



LEARNING, EDUCATION & GAMES

100 GAMES TO USE IN THE
CLASSROOM & BEYOND

EDITED BY KAREN SCHRIER

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100 Games to Use in the Classroom & Beyond

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PLAY THE KNAVE

GINA BLOOM

Game: *Play the Knave*

Developer: ModLab, University of California, Davis

Year: 2019

Platform(s): Windows-based gaming PC with Microsoft Kinect v2 camera (Xbox One sensor) and adapter; developer offers an equipment loan program for the hardware.

Number of players: 1-4

Genre: Mixed reality; collaborative; digital; sandbox

Type of game: augmented reality; motion capture

Curricular connections: Common Core; English language arts; literature; media literacy; presentation skills; social studies; theater

Possible skills taught: close reading; collaboration; literacy; media literacy; presentation skills; creativity; critical thinking; perspective-taking

Audience: elementary school, middle school, high school, higher education

Length of time: 3-5 minutes for one play-through

Where to play: Home; class; afterschool

Cost: Free

URL: <http://playtheknave.org>

SUMMARY

Play the Knave is a mixed reality sandbox game primarily designed for the study of Shakespeare and drama but adaptable for the study of any subject matter. In its primary application, players use their bodies and voices to create a short, animated production of a scene from Shakespeare. Players use the game's menu system to select one from among hundreds of scenes from nineteen Shakespeare dramas (see Figures 1 and 2). Players then design their production, selecting avatars from different historical eras (e.g., ancient, Elizabethan, modern) or fantasy settings; a soundtrack; and a theater stage (see Figures 3, 4, and 5). The screen transforms to show the selected stage with the players' avatars on it, ready to perform. Lines from the Shakespeare script appear, karaoke-style, for players to read aloud; and a Kinect motion-sensing camera allows players to move their avatars around the virtual

stage using their own bodies. For instance, players can move an arm and the avatar mimics that action in what feels like real time (see Figure 6). The animated video that players create while they play is recorded and can be shared and studied after the gameplay session has concluded. In addition to Shakespeare scripts, *Play the Knave* includes a set of theater improvisation mini-games that can be used as warm up activities or played alone. Users can also write their own karaoke scripts to upload into the game. The script-writing program is hosted on the developer's website, but to play the full game, users will need to connect their Windows-operating PC computer to a Microsoft Kinect motion-sensor camera via an adapter. Microsoft recently discontinued manufacture of the Kinect and adapter, and the game's developers are researching other cameras. In the meantime, they offer an equipment loan program, which would also serve schools without resources to buy the hardware.



Figure 1. Screenshot from *Play the Knave*.



Figure 2. Screenshot from Play the Knave.



Figure 3. Screenshot from Play the Knave.

HOW TO USE THE GAME

The game adapts to the digital realm theater-based activities that many English teachers use to facilitate student comprehension of literature, particularly of Shakespearean drama (Banks, 2014; Edmiston & McKibben, 2011; Potter, 1999; Thompson & Turchi, 2016; Winston, 2015). Although the primary use is for middle, high school or college English classes—where Shakespeare is part of the curriculum—the game’s modular design accommodates a range of learning goals and student audiences. Here are some of the ways teachers have used the game:

1. **Elementary school enrichment.** *Play the Knave* introduced Shakespearean language to fifth graders. Students played a mini-game called “Punctuation Groove.” As lines from Shakespeare scrolled karaoke-style on screen, two student volunteers moved the avatars whenever they saw a punctuation mark. The rest of the class read the text out loud together, pacing themselves with the karaoke timer. The teacher then lead a discussion about how punctuation highlights certain key words, structures a passage, and conveys the character’s state of mind.
2. **High school Shakespeare curriculum.** A ninth grade teacher used *Play the Knave* as a scaffold, or support, for a summative assessment of student understanding of *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher lead an activity that highlighted the diction, rhythm and rhyme scheme in Romeo’s final monologue to explore how Romeo’s language communicates his state of mind. Is he hesitant or determined in his decision to commit suicide? Working in groups, students then completed worksheets to identify how key moments in the passage could be staged (through bodily movements and vocal intonation) to answer this question. Groups rehearsed the scene through the *Play the Knave* platform. After each playthrough, the teacher prompted students to articulate how their staging choices expressed Romeo’s state of mind. Once students had perfected their productions and were comfortable performing, they shared their scenes with the full class.
3. **Advanced study of Shakespeare.** I taught the game in a number of English classes at my university. In a lower-level course, I assigned groups of students to different interpretations of Falstaff’s character in *Henry IV, Part I*: clown, Vice character or representation of Carnival. The groups played the same game scene and defended their production decisions—choice of avatars, gestures, blocking, and voice intonation—explaining how these supported their interpretation of Falstaff (Bloom, 2015). In an upper-level course, I used the game to teach gender identity in *As You Like It*, a play in which a female character (who, in Shakespeare’s day, was played by a boy actor) dresses as male. Student scene performances reflected on the complications of assigning gender identities in the play and in the game, where the gender of the player may or may not match that of the avatar.



Figure 4. Screenshot from *Play the Knave*.



Figure 5. Screenshot from *Play the Knave*.



Figure 6. Members of the sixth-grade class at the Epstein School (Atlanta, GA) performing scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* via *Play the Knave*, 4 April 2017. Photo by Gina Bloom.

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

1. Teachers need clear goals for the activity. The game should be part of, not a supplement for, a full lesson plan.
2. Because of the low-cost animation system, the avatars can move in unpredictable, “glitchy” ways, making it difficult to play a scene with gravity and irritating students accustomed to high-end graphics. Teachers can use these glitches, however, to encourage students to think about their expectations for technology and to reflect on how digital media shape personal expression.
3. Students benefit if they can first play around with the platform to become familiar with its limitations and affordances and thereby avoid or exploit glitches during their gameplay.
4. Teachers should allow time after a play-through for students to offer feedback on gestures or vocal intonation players used. Students can then offer advice for the next group's play-

through.

5. Teachers short on time or with very shy students can allow students to rehearse without others watching and then record their virtual productions to share them later with the teacher and/or class. This would also be an option for distance-learning classes.

RELATED GAMES & MEDIA

The Bard Game (<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/12372/shakespeare-bard-game>)

Dance Central (<https://marketplace.xbox.com/en-US/Product/Dance-Central/66acd000-77fe-1000-9115-d802545607d3>)

Elsinore (<https://elsinore-game.com/>)

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