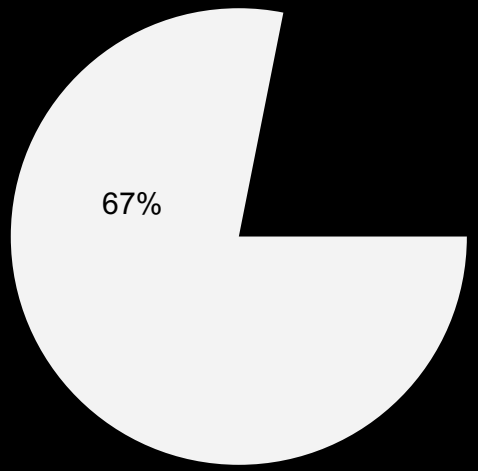
“We don’t math. But, we do play.” Teaching game design for Journalism

Juli James, Lecturer
University of North Texas

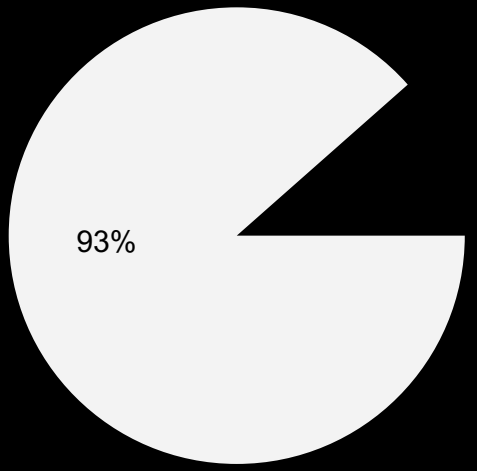
Command Center

Half of Americans
play mobile games.

Who Plays?



US Adults



US Teens

“The overwhelming majority of adults play games on their smartphones” - *Statista*

games are an effective way to communicate an idea.

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.” - *Ben Franklin*

make games, not code

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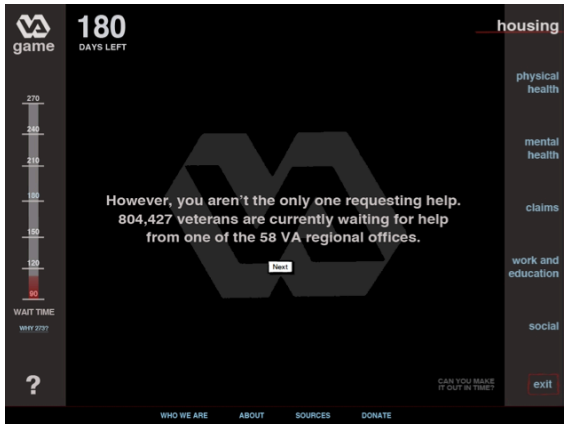
Easy

Engaging

Interactive

Mobile

engage our audience where they are



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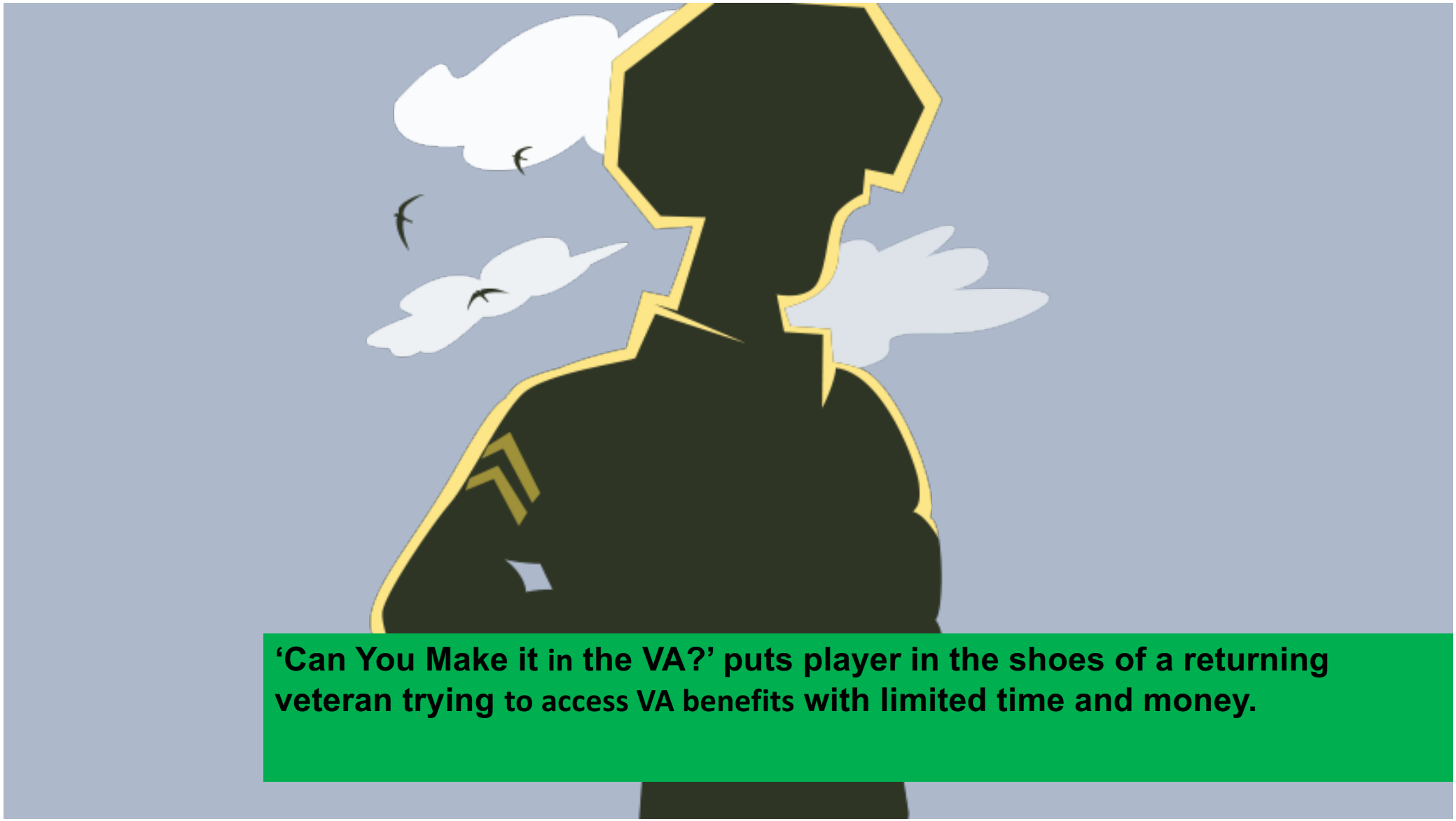
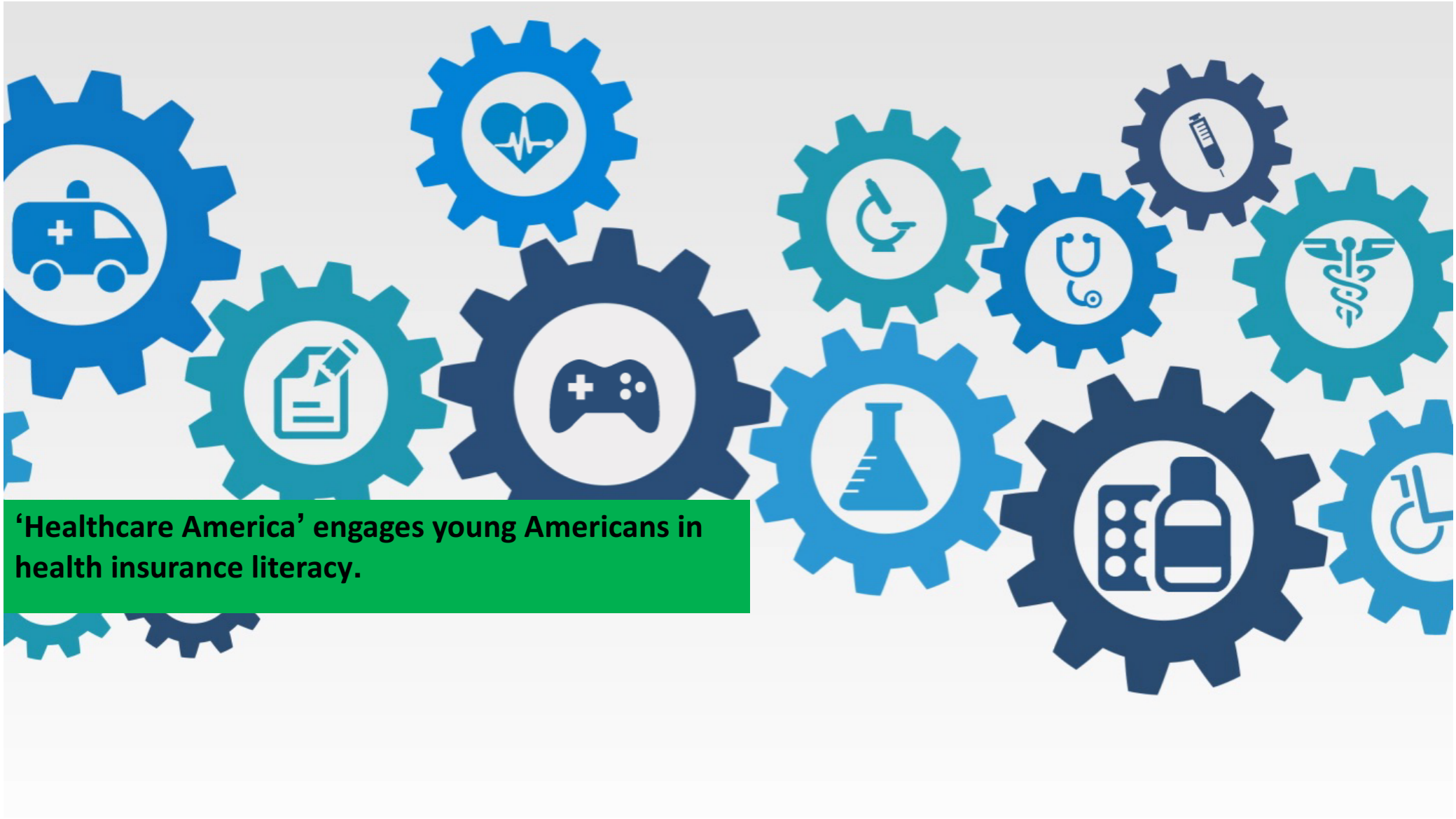
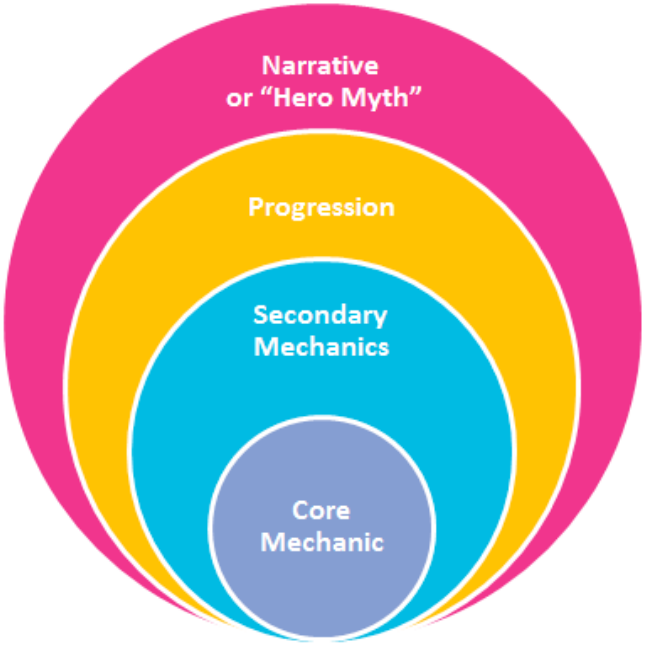


‘Can You Make it in the VA?’ puts player in the shoes of a returning veteran trying to access VA benefits with limited time and money.



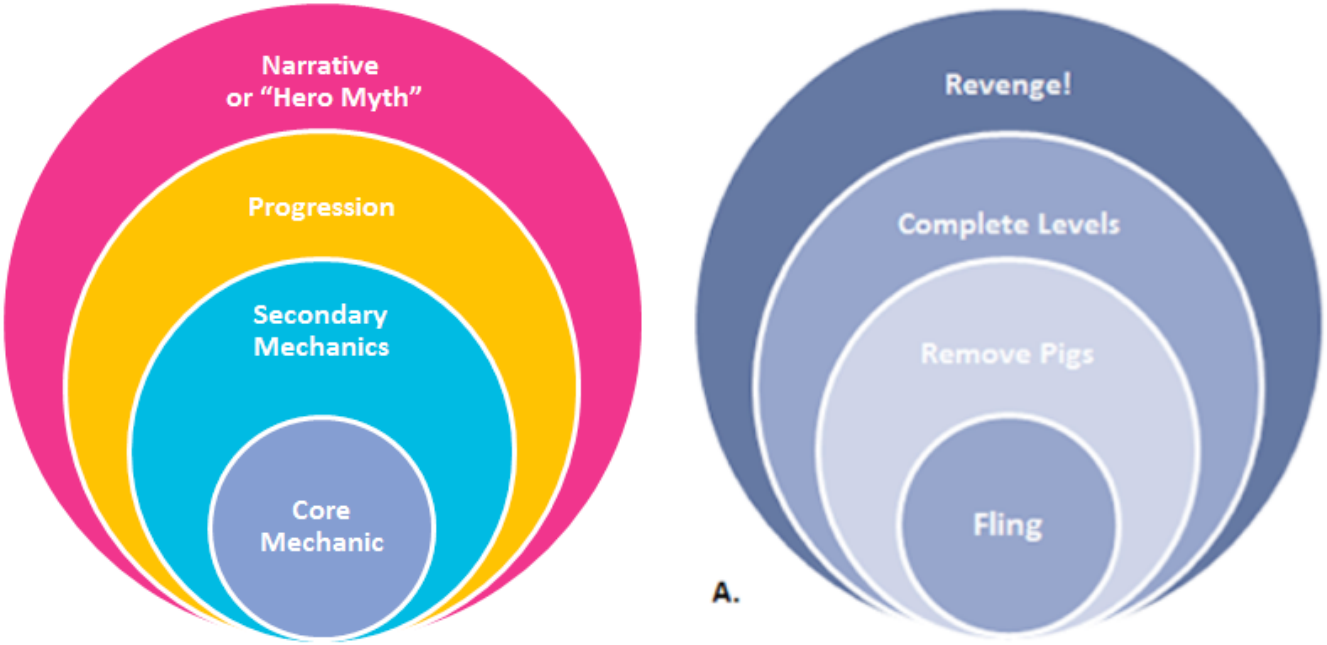
‘Healthcare America’ engages young Americans in health insurance literacy.

A Game Design Tool for Journalism

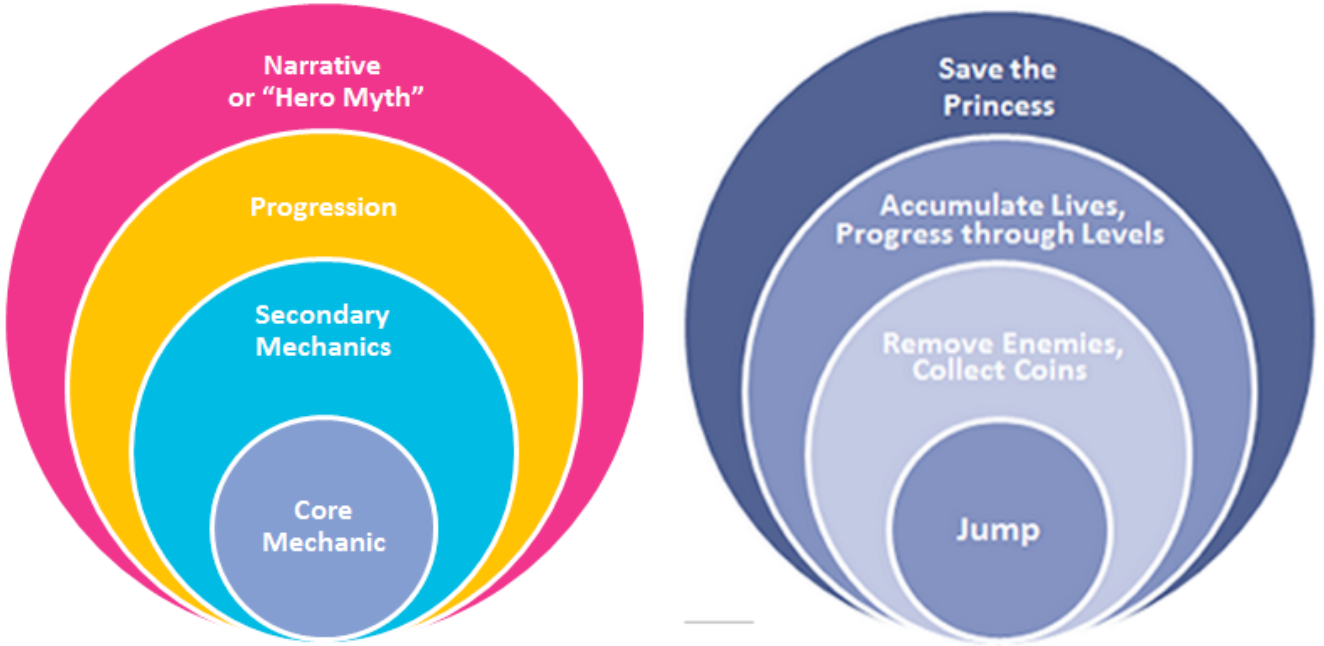


- Subject/Theme/Narrative:
  - What is the game about?
- Rules:
  - What happens? When? How?
- Mechanics:
  - What does the player do?
- Message/Impact:
  - What does it mean to the player, for the story, for the world?

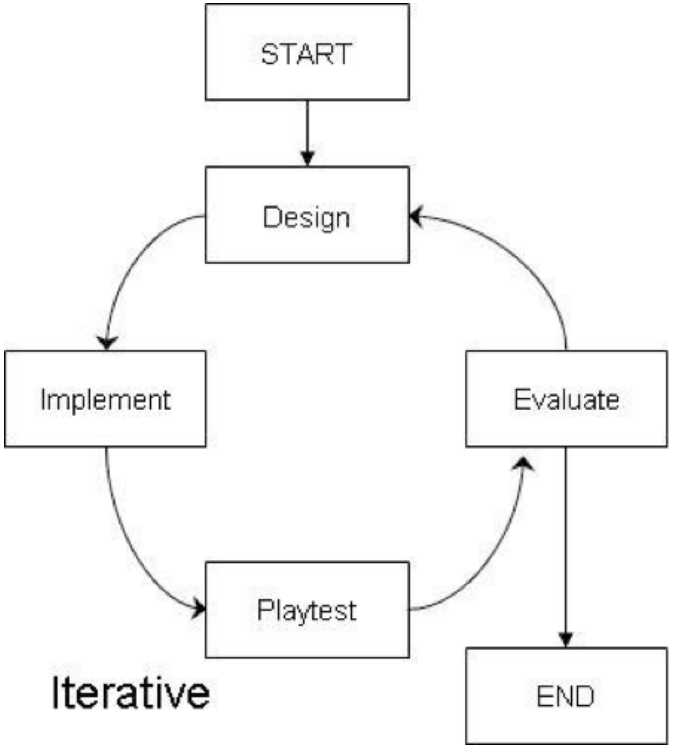
A Game Design Tool



A Game Design Tool



The Basic Game Design Cycle



Begin the cycle

1) Start: Imagine the World
2) Design: Create the World
3) Implement: Open the World
4) Playtest: Explore the World

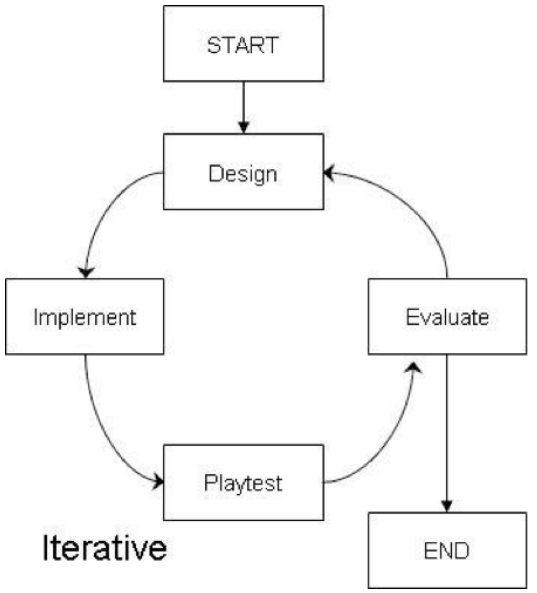
Repeat steps 2-4 as needed

Iterate as you go

- A design will “speak” to you through iterations.
- Pay attention to what it says!
- Is it getting the gameplay clear?
- Is it improving?
- What is working, and what isn’t?

Workshop Exercise

- Work in Groups
- Roll for Inspiration
- Use the Game Design Cycle
  - Design: Imagine the Game
  - Implement/Playtest: Create
  - Evaluate: Refine
  - Implement/Playtest: Replay



Play, Design, Share

Game Design Exercise Example

Elements:

Topic: Sustainability

Verbs: Run, Bluff

Themes: Ninjas, Aliens

Adjectives: Angry, Old

How do you take your idea and make it playable?
How is it a news game?

Activities/Assignments

- Game Design Challenge: Getting started with game design
- DOPESTRONG: The mechanic is the message activity
- Table top game prototype
- Digital game prototype

Visual Engines for Game Design

- Twine https://twinery.org/
- Story Builder https://app.playablemedia.org
- RenPy https://www.renpy.org/
- Scratch https://scratch.mit.edu/
- Flowlab http://flowlab.io/

Games/Resources

- Spent https://playspent.org
- Fiscal Ship https://fiscalship.org
- Explorable Explanations http://ncase.me/
- Games for Change http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/
- JoLT Newsgame Resource https://edspace.american.edu/jolt/