TALEBLAZER GAME DESIGN

Helping Youth Make TaleBlazer Games

A GETTING STARTED GUIDE AND CURRICULUM

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

MIT | SCHELLER TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Written by Susan Baron, Judy Perry, Lisa Stump, and Bob Coulter

www.taleblazer.org

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TaleBlazer Game Design

INTRODUCTION

TaleBlazer is a versatile game creation program that can support many different learning goals. While TaleBlazer games can be quite complex, this curriculum is intended to be a short introduction to building simple games with TaleBlazer. For beginning designers to be able to complete satisfying games within a four-hour period, this curriculum uses template games for designers to play and make their own. The templates use basic structures that are highly adaptable to a variety of contexts and storylines. Facilitators can confidently lead the program with minimal familiarity with the software. Before leading the program, however, facilitators should read and complete the *Facilitator's Guide to Getting Started*.

The curriculum is split into one-hour sections. These can be completed in a single day or spread out over multiple days or weeks. If you are able to schedule more than four hours, we have included suggestions for extending the program in meaningful ways. Note that times and activities in this curriculum are for hands-on game building and software work, only. Any time spent exploring content areas would be additional.

If you have more than four hours available to you for Tale Blazer work, here is what you might expect:

- **4 Hours:** Youth make a basic game that follows the template closely.

- **5–6 Hours:** Youth have time for more extensive testing and revision, allowing them to polish their games more. Some designers may have time to customize their game structures beyond the template game. You may have time for peer review.

- **7–8 Hours:** Formalized peer review and sharing will be possible. Most designers will be able to customize their game structures beyond the template.

OBJECTIVES

- Youth play location-based mobile games
- Youth create their own mobile games using TaleBlazer software and template games.
- Youth explore their physical location and integrate it into their games.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computers with internet access (1 per 2 designers)
- Mobile devices with GPS capabilities (iOS or Android, enough for 1 per 2 designers).
- Wi-Fi available for mobile devices
- Paper and pencils for game planning
- White board or similar for group planning/instructions
- Projector/screen to share computer screen
- Worksheets for game planning
- Safe, accessible outdoor space for locating game

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

1. GETTING STARTED		
Time	Activity	Process
5 minutes	Welcome and framing	Welcome game designers and outline the program.
20 minutes	Play template game	Play chosen template game outdoors in pairs.
5 minutes	TaleBlazer introduction	Compare/contrast TaleBlazer with other games.
10 minutes	Talk through template format	Map out what happened in the game and begin to introduce TaleBlazer vocabulary.
5 minutes	Generalize agent functions	Take another look at the game format and identify the purpose of each agent.
*If >10 minutes remain	Brainstorm game ideas	As a group, brainstorm game ideas for other games that could fit the template, sorting ideas into categories.

2. GAME PLANNING		
Time	Activity	Process
*10–15 minutes (if not done previously)	Brainstorm game ideas	As a group, brainstorm game ideas for other games that could fit the template, sorting ideas into categories.
30 minutes	Game planning	Use worksheets and other materials to plan game on paper.
5 minutes	TaleBlazer Editor overview	Short presentation to introduce main areas and vocabulary of the editor.
25 minutes (or whatever remains)	Begin working on game in software	Use Game Designer Tutorials to make new games from the template.

3. GAME WORK		
Time	Activity	Process
40–60 minutes	Continue work on games	Use Game Designer Tutorials to continue work. This will easily take more time, if available.
20 minutes (optional)	Peer review of games	Designers use Peer Review Guide to help give and receive useful feedback on their games.

4. FINISH UP		
Time	Activity	Process
Flexible	Finishing touches on games	Use Game Designer Tutorials as needed to finish work on games.
30–40 minutes (Option 1)	Game showcase	Teams play each other's games or invite other people to come play their games.
20–40 minutes (Option 2)	Game presentations	Teams present to each other and community members about their game design experience.

Note: This schedule is divided roughly by hours for a 4-hour format. If you have more time available, most of it will be used to expand the Game Work section so designers have more time to test and refine their games.

1. GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND FRAMING—5 MINUTES

Welcome your game designers and give them an idea of what they are going to be doing during these four hours!

Things to mention might include:

- Names of all participants
- Schedule for the program
- Participants will use TaleBlazer software to create games
- Logistical details as needed (restrooms, water, etc.)
- Any theme or content you plan to focus on

PLAY TEMPLATE GAME—20 MINUTES (plus time to walk to game location)

It is really helpful for new game designers to have a chance to play a TaleBlazer game before creating one themselves!

1. **Instruct the group about any logistics necessary to go outside,** including where to meet the group when they have finished the game. It can be useful to remind everyone that the games aren't races and that they will do better in the game if they read carefully and pay attention. Tell the group they will be playing in pairs and suggest that they alternate holding the device so that everyone has a chance to navigate.

2. **Break the group into pairs.** These don't have to be their design team partners—short-term pairings are fine.

3. **Give each pair a mobile device.** Have them open the template game. Alternately, you could have the games ready and open on the devices already.

4. **Walk outside to the game area and have designers play the template game.** If the group is

OBJECTIVES

Game designers will:

- Play a TaleBlazer game
- Become familiar with the TaleBlazer game format
- Generalize agent functions from the specific agents in the template game

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Mobile devices, with TaleBlazer and template game loaded
- Projector and computer
- White board or chart paper for group discussions
- Sticky notes with agents written on them
- Pencils
- Large print or projected version of game map
- Template game diagrams

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

See the notes in the *Facilitator's Guide to Getting Started* about creating a productive classroom culture during this program.

large, you may want to stagger the game start times a little so the teams will spread out.

    a.   While outside, you and other leaders should walk around and make sure the games are going smoothly and that pairs are sharing the devices appropriately. You may need to help the teams navigate at first, if the area is unfamiliar.

5. **Once everyone has finished, go back inside.**

TALEBLAZER INTRODUCTION—5 MINUTES

Begin thinking about TaleBlazer as a tool and the type of games that are possible to make with TaleBlazer.

1. **Start by asking the group about the elements of the game they just played.**

- How did they learn things (what to do/goal of the game and information relevant to the game)?
- What did they do to play the game (game mechanics)?
- How did the game end?
- What, if anything, made the game challenging?
- What, if anything, made it fun?

2. **How does the game they just played differ from other games they have played?** What makes a TaleBlazer game unique? (Briefly talk about combining the physical world with virtual elements, using a specific location, etc.)

DIG DEEPER INTO FORMAT OF THE TEMPLATE GAME—10 MINUTES

Since the game designers will be using the template game as the foundation for their own games, it will be helpful to look at the template game in depth and start figuring out what is going on. You may want to have a large map of the game area available to look at, either projected or printed out. You could also use the blank game diagram for the template game you are using to chart the game with your game designers. (Blank game diagrams can be found among the materials for each template game.)

1. **Hand out sticky notes with the name of an agent from the template game written on each one.** If there are more designers in your group than agents, split the designers into small groups so they have one sticky note per group.
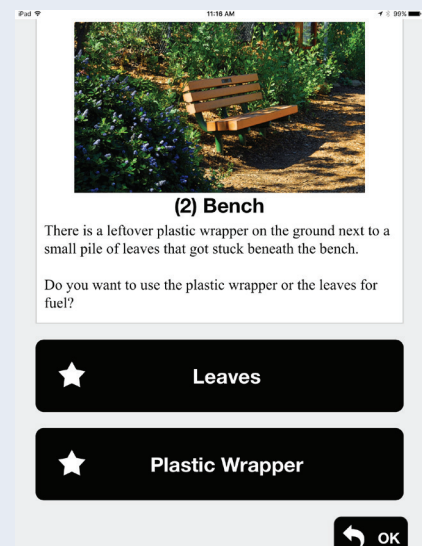
2. **Ask each group to write on the sticky note what happened at that agent** (did it give the player information/a clue? Ask a question?)

3. **Have each group add their agents to the map or chart in order.** If they don't remember where it goes, have the larger group help them.

4. **As a large group, talk through what happened at each agent.** (What information did you receive? Were any choices offered? How did the game change for each choice?)

5. As you walk through the game, **try to introduce some of the TaleBlazer vocabulary**. As appropriate, include:

   a. **Agent** – any character or object the player encounters. Usually marked by an icon on the map.

   b. **Bump** – When you bump into agents, you (usually) see their image and description, and the software follows any instructions connected to that agent. Most often, players bump agents by walking to them on the map.

   c. **Dashboard** – The screen that appears on the mobile device when you bump an agent (an agent dashboard) or view the player or world tabs (player and world dashboards, respectively). The dashboard shows the name, image, and description of the agent or tab.

   d. **Action** – Actions appear as buttons on dashboards during the game. Actions allow the player to do something: make a choice, pick up or drop an agent, read text, etc. (**OK** buttons are not action buttons.)

GENERALIZE FROM SPECIFIC STORY TO AGENT FUNCTION—5 MINUTES

Take a step back from the specifics of the template to think about the function and role of each agent. This will help designers think about ways to use the template for their own games. Depending on how things went during the walkthrough above, this part might be really brief. If you used a

This is an **agent dashboard**. The buttons at the bottom are actions.

(2) Bench

There is a leftover plastic wrapper on the ground next to a small pile of leaves that got stuck beneath the bench.

Do you want to use the plastic wrapper or the leaves for fuel?

Leaves

Plastic Wrapper

OK

map for the walk-through, do make sure to introduce the game diagram.

1. If you have been using the map to talk about the game, **introduce the diagram of the game** (available for each template in the template packets). Use the version that only lists the agents' names and leaves the function tags blank.

2. **Option 1:** As a group, develop a list of functions/roles that the agents play in the game. Match them to the agents in the template game. (Refer to the template game diagram for ideas about what to call the functions, but feel free to use language that makes sense to your designers…)

3. **Option 2:** Fill in the game diagram as a group, writing in the function for each agent as you review the game. Encourage game designers to think about the agents by asking questions such as:

   a. What role does this agent play in the game?

   b. Why is this agent important in the game?

   c. How would the game be different without this agent?

   d. Does this agent affect the player's score or the outcome of the game?

4. **IMPORTANT: Tell game designers they will be using this format for their own games.** The stories and goals will be different, but the general function of the agents in the game will be the same/similar.

BRAINSTORM GAME IDEAS—10 MINUTES

If you have at least 10 minutes left at the end of the first hour, you can do this activity. If not, it is better to do this at the beginning of the second hour than try to rush through it. As a group, begin thinking about what kinds of games could be made based on your chosen template.

1. **Introduce the games as a design challenge.** Teams need to create games that fit the criteria, being as creative as they can within those bounds.

2. **Introduce the required elements for the games**

   a. Based on the given template

   b. Any content/audience/location/goals criteria that you have decided on (refer to your notes from the *Facilitator's Guide to Getting Started*).

3. **As a group, begin brainstorming ideas for games that would fit (or mostly fit) within the given parameters.** Try not to reject ideas that don't fit—they might inspire other ideas—but do encourage game designers to find creative ways to stay within the pa-rameters given. Consider recording ideas in different "buckets" on the board. "Buckets" might include (1) narrative, setting, and world, (2) goal or question to be answered, (3) character, etc. Some game ideas are available in the template packets to get you started.

2. GAME PLANNING

GAME PLANNING—30 MINUTES

Game designers likely will be excited to get on the computers and start using the software, but planning out the games on paper will help them complete their games during the allotted time.

1. If this second hour does not immediately follow the first hour activities, **briefly review the design constraints for the games and the ideas generated during the brainstorm**, if necessary.

2. **Have game designers split into pairs** (or whatever size design teams you are using) **to form their design teams.** They will be working together for the rest of the program.

3. **Hand out game design worksheets for the chosen template to all the teams, along with scratch paper and pencils.**

4. **Have the groups use the materials to create a preliminary plan for their game** (it's OK if it changes later!). They should be able to articulate, at a minimum, the player's goal during the game, the main challenge, and some of the agents the player will meet. Having these things written down or recorded in some manner will help designers stay on track once they begin working in the software.

5. As needed, particularly if designers are not familiar with the space, **go outside and let designers explore the game area**, and take notes/pictures of points of interest that might be useful in their games.

6. In the last few minutes of planning time (5–7 minutes) **have each group quickly present to everyone about their game ideas**. Have them share:

    a. Setting for the game

    b. Player goal

OBJECTIVES

Game designers will:

- Plan their game on paper
- Begin creating their games in TaleBlazer
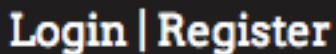
MATERIALS NEEDED

- Scratch paper
- Pencils
- Game worksheets (from template packets)
- Maps of game area (optional)
- Computers
- TaleBlazer account information
- Mobile Devices
- Cords for transferring pictures from mobile to computer (optional)

c. Relevant question depending on template used:

    i. Narrative Mystery: What is your final question?

    ii. Score Game: What score will the game track?

TALEBLAZER EDITOR OVERVIEW—5 MINUTES

Introduce designers to the game editor. Resist the temptation to show them too much in the editor, or they might disregard the written tutorial instructions completely and miss important information. Do remind them not to delete the agents already in the game. With your screen projected, walk through the following steps:

1. **Navigate to** *http://www.taleblazer.org.*

2. **Log in to your account** (or an account the designers will be using).
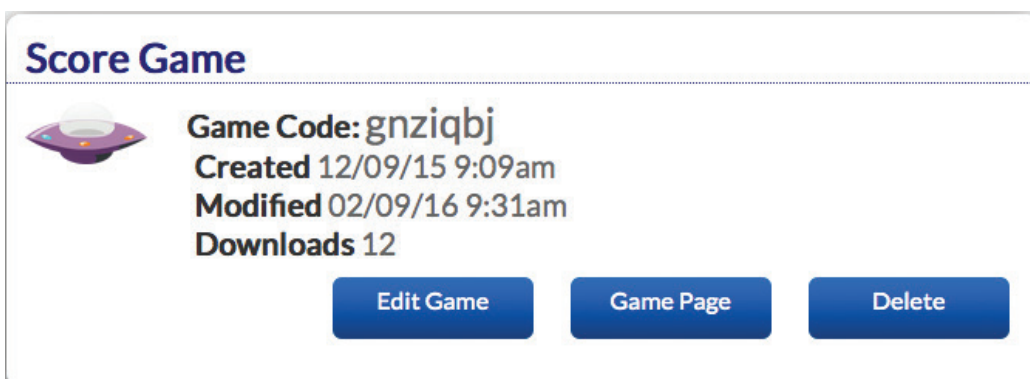

3. **Use the *Games* menu at the top of the screen to go to your *My Games* page.**
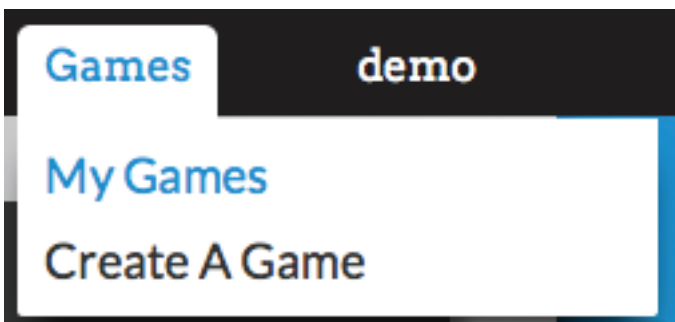
4. **Find the game you want to work on and click *Edit Game*.** If the game designers are going to need to copy a template game before they work on it, click on *Game Page*, then *Copy*.

5. The game will open on the *Map* tab. **Show the designers how the icons representing agents are on the map and can be moved around.**

6. **Switch to the *Agents* tab and show them how all the agents show up in the ribbon at the top of the screen.**

| Map | **Agents** | Player | World | Settings |
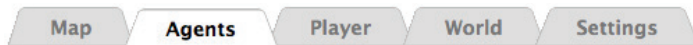
7. **Point out the block drawers in the center of the screen and the scripting area to the right.** Some templates will use blocks more than others, but designers should know their general purpose (to give the computer instructions).

8. **Tell designers they will be using the agents already in the game as a base for their own game, and remind them not to delete the agents in the template game.**

9. **Remind designers that TaleBlazer does not automatically save their work.** They will need to click the *Save Game* button often!

Save Game

BEGIN WORKING ON GAME IN SOFT-WARE—25 MINUTES

It's time to start working in the TaleBlazer editor! Each template has a customized tutorial to guide designers through the process of making their own games based on the template.

1. **Introduce the written tutorials and hand one out to each group.** Encourage game designers to work through them carefully. Making a game will be

MANAGING OUTDOOR TIME

Design teams will need to go outside periodically to explore the game area and test out their game. Have a plan in place to manage this. Consider having a list on the board that teams can add their name to when they need to go outdoors. Encourage teams on the list to make their own list of what they need to do outside, then work on other things until it is possible for them to go outside.

GAME TEMPLATE TUTORIALS

There are two versions of the written tutorial for each template game. The short version is less intimidating and should work well for most game designers. The long-form tutorials give more details about the game creation process. As the facilitator, you may want to go through the long-form tutorial to learn some of the nuances of the software. It may also be helpful to have a copy or two of the long tutorials available for designers who want more detail or for reference during steps that are more complicated.

easier, and ultimately faster, if they use the tutorials.

2. While the game designers are working, **be available for questions and check in with the teams about their progress.** Use the TaleBlazer Troubleshooting document to help you as questions arise.

3. **Remind teams to refer to their notes and worksheets as they build their games in the computer!** Things will certainly change over time, but using their notes will help them build their first draft quickly.

4. **Teams will need to go outside at some point to test their games and make sure their agents are in the correct places.** They may also want to take some pictures to put in their games. Manage the logistics of this as best you can (remember that there is often *something* they can do with their game while they wait for another team to be ready to go outside). Make sure before going outside they have:

    a. Saved the most recent version of their game in the online editor.

    b. Completely downloaded/updated their games to their mobile devices.

    c. Notebook/clipboard for taking notes on what to change in their game.

    d. Written a list of what they need to accomplish outside (optional).

3. GAME WORK

CONTINUE WORK ON GAMES—AT LEAST 60 MINUTES

Have design teams continue the work they started in the second hour (2. Game Planning). Go outside as necessary to test the games and agent locations. If teams "finish" their games early, encourage them to double check their work or add something to enhance their game.

1. As interest and time allow, **designers can use the built-in tutorials** in the TaleBlazer editor to help them add more elements to their games.
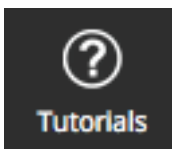
2. Tutorials that might be particularly useful include:

    a. Add a new agent to your game:
        Getting Started > Your First Game > 4. Add a Character or Item

    b. Make your agents show up in the correct order:
        How To > Make a Story

    c. Add actions to an agent, including the option to pick up or drop an agent:
        How To > Add Buttons

    d. Add a score that will be displayed on the **Player** tab in the app:
        How To > Add a Score

    e. Make agents that are invisible or show up only when the player is close to them:
        In Depth > About Bump Settings > 3. Agent Interactions

    f. Add passwords to agents:
        How To > Make an Indoor Game > 1. Password-Protected Agents and Glossary > Password

OBJECTIVES

Game designers will:

- Finish a draft of their games
- Give feedback to others and receive feedback about their games (optional)

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Team notes for games
- Computers
- Mobile devices
- Cords for transferring pictures from mobile to computer (optional)
- *Peer Review Guide* sheets (optional)
- Clipboards
- Pencils

(OPTIONAL, IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL TIME)
PEER REVIEW OF GAMES—20 MINUTES

Depending on your program goals, peer review might be a helpful activity to encourage game designers to think more critically about their games and ways to improve them. Peer review does take significant time, however, and requires that the games be at a playable point. If you decide to do a peer review session, you might want to choose the shorter presentation option during fourth hour (*4. Finishing Up*) to give teams more time to finish up their work and incorporate feedback from their peers.

1. Have one person from each design team serve as Observer, and have the other serve as Game Tester. **Match up the Game Testers with Observers from other design teams.** The Game Testers will play the games their paired Observer created.

2. **Make sure all Observers have their games downloaded and updated on a mobile device.** Once the devices are ready, have the Observers hand them over to their (new) Game Tester partners.

3. **Hand out Peer Review Observation forms to the Observers, along with clipboards and pencils.**

4. **Instruct the Observers that they are there to observe someone else playing their game—not to help them play the game.** The goal is to have a game that somebody could pick up and play unassisted. (If the Game Tester gets stuck to the point that they can't continue, the Observer may help them briefly, but take note of the confusion so that it can be improved later.) **Encourage Game Testers to "think aloud" as they play the game, to help the Observers know what is confusing, fun, surprising, etc.**

5. **Go outside to test the games!** Game Testers play the games, while Observers follow along, taking notes (and staying quiet!).

6. **When the game is over, the Observer can interview the Game Tester** using the questions at the end of the Peer Review sheet or any other questions they might like to know, based on their observations.

7. **Have design teams reunite and report back about their experiences**, focusing specifically on changes they might want to make to their game. Encourage teams to make notes of any intended changes.

8. **Optional**: If you have more than 20 minutes, you could pair up design teams and have them play each other's games, alternating roles as Observer and Game Tester. This gives everyone a chance to play a different game and receive direct feedback on their own game.

4. FINISHING UP

FINISHING TOUCHES ON GAMES—FLEXIBLE TIMING

Give game design teams time to revise and put finishing touches on their games. Depending on time available, you may want to encourage designers to focus on polishing what is already there rather than adding new elements. Make sure to test the games outside to ensure everything works as expected!

(OPTIONAL)
GAME SHOWCASE—30–40 MINUTES

Holding a game showcase is a fun and celebratory way to share the designers' work with others. Since TaleBlazer games are location-based, designers often enjoy having the chance to show their games to friends and family on-site. If you had other people visit as content experts, or if your colleagues are wondering why everyone has been running around with smart phones, invite them too! To make it extra celebratory, you could provide some snacks for visitors.

1. **Have each design team write the name of their game and their game code on the board.** This way others can play the game, even if the designers aren't in the room.
2. **Designers and visitors download and play games!**
3. **Have a computer set up** so that visitors can see the game editor, if desired.

(OPTIONAL)
GAME PRESENTATIONS—20–40 MINUTES

If you don't have as much time, or aren't able to invite outside guests, you could wrap up the session with short presentations from all the design teams about their games.

OBJECTIVES

Game designers will:

- Revise and put final touches on their games
- Share their games with others

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Computers
- Mobile devices
- Game notes

GAME SHOWCASE OPTION

If you have more time available, it can be nice to have design teams create posters about their games so that others can browse the games, even if they don't have a chance to play all the games. Include game codes on the posters and maybe have teams answer some of the focus questions outlined in the Game Presentations activity.

1. **Ask design teams to spend 5 minutes preparing a short presentation (3–5 minutes) about their game and the game design process.** Focus questions might include:

   a. Title, setting, and player goal of your game

   b. The most challenging part of creating your game

   c. The thing you are most proud of

   d. Something you learned

2. **Gather the group and have each team present what they prepared.** If time permits, allow others to comment or ask questions of the presenters.