



humanities.games



# Education Partner Packet

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# about

**humanities.games** is a web platform that enables students with paper and drawing supplies to create digital games.

Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project strives to inspire students with limited access to computers to engage in a new way with content they are studying, and also to stimulate an interest in digital work.

As an education partner, your role is vital to this project. Your participation will not only expand the options we can provide to students, but will also help the project collect data with a workshop to evaluate the experience, refine the project design and hopefully improve outcomes for students.

Our team is delighted to work with you on this exciting stage of the project!

Enclosed are the following materials for your review:

1. Project Overview
2. Education Partner Role Overview
3. Example Materials
4. Frequently Asked Questions

*If you have additional questions, you can reach out to **info@humanities.games** for more details.*





# project overview

## What is humanities.games?

humanities.games is a prototype platform that will enable educators, students and the general public to create digital humanities games via a website with pre-built minigame templates. Users will select a minigame mechanic that best suits the subject matter they are studying, and then will be given instructions on how to create artwork and educational content for the game. Once this material is scanned and uploaded to the humanities.games platform, a new customized minigame will be created that can be played by all. Users will witness their art, characters and text come to life in a playable experience without needing to learn complex software or write code.

We are currently in Phase II of the project. In our first phase, also funded with an NEH grant, we created a brief game alongside a WordPress tool that explored violin prodigy George Bridgetower and his relationship with Ludwig van Beethoven:

<http://beta.searchforharmony.org/full-game/>

With the tool successfully built, we now aim to take the project to the next level, creating an easy-to-use platform and partnering with educational groups such as yours to expand the catalog of available minigame options, run workshops with students and refine the approach. While our software will empower both educators and students to apply humanities concepts with game creation, this phase will emphasize ways that students who have limited access to technology can still participate in creating and sharing a digital game.

## How it Works

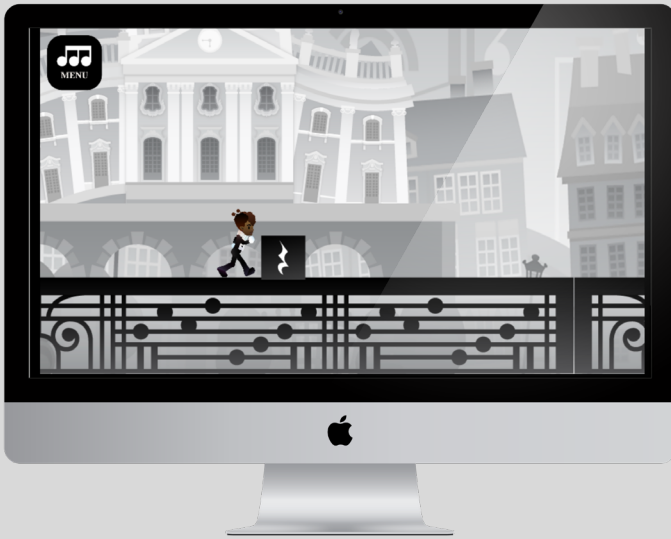
Our design team provides a teacher or group leader with a username and password to access humanities.games, where they can then review a series of minigame templates that can all be customized and adapted into a basic educational video game.

The teacher or group leader selects a few minigame templates from this catalog that are the most applicable to the themes or topic of study being taught. Examples could include using a brick-breaking game to learn about the fall of the Berlin Wall (with context indicating its history and significance), or a Frogger-style game with a 17th century ship crossing the Atlantic as the 'frog' (with obstacles representing perils of the journey).

The teacher will present the minigame options to the class, and students will form groups (or work as a class) and choose which minigame to they want to make and why. The groups will then research the topic and strive to explain and justify that minigame's relevance through game text and visual assets, which can be written and drawn in provided paper packets. The art from these packets can then be scanned, and text entered, into a single computer. Our system then integrates these assets into the code so that the students can play and share a unique game, which will live on the web at an



Here is an example of the software at work:



#### Default Art

<http://beta.searchforharmony.org/game/demo-game-2/>



#### Packet Generated

<http://beta.searchforharmony.org/game/scenic-scramble/>

For the brick-breaker example, a student could create their game considering the following:

1. Why was the Berlin Wall built and what did it come to symbolize during the Cold War?
2. What goal would motivate a player to want to destroy the bricks? What motivated people to want to remove the Berlin Wall? How do I explain that motivation to a player?
3. What was the experience like watching the wall come down (as bricks are removed in-game)?
4. What does it mean for the player when the bricks are gone? What was the significance of the wall being destroyed? How do I explain the meaning of the player's actions at the end of the game?

humanities.games is being designed keeping in mind that not all users will have access to computers. All that will be needed is one computer and one scanner, which the teacher or facilitator will have on-hand during the workshops. By mid-2020 we also hope to have a mobile app up and running that will allow the digitizing to happen with a smartphone camera, so a group of students will be able to make one or more digital games with a single smartphone as the only required piece of technology, eliminating the need for a computer and scanner, and helping to further reach across the digital divide for this exercise.



## Student Value

The experience of doing research on a particular topic and then applying themes and facts so that they make sense in a game context is a valuable learning moment for the student - and one that may allow for a deeper understanding of a subject than simple memorization could provide. There is also the novelty of a classmate creating an educational game, which will encourage other students to play the game and engage with the humanities content.

For students who have more access to technology and an interest in game creation and design, we have also exposed the code that makes the game work within the dashboard. Students who would like to 'peer behind the curtain' can explore the software behind the content.

### Sprite

Four poses that animate running/jumping.

Show What Sprite Controls Show All

```
15      /*
16      - Defaults are set here.
17      */
18      this.player;
19      // How fast the player runs
20      this.player_speed = 300;
21      // How fast the player goes up when they jump
22      this.initial_jump_velocity = 500;
23      // How fast the player falls down when they are done jumping
24      this.initial_jump_pullback = 300;
```

```
129     /*
130     - The image created in WordPress is loaded as BridgeRunnerPlayer
131     - Several poses are added, and the default (run) is triggered
132     */
133     this.player = this.game.add.sprite(0, 200, 'BridgeRunnerPlayer',0);
134     /*
135     - Run is the default, and has three poses (0, 1 and 2)
136     - In code, 0 often represents 'first' where 1 might be used in normal language.
137     */
138     this.player.animations.add('run', [0, 1, 2], 6, true);
139     // Jump is the final pose (3)
140     this.player.animations.add('jump', [3], 6, true);
141     this.player.animations.play('run');
142     // The sprite is sized so it is not a giant or too small relative to the level.
143     this.player.scale.setTo(0.2,0.2);
```





# education partner role overview



One major goal of humanities.games is to create a catalog of minigame options that are highly likely to be a sensible choice for students when they begin this exercise. Our approach to help ensure this outcome and to help test the platform is to collaborate with partners in various humanities fields who work with students. These partners will help choose the minigames that would make sense for their students and their area of study, so we know once the minigame is built that there will be at least one reasonable application.

The role of an education partner has three distinct parts:

1. Assist in brainstorming and selecting a minigame option that is most applicable to your humanities subject.

2. Coordinate with the program to schedule a game creation workshop.

3. Provide any pre or post-test surveys to your students, which will be invaluable to helping us understand program's effectiveness and engagement, and to help improve the tool for future use.





## What is a 'minigame option'?

Consider brief 2-dimensional games you may have played on a smartphone, computer or older game console:

- </> The original Super Mario Bros. is a running/jumping/collecting platformer game.
- </> Simon Says is a memory game where the player must repeat a pattern provided by the game that grows more complex with additional rounds.
- </> Guitar Hero requires the player to hit keys at the correct times to accumulate a score.

None of these game mechanics are unique to a single product, and can be recontextualized for different goals. humanities.games creates a template from these types of game mechanics that can be filled in with artwork and text to change the meaning of the experience - in our case to reinforce and/or creatively portray content from a humanities subject.

For example, here is how a few of these templates were applied in the first phase of this project.

### The Arrival:

A musician named Maestro runs and jumps to collect music notes for his staff.

### Melody Memory:

The player repeats music note patterns to compose *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

### Bridge to Another World:

The player taps columns along with *The Kreutzer Sonata* as Maestro runs along a path collecting tokens.

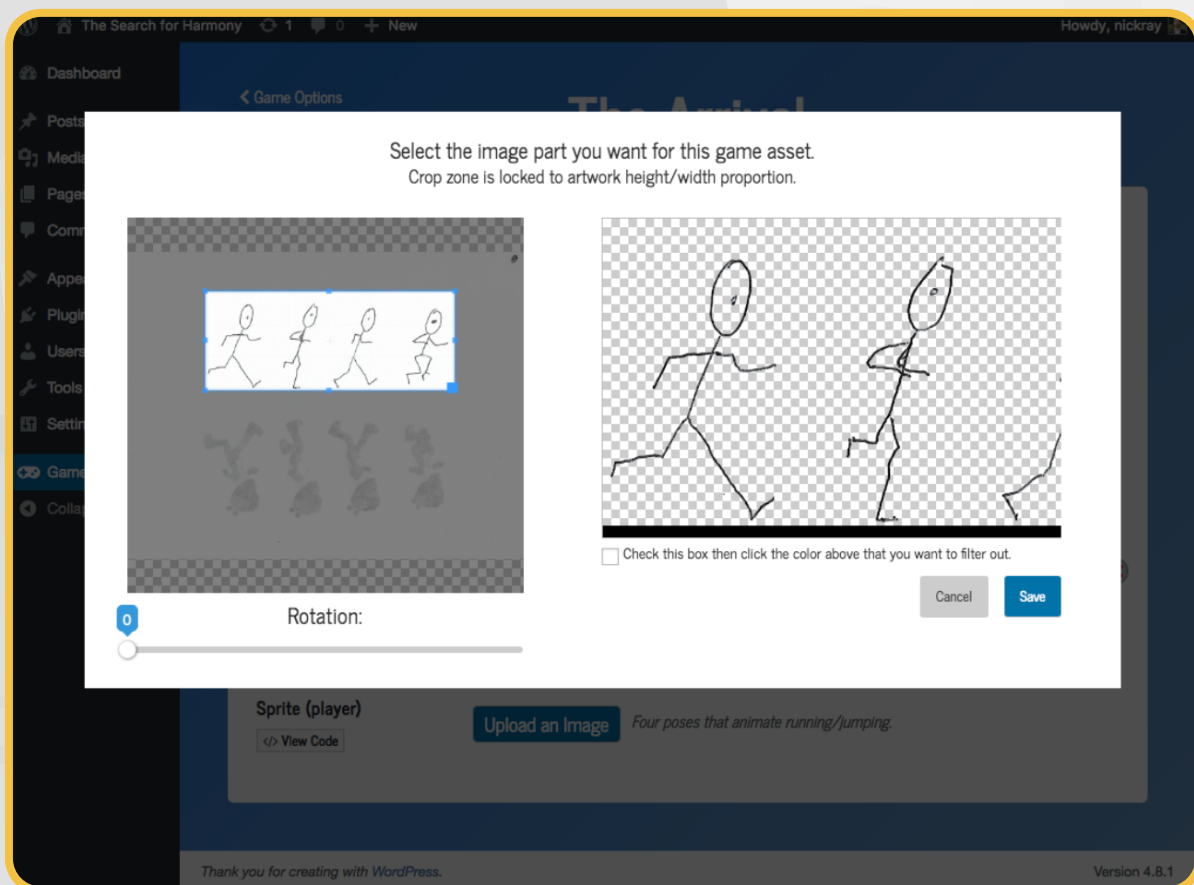


You can play by clicking [here](#).



- </> Is there a topic in your field that could be explained through a type of game?
- </> If so, how might this connection be made more accessible so your students could demonstrate it and learn from the experience?

These are the questions we will work with you to answer so that you'll know how the game fits within your curriculum.




# timeline

We are currently seeking additional  
education partners to help develop  
minigame options  
(limited to 7 for the immediate future).

That said, if you are interested in working with us, great! We can connect and discuss potential ideas for future growth of the project.

In the Fall of 2022, we will begin coordination for the workshops, which we hope will begin in November, followed by post-workshop discussion to review the evaluations and to discuss what was effective and what could be improved upon.



The background is a dark, monochromatic illustration of a cityscape. It features several buildings of varying heights and shapes, some with grid-like patterns representing windows. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of trees and a street lamp. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

example  
materials



The background is a dark, stylized illustration of a city street at night. It features several multi-story buildings with many windows, some of which are lit. A street lamp is visible in the lower right corner. The overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

# frequently asked questions

## What is humanities.games?

humanities.games is a web platform that enables students with paper and drawing supplies to create digital games. Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the platform will live at the web address <https://humanities.games>

## Are students really making games, since they only create art and text, and not code?

Yes. Once the art and text has been submitted to humanities.games and applied to a template, a new game is created. Just as authors don't create their own paper and musicians don't usually make their own instrument, our minigame templates serve more as tools than games in their own right. A student's choice of minigame, their rationale for that choice and the content they produce to communicate that clearly is where the game's value develops.

## How can I sign up my class/after-school group?

Once the platform launches, you can use an email address to create an account for your class, which will live at a unique web address, e.g. stonesoup.humanities.games. You can then create accounts for your students so they can log in and create, or you can publish games on their behalf, depending on the technology available and format of the activity.

## My classroom is not equipped with computers. How can we participate?

humanities.games is designed for this situation. If you can provide the printed minigame packets to your students, our planned mobile app will allow you to capture their work with a smartphone, which will then publish the game and make it playable on the same device. Students who do have access to technology elsewhere, e.g. the library, can also play created games on the web.

## What if my students have access to computers and want to see how the game is built?

Every aspect of the game that can be changed in the dashboard has a button that will show the complete code for a minigame, as well as the lines relevant for each part. One long-term goal is to make the game code downloadable so it can be modified directly by any interested students.





## How does game creation teach a student?

Experiential learning is a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (See work by David Kolb). Students must research and internalize knowledge about a topic in order to brainstorm and choose which minigame would be most relevant, and apply that knowledge when writing game text and creating artwork. Like a science fair uses project creation to foster understanding of the scientific method, making a game encourages a student to internalize the knowledge they need to produce the best game. Like winning educational games themselves, the task of acquiring content knowledge makes immediate, short-term benefits clear to the participant.

## What does an activity look like?

In part this will depend on the level of technology your students have for the exercise.

An example activity:

- Students (in groups) are given the topic and a few options for minigames
- Minigames may be curated in advance to help guide thought
- As a group the students decide on which game they are making and why
- Tasks are given to create the assets, and these are then scanned
- Students play the completed game either on desktop or on mobile

There are different approaches possible (e.g. students uploading their own work, using digital tools to create art vs. drawing), as well.

## How will I know which minigames would work best for my subject?

As part of our minigame creation process, we work with educators to develop minigames that have at least one concrete application (e.g. a street-crossing minigame reworked to portray a ship crossing an ocean and perils it may encounter). We then consult scholars in varied humanities subjects with created minigames and ask them to advise on possible alternative uses. These are not exhaustive ideas, but can be used to help you decide if a minigame is likely to make sense with the subject you are teaching.

**Have more questions?**

*Reach out to*

*[info@humanities.games](mailto:info@humanities.games)*





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