

## Lens #2: The Lens of Essential Experience

To use this lens, you stop thinking about your game and start thinking about the experience of the player. ask yourself these questions:

- What experience do I want the player to have?

The experience of imagining what's possible.

- What is essential to that experience?
  - Mystery. When you imagine something (the future, a world, a person), you don't know everything about it. The gaps are filled by your imagination. However, we can't possibly imagine every aspect of something into definition. Even once we've imagined something, mystery remains. Often, we're left with more questions than answers.
  - Meditation. When we imagine something, we're transported somewhere else for a time. We forget about our surroundings, lose track of time, and enter into a daydreamy state. We spend time in this state. This is often a calm state, but can also be a dizzying spiral of anxious thoughts.
  - Repetition. We often imagine the same thing over and over again. Sometimes we imagine it differently, depending on what we've learned or the emotional state we're currently in.
  - Surprise. How we imagine something often surprises us. Similarly, how other people imagine the same thing is often very different, and so surprises us.
  - Expression. How we imagine something is an expression of ourselves (beliefs, emotions, struggles, pasts, personalities, goals).
  - Emotion. Similarly, just as what is imagined is colored by emotion, so too does imagining alter our emotions. Optimistic imagination creates excitement, wonder, compassion. Pessimistic imagination creates anxiety, defeat.
- How can my game capture that essence?
  - Players imagine things by making choices to decide the story content.
    - Characters
      - how they interpret the past and the present.
      - how they themselves imagine people, worlds, and futures.

- how they express themselves. By choosing how a character expresses themselves, the player is also imagining the context in which the character expresses themselves.
- Worlds
- Futures
- Players engage in imagination through the perspective of characters.
  - By removing the act of imagining from the player's own perspective, the game draws attention to the magic of imagining. Because imagining is expressive, what's imagined from one individual's perspective is unique from what's imagined from another's.
    - Characters face much uncertainty.
  - The player would engage in imagination through the unique perspectives of multiple characters, redoubling this effect.
    - The story involves multiple characters that share things to imagine.
- Players re-imagine things in different ways.
  - The story has characters repeatedly imagining the same things in different narrative contexts.
  - Scenes can be replayed. When scenes are replayed, they draw attention to the subsequence of the imagination that occurs.
    - through a meta-narrative.
    - by offering new ways for the PC to imagine something.
    - by altering elements of the story that follow a re-imagining.
- What PCs and NPCs imagine would surprise the player.
  - Some acts of imagination by the characters are not decided by the player.
  - When choosing how a character imagines something, the player does not necessarily choose specifically what specifically the character imagines. More imagination, initially hidden from the player, follows their choice.

- Because the act of imagining colors one's emotions, characters would act differently depending on how they imagine something.
  - Any branching paths that exist in the narrative are reflective of how a character imagines something.
- The things players and characters imagine would never be fully defined. Imagining would fill in the gaps, but mystery would always remain.
  - The things the characters imagine are ultimately unknowable in their entirety.
- Large gaps in continuity between scenes ask the player to imagine what came between them.
- A meta-narrative frames the story as something imagined.