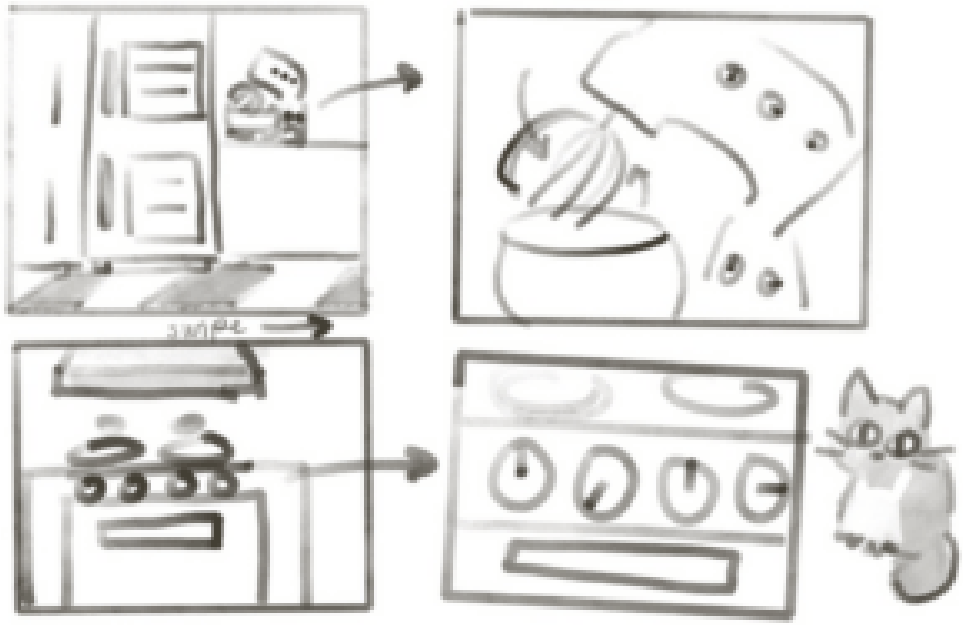
Playtesting and Iteration History

1. Early Iteration: Thursday May 8 & Friday May 9



Sketches of Storyboard

Guiding questions:

1. What feelings arise when you hear the narrative?
2. How would you describe the vibe of the game, just from our explanation?
3. What music/art style do you think of?
4. Can we balance heavy topics with a cute/cozy vibe?

Our initial concept playtests in section and lecture were conducted using storyboard sketches and verbal explanations of our narrative. We explained the premise of our

game and themes we were exploring. A particular theme we debated on was whether or not to include a theme of grief in Mochi losing their parents and thus needing to take over the bakery. Furthermore, we were unsure how to reconcile the difficulty of challenges with the relaxed vibe of our game.

After feedback from peers, we decided to lean more into Mochi's independence and responsibility arc since it made more sense to solve puzzles to overcome these obstacles. We kept the absence of Mochi's parents in our story but were more elusive in the reasons why. Following the feedback, we decided to integrate the familial theme throughout our gameplay through unlocking certain memories after

Our testers/interviewees said "I think the storyline gives a clear reason for why the player needs to help Mochi learn tasks in the game." They liked this spin on the escape room concept that was cute and cozy, and suggested using the narrative to add connection between modules/levels. We chose to include this less explicit backstory to shift more focus on how we can integrate narrative in the game mechanics. This design decision was based on appealing to a broader audience and allowing players to find fun in various ways rather than simply through a traditional storybook narrative.

2. Early Playtest in Section, Friday May 16

We playtested with two people from our section. In this iteration, as seen in the picture, our oven minigame involving dials was still in its early stages.

Our first playtester responded positively to the overall aesthetics of the game, noting that the visual design felt cohesive and engaging. However, they encountered a functional issue: when rotating the dials and then exiting the scene, the game did not save the updated positions of the dials. This created a sense of disorientation upon returning to the puzzle, as the dials had reset to their default state, and they also had to re-enter the position from memory, which felt unnecessary. The playtester suggested that keeping the dial states between scenes would greatly improve the player's experience by reinforcing a feeling of progress and continuity, and also avoid unnecessary recall.

Additionally, this playtester initially overlooked the dials and instead interacted with the stove burners, which delayed their puzzle-solving process. They suggested that making the dials larger and more visually prominent could help guide the player's attention toward the primary mechanic of the minigame. Despite this initial confusion, they ultimately solved the puzzle quickly, suggesting that once the correct interaction was discovered, the underlying logic of the puzzle was intuitive and accessible.

Our second playtester approached the game from a slightly different perspective, bringing a background in music. Their feedback centered primarily on the game's audio design. While they appreciated the concept and visuals, they pointed out that the current version lacked sound effects and background music, which made the experience feel somewhat flat. They suggested incorporating auditory feedback for key interactions (such as rotating a dial or turning on a burner), as well as ambient

background music to enhance immersion and emotional tone. We ultimately took all of these findings into account for our future versions.

Playtester rotating dials on stove mini game with early iteration + design (large burners, small dials)

3. Playtest in Class, Friday May 20

Caption: Izzy playtesting our game

Guiding questions:

1. What did you enjoy in your experience playing the game?
2. What did you find most frustrating?

3. What did you find confusing?

In the development of our first game, we playtested with Izzy during lecture. We implemented the colored dials and hidden clocks and wanted to test whether players could draw the connection between the colors of the two components. We gave the backstory of our game and started the tester off on the main kitchen page, asking the tester to think out loud. The player searched around the landing/main kitchen page before asking for help from the moderator (us). We gave the hint that there was a second screen but the player still felt lost. We then gave another hint that the colors match the dials and the player finally solved the puzzle.

The main findings were that the graphic flaws impacted the player's experience, especially interactive elements that were low in contrast. This included the yellow clock against the beige background and the arrows to move screen to screen. From this playtest, we prioritized redesigning graphical elements, such as including a bulletin board to create more contrast in the yellow clock. We also iterated on the design of the button to switch screens, such as a darker and bolder outline. We made these changes not only because it created confusion in our player rather than a challenge but also because this flags our game for possible accessibility issues on low-vision individuals.

Another early iteration of stove mini game. In this picture, the arrow was moved to be in a consistent position, but players still initially had trouble figuring out the navigation between screens.

4. Playtest in Section, Friday May 23

During our weekly section playtest, we identified several key areas for improvement. The most significant issue was that players had trouble with the pink watch, one of the main clues for the dial mini game. One of the most insightful moments came when a player pointed out that the shade of pink used in the clock was too similar to other pink elements in the game, making it difficult to identify patterns and map them to the dials.

Another issue was the lack of clarity around which items were clickable. Players spent a lot of time clicking randomly, which they felt could have been better spent looking for actual clues. Additionally, after adding a scale to the game, several players mistook the dial on the scale for another clock. To fix this, we redrew the scale to appear more neutral, using a vertical slider instead of a circular dial.

Redesgined food scale to prevent confusion for another clock

One playtester noted they often forgot they were playing as a cat, which made us realize the need for stronger cat-related visuals and a more emphasized narrative. Another suggested adding more interactive elements, such as clickable objects, while a different playtester recommended greater immersion through audio, such as adding a radio or ambient sounds. Lastly, we observed that the dials should reset automatically when the game starts. Previously, we saved dial positions between scenes for

convenience, but this resulted in puzzles staying solved between players unless manually reset.

To address the issue of narrative and world building, we decided to add more cat-related elements for players to interact with or notice in the scene. We also added cutscenes to the onboarding section to strengthen the story and provide more context. To improve clarity around interactable elements, we implemented hoverable tints to differentiate clickable objects from the rest of the scene. Lastly, we adjusted the shadows and contrast on the pink watch to make its shade more distinct and to make sure it clearly matched the pink oven dial.

5. Playtest in Class, Tuesday May 27

Our playtester noted that the arrows for the introduction didn't necessarily make sense; having been individually working on separate parts, some of our game had dialogue that progressed when clicking on the full screen, while others didn't. We made a note to standardize this across all screens.

Additionally, at first, the playtester thought that the stoves were corresponding to the dial at first. Although we enlarged the dials significantly, it seems that the stoves were still distracting for players. We eventually took this into account, and redesigned the stove scene so that the dials were the only things visible (although this also was a result of a redesign of the connections between puzzles— more in our next playtest!)

At first, our playtester also didn't realize there were multiple screens. She noted that the arrows didn't draw the eye, and suggested helpfully that we might consider changing the colors. After this playtest, we redesigned our arrows, and also made the highlight colors more apparent. We were also in the process of creating an onboarding flow / tutorial, and added a portion on how to change between scenes.

Lastly, our playtester also found an issue with the way we designed the teacup puzzle minigame; the puzzle only works when the teacup is assembled on top of the saucer. To guide the player, we added a shadow of the teacup on top of the saucer, which seemed to work; our later playtests did not have issues with where to place the teacup.

Left: A second iteration of the stove dials, redesigned to be larger.

Right: Our first iteration of the teacup minigame. Our playtester pieced together the puzzle on the screen, but not on top of the teacup, where the puzzle is meant to be solved.

5. Playtest in Class, Thursday May 29

During our playtest, one participant provided insights on the feedback in our minigames, as well as the overall structure of progression throughout the game. One of their initial observations was that there was insufficient feedback after clicking on a puzzle piece. Specifically, the piece would remain on the screen even after it had been successfully selected or interacted with. This created confusion, as it was unclear

whether the action had been successfully registered, since it would appear in the inventory, but would remain on-screen. In response to this, we modified the game so that pieces now disappear from the scene immediately after being clicked, providing clear, instant feedback that the piece has been collected in the inventory, without the player having to check.

The playtester also pointed out a lack of a conclusive success screen or transition after completing a minigame. At the time of the test, the game lacked a clear indicator of completion. Coupled with this feedback, the playtester also noted that they wanted a progression of the minigames. In the version at the time, these minigames could be solved in any order, and the collectible pieces needed for them were scattered throughout the scenes. While this provided a sense of openness, the playtester found it slightly disorienting and expressed a desire for more narrative and gameplay continuity between the puzzles. They suggested that introducing some form of progression—either through gating content or guiding the player with environmental cues—could enhance both clarity and player satisfaction.

They also observed that since the oven was located in the first scene, it naturally became the first interactive element players encountered. This made it a strong candidate for introducing the game's core mechanics: navigating between scenes and interacting with objects, which would naturally allow players to discover pieces as they went. They suggested that the oven minigame could serve as a first minigame in a sequence, teaching the player how to explore and interact with the world before taking on the teacup puzzle.

Taking this very helpful feedback into consideration, we restructured the game's progression. To create a more linear experience, we locked the final piece of the teacup puzzle inside the oven, meaning the player could not complete the teacup minigame until they had first completed the stove minigame and unlocked the oven. This created a natural dependency between the puzzles, guiding players to follow a sequential order without relying on explicit instruction.

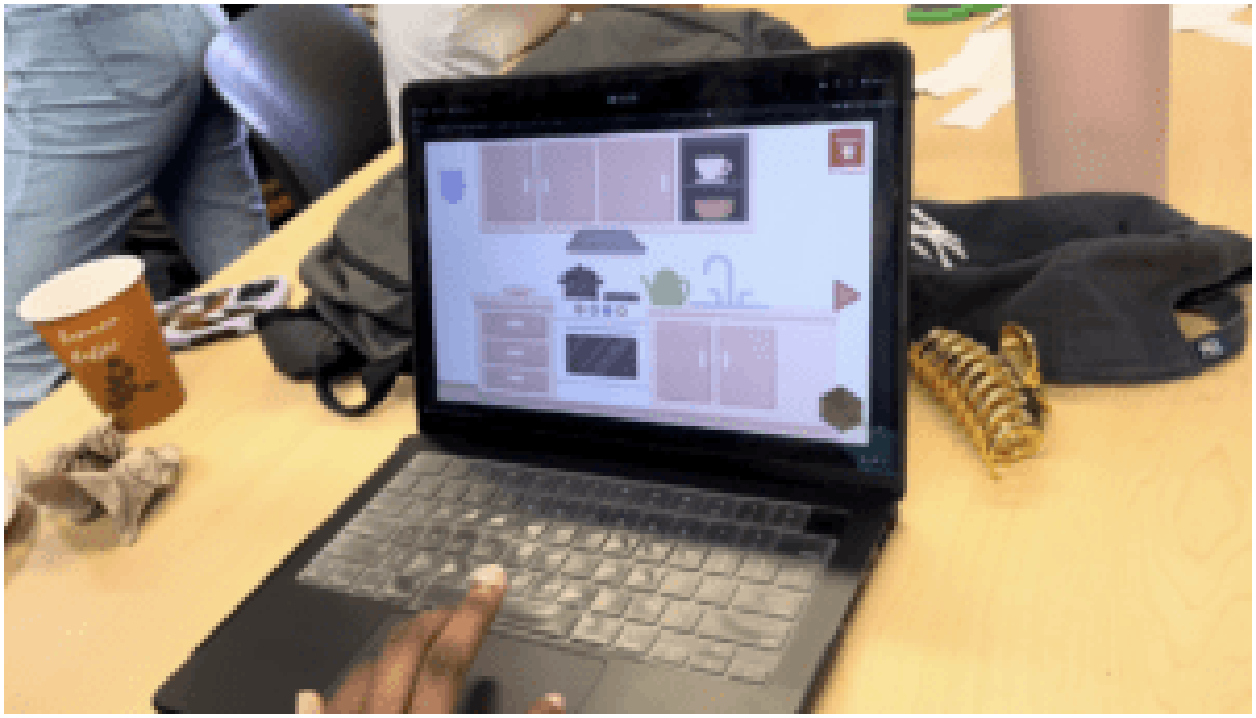
Playtester interacting with an early iteration of our inventory

6. Final Playtest in Class, Tuesday June 3

Guiding questions:

1. How did the game make you feel?
2. How was the pace of the onboarding process?

Our in class final playtester was Zion, who was the first playtester to test out our onboarding and hint book process. We hoped this would eliminate the need for us/the moderator to step in and help out the player in the game, so we stayed as silent as possible. The player thought the dialogue in the beginning was very cute, but the interactive parts were confusing because they were not sure what steps the tutorial wanted them to take and clicked skip instead. Because they skipped the tutorial, they were also unaware that there were other rooms. We received positive feedback on finding all puzzle pieces for teacup, but they were really confused with how to interact with the oven. They suggested adding arrows to rotate the dials or some animation. Our playtester remarked “I thought the green of the teapot meant something for the blue and yellow dials…”, which was not our intention. Another non-functional piece that stumped our playtester was the spoon in the apron, which made the puzzle piece more hidden. They drew a connection to the spoons in the drawer before, which were non-essential to our gameplay. Our playtester also tried dragging and dropping the inventory pieces and our moderator informed them that they needed to click to drop. The hintbook was used and received positive feedback, although it did not explain the interaction of how to rotate the dials, only that the colors corresponded to clocks.



Zion playtesting one of the final iterations of our game

This playtest was very useful in informing our final pushes.

1. We removed the skip tutorial button in the middle of the game so that only users who had played the game before and had gone through the onboarding process would click it. We decided to dedicate more effort towards making a more robust onboarding process to explain the interactions possible in our game (clicks, hover, and drag). Every part of our onboarding is intentionally designed: the text is animated to be revealed letter by letter to ensure the player reads thoroughly instead of quickly skipping through. The player can only view/click the next button when the text has finished its animation. The tutorial is framed as a part of Mochi's parents explaining to them how to run the bakery and forces the

user to try out the necessary interactions needed to play the game. Adding all the interactions (dragging, dial turning) in the tutorial was a high priority for us. Furthermore, there was a significant lag in loading the game, therefore we included a sound effect on the press of a button to give user feedback that the system did receive the click. Finally, we made the onboarding puzzles much easier than our real game (instead of equivalent) so it was obvious to the user what interactions were expected.

2. We repositioned the apron scene colors to center the pink piece against the blue apron in the middle. This draws more focus to a small piece while also maintaining the color contrast we struggled with before (pink on pink was too low in contrast).

Old iteration of puzzle piece not centered on screen

3. We cached the puzzle piece positions so that when the user dragged a piece, even if they did not have all pieces, their progress was saved. We did this because we noticed our playtester redoing the dragging 3 times, since it took them multiple tries to find the pieces. They also noted they didn't know how many pieces they were looking for, so dragging them to the correct place helped give them a clue. This avoided creating frustration in the user unnecessarily repeatedly dragging pieces and focused more attention on the fun of solving the puzzle.

The reason for these changes were to allow the user the most autonomy/independence in their game experience. We envisioned this game a player can play alone, but a solo-player puzzle game also poses challenges in getting oneself unstuck, since there's a lack of other perspectives to view the game from. By allocating efforts towards robust onboarding and more obvious graphic elements, we were able to improve the solo-playability of our game.