

Why My Students Design Escape Rooms

GDC 2021

Sam Liberty



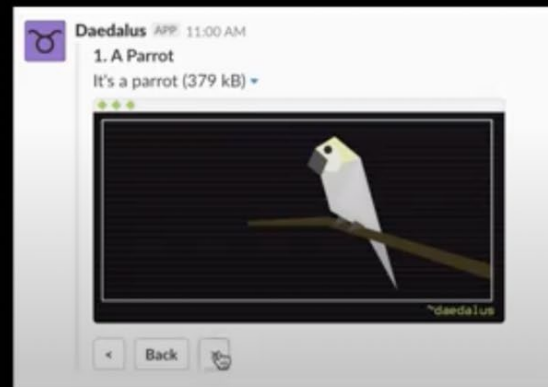
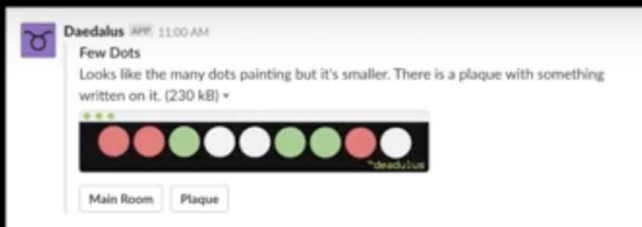
Northeastern

EXTRA LUDIC

ENGAGE
— MENT LAB



Daedalus ARG: Online Escape Room



Northeastern: Fundamentals of Game Design

The players quickly pick up on the idea behind the separation puzzle



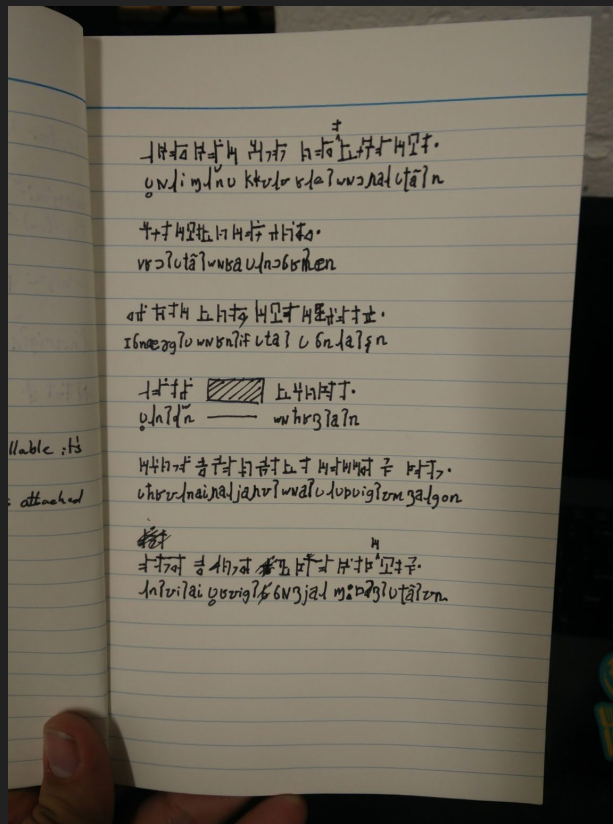
Overview

Why Escape Rooms?

- Features of Escape Rooms
- Skills to Drill

How To Teach With Escape Rooms

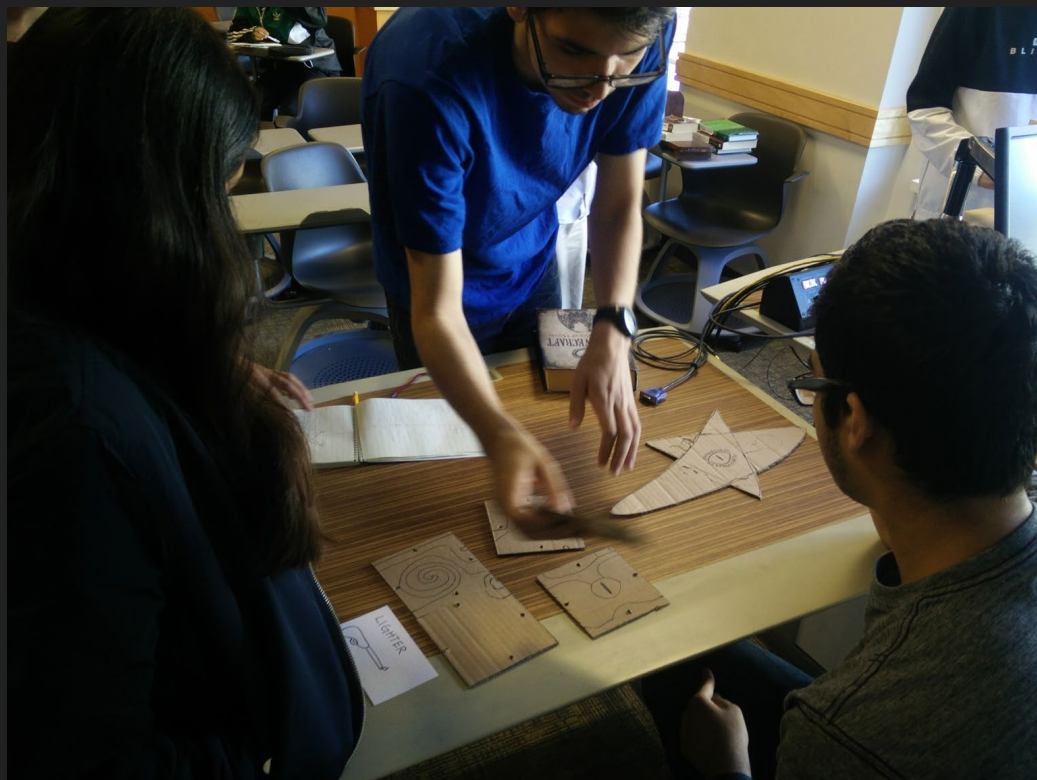
- Phases of Design
- Deliverables
- Reflections



Why Escape Rooms?

Feature: Analog

- Easy to rapidly iterate
- No coding required



Feature: Highly Thematic (Hopefully)

- Clear aesthetic goals
- Top down OR bottom up designs work

BAR MENU

-Drinks-	- Price-
Gravedigger's Spade	\$1
New York Club	\$2
Permanent Moon	\$3
Charley's Wife	\$4
The Boss' Special	\$5
Beelzebub Brew	\$6
Bingo	\$7

REMEMBER:

Buy three drinks and
get The Special free,
for a total of only \$14!

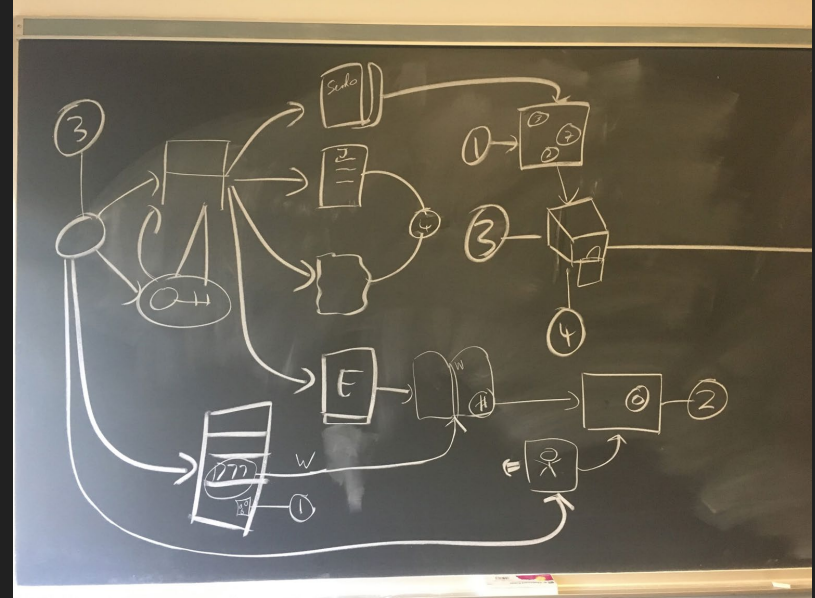
Feature: Multiplayer

- Designed for teams
- Multiple player psychographics



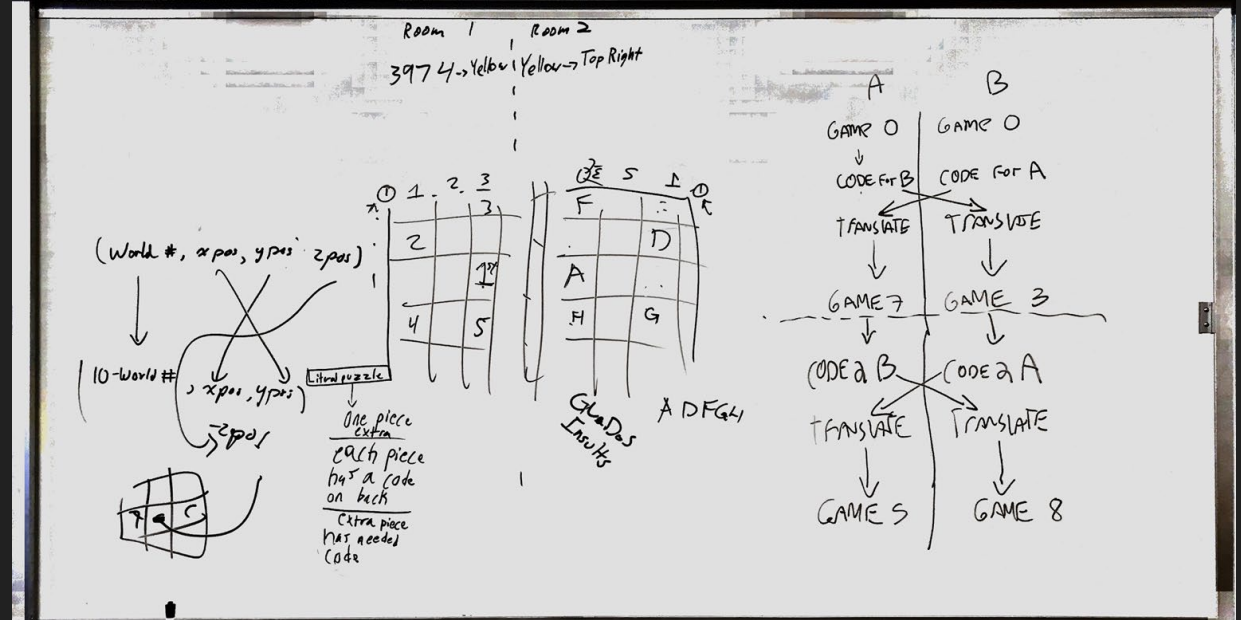
Feature: Interlocking Subsystems

- An abundance of design space
- Ideal for a small team of dedicated designers
- A challenge to unite all the moving parts



Feature: Obvious Balancing Heuristics

- Puzzle Difficulty
- Time
- Legibility/UX

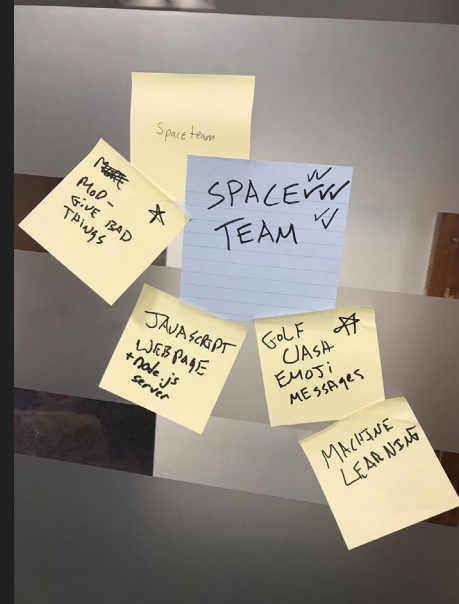


Feature: Others?

- Any other features you can think of?
- Add them as a comment to this video, and maybe we can talk about them!

Skill Drilling: Brainstorming

- Large group brainstorming
 - SNAP
- Small group brainstorming
 - Building consensus
- Individual brainstorming
 - Puzzles



Skill Drilling: Rapid Prototyping and Iteration

- Building puzzles fast
- Testing them multiple times
- Physical puzzles can be rapidly iterated

PUZZLE 1: BEFORE

Each team are given a hint for the other team to find the next hint to find the next hint to find right Minecraft world (to play puzzle 1)

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12

C	B	A
E	F	D
J	I	H
N	L	K

5

Skill Drilling: Playtesting

- Work inside and outside of class
- Final deliverable is tested live
- Major fabrication task requires thoughtful testing



tz 4:00 PM

I can't find any 4-digit combo locks that aren't waaaay too expensive.

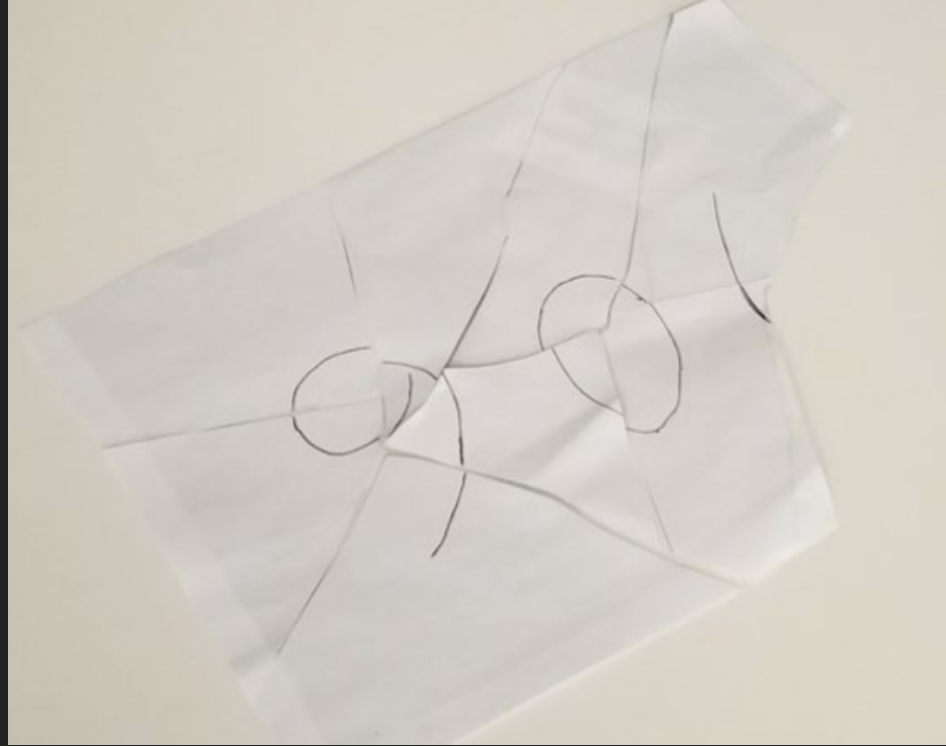
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Are these alright?

Skill Drilling: Fine Tuning

- Puzzle design is very granular
- Balancing to the clock
- Developing a hint system
- Iterations of components can take
- students across the finish line
 - (Or kneecap a good design)



How To Teach With Escape Rooms

Unit Overview

- Week 1: Research and Brainstorming
- Week 2: Prototyping and Iteration
- Week 3: Live Test and Post Mortem

Field Research

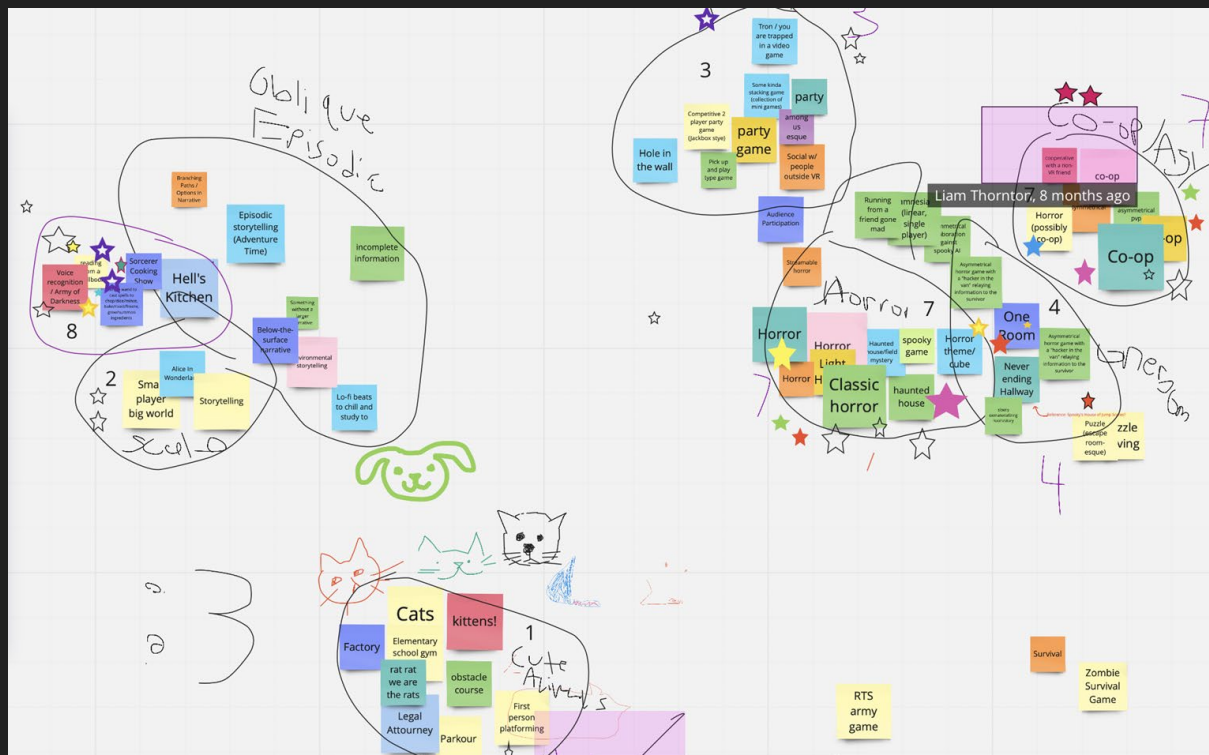
- Students visit local escape room
- Write field report on their experiences



Escape The Room Boston

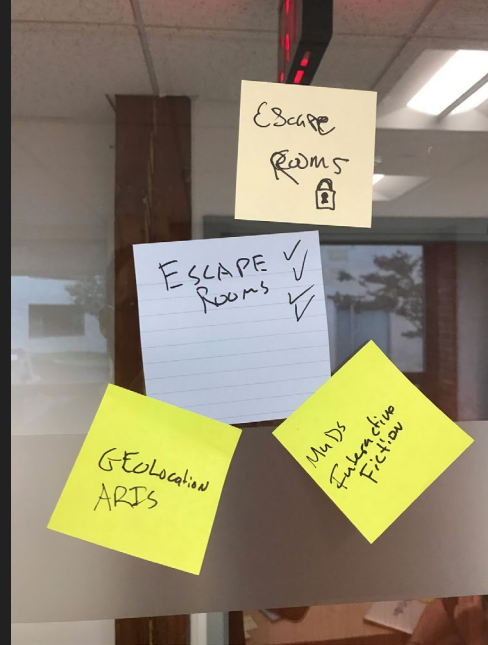
Brainstorming

- SNAP



Brainstorming (con't)

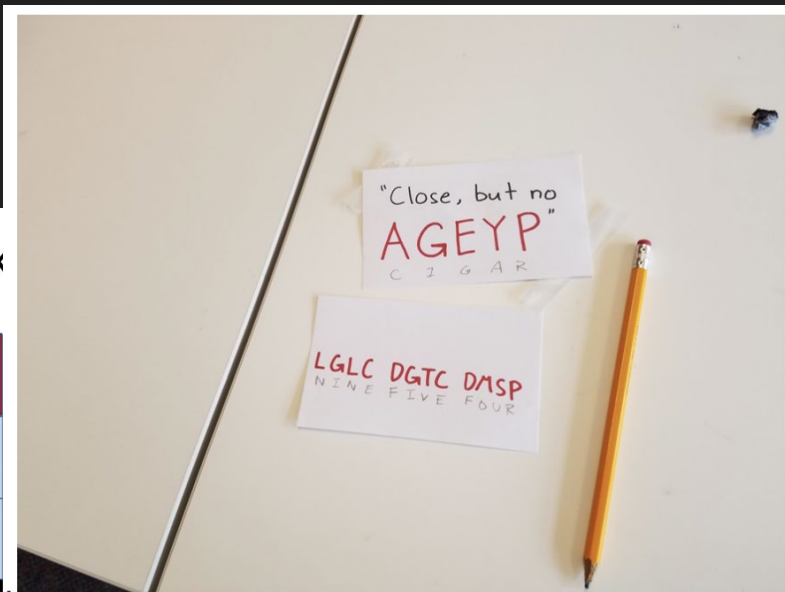
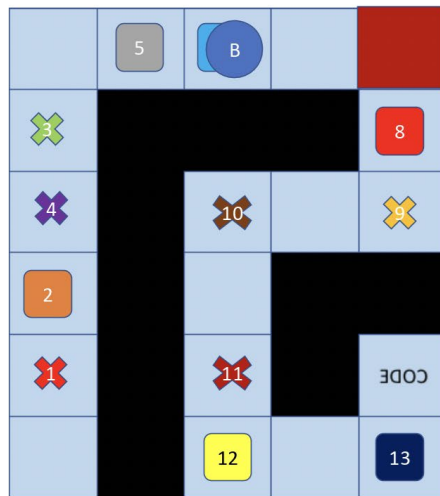
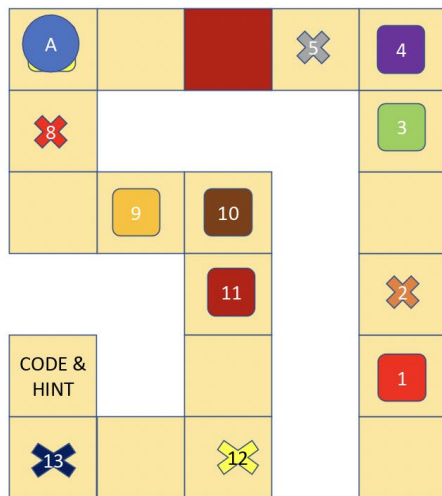
- SNAP
- Group formation based on SNAP
- Small group brainstorm
 - Building for the room
- Puzzle Brainstorm
 - Splitting up and coming back together



Rapid Prototyping

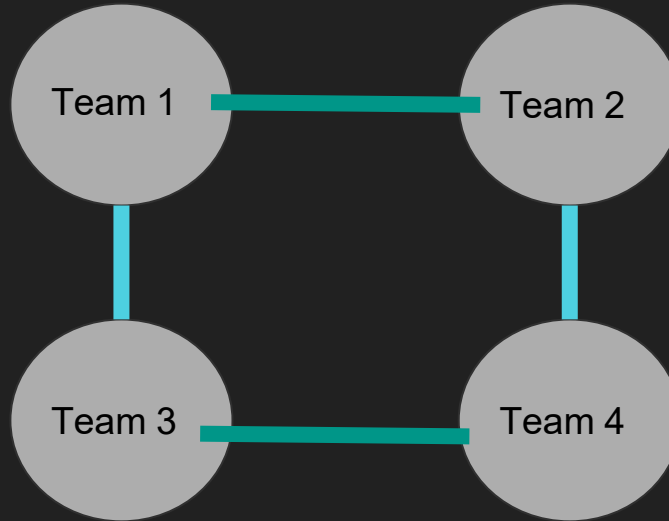
- Puzzle Design + Paper Prototype

PUZZLE 1: DURING (KNOW WHEN TO WALK)



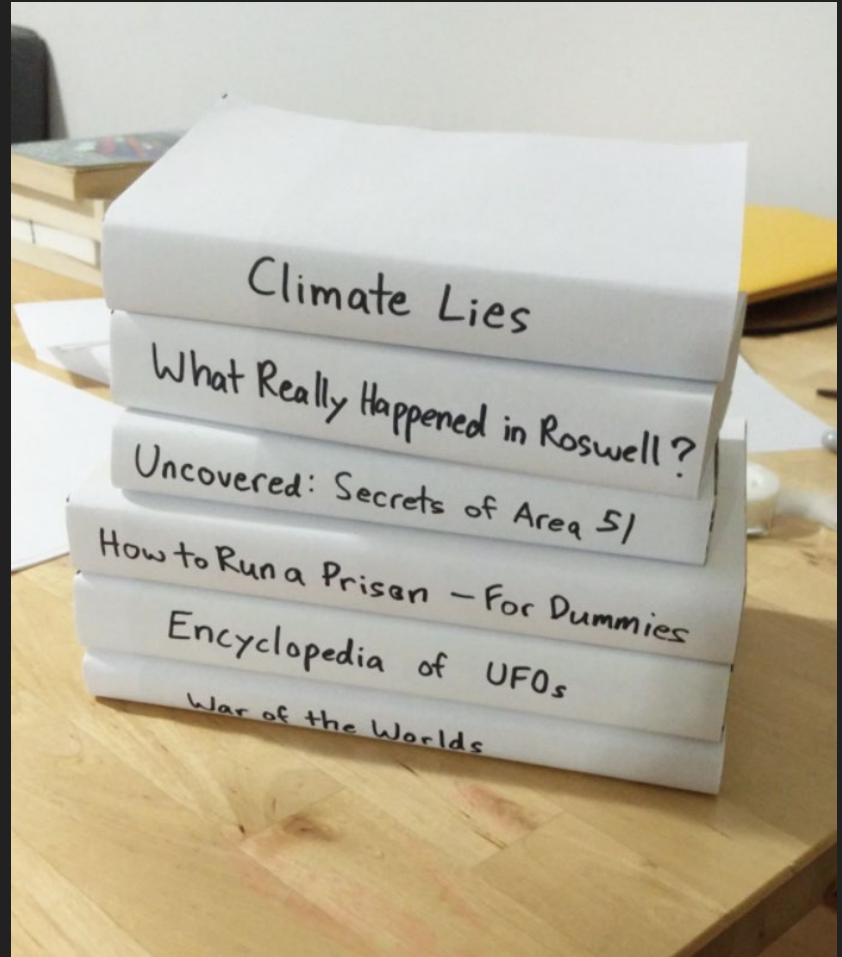
Rapid Prototyping

- Match with a partner group



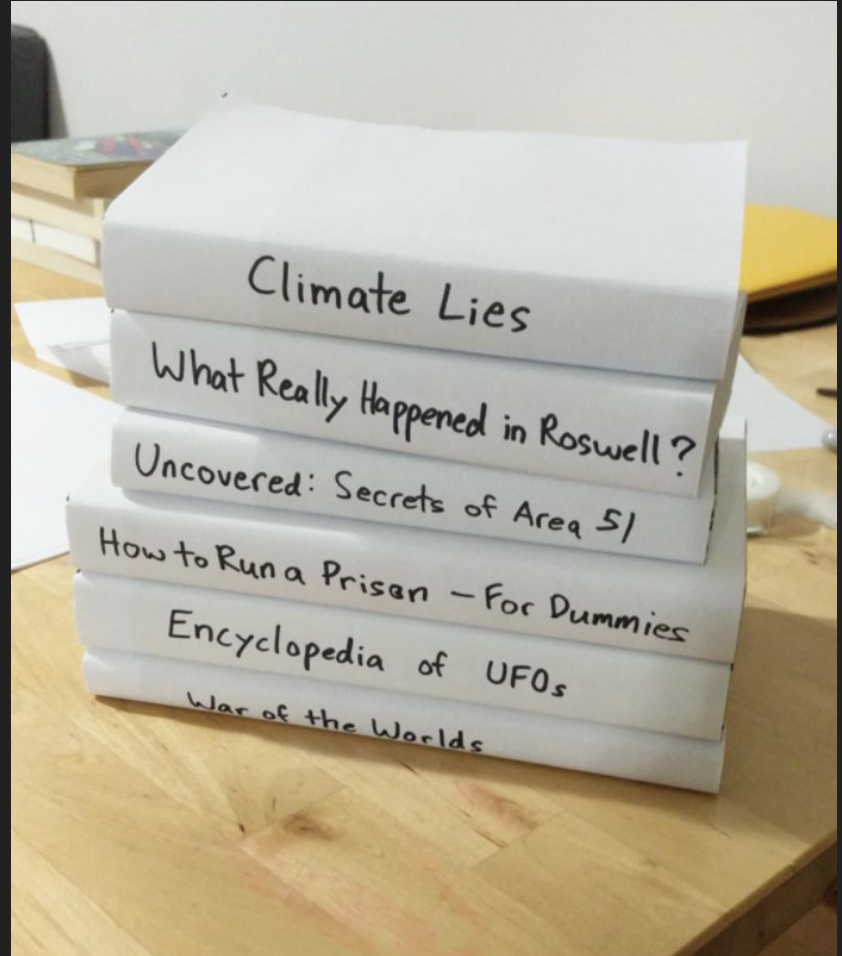
Rapid Prototyping

- Puzzle Design + Paper Prototype
 - Match with a “partner” group
- Playtesting outside of class



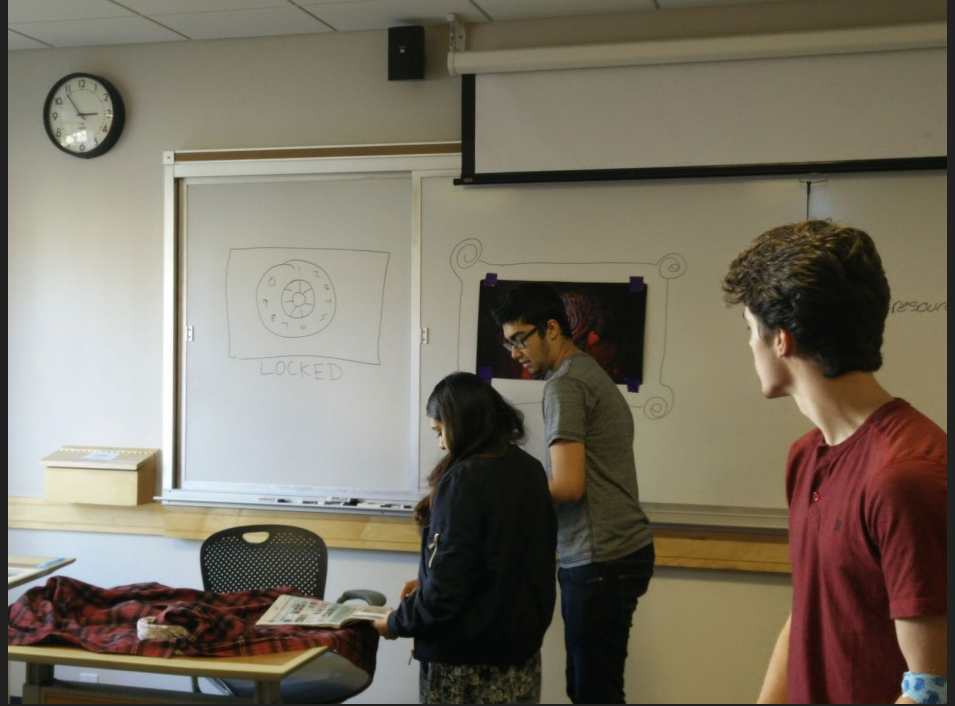
Rapid Prototyping

- Puzzle Design + Paper Prototype
 - Match with a “partner” group
- Playtesting outside of class
- Fabrication



Live Playtest

- In class, run the entire escape room under a timer
- All prep must be complete before class begins
- Gather feedback from playtesters



Post Mortem

- Assignment: Read 3 postmortems for favorite games
- Write a group post mortem on the escape rooms
 - What went right
 - What went wrong
 - What would be done different in the future

Prison Escape Room Postmortem

Theme/Description:

Our theme for the escape room was a prison. We felt this was a good theme because it is synonymous with breaking out, and it felt like we could work with the theme fairly easily within the constraints of the project. We tried to stay as authentic to the theme as we could while still providing a challenge to players when creating the room. Ultimately, we made theme tradeoffs so that we could enhance the experience and puzzles being offered by the room. Of course, if we had no constraints we'd be better able to tie in both categories.

What went right:

1. Good feedback for puzzle fun and difficulty. The group of players that played our room

Thank You!

Questions?

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