RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can we design puzzles around key story events and give players enough freedom without making it a handheld experience?

- Does a unique gameplay experience in each chapter of the story add to the novelty of the experience?

- How can you alter player experience based on their prior interactions without changing the overarching narrative?

- How to create a fail state for stories central to the gameplay?

* How can we design puzzles around key story events and give players enough freedom without making it a handheld experience?

Games such as “What remains of Edith Finch”, “Disco Elysium”, “Firewatch” and “Return of the Obra Dinn” are the sources of inspiration for the game I’m trying to make. So going through the talks by these developers, game designers and narrative designers working on the game will give me some ideas of what their thought process was when they were working on the game, the issues they’ve faced and ways they’ve solved it either technical or design based. Also going through various reviews by people who’ve played the game and critiques would help get another perspective on these games by seeing what the audience thinks was bad/ good.  
  
Designing puzzles around key story events while giving players enough freedom can be a challenging task. One approach is to design puzzles that are interconnected, where solving one provides clues for another. This way, if a player gets stuck on one puzzle, they can try another1. Another approach is to design puzzles around a particular aesthetic choice or combine mechanics that haven’t been used together before2.

As for your research method and literature review, you could start by looking at existing literature on puzzle design in games. There is surprisingly little research dedicated to this major aspect of game design1. You could also analyze successful games that employ puzzles and see how they have integrated them into their gameplay and story.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265206701_A_Model_for_the_Design_of_Puzzle-based_Games_Including_Virtual_and_Physical_Objects>

Melero, Javier & Davinia, Hernández-Leo. (2014). A Model for the Design of Puzzle-based Games Including Virtual and Physical Objects. Educational Technology & Society. 17. 192-207.

There are several techniques for designing puzzles in games. One approach is to design puzzles that are interconnected, where solving one provides clues for another. This way, if a player gets stuck on one puzzle, they can try another. Another approach is to design puzzles around a particular aesthetic choice or combine mechanics that haven’t been used together before.

When integrating puzzles into gameplay, it’s important to consider the role of puzzles in the game and how they fit into the overall narrative and gameplay experience. Puzzles can be used to set intermediate goals for the player or to blend action with detective work.

Some common mistakes when designing puzzles include making them too difficult or too easy, not providing enough feedback to the player, and not considering the player’s perspective when designing the puzzle.

* Does a unique gameplay experience in each chapter of the story add to the novelty of the experience?

In “What Remains of Edith Finch”, playing a part in the life of each character feels like a new experience and makes the story more engaging. It adds different ways to move or to take the form of another subject to make us go though the story from another perspective. Similarly, in “It Takes Two” which is a co-op game, every location has different ways to solve puzzles by using the level design and alternating between the players helping each other to solve puzzles. This makes for exciting gameplay and the player doesn’t know what to expect next peaking their curiosity.  
  
[(PDF) Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion. (researchgate.net)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221217389_Fundamental_Components_of_the_Gameplay_Experience_Analysing_Immersion)

Ermi, Laura & Mäyrä, Frans. (2005). Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion.. Worlds in Play: Int. Perspectives on Digital Games Research.

* How can you alter player experience based on their prior interactions without changing the overarching narrative?

This is one of the more complicated questions since I’m bound by the story and cannot have branching dialogues like other games do. Nor can I have a stats system which would change the players interaction completely because the story is linear and I’m trying to deliver an experience. Some ways I will explore are dynamic difficulty adjustments which won’t make a drastic impact on the story but make things easier for some players. Few dialogues for actions performed by players by just changing the main dialogue. This could add replayability value to the game. Personalization of the player character will also be explored.

* How to create a fail state for stories central to the gameplay?

We’re trying to tell a story and the player doesn’t fail according to the story. And it wouldn’t be a game, or a fun one if it wasn’t challenging enough to kill the player. Some games add abilities to heal oneself whereas other games play around with the difficulty level. Having multiple ending is another way of going about it because even though we have a linear story, we still give the player some control over their character and it should feel like it. Another method would be by having a soft fail state where the player is allowed to continue but with the bare minimum resources needed.