

# CART 451 Final Project Proposal

*Regale Me With Tales of Joy* by Sharon Ku

## Table of Contents

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<b>Topic &amp; Form</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Project Stages</b>	<b>2</b>
Stage 1: Aim for prototype	2
Stage 2: Aim for final	2
Stage 3: If time allows	3
Stage 4: If time allows	3
<b>Visual Storyboard</b>	<b>3</b>
Sketches	3
Mood board for color palette and atmosphere	6
<b>Medium</b>	<b>6</b>
Technical challenges	7
<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Algorithms</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Link to Readings</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition</i>	8
<i>The Point of Collection</i>	8
<b>Inspirational Projects</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>We Feel Fine</i>	9
<i>Exhausting a Crowd</i>	9
<i>Oat the Goat &amp; How to Talk to White Kids About Racism</i>	10
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>11</b>

# Topic & Form

*Regale Me With Tales of Joy* (or *Regale Me* for short) is an online website that allows people to collaborate and build stories together, with the starting prompt being people's happiest memories. My goal is to design a space of beauty and joy for other people. I think a lot about my little cousins when I decide on topics for my creative projects because I want to create a better world for them, where they are free to learn, explore, and have fun. With this theme, I want to remind them to always seek happiness and to be surrounded by rich and enthralling stories. On a large scale, I want to empower people through collective creativity by providing them with an easily accessible space where they can share their identities and personalities in writing.

I envision my project as an online bookshelf filled with old, musty storybooks—think the small bookshop at the start of *Beauty and the Beast*. Visitors to the library click on books to open them. Then they read through the pages and can anonymously continue the story by adding a page of text to the end of the book. Visitors can only add one page per session to allow other people to contribute to the story. The cover page that reveals the topic of the book is based on someone's happiest memories. For these prompts, I will begin with my own happiest memories, and if there is time remaining in the project, I will allow visitors to submit their happiest memories as starting prompts.

My audience is storytellers of all ages. If I target this project's audience further, the audience is my two baby cousins, my family members, and my friends.

## Project Stages

I recognize that my project has a large scope, so I split it into different stages. I intend to at the very least accomplish Stage 1 for my prototype, and finish Stage 2 for my final project.

### Stage 1: Aim for prototype

- **Description:** Book scene where visitors can add pages to one book only
- Display a book with a topic on the cover page (I will select my own happy memory)
- After the final page of the book, add a text input field to continue the story
- Allow the visitor to add one page per session, and this page gets saved in the database for future visitors to see
- Playtest

### Stage 2: Aim for final

- **Description:** Bookshelf scene where visitors can choose books, book scene where visitors can continue the stories
- Add a bookshelf where there are 10 different books to choose from
- All book topics will be my own memories
- Allow visitors to continue the stories with text input that gets saved to the database
- Playtest

### Stage 3: If time allows

- **Description:** Bookshelf scene, book scene, UI to input happiest memory prompts
- In the bookshelf scene, add a button that when clicked, reveals an input field where visitors can add their happiest memories
- These memories will be saved to the database, and randomly chosen as starting prompts for stories
- Playtest

### Stage 4: If time allows

- **Description:** Bookshelf scene, book scene, and outdoors scene where visitors can drop their happiest memories
- Add an outdoors autumn scene with floating leaves on a pond
- A button allows visitors to add their happiest memories to this pond of ideas
- Once a memory is added, it takes the form of a leaf that floats down on the pond
- Visitors can click on a leaf to see individual memories
- Playtest

## Visual Storyboard

### Sketches

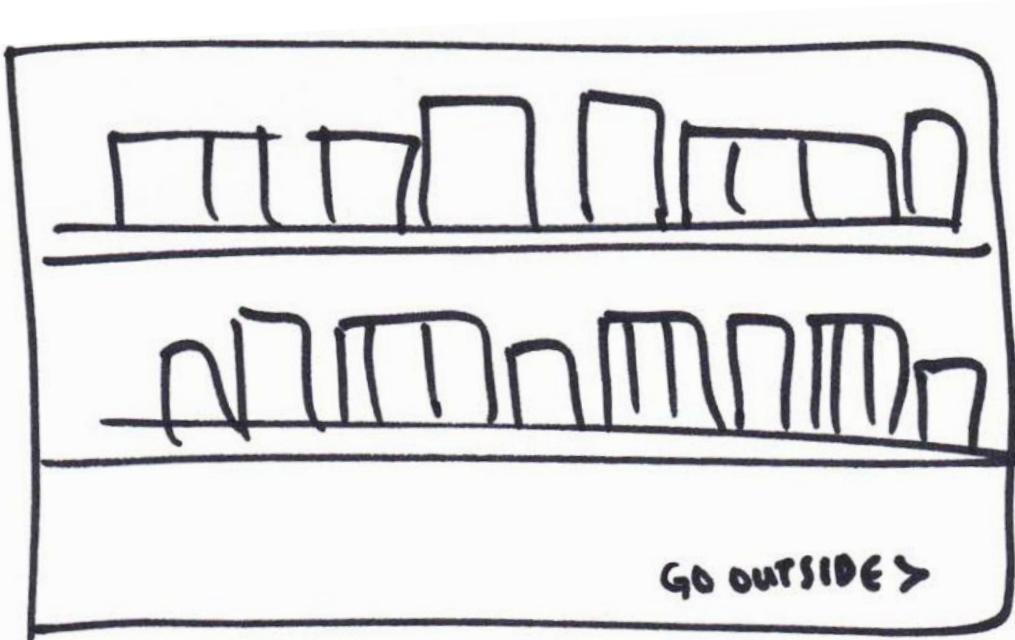


Figure 1. Bookshelf containing books to choose from (Stage 2). "Go outside" button will only be an option if the outdoors pond scene in Stage 4 is implemented.

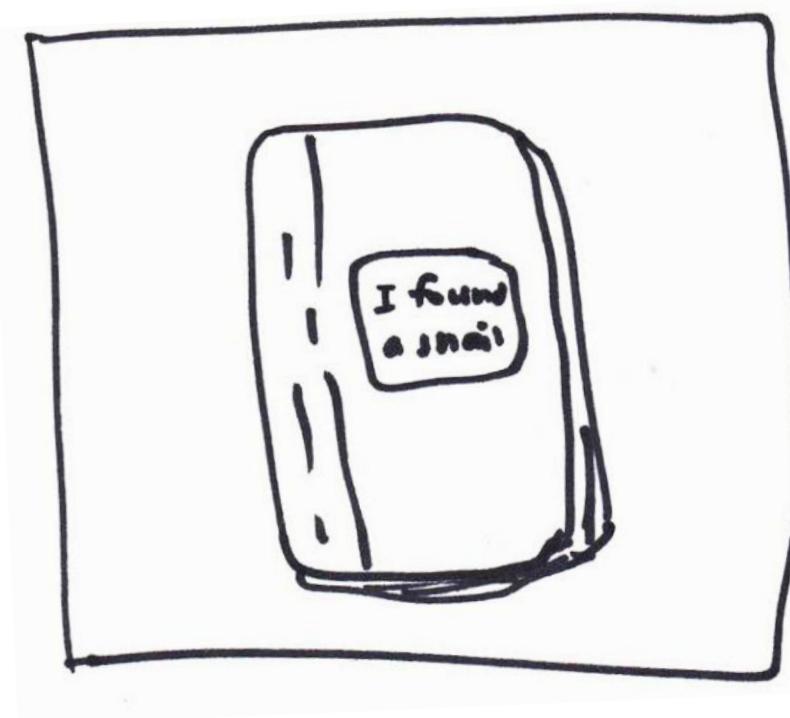


Figure 2. When a visitor clicks on a book, the scene expands into the book view (Stage 1). The cover page shows a happiest memory prompt, in this example: "I found a snail."



Figure 3. Visitor can flip through the pages of the book (Stage 1). When they reach the last page, there is a text area that says "Click to continue the story." If the user clicks there, they can type the next part of the story.

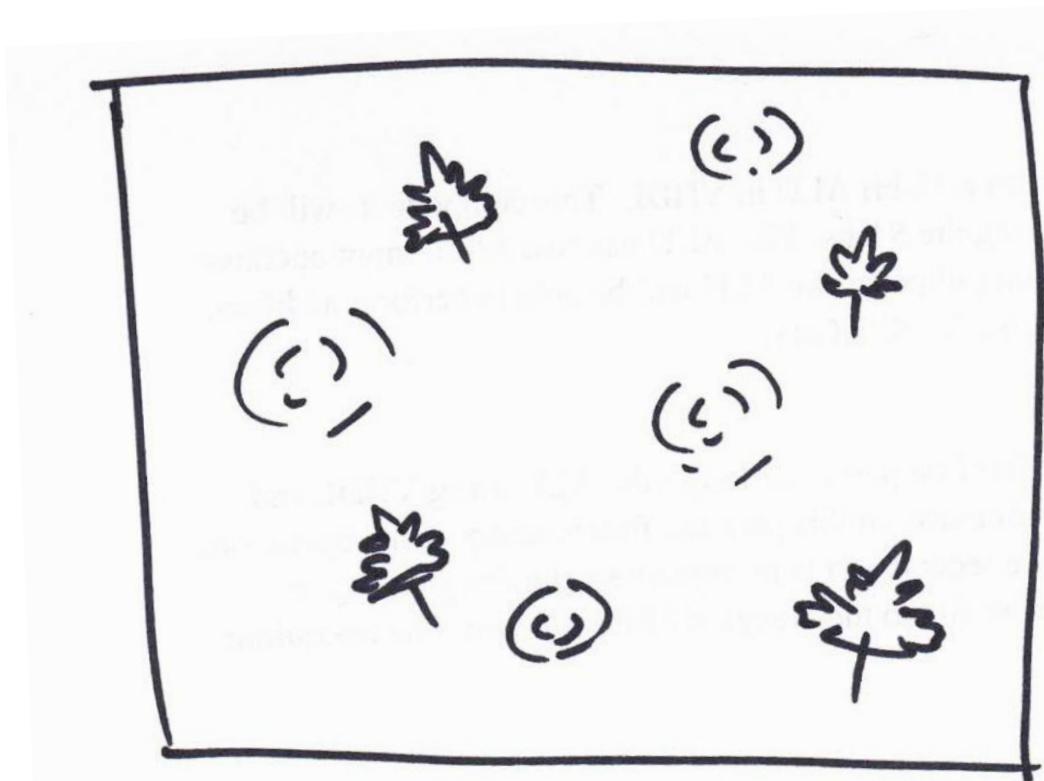


Figure 4. Outdoor scene with pool of happy memories (Stage 4). This pond contains leaves that can be clicked on to reveal someone's happiest memories.

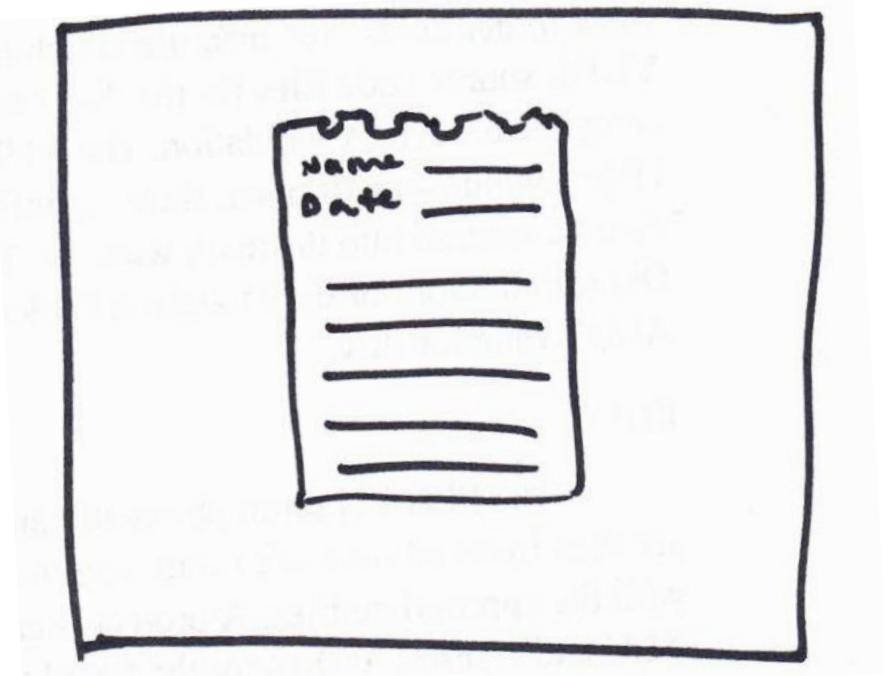


Figure 5. Input field to enter happiest memory (Stage 4). When the visitor wants to add a happy memory, a torn notebook page opens up, with the option to add your nickname and write the memory. This will then be stored in the database.

## Mood board for color palette and atmosphere



## Medium

I intend to create a website. The client side will show a 2D canvas made using PixiJS, HTML, and CSS. The website's aesthetics will be heavily based on illustrations that convey themes of autumn coziness, beauty, joy, and peace. I want visitors to reminisce about the story books they read as children. I chose to use the PixiJS library because it renders quickly (based on my own experiences, it renders quicker than p5.js) and it is free.

The backend will require Node.js, socket.io, and MongoDB. Node.js and socket.io will be used to allow the stories to be updated with different users and communicate between the server and database. MongoDB will store the happy memory prompts, and story titles with their corresponding page content.

## Technical challenges

I anticipate that I will encounter the following challenges during development:

1. Integrate PixiJS with Node.js: This is my first time doing it, so I will need to research how.
2. Communicating with server and database: Having worked with databases and sockets before, I know that coding problems are bound to arise. I have to do some pre-planning to determine the order of the code.
3. Practicing Async/await: When Sabine introduced this pattern in class, I was blown away by how helpful these functions are. I need to practice using this.
4. Accessible on mobile: I also want to make this project mobile-friendly, which means I have to ensure that it loads quickly and scales properly.
5. Incredible user experience: I want to ensure the user experience flows seamlessly; this will require constant playtesting.
6. Hosting the final project: I want people to be able to participate. I wonder if it's possible to host this on itch.io, to look into.

## Data Collection

I will collect data through the website's input fields so that the entire experience of writing and reading can be simply accessed through the website. The story readers can also be authors, and all visitors are treated as equals. I chose to collect data from the website's visitors because I assume they are voluntarily on my website because they wish to partake in the collective storytelling. By having the data created and circulated within the library space, I am simulating an intimate book club experience among friends.

For the story development, I will have a text area with the instructions "Click to continue story" and the content that the users type and submit will be logged onto the database and updated on the story page.

If I reach Stage 3, I will display a text input box to allow visitors to add their happiest memories. I will then store these in a database. When a new book is created, I will randomly choose a memory to display on the cover page.

## Algorithms

Breaking down the code for seeing books and updating stories (Stage 2):

1. Check the database for number of existing book entries
  - a. Display that number of books as book images on the bookshelf
2. If a user clicks on a book, grab the book title and page contents from the database, then open book view so that the user can flip through pages.
3. Once the user reaches the last page, show an input box to continue the story.
4. If the user types in that box and saves, update the database with the new text string.
  - a. Then update books for all visitors: all visitors should see this new page when they view the book.

Breaking down the code for creating a pond of happiest memories that can be added to (Stage 4):

1. Check the database for number of existing memories
  - a. Display that number of memories as leaf images on the pond
2. If a user clicks on a leaf image, randomly grab a memory entry from the database, then display the memory string, name of writer, and date of entry.
3. If a user adds a new memory, provide input box and once saved, store the memory string in the database and add a new leaf in the pond.
4. Once it is time to create a new book, randomly select a memory from the database that hasn't already been used as a book topic.
  - a. In the database, create a new book entry with this memory.
  - b. Visitors can now add to this book.

## Link to Readings

### *A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition*

This article by Hito Steyerl highlights the issue of information overload and the need to filter and analyze it. The enormous quantity of data that we have is perceived as “noise” that cannot be understood unless it is processed through pattern recognition. Steyerl further comments on the importance of separating signals (what’s important) and noises (the useless garble). This point pushed me to question who are the signals and who are the noises of *Regale Me*. I am striving to give all participants equal opportunities for authorship. I recognize that there is bias built into my experience that I hope to minimize. For instance, in the early stages (Stage 1 and 2), I am introducing bias by using my own happiest memories as starting prompts for stories. Not everyone will relate to my memories. I intend to correct this in Stage 3 by opening the floor for others to include their memories then randomly selecting the prompts.

A second point that drew my attention is the notion of “dirty data.” An example of dirty data is “where all of our refusals to fill out the constant onslaught of online forms accumulate. Everyone is lying all the time, whenever possible, or at least cutting corners” (Steyerl). The cause of dirty data lies in the tediousness that people experience when completing the data. This data is not collected voluntarily or with joy. In *Regale Me*, I want to counter that experience by making the option to contribute entirely voluntary. Every step of the user experience should be joyful (perhaps even playful) so that data collection is seen in a positive light. I will verify this by conducting multiple playtests.

### *The Point of Collection*

This article by Mimi Onuoha discusses the issues of “big data” that emerge at the point of data collection. Onuoha analyzes five theses around data collection to demonstrate how to work with data responsibly. A key point inspired my research: the means of collection influences the data sets we obtain. Onuoha shares that “There’s no pure objectivity encoded into data sets. Each one is the result of a number of human processes and decisions that affect, in a variety of ways, the data that they aim to report.” I aim to give participants agency of the collected data by letting the data live on its own,

and thus letting people construct their own interpretations of what the data means to them. I will not filter the memories or stories data to draw my own conclusions of any sorts. The data is offered by people (through a simple input field) for the benefit of people (resulting in collaborative stories that amplify people's voice and creativity).

## Inspirational Projects

### We Feel Fine

*We Feel Fine* is a website that uses crowdsourcing, taking data from online blogs about people's emotions. Data is collected on a global scale; the project searches the web for blog entries that contain "I feel" and "I am feeling," then categorizing the sentences based on those feelings. The data is shown through six types of visualizations: Madness, Murmurs, Montage, Mobs, Metrics, and Mounds.

*We Feel Fine*'s starting point is based on people's feelings and it resists the assumption that data is objective. When browsing the FAQ section of the *We Feel Fine* website, I saw this question: "Can I submit my feelings directly to We Feel Fine?" with the following response from the creators:

"No. We Feel Fine finds feelings on blogs, in context, and doesn't let anybody submit feelings. We think that this makes for more honest and unique statements of emotion than if we were to solicit people's feelings directly."

This sparked my interest in developing a project that invites people to be more active participants when sharing their feelings than simply scouring the web for data. I will be giving people the opportunity to be the primary sources of data. Another point of divergence for my project is that I want to make the aesthetics calming to look at since my theme focuses on happiness. Furthermore, *We Feel Fine* collected a total of 13,968,683 feelings. That is an impressive feat that supports the project's goals of analyzing emotions globally. Conversely, I want my project to take place on a small scale, stemming from people that are close to me and extending outwards to mutual connections. I think there is beauty in slow expansion that gives room to nurture the crafted stories.

### Exhausting a Crowd

While happiness was the origin of my project idea, I transformed my project's main goal into story building because I was inspired by *Exhausting a Crowd*, another crowdsourcing example that allows people to tell stories collectively by annotating surveillance footage. When I added commentary over the footage, I felt like I was pulled into a secret conversation with other people watching the footage live, and it was surprisingly entertaining to keep reading, watching, and annotating. I appreciated the anonymity of my messages because I did not have to worry about what others would think of me.

*Regale Me* will carry on the spirit of being an outlet for ideas that you can release into the world without tying your name to it. It will hopefully spur the same excitement that I felt when creating annotations on *Exhausting a Crowd*.

## *Oat the Goat & How to Talk to White Kids About Racism*

Two websites serve as inspirations for interactions and aesthetics. First, *Oat the Goat* is a narrative website for children that recounts the adventure of a goat that chooses his pathway when witnessing bullying. I admire the website's calming aesthetics and mood and how these tie in so well with the themes of overcoming challenges and standing up for strangers. There are some scenes in the narrative that are beautiful, like when Oat sees a tall mountain towering over him that represents the gargantuan challenges he is about to face. I felt at peace when reading this story. I hope to create a similar atmosphere with my website that draws people in through the beauty of not just visuals but also sounds and transitions. Second, *How to Talk to White Kids About Racism* is a guide that helps parents teach kids about racism. I am inspired by its storybook format and page flipping interaction. It also has a nice parallax effect that gives a false 3D look which I may replicate if it's not too complicated programming-wise.

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