# English 230 Worksheet for Week 12
Celeste, by Extremely Ok Games (EXOK)

Celeste was published in 2018 and made by [Extremely Ok Games (EXOK),](#) who are based in Vancouver. [Maddy Thorson](#) (Director of R&D; she / her) writes often about the game, including a November 2019 piece on the [making of it](#) (this post contains spoilers). She's said, for instance: "One thing *Celeste* has done from the start, is take tried-and-true platformer concepts and morph them into metaphors for Madeline's emotional journey." Mechanics are expressive, indeed. To elaborate on that story, she also published ["Is Madeline Canonically Trans?"](#) on 5 November 2020. There, she says, "People need to see and feel the experience of those different from themselves, especially from less-privileged groups who they share society with but wield outsize and often invisible power over. Trans folks, and other marginalized groups, have a lot to teach that will help everyone. If you're cis and *Celeste* helped you, that's awesome! That simply means that you learned something about yourself from a trans story." I recommend reading these two pieces at some point if you're at all interested in *Celeste*.

This week (Week 12), we'll look at how *Celeste* enacts Madeline's journey through verbs, a map, characterization, dialogue, and an "assist mode." When the game begins, we learn that important verbs are "climb" and "dash." These verbs correspond with Madeline's journey up a figurative and literal mountain.
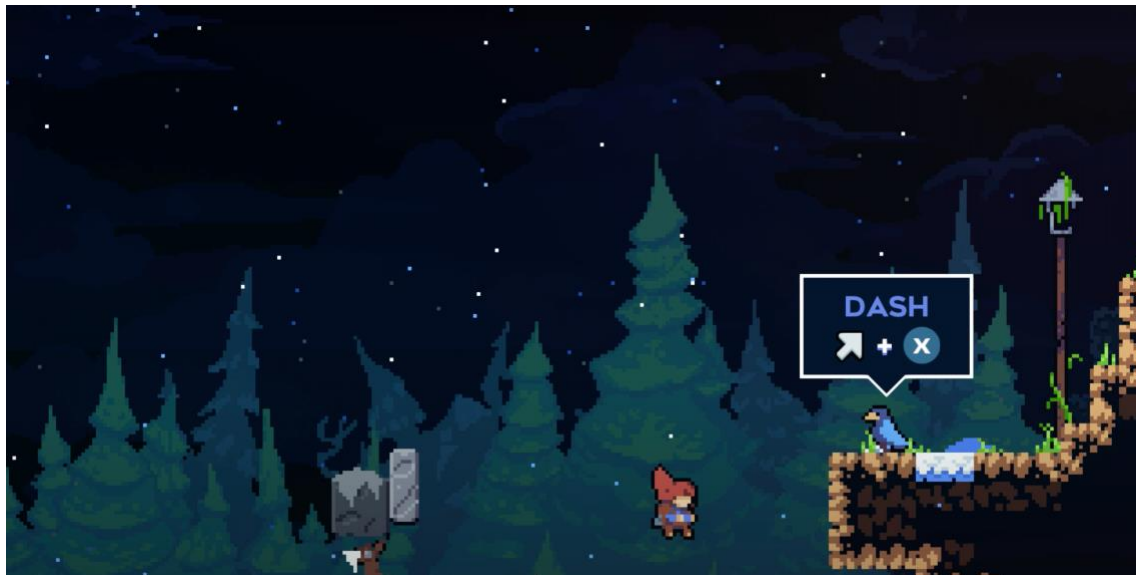
We are also given a map, which helps us to visualize a path of action—with milestones—up that mountain. The map gives us goals.

And *Celeste* relies heavily on characterization along the way. Madeline meets several characters with whom she builds a community of care, if you will. Themes of anxiety persist, for instance, alongside the game's challenging mechanics. Two notable characters are Theo and Mr. Oshiro:
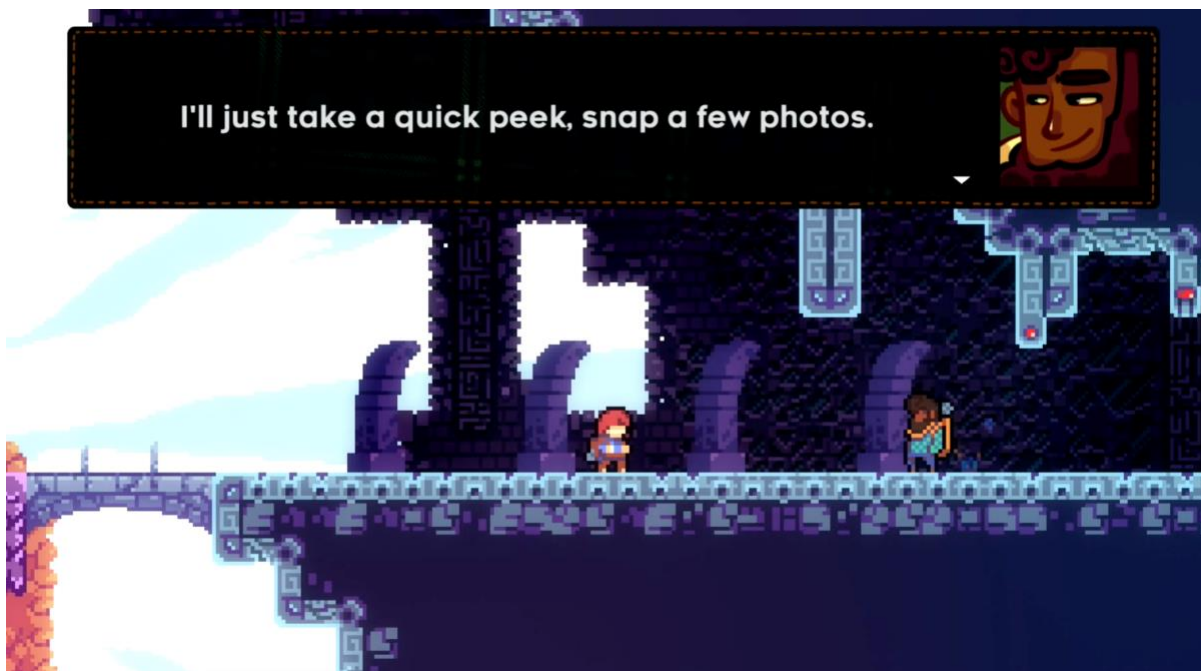
There's also "Badeline" (aka "Part of You"), a foil who wants to make Madeline feel insecure and will chase the player character through the game. The game's pacing increases dramatically during these moments, as does the tempo of Lena Raine's phnomenal soundtrack.
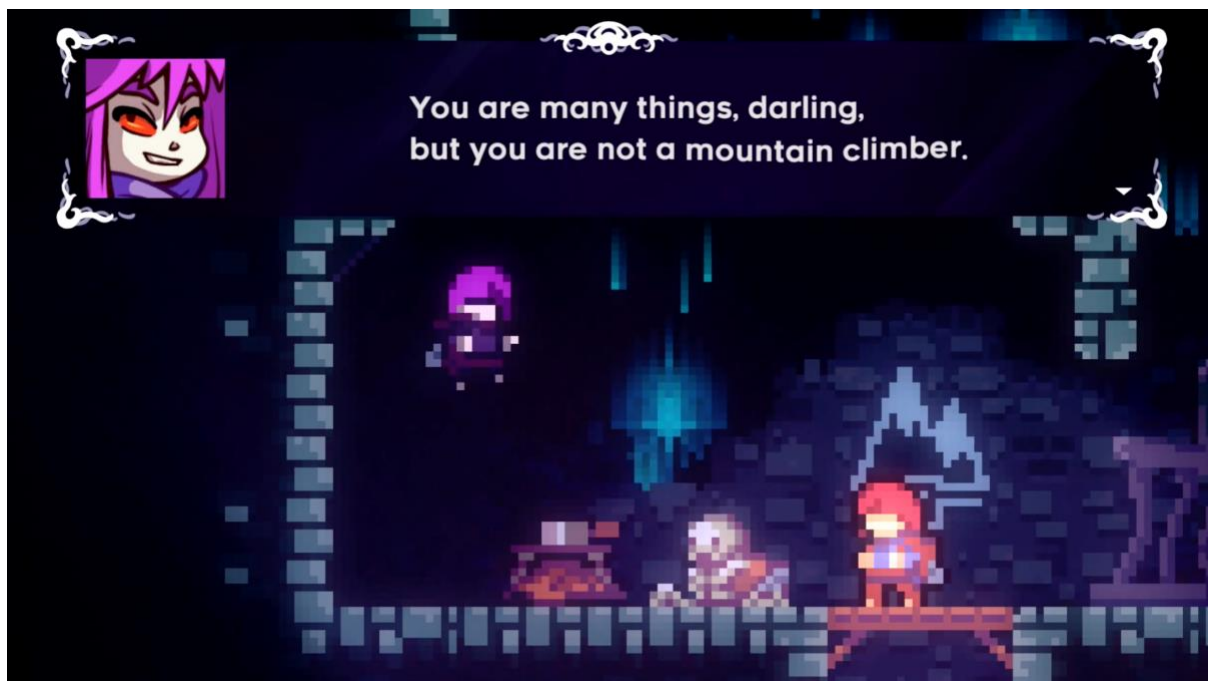
Given all these challenges, Celeste comes with an assist mode, such that players can complete the story and learn more about the characters in the process. The uncertainty produced by the mechanics (e.g., if you—like me—are unsure you'll be able to complete the game on the default settings) are mitigated to render its story about Madeline's emotional journey more accessible. Perhaps, then, assist mode offers

players a choice that also increases the likelihood of inclusion and satisfaction. (The game becomes more story and less . . . sport?)

During class discussions, I'm curious to hear about other ways do the game's actions resonate with its story. Here are some themes and questions we might address alongside *WTWLA* (from Week 11):

1. **What does it mean for a story to have an interface? Or, if you prefer, how do people interact with fiction?** It's common for audio, image, and text to be treated as media. It's less common to understand action this way; however, people (designers, developers, artists, writers) routinely craft fiction with action + play as core elements of the narrative. Games such as *Celeste* and *With Those We Love Alive* are two examples among thousands.
2. **How does choice affect people's relation to a story?** You might think about choice in terms of not only "paths" through a game but also the "verbs" you (or a player character) can perform. Some verbs may be repetitive (pressing the same button over and over again), and paths may offer variety ("choose your own adventure"), for instance. Paths may be "hidden," too.
3. **How does satisfaction affect people's relation to a story?** You might think about satisfaction in terms of not only boredom or fun but also predictability and uncertainty. Maybe a game relies heavily on hidden information, random number generation, or cooperation with other players (uncertainty), or perhaps it establishes a clear relation between cause and effect (predictability), where a specific input (say, pressing the "A" button) always results in the same output (the player character jumps, e.g.).

We can also focus these questions on the techniques used to make games:

- *Player perspective*: How is the game framed? How is the player addressed?
- *Interface*: How does input become output? Is there a HUD (heads up display)? How immediate is the action? What kind of feedback does the player receive?
- *Player character*: Who is the player character? How does the player relate to them?

- *Worldbuilding*: What's the world like? 2D or 3D? How does the player character move through the world? What's attainable? What isn't?
- *Map*: How do players know where they are? How much control do they have?
- *Primary verbs*: What actions can the player character perform? What can't they perform? How are those verbs expressive with respect to identity or story?
- *Art*: Describe the graphics and sound. What's their vibe? What's their relation to realism?
- *Primary objects*: With what important objects does the player character interact? What do these objects do?
- *NPC interactions*: Who are the NPCs? How does the player character interact with them?
- *Conflict and challenge*: What's the conflict in the story? How challenging are the mechanics? How, if at all, does the game assist players with difficulty?
- *Progression* (goals, scenes, levels): How do players know they are progressing? How is progress measured or defined?
- *Choice*: What kind of choices are available? How does the game limit the range or number of choices? To what effects?
- *Repetition*: What verbs or actions are repeated? What changes with repetition?
- *Uncertainty*: How does the game introduce uncertainty? What's hidden? What's difficult to predict? What's predictable?
- *Satisfaction*: What draws you (the player) back into the game? What's the game's relation to fun? What's the risk, if any, of associating its story with fun? When does the game ask you to move beyond fun, and how do you make your own fun in it?