

How I Got My Mom to Play Through Plants vs. Zombies

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PopCap Games
March 9, 2012**

About me

I'm George Fan

**I like my steak well-done and my
Magic cards rare**

PLANTS vs. ZOMBIES™





My Mom



My Mom

Non-gamer



My Mom

Non-gamer
Favorite food: lettuce



My Mom

Non-gamer

Favorite food: lettuce

Zombies destroyed: 4395



**My
Non-g
Favorite fo
Zombies de**

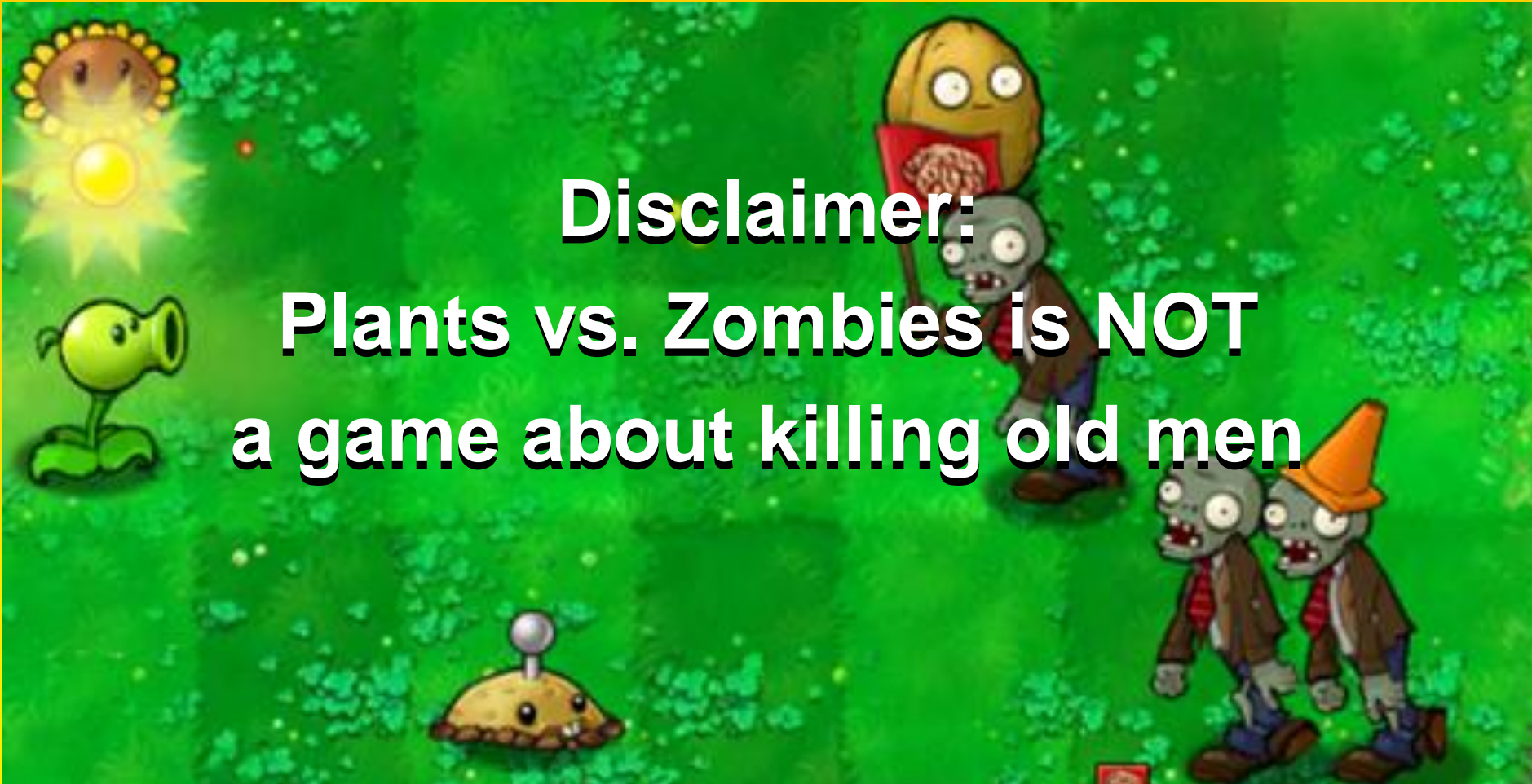






“Why are you killing old men?”

Disclaimer:
Plants vs. Zombies is NOT
a game about killing old men





?



Tutorial
Strategy
Pacing
Game Balance
Consistent Rewards
Unit Design

=





Tutorial
Strategy
Pacing
Game Balance
Consistent Rewards
Unit Design

=



I'm going to talk about tutorials

Tutorials are important!



7975

125

100

325

150

125

300

17,830

Survival: Endless - 35 flags completed



**The final boss
in your game
just got worked.**

By me.

Booyah!*

***not an actual quote from my mom**

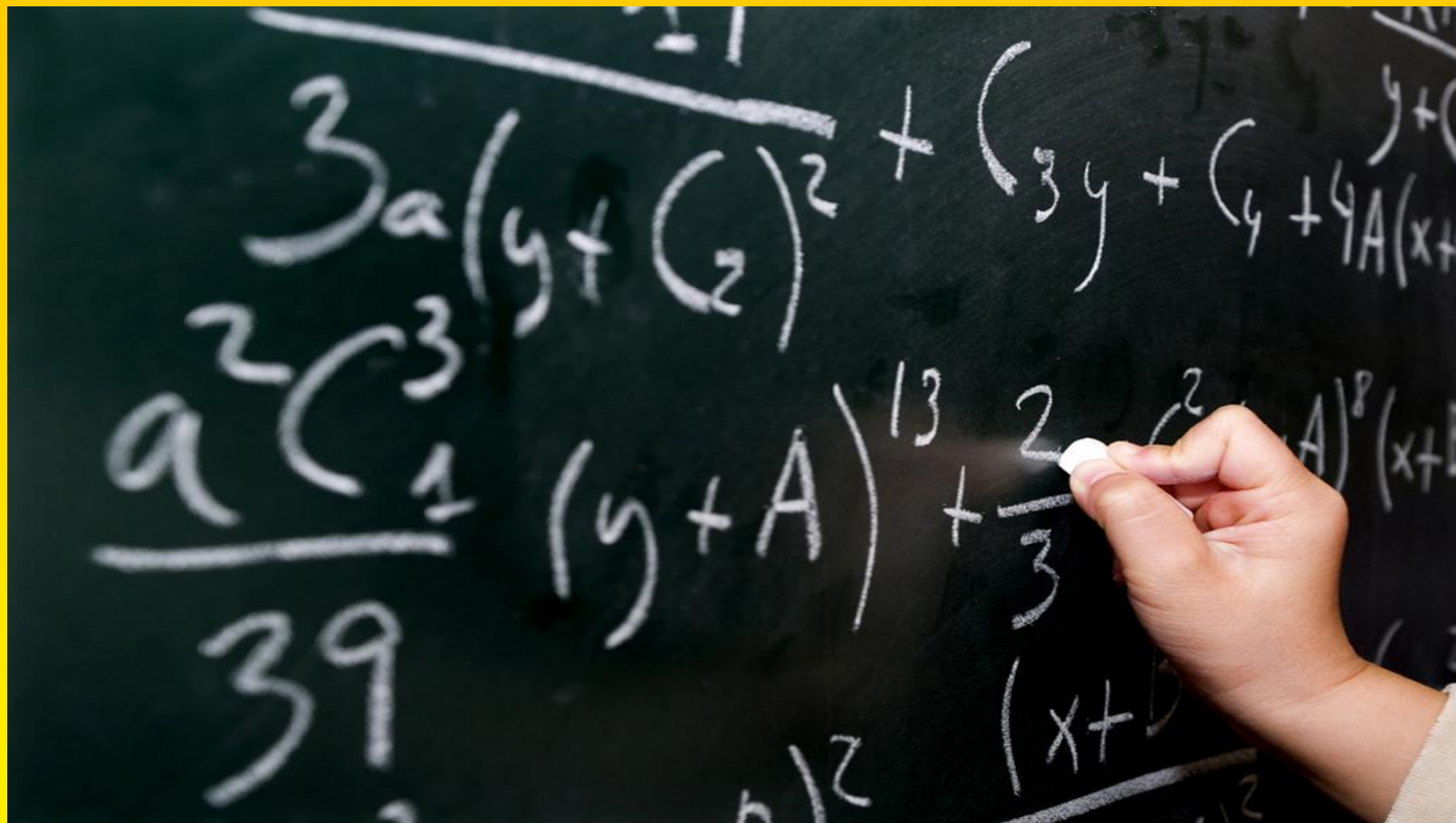
PLANTS vs. ZOMBIES™



10 tips for making your tutorials better

AKA a Tutorial on Tutorials

**1. Blend the tutorial
into the game**



Learning is hard

MAIN MENU

NEW GAME

TUTORIAL

OPTIONS



MAIN MENU

NEW GAME

KILL MYSELF

OPTIONS

**Reality: Learning in
games is actually fun**



This isn't the tutorial you're looking for

TUTORIAL

Pan Camera



Rotate Camera



Zoom In / Out



NAVIGATION

1. Swipe with one finger to pan
2. Swipe with two fingers to rotate the camera view
3. Pinch your fingers to zoom in and out

SQUARESOFT

Westpark G-1, 8351-154 Ave. N.E.
Redmond, WA. 98052

For Square Soft Customer Service/Game Counseling Call
(206)861-0303
Automated 24 Hours
Live Service Mon-Fri, 8 am to 5 pm PST

PRINTED IN USA

SECRET of EVERMORE™



SQUARESOFT

INSTRUCTION BOOKLET



SUPER MINTENDO
SUPER MINTENDO



is just a 7 hour tutorial for



“Tutorial? That game had a tutorial?”



The Tutorial Chameleon

**Now you
see me...**



**Now you
don't!**



**2. Better to have the player
“do” than “read”**



Let the player try stuff out in a safe environment



Zombies walk to the left in a straight line
Peas shoot to the right in a straight line

Level 1-6

LEVEL PROGRESS



Let the player try stuff out in a safe environment

The shovel “tutorial”





Did you know you could use your shovel to dig up plants to replace with others?



Attempt #1-Get rid of weeds!





= gets rid of harmful things?



Attempt #2 – remove the wall-nuts!

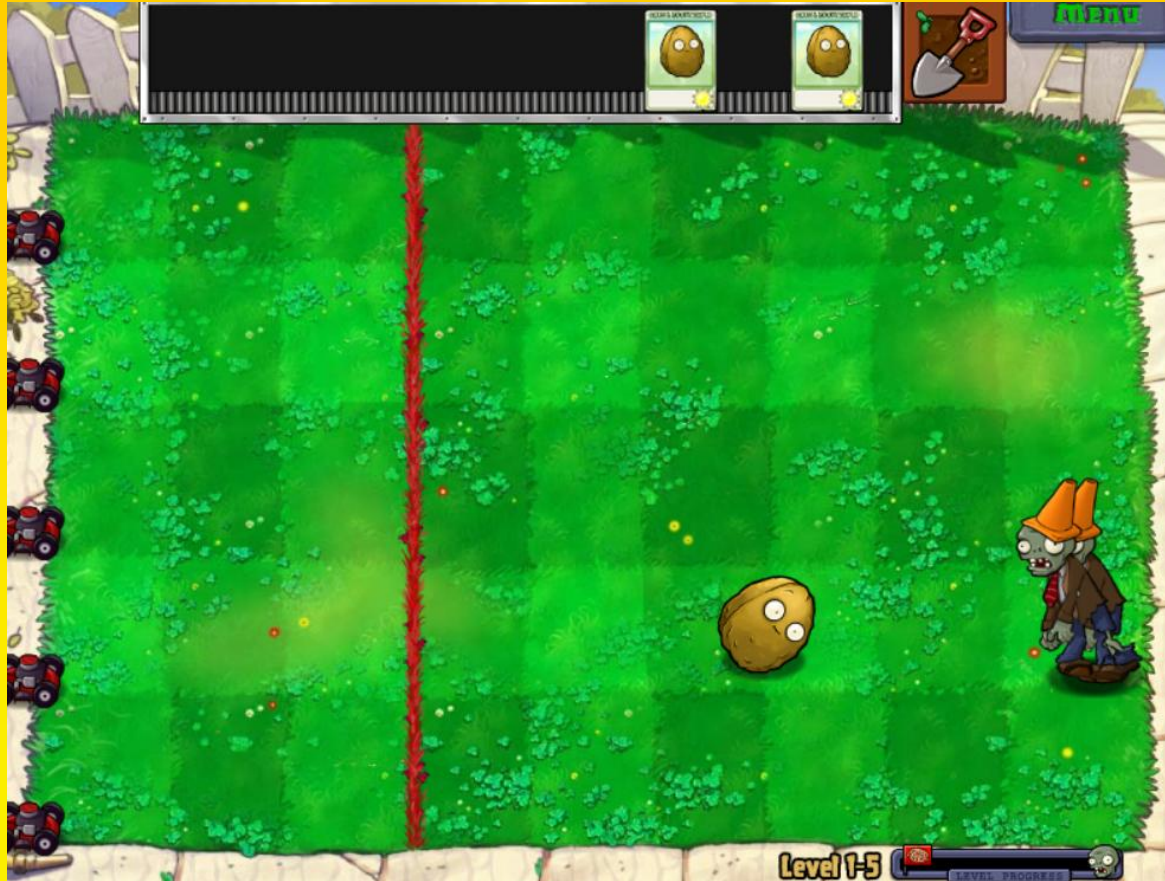




Attempt #3 – Find the squirrels!



Attempt #4 – Clear the lawn (and go bowling)



Attempt #4 – Clear the lawn (and go bowling)



3. Spread out the teaching of game mechanics

**You don't have to teach
everything right off the bat**

MAIN MENU

YOU GOT THE SHOVEL!



SHOVEL

Lets you dig up a plant
to make room for
another plant

NEXT LEVEL!





Our prices are unbelievable!!!

CRAZY DAVE'S TWIDDY DINKIES



\$750



\$1000



\$200



\$5000



\$5000

NEXT LEVEL



\$10

MAIN MENU

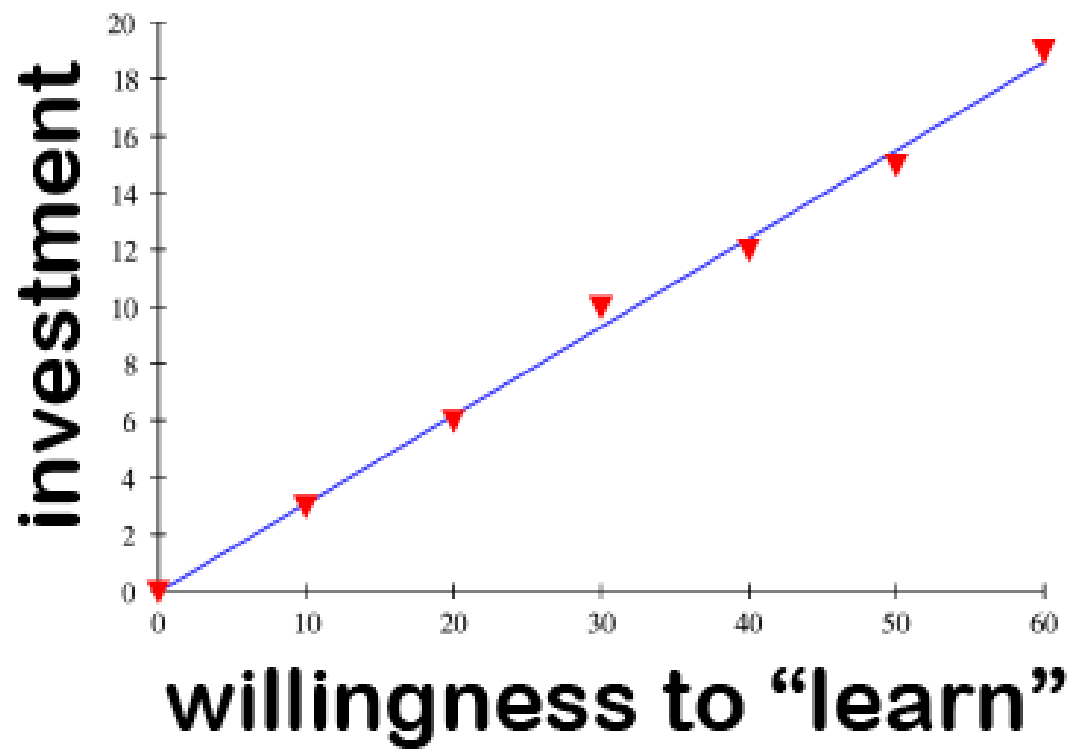
YOU FOUND A WATERING CAN!



WATERING CAN

Now you can play
Zen Garden Mode!

CONTINUE



Context is important

**Let players play with their
toys before introducing new
ones**



In-game shops can teach!

**4. Just get the player to do it
once**



Menu



150



100

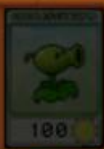


Click on a seed packet to pick it up!

Menu



150



100



Click on a seed packet to pick it up!

Menu



150



100



Click on the grass to plant your seed!

Menu



150



100



Click on the grass to plant your seed!

Menu



50



100



Nicely done!

Sunflower dilemma



**“My wife doesn’t understand
sunflowers”**

**“seems better to get your defenses in
place before investing in something
frivolous like extra sun”**

**-feedback from PopCap
employees**





**“I didn’t have a clue about
the value of sunflowers”**

**“I was just sitting there waiting for
enough sun to develop while the
zombies took my yard”**

**-feedback from PopCap
employees**

How did we fix this?

**Suggestion 1: make it more
like traditional TD**

Suggestion 2:
Add tutorial messages

Suggestion 3:
Start with a column of
sunflowers

Suggestion 4:
Reserve spots for
sunflowers

What did we end up doing?

200



MENU

LEVEL 1-2



100



100





25



MENU

LEVEL 1-4



Menu



50



100



50



Thank you, Fisher Price



Menu



50



100



50



Menu



50



100



50



150



50





50



100



50



150



50



25



175



Menu



**Had to rebalance the entire
game...**



25

25 minerals for an SCV? Madness!

5. Use Fewer Words

**Eight words on ~~the~~ screen
at any given time**

1 sentence vs. 4 sentences





MENU

Hi, welcome to Plants vs. Zombies!
Please click on the seed packet
in the upper left corner by using
your left mouse button!
Seed packets turn into plants when
you place them on the grass!
Have fun!





MENU

Hi, welcome to Plants vs. Zombies!
Please click on the seed packet
in the upper left corner by using
your left mouse button!
Seed packets turn into plants when
you place them on the grass!
Have fun!

YOU GOT A NEW PLANT!



SUNFLOWER

Gives you additional sun

NEXT LEVEL!



CHERRY BOMB

Blows up all zombies in an
area



FUME-SHROOM

Shoots fumes that can pass
through screen doors





FUME-SHROOM

Shoots fumes that can pass
through screen doors



Think of it as...

“The Sophisticated Caveman”



“The Sophisticated Caveman”



**Shoots peas
at the
enemy**



**Blows up all
zombies in an
area**



**You got the
shovel!**

**“It was really bad and
that made me really sad”**

- George Fan, GDC 2011



**It was really bad
and that made
me really sad**

**Break your dialog up into
small bits**



You know, they used to call
me "Fog Man"

[click to continue](#)



'cause I would hang out in the
fog and **JUMP OUT AT**
PEOPLE!

click to continue



Ah, those were the days.

click to continue

THANKS LINK, YOU'RE
THE HERO OF HYRULE.



FINALLY,
PEACE RETURNS TO HYRULE.
THIS ENDS THE STORY.



Greetings, neighbor!

click to continue







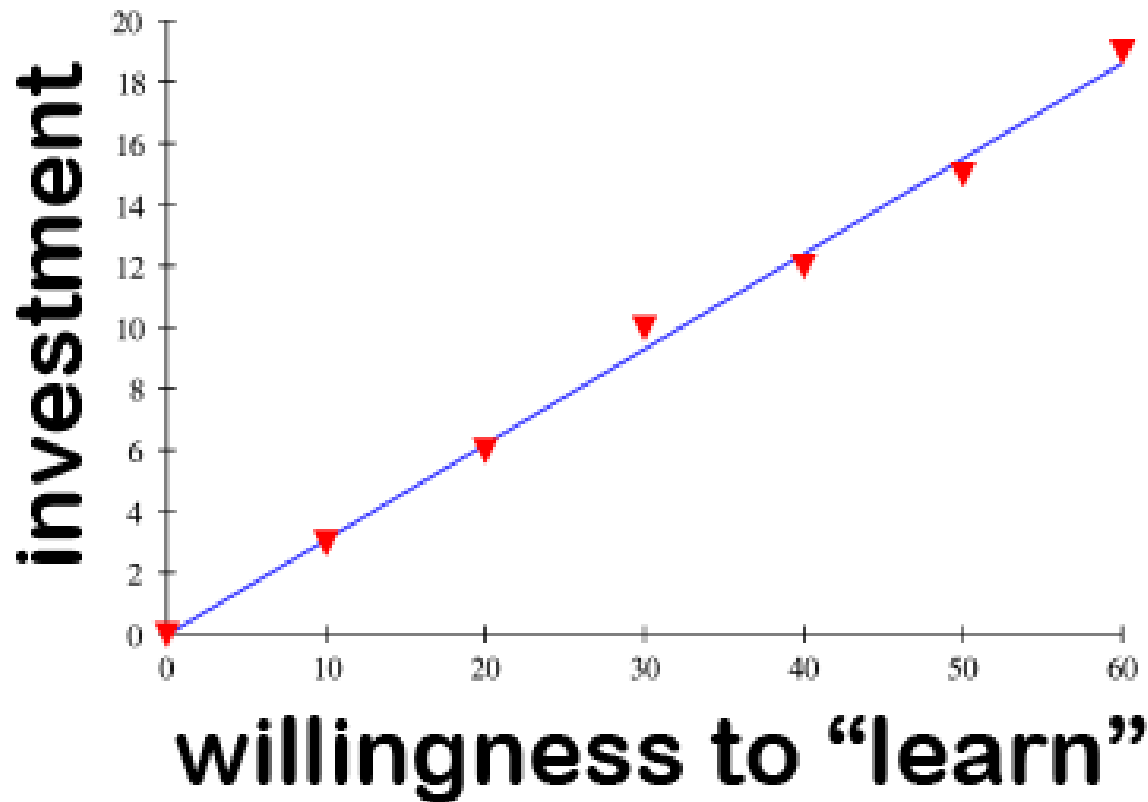
The name's Crazy Dave.

click to continue




Click on a seed packet to pick it up!

Level 1-1



**6. Use unobtrusive
messaging if possible**

Don't break flow

The background of the image is a screenshot from the game StarCraft II. It shows a Protoss base in the upper half, with various units like Pylons and Stargates. In the lower half, a massive swarm of Zerglings is rushing towards the Protoss structures. A semi-transparent gray dialog box is centered on the screen, containing text and two buttons. The text is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The buttons are also gray with black text.

**I know you're in
the middle of fending
off a zerg rush,
but please press 'OK'**

Cancel

OK

Examples of passive messaging



Examples of passive messaging



Examples of passive messaging



7. Use Adaptive Messaging



One of your peashooters died!
Try planting them further to the left!

Level 1-4

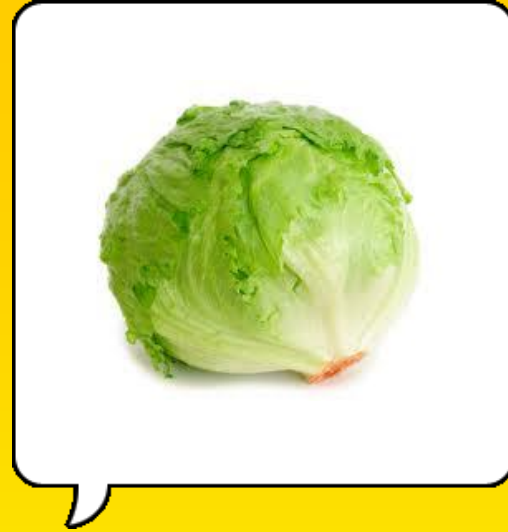
Watch someone play your game







“Duh! Of course you’re supposed to plant them on the left!”





“Do I look like a noob to you?!”



“DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHO I AM?!”





Leave room for exploration



Tank 1-3



Tank 1-3



Warning! Your carnivore has died!



Hint: Carnivores won't eat fish food!



Try feeding small guppies to your carnivores!

8. Don't create noise

50



ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED

You are reading this instead of what
you are supposed to be reading



One of your peashooters died!
Try planting them further to the left!

Level 1-4



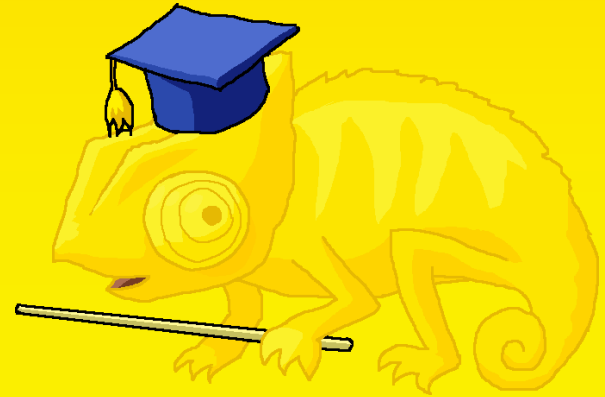
**blah blah blah
wolf wolf wolf**

Don't cry wolf



Don't cry, wolf

9. Use visuals to teach



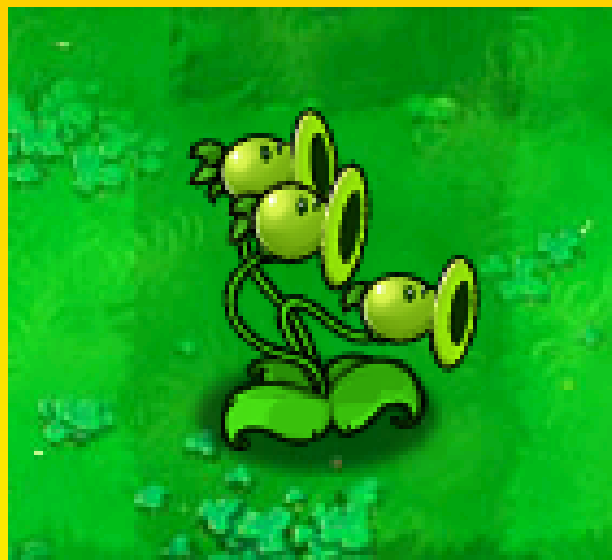
**Make your game intuitive
and it will be easier to learn**

**Rule #1: You should be
able to look at a
plant/zombie and know what
it does instantly**

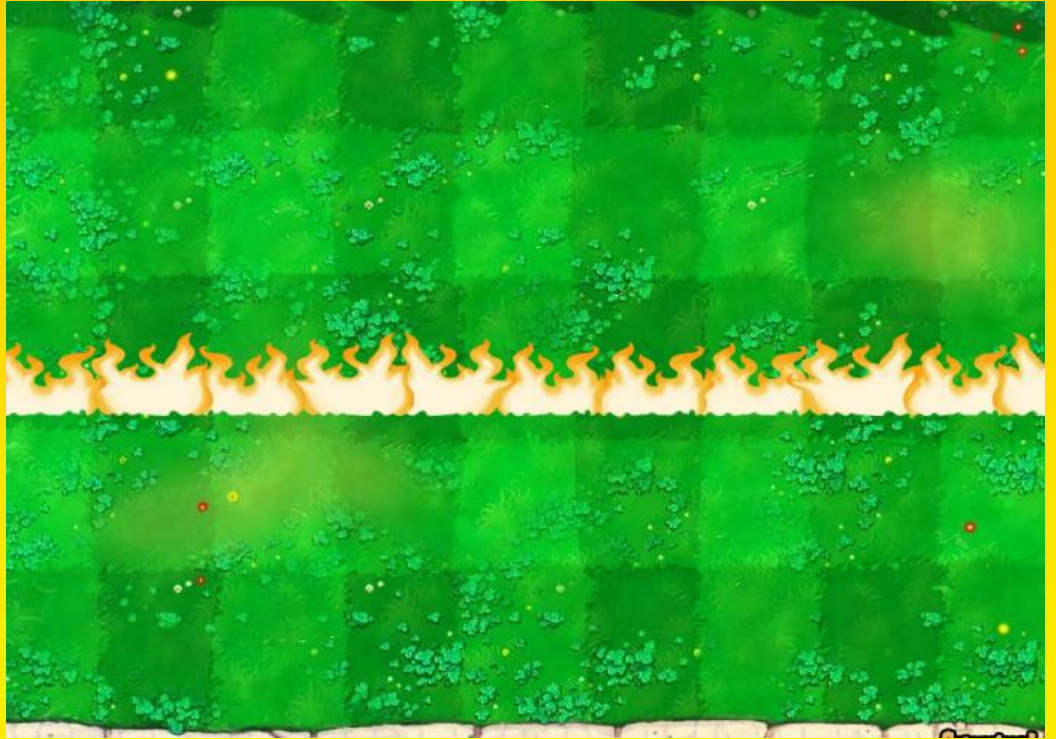








**Rule #2: If you can't
achieve rule #1, then you
should know what a
plant/zombie does after
seeing it do its “thing”**







Repeater

=



Peashooter

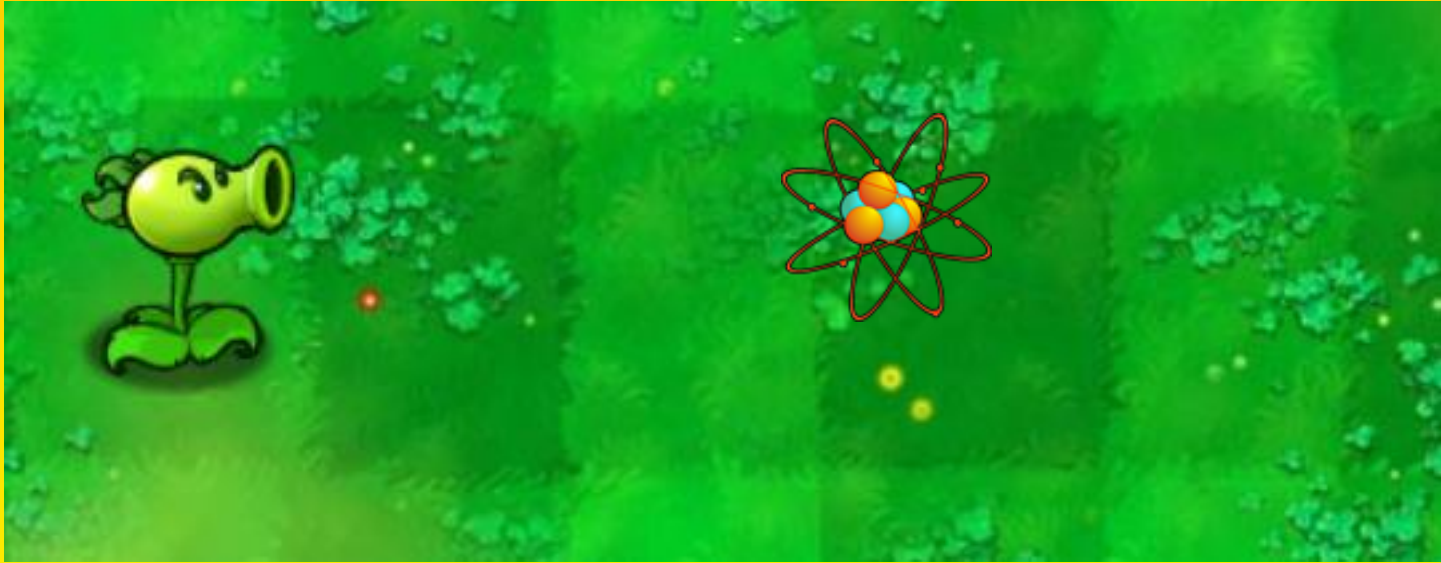
x 2



What should the repeater shoot?



unacceptable: feathers



not good: “neutronius”



pretty good: swords



also pretty good: large peas



very good: twice the peas



best: volleys of 2 peas



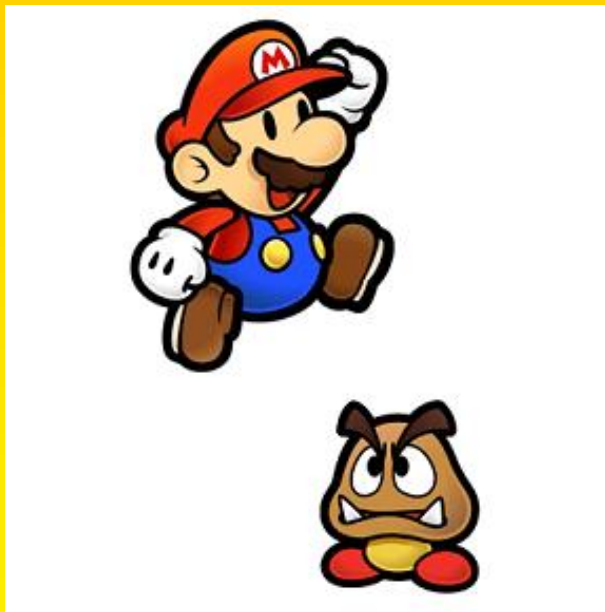








Jump



Hammer





Spiky = can't use jump



Flying = can't use hammer



can't use jump



can't use hammer



???????



**10. Leverage what people
already know**

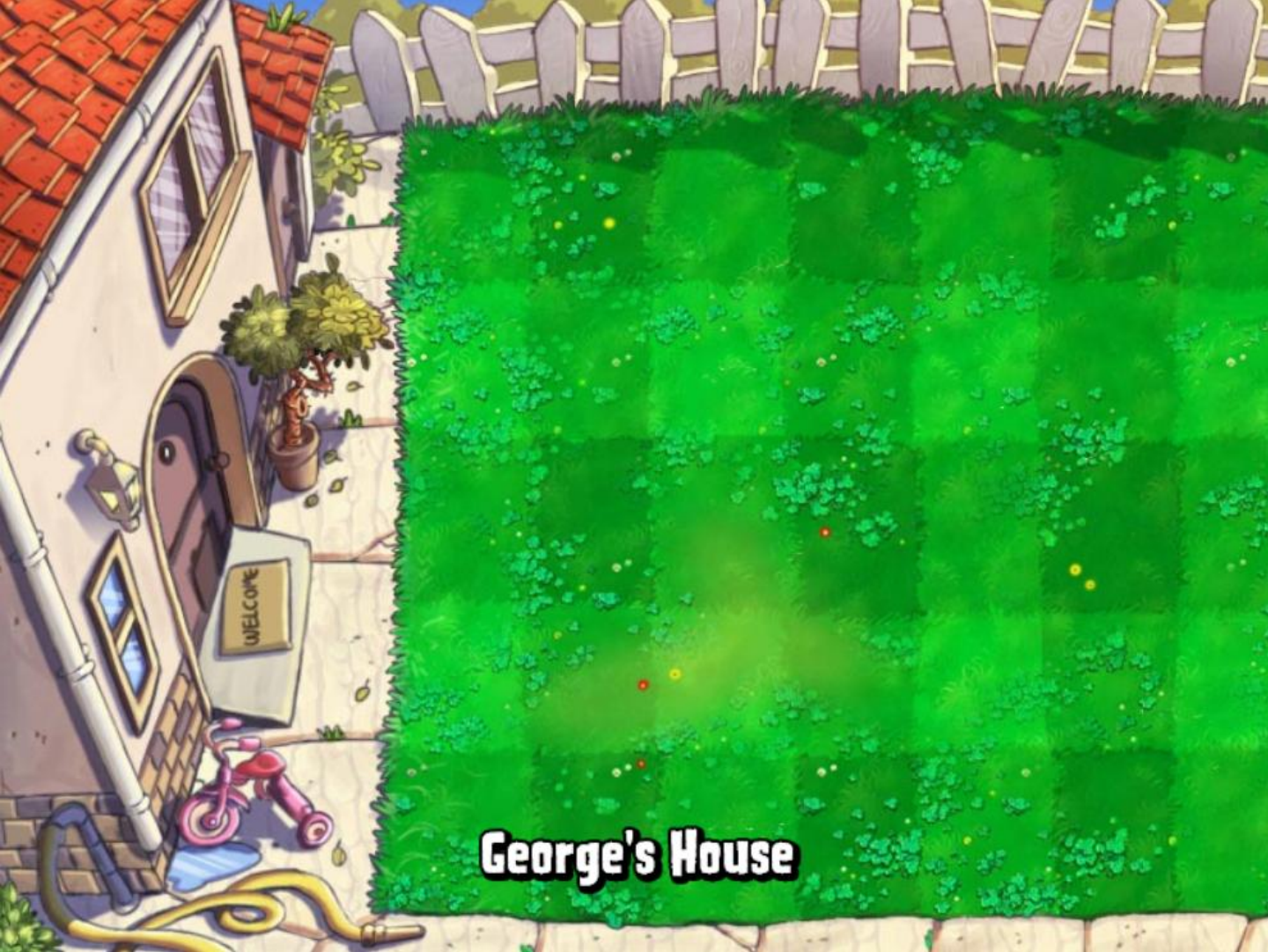
PLANTS vs. ZOMBIES

The logo for the game "Plants vs. Zombies" is centered on a yellow background. The word "PLANTS" is in a bright green, bubbly font with a black outline. The word "vs." is in a smaller, white font with a black outline, set against a dark grey, tombstone-like background with a small white flower. The word "ZOMBIES" is in a grey, blocky font with a black outline. The background of the logo features a blue sky with white clouds on the left and a purple sky with white clouds on the right.









George's House







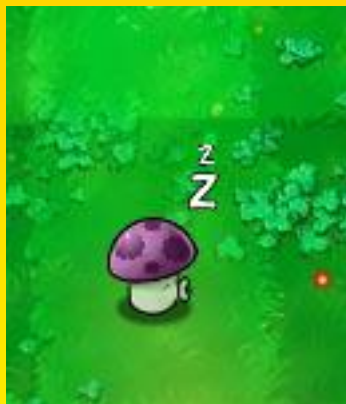
Tank 1-3





=





+



=



Zombie Toughness



>



>





Resource Representation



grows plants



buys stuff









**Plant names are
purposefully descriptive**



Peashooter

vs.



The Vindicator





Peashooter



Snow Pea



Threepeater



Repeater



Split Pea



Sunflower



Marigold



Wall-nut



Squash



Puff-shroom



Sun-shroom



Hypno-shroom



Magnet-shroom

Recap

1. Blend the tutorial into the game
2. Better to have the player “do” than “read”
3. Spread out the teaching of game mechanics
4. Just get the player to do it once
5. Use fewer words
6. Use unobtrusive messaging
7. Use adaptive messaging
8. Don't create noise
9. Use visuals to teach
10. Leverage what people already know
11. Everything can be made better by adding dragons







Help for Plants and Zombies Game

When the Zombies show up, just sit there and don't do anything. You win the game when the Zombies get to your house.

-this help section brought to you by the Zombies

MAIN MENU

it's over!