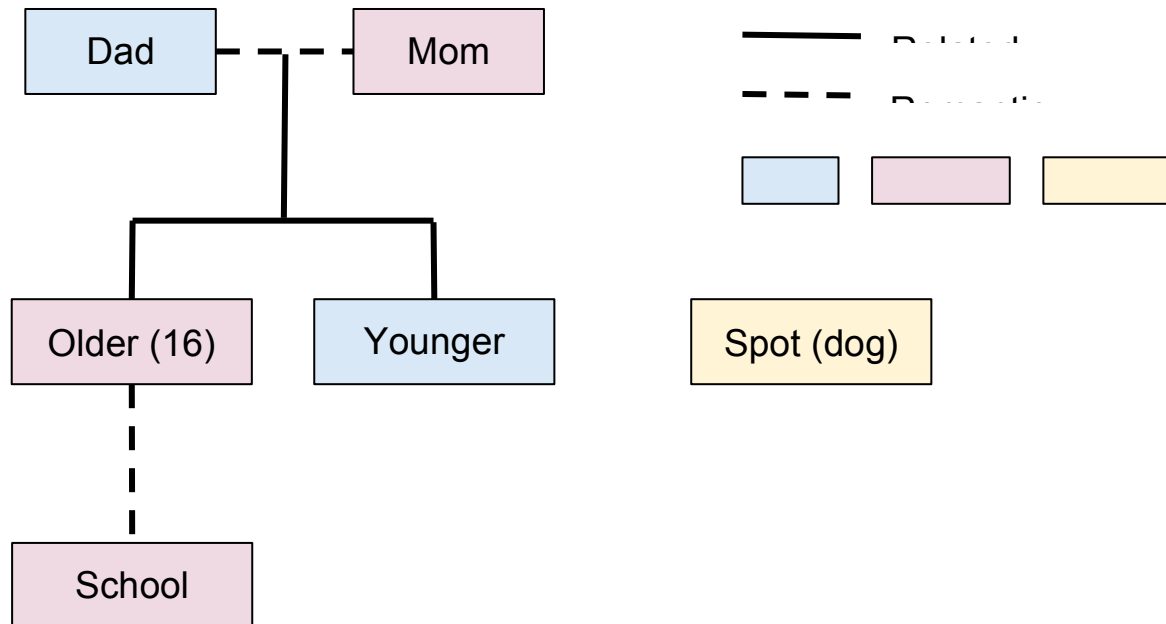
Story (Brief)

Spot's life is turned upside down when Leah Smith gets cancer and his family struggles to cope. Spot spends the following weeks trying to comfort them and figure out what has happened (since he's a dog so he doesn't know that she has cancer). Depending on the player's choices throughout the game, the story has one of two endings: one happy and one sad. In both endings, Leah ends up passing away; how the family reacts to this final tragedy depends on how well they were able to handle their grief, with your help. In the happy one, the family slowly heals, eventually getting back to normal and the family stays together. In

the sad one, James becomes an alcoholic, Chris runs away, and Spot spends the rest of his days cheering up Ben.

Story (Detailed)

Family Tree (relationships)



The game starts with the daily life of the family dog, Spot. One day, the mother, Leah, gets sick and gets a depressing diagnosis: lung cancer. Leah informs the rest of the family, who react in a number of ways to the prospect of losing her. Spot, however, does not understand what is going on, since he is a dog. He only knows that something is wrong and that his family is sad. Leah starts going to chemotherapy, and Spot notices the changes in her appearance: she shaves her head, she gets paler, she gets weaker, etc. As the weeks pass, each family member acts out in a number of ways: the children hide in their rooms and James starts coming home drunk. Spot must do what he can to help each family member keep their hopes up, so he brings them toys, gives them snuggles, and distract them when they are fighting. Leah's cancer gets worse and worse, until one day she doesn't come back from the doctor. The family and Spot attend her funeral, which Spot doesn't understand at first. Depending on the player's choices throughout the game, there are two different endings. If the player does not do well in helping the family cope in healthy ways throughout the game, the game will end with James becoming a serious alcoholic, the older sibling eventually running away with her lover/friend, and the younger sibling battling depression. Spot decides to spend the rest of his life focusing making the

younger sibling feel better. In the other ending, the family comes together and learns to grieve together. At the end scene, the family visits the mother's grave together and accepts her death.

Each family member represents a different stage of grief:

- Father/James: Denial
- Daughter/Chris: Anger
- Dog/Spot: Bargaining
- Son/Ben: Depression
- Mother/Leah: Acceptance

The ways they express their grief over the situation will represent their associated stage.

- Denial - the father will turn to alcohol as a way to escape the reality of his wife potentially dying.
- Anger - the daughter will act out against her parents, fighting with the father over his alcohol abuse
- Bargaining - the dog will try to fix the situation by trying to help everyone else cope with their grief in healthy ways, thinking this will make the situation better
 - He doesn't understand that Leah has cancer, so he's not going to try to fix that
- Depression - the son will keep to himself, hiding in his room, sitting outside by himself
- Acceptance - the mother, being the one going through cancer, will be the closest to the situation and will come to terms with her fate, trying to remain optimistic and, like Spot, keep everyone else's hopes up

Gameplay (Brief)

Each level is a different scene of the story. Spot walks around the room(s) that the scene takes place in and interacts with various characters in that level. Some events take place, giving the player a number of options of actions to choose from. The player picks an option, and performs the action(s) that are involved with that option. Once the actions for that level have been chosen and performed, the level ends.

Gameplay (Detailed)

Level 1: Before Leah gets sick (Spot Smells Something)

- Day 1: Spot wakes up, and heads to the kitchen. The game tells the player through text displayed on the screen that they are playing as Spot, the Smith family dog. The player meets each Smith family member as they come down to the kitchen to start their day. The game gives the player the choice of who to interact with first: James, Leah, or Chris and Ben. The player chooses 1 character (or set of characters).
- James: Spot walks up to James, who is drinking coffee. He says something to Spot, who picks up the words “go get the paper.” There is a newspaper icon on the screen that the player can click on, which triggers the animation of Spot running outside and finding the newspaper. Once he finds it, he brings it back to James, who says “Good boy!” Both of their happiness meters go up. There are also leash, hat, and coat icons that the player can choose. Clicking on them triggers animation of Spot grabbing those items, causing James to say “Nope.” Spot’s meter goes down, James’s meter stays the same.
- Leah: Spot walks up to Leah, who is cooking breakfast. She pats Spot on the head and says “Sit.” A key menu pops up and the player is instructed how to perform tricks. If they press the wrong button, Spot will not perform the wrong trick and the game will suggest they press the correct button. Once Spot sits, Leah hands him a piece of bacon, and both of their happiness meters go up.
- Chris & Ben: Spot walks up to Chris and Ben, who are eating breakfast. Chris says “go get toy”. Three items are on the screen for the player to choose from. The player gets to choose between a tennis ball, a piece of rope, a stick, and a backpack. Clicking on an item triggers an animation of Spot retrieving the toy and the three of them play together. All three of their happiness meters go up.
- Once the player has finished interacting with the selected character, he approaches Leah. He notices a smell about Leah. The player presses the s button to cause Spot to sniff her and he notices something off about her. It is not a good smell, so the player is given the choice to bark to signal the rest of the family or to pretend it is not there.
- Barking causes the family members to jump in shock. They yell at Spot, which decreases Spot’s happiness meter. It also causes Leah to cough up blood, which is concerning. She calls the doctor.
- If the player does not bark, the day continues, with people leaving for work and school.
- When the Smith family returns later that the day, Spot runs to the front door to greet each of them. The player is then given another choice to interact with the Smiths: James, Leah, Chris, or Ben. The player may choose two characters.

- James: Spot runs to James and Leah's bedroom. James is reading a book at the desk. Spot barks hello, and James pats him on the head. The player is then given the choice to take a nap at James's feet or bring James a nearby ball and play. The nap increases their happiness meters significantly, whereas the ball only increases Spot's meter significantly and James's slightly.
- Leah: Spot runs to the kitchen. Leah is preparing dinner. Spot nudges her legs with his head. Leah pats his head and fills his food bowl. Spot eats dinner and then can choose to stay in the kitchen or find another family member. Staying in the kitchen increases both of their happiness meters. Leaving to find another family member does not affect either of their meters, and allows the player to re-choose which family member they interact with.
- Chris: Spot runs downstairs to Chris's bedroom. Chris and her friend Meg are sitting on Chris's bed listening to music. The player can choose to jump up on the bed to nap between them or to grab a leash and beg Chris to take Spot on a walk. Napping on the bed increases Chris and Spot's happiness meters (Meg does not have a meter since she is not a Smith). Grabbing the leash causes Chris to take Spot on a walk, which significantly increases his happiness meter, but slightly decreases her meter because she is frustrated that she has to send Meg home.
- Ben: Spot runs to Ben's bedroom. Ben is playing with legos on the floor. The player may choose to bark at Ben, which will cause him to ask Spot to perform tricks for treats, or the player may choose to bring a toy to Ben, causing the two of them to play together. Performing each trick correctly will significantly increase their happiness, with each incorrect trick slightly decreasing how much their meters increase overall. The toy increases the meter as much as performing half of the tricks correctly would.
- After interacting with the characters, an animation shows Spot going to Leah and James's room. Leah coughs up blood. No one's happiness meter decreases and the level ends.

Level 2: Leah and James return from the doctor (Family Starts to Respond)

- A few days later, Spot wakes up and runs to the kitchen. The player is given the same choices as level one (see level 1 details). The family members leave for school and work. James and Leah come home early. Spot is surprised and excited to see them. He runs up to them and notices another smell. The player presses 's' and notices that they smell like the doctors (or rather the vet without the animals smells). He also notices that they both are sad and that Leah is

crying. He decides to bring them something, and the player can choose what Spot grabs: a toy, a box of tissues, or a bone.

- If Spot grabs the toy, he brings it to James, who grabs it, pats Spot's head, and puts the toy down. Spot's happiness meter decreases slightly, but James and Leah's increase slightly.

- If Spot grabs the box of tissues, he brings to Leah. Leah grabs it appreciatively, and uses the tissues to dry her eyes. Everyone's happiness meter increases slightly.

- If Spot grabs the bone, he brings it to James. The bone makes both James and Leah upset because it makes them think about death. Spot lays down with the bone and chews on it happily. Spot's happiness meter increases slightly, but James and Leah's decrease slightly.

- Chris and Ben return home and the game shows the family having dinner. James and Leah look at each other, but don't say anything until everyone has finished their meal. Once the table is cleared, Chris goes to leave the table, but James tells her to stay (which Spot recognizes, since it's a command they use with him). James and Leah start talking, and Chris and Ben start to get sad. They both hug their mother and cry. Spot can tell they're sad and wants to help, but doesn't know what to do. Everyone's happiness meters decrease and the day ends.

Level 3: Leah starts Chemotherapy (Family Starts to Respond)

- A few days later, Spot wakes up and runs down to the kitchen. The player is given the same choices as level one (see level 1 details). Spot notes that everyone seems sad and that breakfast is quiet.

- Spot also notices that Leah seems different. She is wearing a scarf over her head.

- Later in the day, Spot can choose to interact with two of the Smith family members.

- James: Spot goes to the James and Leah's bedroom. James is at his desk with a bottle of scotch open on the table. He is holding a photograph and drinking from a glass. Spot nudges him with his head. James puts down the photo and pats Spot on the head. Spot can choose to nap at his feet or bring James a ball. Napping causes Spot's happiness meter to go up, but lets James continue drinking, so his meter decreases. Grabbing the toy causes James to play with Spot, but James is tipsy and does not play well. This makes Spot sad, and his happiness meter decreases. James's happiness meter increases.

- Leah: Spot goes to the living room, where Leah is laying on the couch watching tv. She looks cold, so Spot wants to grab her something to warm up. Spot may choose to grab Leah's scarf or find a blanket. Grabbing the scarf exposes Leah's shaved head, which makes her cry. Both of their happiness meters decrease. Grabbing the blanket makes Leah smile, and both of their happiness meters increase.

- Chris: Spot goes down to Chris's room, where Chris is crying on Meg's shoulder. Spot notices that she's sad and wants to help, but isn't sure if he should interrupt. Spot can choose to jump on the bed or leave the room and find another family member. Jumping on the bed upsets Chris and Meg, and everyone's happiness meter decreases. Leaving the room lets Meg cheer Chris up without interruption, and the two end up kissing. Meg's happiness meter goes up and Spot gets to pick another family member to visit.

- Ben: Spot goes to the backyard, where Ben is kicking around a ball. Spot gets excited and joins him. Spot must choose between grabbing the ball and running away or bringing it to Ben. Running away causes Ben to chase after Spot and both have a good time. Bringing the ball to Ben causes Ben to pick it up and throw it for Spot. Either way, both of their happiness meters increase.

- The day (and level) end.

Level 4: James comes home drunk (The Big Fight)

- A few days later, Spot wakes up and runs to the kitchen. The player is given the same choices as level one (see level 1 details). Spot notes that everyone seems sad and that breakfast is quiet. Leah is looking worse.

- A few hours later, everyone but James comes home. The family seems concerned. Spot sits by the door and waits for him. James misses dinner. Finally, James comes home plastered. Leah and Ben cry, and Chris yells at her father. Spot is concerned and doesn't know if he should do anything. The player must choose between going to Leah and Ben to comfort them by rubbing up against them or running between Chris and James. Going to Leah and Ben lets the fighting continue, but increases Leah, Spot, and Ben's happiness meters, but Chris and James's happiness decrease. Going between Chris and James stops them from fighting, James goes up to bed with Leah, and everyone's happiness meters increase slightly. The day ends.

Level 6: Leah falls (Mom Falls and the Family Comes Together)

- A few days later, Spot wakes up and runs to the kitchen. The player is given the same choices as level one (see level 1 details). Spot notes that everyone seems sad and that breakfast is quiet. Leah looks worse.

- Leah stays at home while everyone else leaves for work and school. Spot sticks around her. Leah walks to the kitchen and falls to the ground. The player must choose between grabbing her cell phone or grabbing the first aid kit. Grabbing the cellphone, Spot brings it to Leah, who calls James. James comes home and takes Leah to the car. Grabbing the first aid kit lets Leah patch herself up before calling James, who comes home and takes her to the car. This option increases Leah's happiness meter slightly; the other option does not affect anyone's happiness meter.

- A few hours later Chris and Ben come home to only Spot in the house. Chris gets out her phone and calls someone. She hangs up and takes Ben to the car.

- A few hours later, Chris, Ben, and James return to the house without Leah. The player must choose between interacting with two of the family members.

- James: Spot goes to James and Leah's room. James is drinking straight from the bottle. Spot must choose between jumping on James' lap or nudging his feet. Jumping on James's lap causes James to drop his bottle and yell at Spot. Spot feels sad and his happiness meter drops, but James can't drink anymore and gets his act together, so his happiness meter goes up. Nudging James causes James to pet Spot and Spot falls asleep at his feet. Spot's happiness meter goes up, but James continues to drink and feels worse, so his meter drops.

- Chris: Spot goes to Chris's room. Chris is crying while listening to music. Spot must choose between jumping into Chris's bed or grabbing her a toy. Jumping in bed causes Chris to hug Spot. Both of their happiness meters go up. Grabbing a toy causes Chris to throw the toy in anger and slam the door behind her. Both of their happiness meters go down.

- Ben: Spot goes to Ben's room. Ben is crying. Spot must choose between jumping in bed or grabbing him a toy. Jumping in bed causes Ben to push Spot out of bed. Both of their happiness meters go down. Grabbing the toy causes Ben to pick up the toy and they start to play. Ben stops crying and even smiles at the end. Both of their happiness meters go up.

Level 7: Epilogue (Death: Family Comes Together OR Family Falls Apart)

- At this point, the happiness meters of each family member are compared and the game chooses the ending. The player sits back and watches what occurs.

Assets Needed

- Note: the colors used in this game should be limited to yellows, blues, browns, white, grays, and black – those are the only colors dogs can see.
- **2D**
 - Textures

- Clothes – colors/patterns
 - Dog color
 - Hair color and textures
 - Photos
 - Posters
 - Papers on desks
 - Magazines on coffee table
- Environment Textures
 - Grass
 - Hardwood
 - Carpet
 - Glass – windows
 - Asphalt – roads
 - Concrete – sidewalks
 - Water – puddles
 - Mud
 - Wall paper/color
 - Sky – different for time of day, weather
 - Other houses (in neighborhood)
- **3D**
 - **Characters List**
 - Spot – white dog with a brown spot around his left eye – protagonist – Smith family dog
 - James Smith – 45 year old man - father of Chris, and Ben - lawyer
 - Leah Smith – 44 year old woman, mother of Chris and Ben – high school English teacher
 - Christina “Chris” Smith – 18 year old girl – daughter of James and Leah – senior in High School
 - Ben Smith – 10 year old boy – son of James and Leah – 5th grader
 - Meg Jones – 17 year old girl – Chris’s best friend – senior in high school
 - **Environmental Art Lists**
 - Smith Family House
 - Kitchen
 - Living Room
 - Bedrooms
 - Backyard
 - Front yard
 - Hallways
 - Smith Family neighborhood
 - Smith Family car
- **Sound**
 - Sound List (Ambient)
 - Upbeat, happy music for beginning of game before Leah gets sick
 - Melancholy music that gets sadder as the plot progresses

- Outside noises:
 - Dogs barking, birds chirping, cars passing
 - House noises:
 - Stairs creaking, doors opening, doors closing, door slammed shut, footsteps
- Sound List (Spot)
 - Spot Movement Sound List
 - Slow walking clatter of dog paws on floor
 - Running sounds of dog paws on floor
 - Thump of wagging tail hitting something
 - Spot vocalization Sound List
 - Bark
 - Growl
 - Whimper/cry
 - Panting
 - Other dog noises
 - Spot interacting with objects Sound List
 - Squeaky Toy squeak
 - Eating dog food crunches
 - Lapping water sounds
- Sound List (Human characters)
 - Human movement Sound List
 - walking
 - running
 - Human vocalization Sound List
 - crying
 - laughing
 - muffled talking (think adults in Peanuts cartoons and tv specials)
 - muffled yelling
 - sighing
 - groans

[1] "Millennials are Picking Dogs over People"

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/09/13/millennials-are-picking-pets-over-people/?utm_term=.37c19d879296