

Educational videogame 1969: Case for a Rookie Filmmaker

Gaming experience with reflection in class

Annotation	<p>The activity will allow the students to complete a gaming experience, which will introduce them to the atmosphere of the months after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 from the perspective of a young beginner filmmaker. It consists of two parts - the individual gaming experience of each student (25 minutes) and follow-up group activities and reflection (20 minutes).</p> <p>During the narrative part of the game, the player reacts to situations with his own choices and by doing so, he moves the plot of the game forward and can influence the direction of the game. Each decision is crucial and it cannot be taken back.</p> <p>The follow-up reflection draws attention to wider social circumstances and dilemmas of the period of the beginning of the era of normalisation, especially to the unravelling of the mechanisms suppressing democratic values.</p>
Recommended age	14+
Duration	45 minutes (including the playtime of the videogame - 25 minutes). For a focus on extended reflection with a broader involvement of the historical context, two lessons are recommended. Pupils can also complete the game before the lesson and teacher can focus this solely on the activities suggested below for reflecting on the experience.
Equipment	Computers / tablets - ideally with headphones Projector Blackboard / flipchart Sheet of paper with compartments for each game character
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The students will learn about the impacts of August 1968 on the liberty of citizens of Czechoslovakia• Learning about the various reactions of society to the disciplinary and censorship practices of emerging normalisation• They are confronted with the realities of living under a totalitarian regime and its influence on the young generation of citizens.• This activity allows to view the impacts of major historical events in a personal and empathic perspective
Educational areas and educational content	Elementary schools/Grammar schools: man and society, arts and culture, languages and communication, information and communication technologies Vocational education: a citizen in a democratic society, information and communication technologies
Key competences	Elementary schools/Grammar schools: for learning, problem-solving (working with informations and critical thinking), communication, cultural, social and personal, digital Vocational education: for learning, for problem-solving, communication, personal and social, civic competences and cultural awareness, digital competences.

Preparation

The activity assumes that the students are familiar with the period of year 1968 in Czechoslovakia – the meaning of Prague Spring after relaxation of conditions in the totalitarian Czechoslovakia, the liberal atmosphere and return to democratic values within the socialist regime, course of events in August 1968 and the immediate response of society to the invasion. The game in its introductory part offers a brief recap of the events of 1968 in the form of an edited video.

The realities with which the game situations work provide stimuli for the follow-up reflection and do not require any prior explanations.

Progression

The teacher provides the students with a link to download the game file, which they can then run on their devices. The game starts with an introductory video that looks back upon the events of 1968 from the main character's personal perspective.

After the introductory video, before students begin to move around the interactive map, follows a short reflection (with the option to replay the introductory video for more focused viewing using a separate file for watching it together on the screen). The teacher asks the following questions:

*What feelings did the year 1968 evoke in you as it was portrayed in the video?
How might the main character have experienced it?*

In the video there was a short clip from one of the films, which were made during this time. What idea did it give you about the filmmaking of young directors at the time?

What are the ambitions of the young hero and what do you think about his chances of success?

The final question helps students better understand the goal of their mission and navigate the plot of the story. The teacher then explains the basic game mechanisms briefly and points out the necessity to make well considered choices that may affect the fate of the main character.

In the next phase, the students go through the story of the game independently and they influence the narration with their decisions. The teacher leaves them space for focused playing experience. When all the students have reached the final title of the game, the teacher asks questions about the key choices and shares the stimuli that led the students to a particular decision.

What location did they originally choose for the screening of their film and how did they think about it?

Who decided to travel abroad on his/her own for the film and who relied on the help of others? What pros and cons did the students consider here? What were their ideas about traveling to the West across the border at the time?

How did they behave during the Wenceslas Square protest? Do they evaluate in retrospect this decision as a good move?

What strategy did they adopt during their subsequent interrogation by security officers? Did they think the interrogation had any impact on the subsequent course of the game?

What did those who succeeded less in achieving their goal do differently?

After reviewing the player's actions in the game, the teacher reveals the keywords related to the game plot prepared on the blackboard, asks the students to explain how they understood their meaning from the gaming experience, and helps them to fill in all the information if necessary.

Keywords: Exit clause, West Germany, state security, Aeroflot, film dramaturg

Reflection

For the final activity, the teacher divides the class into two groups according to their final position in the game. He distributes to each group a piece of paper with compartments for each of the main characters in the game (Marie, Professor Šeda, the head of the film club, the investigator, the protagonist Arnošt). The teacher asks the students how they think each character assumed an attitude to the events of the period – students apply their findings, reflecting the game's variable passages. This allows each group to view the characters in a different light.

They summarize their opinions of the characters in boxes and also characterise the protagonist himself based on his own approach to decision-making (which involves a necessary degree of self-projection into the period situation). The teacher then has the groups express their written opinions about the characters.

The teacher can also let the students complete the worksheet independently in the form of homework, which is followed up in the next lesson by a reflection that connects the knowledge from the game experience more closely with historical realities and events. The teacher can also use other thematic references suggested in the material (Methodological recommendations for the game to extend the reflection).

By facilitating the joint sharing of insights, the teacher creates for the class a picture of the climate in society after the invasion and the disintegrating united resistance. It is ideally illustrated by references to other events of the period and their consequences – the funeral of Jan Palach, the manipulation of state security behind the hockey events, the violently suppressed demonstration in August 1969. Publicly available audiovisual materials (for example, from the ČT EDU platform) serve well to illustrate them in a time-saving manner.

Together, it is essential to capture authentic reactions to the restriction of freedom of opinion and the increasingly coercive “pacifying” of the public.

Sharing their own attitudes towards the characters and the opportunity to reflect on specific events in the changing climate of society leads the students to the final discussion.

During the discussion, they relate the fundamental positions associated with the period of starting normalisation (defiance, resignation, conformism) to the examples from the game/period reality and the teacher uses them to focus the attention of the class on the suppression of the democratic values. With this aim in mind, the teacher asks at which moments in the game or in which of the historical circumstances these values were manipulated and how the students imagine the fate of the game's characters in the next period marked by the absence of democratic principles.

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