

PRISM PINES

A YOUTH GENDER EDUCATION GAME

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OVERVIEW



Duration:
October 2022 - December 2023

Collaborator:
OUT Maine

Website:
<https://lilibaker.itch.io/prism-pines>

Prism Pines is a 2D web-based role-playing game designed for children aged 9-13, developed in collaboration with OUT Maine, a local organization supporting LGBTQ+ youth.

In the game, players embark on an adventure as a customizable character who encounters five unique characters, each representing different gender identities. By listening to their stories, collecting clues, and solving a mystery, players gain insights into the complexities of gender identity.

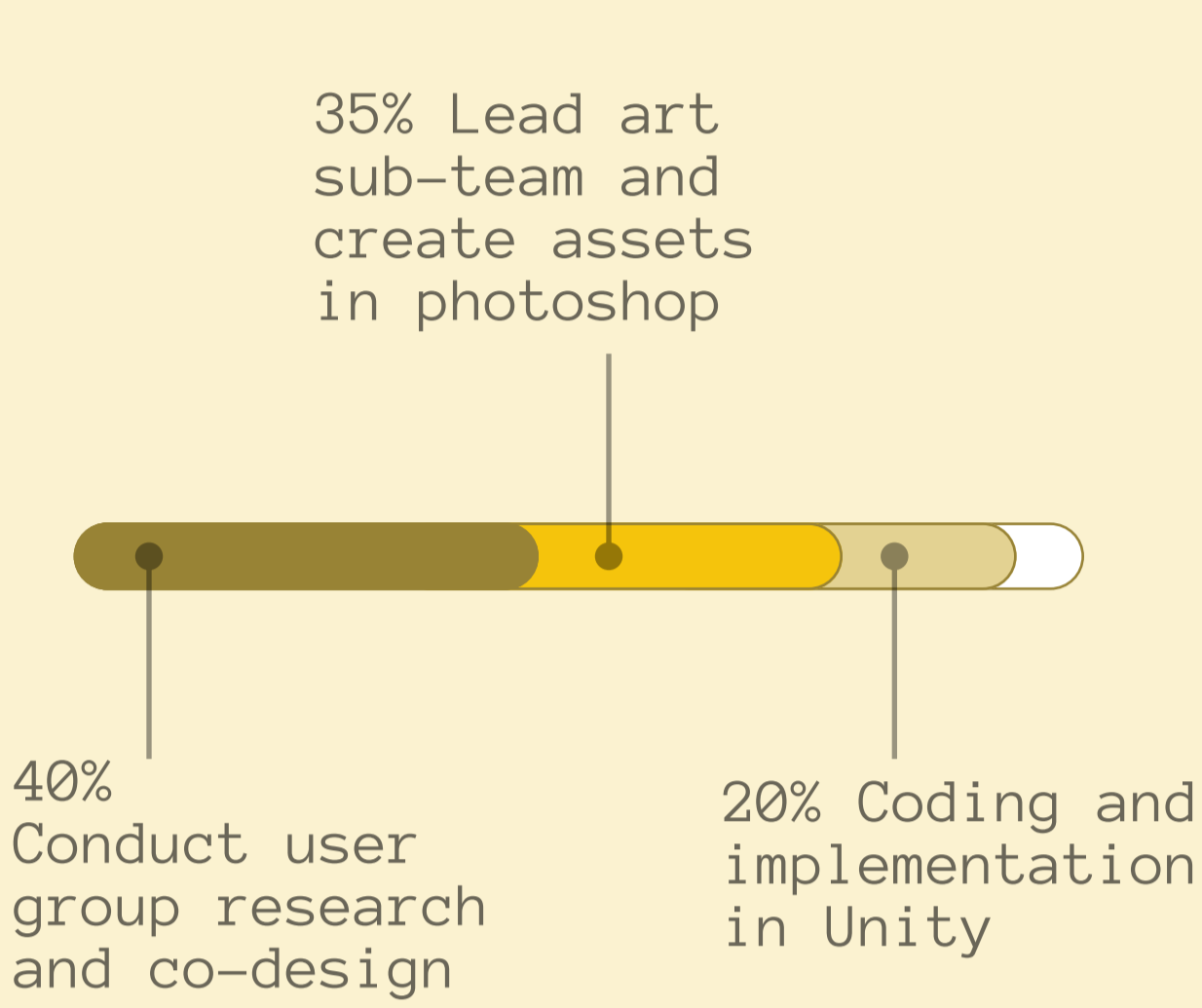
BACKGROUND

Discussing gender identity with children can be challenging, especially in areas where comprehensive gender education is lacking. Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of inclusive games that address gender identity, leaving many LGBTQ+ youth feeling underrepresented.

As part of a sub-team within Public Interest in Technology (PiNT) at Olin College, we partnered with OUT Maine to create **Prism Pines**, a game designed to help players explore various gender identities and gain a deeper understanding of their own, regardless of where they are in their journey.

This project spanned four semesters, with a team size fluctuating between 3 and 8 members.

MY CONTRIBUTION



Research & Art Sub-team Lead

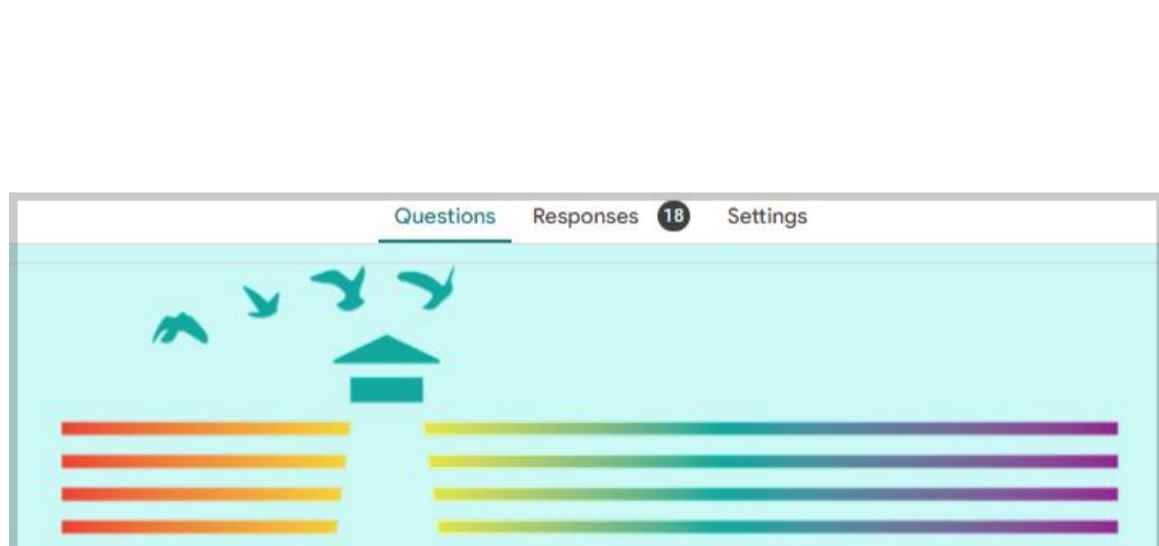
During the research phase, I led the team in analyzing educational games and defining our product's goals based on feedback from OUT Maine's LGBTQ+ student group. I facilitated the development of an engaging and educational game plot with inclusive character interactions, addressing ethical concerns such as respectful representation of diverse gender identities.

As Art lead and coding contributor, I designed pixel characters and game assets in Photoshop for seamless Unity integration. I also developed the initial prototype, enabling character navigation in a pixelated world, and gathered professional feedback for iteration.

DESIGN PROCESS

PHASE 1: USER RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS

- Researching existing games focused on gender education and brainstorming ideas that would best suit the goals of our project.
- Conducting a survey to gauge interest among members of OUT Maine. The response revealed a strong preference for a **role-playing game (RPG) format**, which led us to develop the initial storyboard.
- Conducting **10 in-depth interviews** with individuals who shared their childhood experiences of gender exploration. These real stories helped us shape the game's non-playable characters (NPCs), ensuring authenticity in their representation.

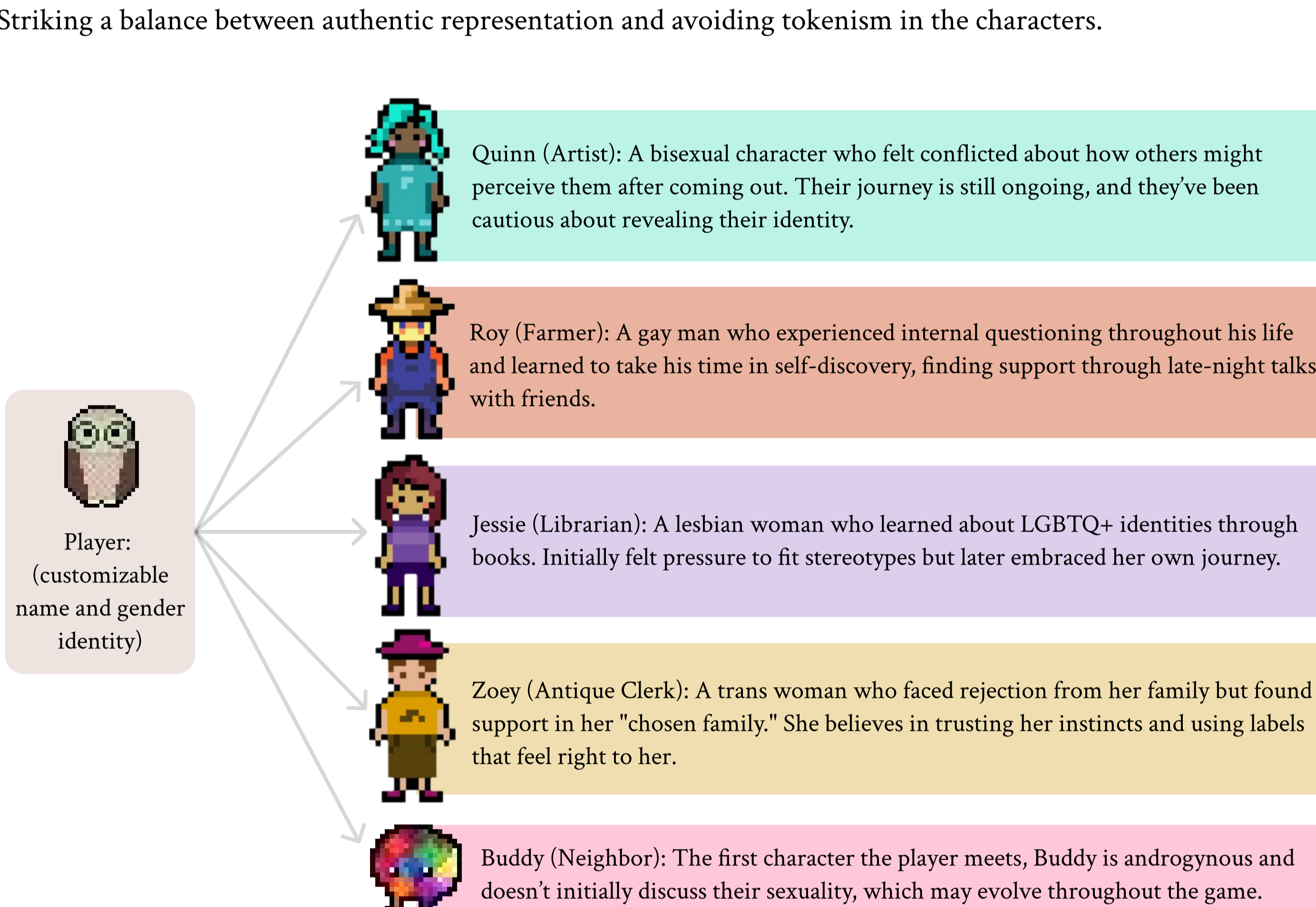


Survey to around 20 OUT Maine members to gauge interest

PHASE 2: PERSONA DEVELOPMENT AND STORYBOARDING

Drawing from real stories gathered through interviews, we designed five NPCs that represent a range of diverse identities. This process required careful consideration as we navigated several key challenges, including:

- Incorporating shared LGBTQ+ experiences without relying on stereotypes.
- Introducing labels in an educational way, without pressuring players to fit into specific categories.
- Striking a balance between authentic representation and avoiding tokenism in the characters.



Players interact with five unique NPCs, each embodying different personas. These characters are crafted from real-life stories shared through interviews with individuals from the corresponding gender identity groups.

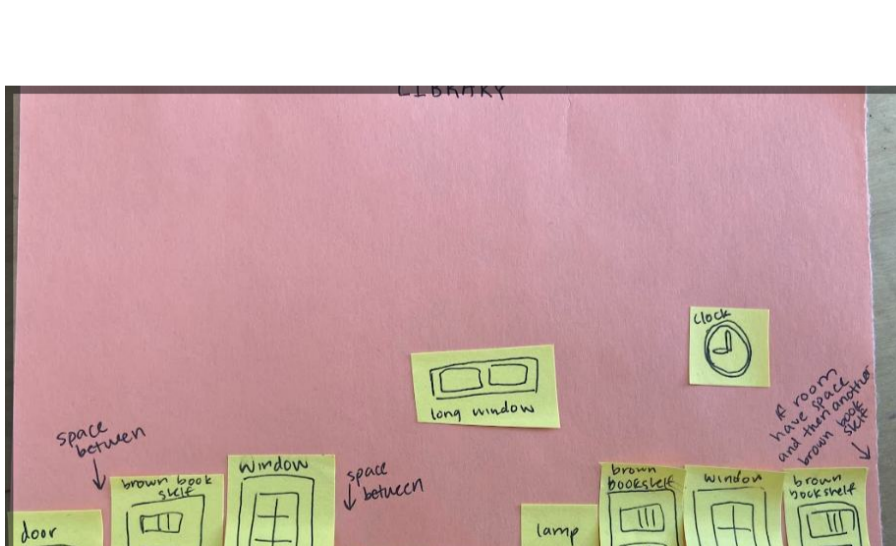
With the characters developed, we began brainstorming the story's plot. We role-played the NPCs, crafting dialogue that conveyed coming-out stories, advice, and words of encouragement. Through discussion, the overarching story arc emerged: on the surface, it's an adventure where the player solves a mystery, but at its core, it's about acceptance and respect for the uniqueness of one's gender identity and that of others. The player's journey of "moving into a new town -Prism Pines"symbolizes embracing a new identity and forming connections within the LGBTQ+ community.



Role Playing



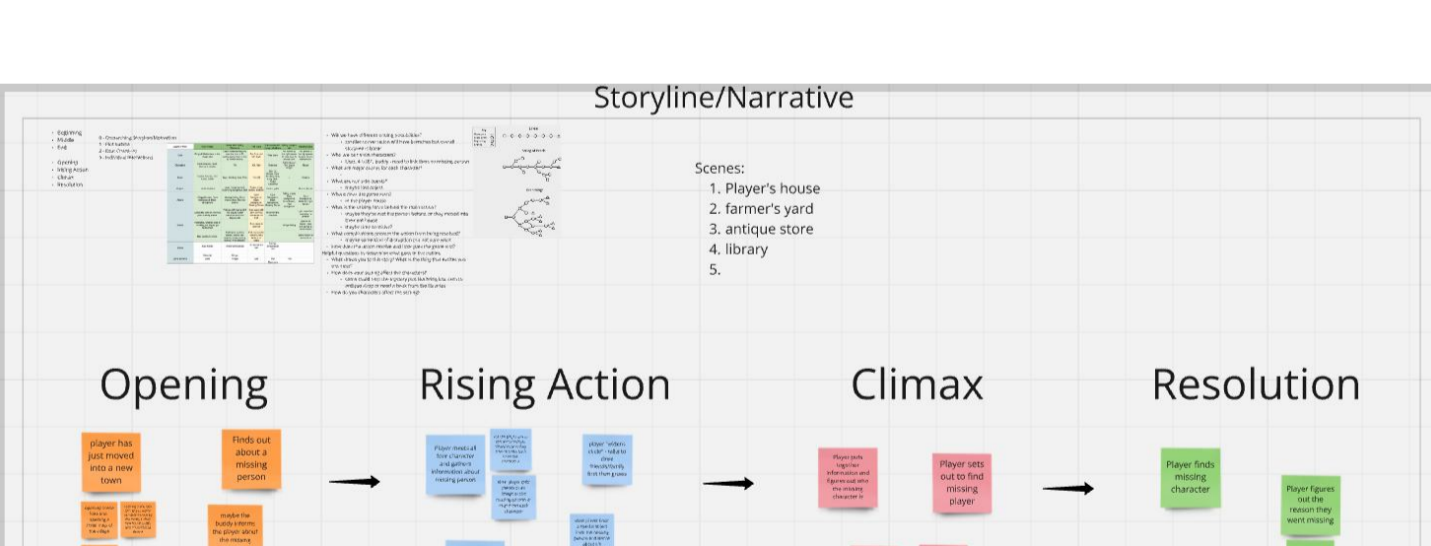
Dialogue Crafting



Scene Setting



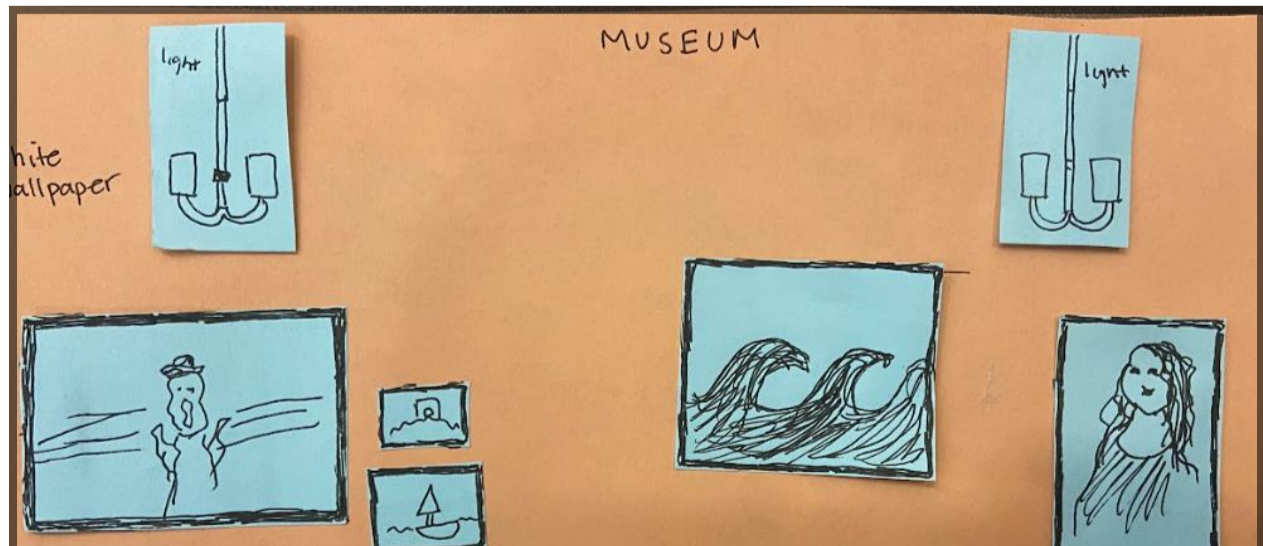
Clues Creating



Overarching Plot Designing

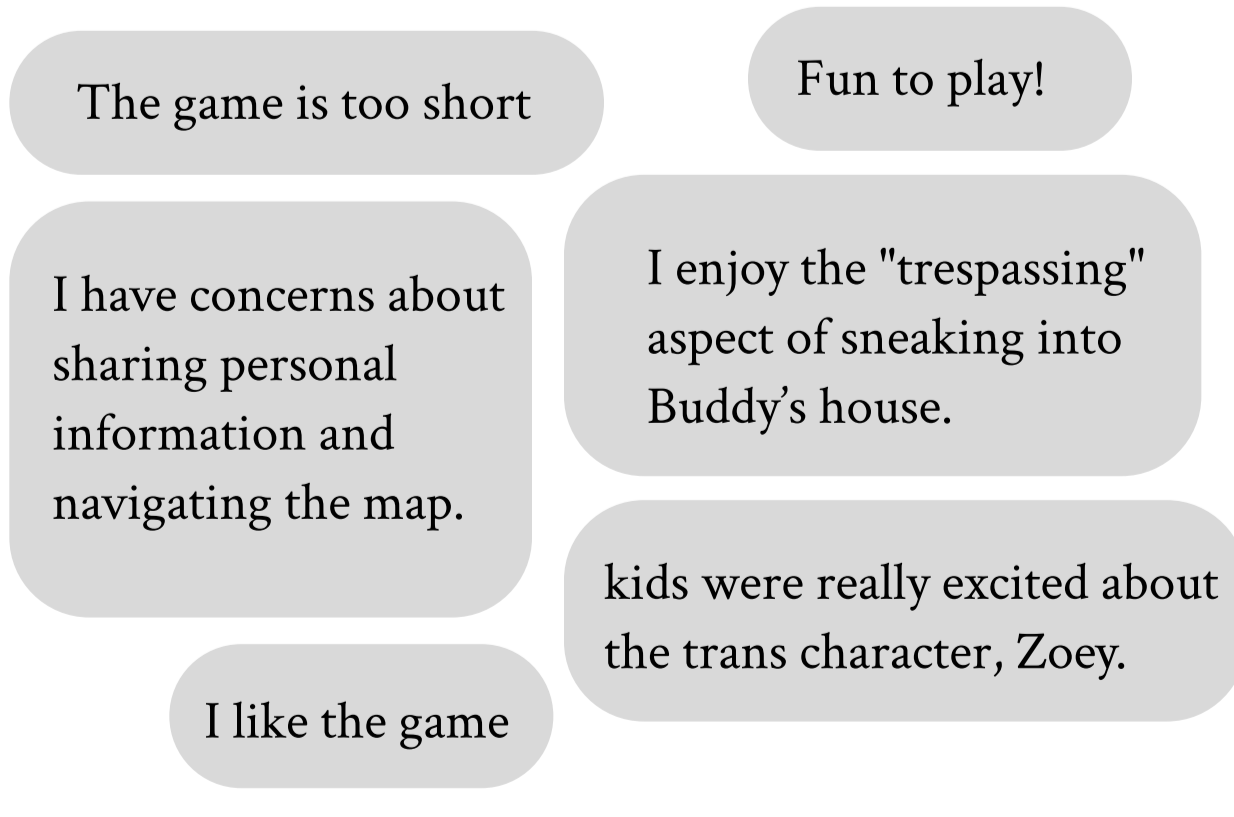
PHASE 3: PLAYTESTING

Building on our storyboarding concepts, we developed seven unique scenes in Unity using C#. In each scene, the player interacts with a different persona, while navigating through the new neighborhood using an interactive map.



Coding storyboard ideas into scenes in Unity

As we developed the game, we invited members from the OUT Maine community to playtest early versions. Their feedback helped refine the plot, flow, visuals, dialogues, and overall experience.



Example feedback from the first playtest with five students (age 9-13) and one teacher

Final MVP game published on itch.io

IMPACT

Our game received highly positive feedback from OUT Maine members and our liaison, though there's still much work to be done in developing a more complete version. A teacher who collaborated with noted that "kids were excited to see characters who shared their gender identities." Many children also showed great enthusiasm for the game design process, offering creative ideas for this LGBTQ+ adventure story, and even expressing interest in designing their own games.

While the support from current players has been encouraging, we recognize this as just the beginning. Our goal is to bridge the gap in gender education games and ensure that marginalized groups are represented in games and other media. By doing so, we hope to empower kids to learn about identity and respect through play, fostering inclusivity and understanding.