■ Project Report: Belong – An Interactive Inclusion Journey

1. Introduction

Belong is an interactive narrative game developed by Team Runtime Terror for the RMIT Hackathon 2025. The project merges storytelling, education, and empathy-building into a pixel-art experience that explores the theme of inclusion in high schools. Players step into the lives of two students — Maya Nguyen, a Vietnamese international student, and Alex Carter, an autistic robotics enthusiast. Each path presents unique challenges related to cultural belonging and neurodiversity, encouraging players to make choices that influence confidence, connection, and inclusion.

2. Project Objectives

- Foster empathy among players for students with diverse experiences. - Educate about inclusion, neurodiversity, and cultural awareness. - Demonstrate how everyday choices shape social belonging. - Create an engaging, replayable interactive story accessible to students and educators alike.

3. Gameplay Overview

Players navigate a four-day school week, making meaningful decisions that impact the protagonist’s Inclusion Score and Confidence Level. Through branching scenarios, they experience the ripple effects of small actions such as speaking up, listening, or inviting someone in. Character Paths: - Maya Nguyen: Vietnamese international student facing language barriers and cultural differences. - Alex Carter: Autistic student passionate about robotics, dealing with sensory and communication challenges.

4. Visual and Audio Design

Visuals: - Pixel art aesthetic with retro 2D charm. - Split-screen storytelling layout. - Character color themes (Maya: pink, Alex: blue). Audio: - Lo-fi ambient soundtrack at 50% volume. - Seamless looping for immersion.

5. Game Mechanics

- Branching narrative with multiple outcomes. - Inclusion Score (0–100) tracking inclusivity. - Confidence System for unlocking decisions. - Auto-save via LocalStorage API. - Multiple endings: Isolated, Struggling, Belonging, Thriving.

6. Technical Implementation

Stack: HTML5, CSS3, Vanilla JavaScript (ES6+) Architecture: index.html, style.css, characters.js, scenarios.js, scoring.js, game.js, and pixel-art assets. Features include dynamic rendering, responsive layout, and a state management system.

7. Educational Integration

Each scenario includes real-world inclusion lessons: - Overcoming language barriers. - Managing sensory overload. - Supporting neurodiverse peers. - Promoting inclusive classrooms.

8. Development Process

Phase 1: Core Structure – built game logic and state system. Phase 2: Visual Design – added pixel art, fonts, and themes. Phase 3: Mechanics – added branching logic and save system. Phase 4: UX Refinement – improved readability and device support.

9. Impact and Educational Value

Belong acts as a digital empathy lab, teaching players the value of inclusion through lived perspectives. It’s ideal for classroom use, fostering discussions on diversity and empathy.

10. Challenges and Solutions

Challenges included balancing tone with gameplay, embedding lessons naturally, and ensuring replay value. These were solved through accessible design, contextual storytelling, and branching narrative structure.

11. Conclusion

Belong demonstrates how narrative games can nurture empathy and promote inclusion. Guiding Maya and Alex reveals that inclusion isn’t about grand gestures but consistent kindness and understanding. “Every choice shapes belonging.”

12. Credits

Team Runtime Terror - Design & Art: Pixel visuals and UI/UX layouts - Development: JavaScript engine and scenario scripting - Writing: Narrative design based on inclusion challenges - Music & Audio: Lo-fi background track