D-ESL

Pedagogical sequence/Introductory sheet

The Absent Minded

Where to find the game

https://d-esl.itch.io/the-absent-minded

Hosting the game sessions

Accessibility

English level

The English level to which the game pertains is B2.

Accessibility features

The arrows on a PC's keyboard and the mouse are enough to make the player plunge into this game of fellowship and humorous wit.

Advice for specific student profiles

The game can be used by students of all ages, including dys-students. The humorous language and allusions in the game are only used for communicative purposes and learning should not be hindered by such instances.

Auditory disability or deafness

There is background music along with sound effects within the game, but they are not necessary to accomplish the steps, nor are they relevant additions to the required information. The game can thus be played on mute, and students with auditory issues or deafness will be able to accomplish all the tasks without issue.

Classroom organisation

Duration

Approximate time needed to play the game: 40 - 50 minutes.

Single-player mode

Solo

The single-player experience is given to one single student, but he or she can work together with other students to accomplish the tasks of the game.

In Group

If PCs in a classroom are not enough for each student, the game experience can be attained in groups of students. This type of class organisation increases the students' fun and engagement, because they can work as a team and share knowledge or game skills.

Multiplayer mode

Not available.

Remote Play

Play as homework

It is advisable to have the game played first under the teacher's observance. Once the students understand all the linguistic structures, they will advance in the game by themselves without feeling frustrated if there is something they don't understand. Then, they can be assigned remote activities based on the game.

Distance learning activity

Distance learning activities can be settled after the main gameplay events in **The Absent Minded** are deciphered in the classroom in order to avoid frustration. Once the students understand the storytelling, the unknown words and expressions explained or given equivalents, they will easier dive into the learning activities.

Briefing

Pedagogical requirements

The students will be exposed to **idiomatic expressions**, **informal language** and **colloquialism**. Practically, students will linguistically step out of the classroom and try non-standard English by exploring language in its day-to-day diversity. This is rarely realised in traditional classes, as the curriculum empowers mainly standard English and students often do not meet vernacular speech at school. In other words, the activity will be effective and successful! Moreover, the **toponymy and etymology** used in the game are also interesting to approach, as many have a double meaning.

Explanations to give before playing

The teacher will inform students that they are going to play a **witty game** which abounds in **idiomatic expressions**, **limericks**, **jokes**, **riddles, tongue twisters**, **rhymes**, thus requiring a very good mastery of the language.

Emotional security and other warnings

The game offers interactive instances, allowing players to impact the gameplay in a meaningful way. They feel emotionally engaged via **metanarratives** created by witty questions, sharp remarks or jokes, thus realising a digital representation of themselves on screen. The students easily identify with the protagonist or her companions who make choices that can either alter their exploring status or help them go further.

Follow-up and Post-play activities

Evaluation: score analysis or resolving difficulties encountered

There is no final score on how the players performed, but they have to understand the story and finish the game.

Lesson plan using the in-game content learned

There are many skill-based activities to teach idioms where the students:

- can draw idioms (their literal and figurative meanings), a learning technique for lower students or students with specific learning needs;
- match idioms with their meanings;
- read together funny idioms and try to guess (or mime) their meanings (e.g. https://games4esl.com/funny-english-idioms/)
- write dialogues which contain idioms;

- take a look at pictures and guess the idiom;

- contextualize idioms through real-life scenarios;

- are involved in role-playing and storytelling;

- interpret the symbol and double meaning of the toponyms in the game.

Debrief or production based on the game session

At B2 level students can write opinion essays or be involved in debating sessions. The game's themes – the oneiric experience, Greek mythology, fantasy world, fellowship, magic, sailing, time travel, curse, good vs. evil – provide interesting topics for **writing** or **speaking** sessions. After game completion, students are invited to reflect back on the **real-life situations** of the game (friendship, surmounting obstacles, teamwork, competition), and how they relate to **personal experiences**.

The game

Context and story

Plot

The heroine, whose name is Marsha, is dared after an 'armoured pyjama party' to pass the test of the Oracle. She doesn't remember how she travelled to another world, but she is determined to accomplish the task. She needs companions to surmount the obstacles and pursue her plan. The four-member fellowship continuously upgrades after each victory over the evil forces. Another important piece of advice for the player is to sharpen one's mind, as the game is designed on both **mechanics** and **quick-witted language**. The Oracle's ultimate challenge marks the end of the game, and perhaps another quest for adventure.

Lore – game world

The game world relies on a melange of real and fantasy elements where magic and mythology are omnipresent. The mission is enjoyable and clever, the characters are narrative and likeable. The protagonist arrives in an unknown world after 'an armoured pyjama party' challenge and must face the obstacles on her way to be prepared for the Oracle's final challenge. Until then, an exciting journey awaits to be discovered…

Map/Level

The game develops around five major levels presented below, to allow players to receive bonus rewards, level upgrades or skills.

Characters

Protagonist

- **Marsha**

Marsha is a young girl who mysteriously arrives in Mainland after she was dared at a real-world party to meet the Oracle and answer his questions. She can cast fire and upgrade her experience points after each fight against the evil forces. She is intelligent and friendly, surrounded by good companions who support and help her, and students can easily relate to her game role. Although she comes from a different world, she advances in this fantasy realm due to her well-balanced abilities. Her major roles in the game – team member and experienced fighter – ensure her mission's success.

Antagonist

- **The Oracle**

The last game antagonist encountered in Mainland is the Oracle, whose name bears mythological roots in ancient Greek. According to historians, the Oracle of Delphi was believed to deliver prophecies from the Greek god Apollo and was often consulted for important decisions. In other words, this character possesses

prophetic wisdom, whose questions must be correctly answered by Marsha in order to complete the mission.

Other antagonists

- Collective character: bats, slimes, orcs, the Minotaurs

These forces try to discourage the four companions (Marsha, Therese, Harold and Lucius). Yet, fighting them means experience points and level upgrades for each team member.

Companion(s)

- **Therese**

She lives a boring life in a mansion in Mem'phish and is very glad to join Marsha's cause. She is contemplative and intelligent as well, being the older sister of two little siblings. Many students can identify with Therese, as she seems to spend more time in her room than with her family. She helps Marsha fight against the bats in the grotto and can upgrade her battle skills. She is also the one who directs Marsha towards the Captain's house and helps obtain a sailing boat to reach the Oracle's island.

- **Harold and Lucius**

They are the last two companions Marsha encounters on the island close to the Oracle's location. Harold and Lucius are male characters who possess healing and self-healing abilities in combat. The first one joins Marsha and Therese out of personal wish, while the latter is a cursed human being wearing a beast skin (Minotaur), who joins the party having been impressed by the fighters' bravery. They help Marsha in the final battle and then are free to pursue their own path.

- **Non-player characters**

The non-player characters have a predetermined behaviour and are found inside or outside buildings; they enliven the place with their communicative approach, being enjoyable and fun characters to interact with (e.g. Therese's playful siblings, siren chickens, fortune fountain, store keeper, East-er Bunny) or less enjoyable but important (the Oracle). Another non-player character is the jocular Tent Skeleton, who gives them important advice on the Oracle's preferences.

Picture: The 'siren chickens' are perhaps the funniest characters in the game, as they wander around the town for no apparent purpose. They were created after the panicking poultry in the animated comedy "Chicken Little", as the noise they make indicates a hysterical and desperate need to keep moving.

Gameplay

Gameplay 1: Quest experience

Description

Marsha answers the town's guard question to be given permission to enter Mem'phish. There she recruits Therese and finds the boat to sail to the Oracle's island, but first, there is another island to discover nearby. In Mem'phish, visitors can find hidden objects, trade different items and interact with different people. Mainland offers a harbour, a signpost with directions, a tent to explore and a dangerous cave. Besides these visual elements, an important aspect of the game relies on the narratives: **idioms** and **text interplay** which are pedagogically exploited below.

Pedagogical impact

While playing, students identify the **idiomatic expressions and phrases** and match them with the definitions provided by the teacher if they work either in pairs or in groups. If there is one single player in front of the PC, this task can be performed as homework.

Idiom	Definition
To pay a visit	to go somewhere to spend time with (someone, such as a friend or relative) : to visit
To lose one's head	To become very upset or angry
To hang around	To wait or spend time somewhere, usually for no particular reason
To cut a deal	To reach an agreement with someone for something
To drive someone crazy	To upset, irritate, or annoy one to the point of distraction
To lie dormant	(phrase) To be inactive, as if asleep
To cross paths with	to meet someone, especially by chance
Halt! Who goes there?	Who is it who approaches?
To be good to go	To be prepared and ready to do something
To come in handy	To be useful for a particular purpose
To run out of	To use up or finish a supply of something
To rest one's bones	To rest one's body; to sleep

To long for	To have a very strong desire or yearning for someone or something
To come to one's senses	To start thinking reasonably

The text in the game is also based on different **linguistic constructions** and **set phrases** under the form of:

- **Play upon words:** longed for so long, in vs. inn, one spring I saw a spring by the spring, wonder vs. wander
- **Irony:** A good start doesn't ensure a good end.
- **Fairy-tale:** Little pig, little pig, let me in.
- **Informal/slang:** jolly sailor bold (a very bold sailor); deal damage (cause harm)
- **Rhymes:** you won fair and square; I don't either, nor do I care, I'll snap my fingers and you are there.

Gameplay 2: Battle experience

Description

There is a good balance between difficulty and reward. The first fight is in the Spooky House against a bat to collect money for the expedition, then in the cave near the tent, against bats and slime. The victorious girls upgrade and receive experience and coins for their bravery.

Visiting the island next to the Oracle's brings another companion, Harold. After the battle on the filthy island, Marsha and Therese befriend Lucius, who had been accidentally transformed into a Minotaur under the spell of a curse. The two male characters have healing abilities, a useful magical feature in battles.

Yet, the complete team of four friends will have to face an orc and a real Minotaur on the Oracle's dwelling place, the players being fully rewarded after this exhausting clash. However, this battle means the end of the fellowship as well.

Pedagogical impact

As there is usually not too much linguistic interaction in combats, the teacher may want to exploit the mythological character having the head and tail of a bull and the body of a man – the Minotaur. Teachers can introduce to students the ready-made stories about this monstrous creature here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQuAUBX5xBw (Theseus and the Minotaur – part 1) and here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d62W9Y-s-Kg (Theseus and the Minotaur – part 2). The myth of the Minotaur can be a prompt for B1+ - B2 students to engage in **speaking** activities and debate on themes like heroes and monsters, morality, confinement (labyrinth), cultural beliefs in ancient societies. For **writing** activities, students can indulge in argumentative essays about myths based on analogies between history and literary works (e.g. the Minotaur in 'Harry Potter', the maze in 'The Hunger Games').

Informative note: The story of the Minotaur can be read by students at https://www.britannica.com/topic/Minotaur and can learn about other characters from the hyperlinks.

Roadmap and solutions

Level A: Visiting Mem'phish

Marsha enters Mem'phish after responding the town guard's short questionnaire. She will enter different places to collect money and objects for the mission. Walking towards the crossroad, in the beautiful mansion on the left, she will meet the first companion to be recruited for the mission, Therese. She offers the hint for finding water transport to the Oracle's island.

Level B: Finding a transport means

Meeting the old lady in front of her house will lead them to the Captain's house, who is now happy to lend them the ship. If need be, the player can return to the direction signpost at the left side of the city wall, close to the harbour, to find the exact route.

Level C: Tent and cave exploration

They are decisive locations for the game, as the Tent Skeleton gives the travellers important hints on how to reach and confront the Oracle, while the victory in the grotto will bring useful items for their mission (e.g. the container for filthy water can be found in the chest on top right corner of the map).

Level D: Collecting the filthy water

Marsha and Therese victoriously depart from the cave in Mainland with the water vessel. They are now heading to the island of the filthy water fountain. Here the girls encounter Harold who joins them immediately, as he was longing to depart from this place. The road to the fountain is blocked by the cursed Minotaur (Lucius), whom the travellers need to fight to reach the fountain. Amazed at their courage,

Lucius wants to accompany them as well. This task is successfully accomplished and the four companions are sailing away to their final destination.

Level E: The Oracles' test and endgame

The top right island is an instantly recognisable landmark to the player as there can be seen graves, wooden crosses and unburied skeletons. The companions enter one last battle together against the orc and the Minotaur, and this collaborative effort can bring a great victory if they effectively work together (special attention to using healing constantly). The Oracle claims the filthy water to quench his thirst and then is ready to put Marsha to the test: a three-question quiz based on riddles. Of course, the young girl is wise enough to map out her next steps.

Sources:

The game has only RPG Maker MV sources.