



# GAMES CONTENT

## Activity 1: Green Re-theming



Game Development students, B.A. or M.A. level



Basic



1 - 2,5 hours



6-25 participants



Basic understanding of theming vs. gameplay mechanics, foundational knowledge of game design and development scope



A timer for activities

## SUMMARY

An interactive workshop where students work to add sustainability messages to existing games without changing the gameplay mechanics.

## TASK

Students will take existing games and create new ideas about how sustainability themes could be added to them without (significantly) increasing the game's development scope.

## PREPARATION

A timer for activities. No further equipment necessary, but it is highly recommended to have a shared screen (e.g. a projector connected to a computer), list making software (e.g. Microsoft Word or Excel) and for students to have access to computers for research and/or note-taking materials.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Improved appreciation of the opportunities to include environmentally-aware themes in a larger game's scope.

## Step 1 Introduce/remind students of theming vs. systemic (5 minutes)

Let students know they will be working with the idea of sustainability theming in games.

Remind them of the distinction between theming and systemic sustainability content:

- 'Theming' – where the aesthetics of the game (visual, narrative, etc.) have environmental/sustainability themes
- 'Systemic' – where a game's core systems operate in ways that relate to sustainability actions
- Typically these either show good practises or act as a warning (utopian v.s dystopian)

*(See Greening Games teaching materials downloads for more information.)*



## **Step 2** *Have students pick a game and suggest three ways to add an environmental theme (10 minutes)*

Ask students to choose any game with little/no explicit sustainability theming, and then note at least 3 options for adding explicit environmentally aware theming.

Encourage students to explore multiple options for the game they choose to work with, not just pick the first game that comes to mind.

*Tip: put a timer on a screen with a 10 minute countdown.*

Students should work alone for this section of the exercise.

Remind them to take note of their 3-or-more options for changes to the theming, otherwise they will likely forget them during later conversational steps.

This should be done individually. A little quiet conversation will likely occur closer to the time limit and can be used as an indicator of readiness to progress.

If they need further inspiration:

- Remind students they can use visual, audio, or even haptic (vibration) feedback for their theme changes/additions.
- Encourage them to consider narrative changes, or changes to key pieces of environmental art such as save-points.
- Encourage them to consider explicit pro- and anti-environmental theming, so long as the message is clear.

Outcome from this step: each student has picked one game, and has three options to change it.

## **Step 3** *As a class, go around the room and collect the names of the games chosen (max. 5 minutes)*

Only get the names – don't ask for the theming changes yet. There will likely be some fun or thought-provoking choices already, which helps maintain energy levels.

## **Step 4** *Presenting the game and theming in groups of two to three students (10-20 minutes)*

Using the notes they've made, students get between 5-8 minutes to talk about their game and their choices. Ask them to collectively and quickly agree their favourite re-theming option per game.

## **Step 5** *Ask students to pick the favourite of each group that will be presented to the class (max. 5 minutes)*

Tell students they will need to give a very quick explanation of the game for people unfamiliar with it (genre, basic gameplay, typical target audience), and then a clear description of the proposed change in the theming.

## **Break** *Drink, exercise, snack (10 minutes)*

## **Step 6** *Every group presents their game and theme adjustments in strictly 5 minutes (30-60 minutes)*

Students present the game and the one theming change to add explicit environmental theming to the game.

Use a timer (on a phone is fine, just turn the sound on, or on a screen). This is usually quite fun!

If you have many groups, limit it to 4 minutes.

Keep a track of the changes on a whiteboard or spreadsheet visible to the students – you can track game name, genre, and type of change (story, visual, audio, haptic, etc.) to see if trends appear.

## Step 7 *Closing reflections (5-20 minutes)*

Encourage the students to pick their favourite suggestions:

- Which was the most entertaining?
- Which would be most impactful?
- What criteria are they applying to judge 'impact', and what does this say about their own priorities?
- Which would be the easiest to implement?
- Would it change the game's target audience?

Ask if they would include similar themes if they were/are working on a game – why would or wouldn't they do this?

Identify any themes in the changes the students suggested, e.g. were they mostly visual or narrative?

Final thought: do they think they feel more inspired about the range of options available to include environmental theming in games?

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More information may be found at: <https://greeningames.eu>.

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