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Twine Game Jam

Kelly Tran (Arizona State University), Earl Aguilera (Arizona State University), & Mark Chen (Free Agent)

Abstract

This workshop will teach participants how to use Twine (twinery.org), a platform for making text-based games. Twine is an accessible game design platform that mostly relies upon plain written text, with a few programming constructs for more advanced features. In this workshop, participants will be given a brief introduction to the tool and how to use it, then will be free to work in teams or alone to create a short game and publish it to the web. At the end of the session, participants will play each others' games, then as a group we will discuss thoughts about the tool and implications for learning with it.

Twine

There are many tools out there today for making games (Gee & Tran, 2015; Burke & Kafai, 2014, Chen, 2015). Making games represents a different approach to learning than the more traditional learning *from* games (Kafai & Burke, 2014). Through design, learners understand the inner workings of various systems found in games and experience first-hand a process of discovering what is and what isn't possible given particular constraints, such as limited class time, limits of their development platform, theoretical limits to the gaming medium, etc. However, there are often many barriers to creating games: many game design platforms are complicated to use and can be expensive, making it difficult to use with students in formal and informal settings.

Twine has been garnering attention recently for being an accessible, easy-to-use game design tool (Anthropy, 2012; Chen, in review). It has been taken up by people who are often outsiders to the game design community (Kopas, 2015) and represents a different way of making games than using other game design tools that require technical knowledge.

Using Twine

Twine are, on a basic level, like *choose-your-own adventure* books. In these literary "precursors" to digital adventure games, readers are presented with choices at varying points of the book, with each decision instructing them to turn to a different part of the book to continue the story (to open the castle door, go to page 38; to sneak in the side entrance, go to page 102). In Twine, users take on the role of

designers that can easily offer their players choices about how the game should proceed. Using some simple, built-in programming logic, a Twine designer can add additional layers of complexity into a game (for example, using an if-then statement to see whether or not a user has found a key to open a particular door).

In the screenshot below (see Figure 1), the squares of text are called *passages.* The arrows represent other passages to which the player can proceed.

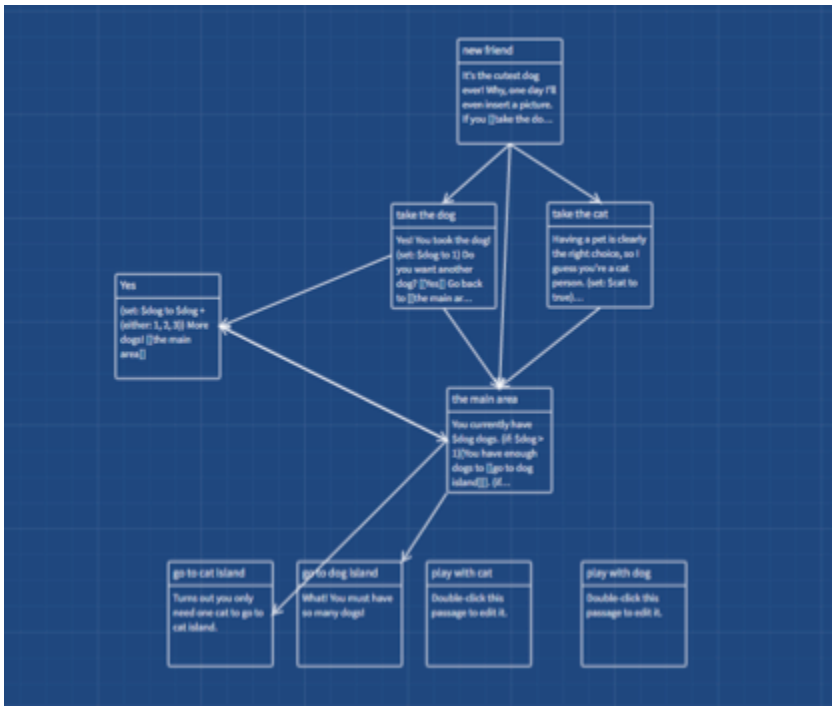

Figure 1: The Interface of Twine.

The Workshop

One of the great affordances of Twine as an accessible tool is that no previous game-making or programming experience is necessary. As Twine can be run in a browser, any program attendee with a laptop can join the workshop without downloading any special software. This workshop is framed as a game jam, in which people work and learn collaboratively to make a game. Some scholars have noted the rich learning potentials of game jams (Fowler et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2012), and this session will extend that idea to a condensed format, similar to previous GLS-run game jams (Nicholson, 2014; Turkay et al., 2015) but featuring digital games rather than tabletop games.

Participants will be given a very brief tutorial of the basics of Twine, less than 10 minutes, which will introduce how to use the tool. Then, working in either small groups or individually, participants will have 30 minutes to make a game. We will set up a web page accessible to participants which explains some very basic features and how to use them, which they will be able to use as reference as they make their games.

True to the spirit of game jams, the idea will not be to make a finished or perfect product but rather to be creative and see what the tool can do. Participants will then have 10 minutes to rotate and play each

others' games. At the end of the session, we will have a group discussion about Twine, participants' impressions of the tools, and implications for using such a game design tool in both formal and informal educational settings.

We will encourage participants to keep working on and showing off their games throughout the rest of the conference. The site Philom.la offers free web hosting for Twine games, and we will encourage all participants to upload their games with the hashtag #glsTwineJam as well as the the general GLS hashtag so that participants can share their games.

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