

Facilitator's Guide to Getting Started

INTRODUCTION


This Facilitator Guide will help you facilitate a game design workshop for people who are new to TaleBlazer. The curriculum as written will take at least 4 hours and can be expanded as desired. You are encouraged to integrate this curriculum into your existing programming as a way for students to explore and investigate the site in a new way. Time for topical research, interviews, and tours has NOT been included in the curriculum, but any time you can devote to these pursuits will make the game design process much more valuable to participants, and their games will be more interesting.

This Facilitator's Guide will provide:

- an overview of the TaleBlazer game platform,
- suggested curriculum and tips for leading a TaleBlazer game design workshop
- an overview of available TaleBlazer “quick start” template games and support materials, and guidance to help you decide which one(s) to use for your program.

Program Note

This curriculum has been written with the intention that game designers work in groups of 2 or 3. This allows designers to help one another and bounce ideas off each other, while still giving them significant time using the software. You will need at least one computer and mobile device per group. If you need to make the groups larger to accommodate more designers, this collaboration across a larger group can work well. Just be prepared to structure group working time so that all team members have tasks to keep them engaged and productive. Details about how best to create a game as a large group are beyond the scope of this curriculum.



OBJECTIVES

- Prepare facilitators to lead a successful game creation program
- Familiarize facilitators with available template games
- Guide facilitators through customization of program curriculum to their own situations

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Computers with internet access (1 per 2 designers) (*note TaleBlazer editor is **not** optimized for tablets*)
- Mobile devices with GPS (iOS or Android, ideally 1 device per 2 designers).
- Wi-Fi for mobile devices (*for game download/updates, not needed throughout gameplay*)
- Paper, pens/pencils, sticky notes for game planning
- White board or similar for whole group planning/instructions
- Projector/screen to share online editor from the computer
- Worksheets for game planning (*optional*)
- Safe, accessible outdoor space for locating games

WHAT IS TALEBLAZER?

TaleBlazer games are location-based games played on mobile devices (smart phones or tablets), which enable players to interact with virtual characters, objects, and other information associated with real-world locations. TaleBlazer software has two parts: the mobile app (a.k.a. **TaleBlazer Mobile**), used for playing games, and the **TaleBlazer Editor** (available by signing up for a free account at <http://www.taleblazer.org>), used for creating games. The TaleBlazer Editor is recommended for ages 10 and older. Since TaleBlazer is not limited to any particular content, games can be created on any subject or topic the designer can imagine (science, foreign language, history, etc.).

WHY USE TALEBLAZER?

TaleBlazer software enables youth and adults to create and design their own entertaining and educational games. As a program facilitator, you can use TaleBlazer to engage youth in creative, collaborative design of their own interactive, location-based games and simulations. As they explore the game area and create their games, game designers develop a deep connection to the location and content of their game. Game designers also learn design and programming skills, allowing them to grow as digital “makers.” Because of TaleBlazer’s flexibility, game designers can make games with game mechanics, themes, characters, dialogue, objects, and narratives that are meaningful to them.

Creating a TaleBlazer game can motivate young game designers to learn new things. A game design program at a botanical garden, for example, might attract some participants who love plants and others who love games or computer programming. As game designers, youth must choose which real and virtual items and locations to include, justifying why each is interesting or important in the game. In order to make those decisions, game designers explore the location, content, and software for ideas and solutions to problems. If time allows, they may interview botanical garden staff experts, making connections between the organization’s behind-the-scenes research and the themes in their games. The rich, multifaceted game design process sparks and nurtures new interests in plants, games, and programming, creating an environment in which youth game designers dig deeper to make better games.

HOW DOES TALEBLAZER WORK?

Outdoor GPS Games: TaleBlazer Mobile games primarily take place in **outdoor** locations, using your mobile device’s GPS technology to locate the player on the game map. Since GPS requires the mobile device to communicate with satellites, **games work best in areas free of significant tree cover, tall buildings, or other things that could obstruct the signal.** (Designers can make indoor TaleBlazer games, but these games are more complicated to create and thus are not covered in this curriculum.)

Mobile Connectivity Requirements: Games are downloaded directly to the mobile device via Wi-Fi or a data signal. Once the game has been downloaded, the player does not need to have access to Wi-Fi or data to play the games, unless the game uses a dynamic map. None of the template games use dynamic maps. Games can be downloaded to a device using a unique game code or by signing in to the game designer's account in TaleBlazer Mobile.

Creating Online Editor Accounts: Anybody can set up an account at <http://www.taleblazer.org> to use the online editor to make games, although children under 13 need permission from a guardian to create their own accounts. If you are working with game designers younger than 13, you can ask them to set up accounts at home with their guardian's permission, or you can create accounts for them to use during the program. The benefit of the latter is that you would then have easy access to the games created during the program. Games created in the editor are saved to the cloud and can be accessed on any computer by logging in to your TaleBlazer account.

YOUR ROLE AS FACILITATOR

You will be doing some demonstrations and leading some activities, particularly at the beginning of the program, but soon the schedule will open up and your program participants will be managing their own time and tasks as they design their games. Your role throughout the program will be to:

- **Create a positive and welcoming classroom culture that values everyone's ideas and contributions.** Create a comfortable atmosphere and allow designers to try new things and make mistakes.
- **Support youth as designers.** Let youth take the lead as they develop, test, and revise their ideas. Avoid the temptation to grab the mouse and do the scripting work for them—guide designers as needed while they do the work. You may need to help designers focus their ideas into something manageable for the time and template allotted.
- **Reflect on the experience.** Take notes on what went well and what didn't go as desired—make changes in the program as needed. Allow time for designers to reflect on and share what they have learned.

NOTES ON FACILITATION

You do not have to be a computer expert to facilitate TaleBlazer game creation! TaleBlazer was designed to be used by novices, and the preparatory materials included here will help you familiarize yourself with the software before you lead others. That said, you will be much more comfortable if you spend some time exploring TaleBlazer on your own. Go through the template tutorials yourself and make your own game. Feel free, too, to modify the existing templates to better suit your site and needs. The online game editor also has some built-in tutorials that you may want to play around with.


As you explore the software, you'll gain a better understanding of common challenges and how to address them.

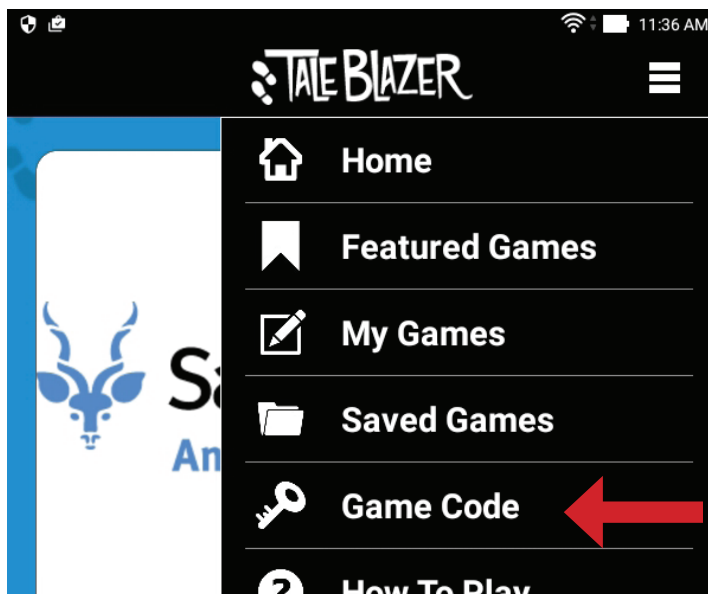
Game design for youth is most powerful when the students can really take charge of their own game design. The more students can own the process and make meaningful decisions about their games, the more invested they will be in the games and their creation. As a facilitator, your job is to balance giving the students support and structure and allowing them to work through challenges themselves. While it is important that the students finish the program with some sense of accomplishment—they've created a game that they are happy with—students learn a lot through the process of designing and building a game regardless of the quality of the end product.

This curriculum places a lot of constraints on the games built in an effort to reduce the burden of learning the software and enable students to complete an interesting game in 4 hours. Building a game from a template reduces student agency to some degree, but we believe that for an introductory experience the benefits of a quick start outweigh the loss of some creative freedom. Consider presenting the games as a design challenge (perhaps for a fictitious client). Rather than telling designers they can make whatever they want, then introducing the limits, start with the constraints and encourage creativity from there. The game becomes a problem to solve creatively rather than an open-ended activity that feels stifling as it gets boxed in.

EXPLORING TALEBLAZER

Although TaleBlazer games are meant to be played on location, you can play many of the games by tapping the icons on the screen instead of walking to them.


1. Download TaleBlazer Mobile to your mobile device.
 - a. Go to Google Play or the iOS App Store and search for TaleBlazer. Download and open it.
2. Tap the menu icon  in the upper right corner of the home screen, and tap *Game Code*.




3. Enter one of the game codes from the template games listed below.

Template Game Codes:

- Narrative Mystery: **gxrvmdi**
- Score Game: **glecbgm**

4. Download the template game, then tap **Play**.
5. Read the first introduction screen, then tap **OK**.
6. Tap on the menu icon  in the upper right part of your screen, then tap **Settings**.

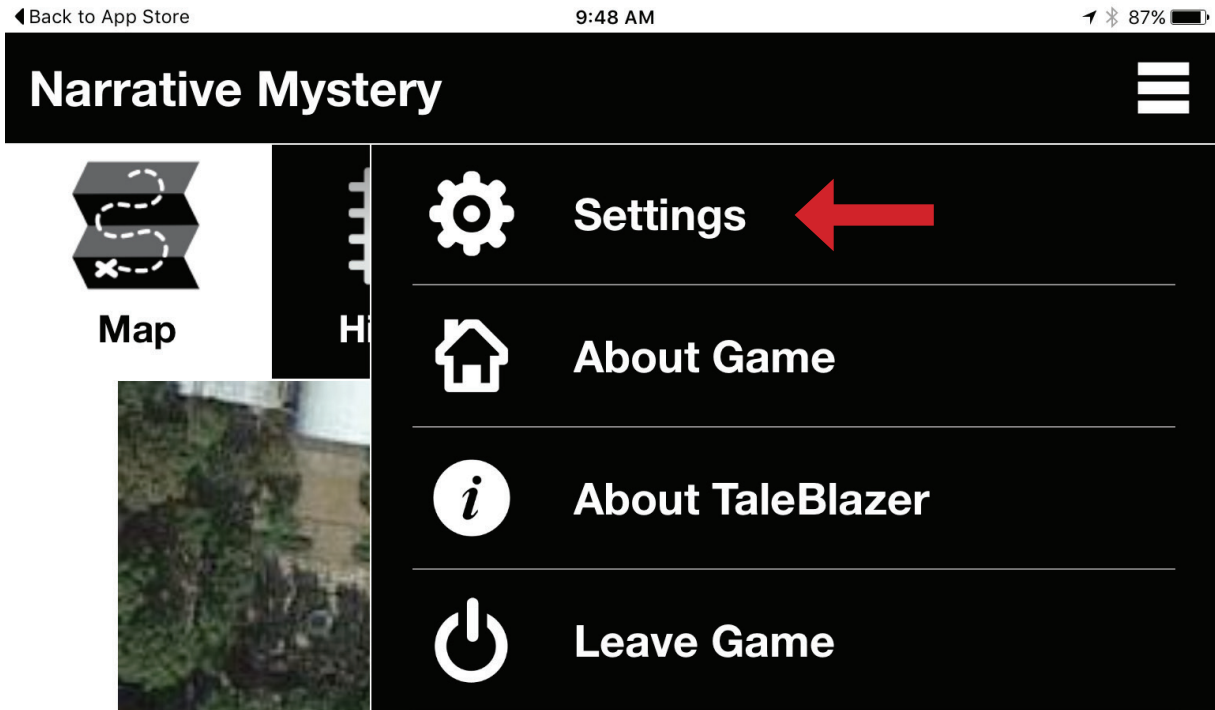


MATERIALS NEEDED

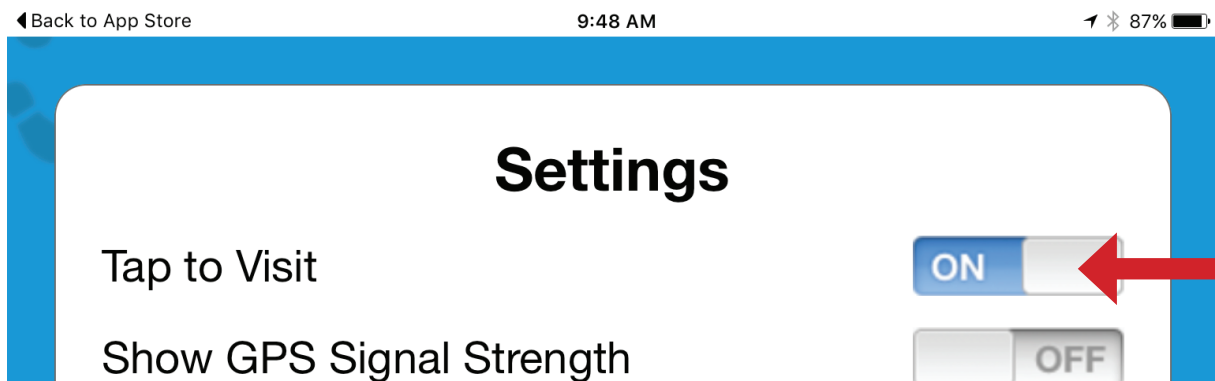
- Mobile device (iOS or Android, see <http://taleblazer.org/Support/systemrequirements> for information about device requirements.)
- Wi-Fi or data signal

TERMS

- **Agent:** a character, object, or clue used in the game. Often represented by an icon on the map.
- **Bump:** to visit/activate an agent. Usually done by walking to an icon on the map.



7. Turn on **Tap to Visit**. This will make it possible for you to visit each icon without physically walking to it.



- a. Tap **OK** to return to the game.
8. Tap the icon on the map (red circle) to *bump* your first agent.
9. Continue to play the game by responding to the agents and tapping on icons as they appear on the map.
10. To leave, tap the menu icon, then tap **Leave Game**.
11. Go back to step 2 and tap through a different template game.

THINKING ABOUT LOCATION

One of the first decisions you will make when designing a TaleBlazer game is where—in the real world—you want the game to take place. For this short workshop, you will need to choose an area beforehand for the game designers to use as their game area. Logistically, it is easiest if everyone is designing a game for the same space. Depending on your site and the number of people available to supervise, you may be able to offer more than one location. The game area should be outside and at least a couple acres in size. The inherent inaccuracy of GPS becomes a problem in small game areas. Conversely, very large game areas also pose challenges for navigation as the player's icon will appear less responsive and landmarks may be harder to see. Try to find an area about the size of a city block.

Some other considerations:

- **Where will your game designers be meeting?** Ideally, your game area will be nearby and easily accessible to designers for design and playtesting.
- **Where are there interesting content possibilities?** Are there existing features that connect well to your content goals?
- **Are there hazards to avoid?** Busy roads, stairs, restricted areas or bodies of water inside the game area?
- **Can you get an accurate GPS signal?** Tall buildings, trees, canyons, and other tall objects can block GPS signals and cause frustration in playing the game.

CHOOSING YOUR TEMPLATE GAME

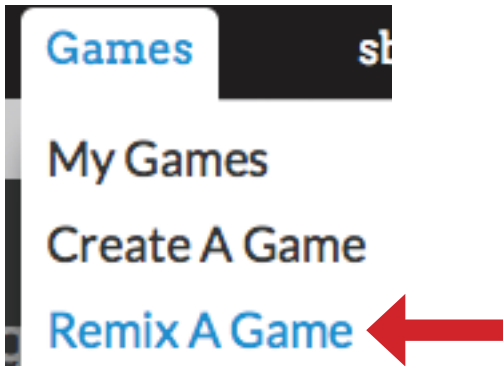
The template you use will affect the type of games your designers create. You've already played the games and have a sense of what they are, but read through the *Game Overview* sheet for each template. The overviews describe the game format and give some ideas about ways to use the template. This will help you decide which template game will best suit your needs.

Please note: Both of the templates, as written, are intended to be fairly generic and therefore easily moved to your location. This means that references to the real world are very general, and the games don't require the player to interact with their surroundings. However, a well-designed TaleBlazer game is location-specific and makes extensive use of the physical world. **We encourage you to customize the template game to integrate it with your site.** If you do customize the template game, make sure that your game designers use the correct game code to play and remix your version of the game—not the generic template.

LOCATING YOUR TEMPLATE GAME

1. Go to www.taleblazer.org and log in to your account. (Create an account if you haven't yet.)

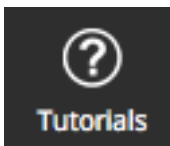
2. Once you are logged in, go to the **Games** menu at the top of the screen, and click **Remix A Game**.



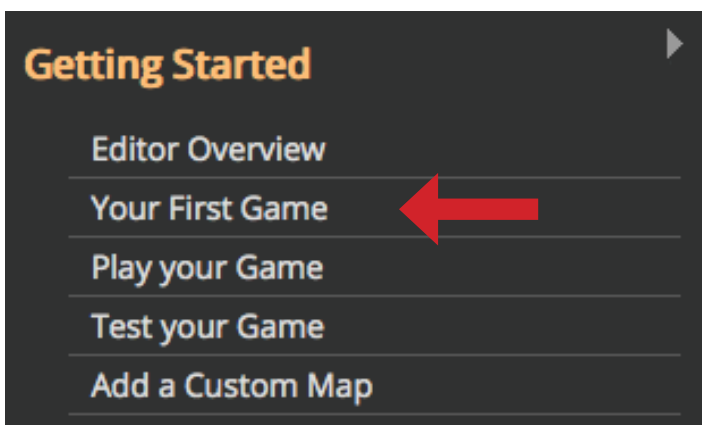
3. Use the game code below to remix (copy) the template game you have chosen.
 - a. Narrative Mystery: **gxrvmdi**
 - b. Score Game: **glecbgm**
4. Click **Save Game** to save a copy of the game to your account. Any changes you make will only affect the game in your account, not the original.



5. If the tutorial panel on the right isn't already open, click on the **Tutorials** button at the top of your screen.



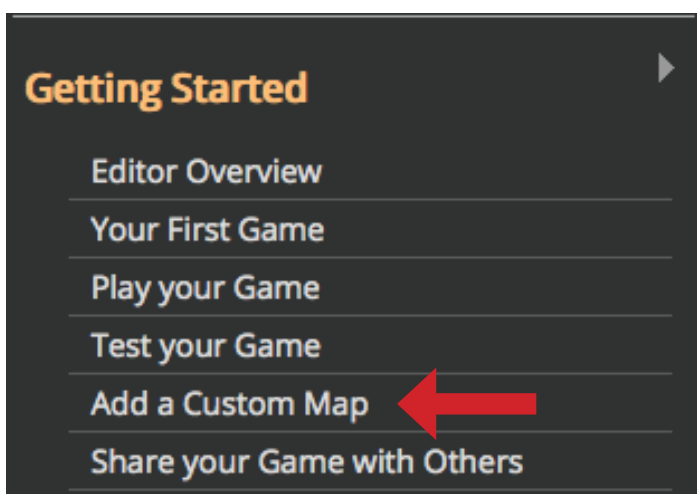
6. In the tutorial panel, click on **Getting Started**, then choose **Your First Game**.



7. Follow the instructions in “I. Locate Your Game” to move the game to your location. Make sure to set the game in the area you want your students to use during the program. To get rid of the original map image and be able to see the map inside the game area, switch the setting to **Dynamic Map** on the left side of your screen. Adjust the map as necessary to show your game area within the red game area box.
8. Now that your game area is set, you will want to create a map image to use with your game so that Wi-Fi is not necessary during game play. Click on the menu button in the upper right corner of the tutorial panel.



9. Under **Getting Started**, choose **Add a Custom Map** and follow those instructions. The custom map you add will be a simple screenshot of the Google map. You can alter that image if you like, by using a drawing program (or even PowerPoint) to draw in paths and buildings. This is time consuming, however, and may not be necessary for an introductory experience.



10. Make sure to save your changes! Note that this game will have a new game code. The game code can be

SAVE YOUR GAMES OFTEN!

TaleBlazer does not automatically save your work.


Dynamic Maps allow the player to move the map around in TaleBlazer Mobile and zoom in or out as they play. The map uses Google Maps and requires a constant data or Wi-Fi connection to play.

Custom Maps use a downloaded image as a backdrop and do not require connectivity to play. The maps are static, but can be customized to show paths and landmarks relevant to the game. In most cases, custom maps provide the player with the best game experience.


To learn more about dynamic and custom maps, read *In Depth: About Maps* in the in-editor tutorial panel.



found by clicking on the small triangle to the right of the game title in the upper right corner of the game editor.

Narrative Mystery 

Pick the game name, image, and description to identify this game when browsing or searching on the TaleBlazer website.



Description

To allow other players to play this game, give them this game code: **gxrvmdi**

DEFINING GAME GUIDELINES

Giving your game designers some goals and guidelines will help them make more meaningful and interesting games. Think about how the games can support your broader program goals. Some questions to consider include:

- Is there specific content you want designers to use in their games?
- Are there technical objectives you want to include (add additional agents, add a certain mechanic, etc.)?

- What audience are they creating the games for (peers, neighbors, younger students, general visitors)?
- Are there aspects of the *players'* experience that are important to design for (learn something, explore an area, interact with the physical world in some way, etc.)?

Write down the game guidelines you want your designers to use. You will introduce game creation as a design challenge for program participants to complete, so consider developing a fictitious (or real!) client for your designers to develop games for.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK AND CLASSROOM CULTURE

Even though this is a relatively short program, setting a tone of positivity, curiosity, and problem-solving can help everyone have a better experience. If you are using this curriculum during an existing program, you likely already have a classroom culture, but it can be helpful to keep the following in mind:

- Creating games using this curriculum is a design challenge. That means there are certain constraints for the games (such as the form of the template game and any guidelines you developed) that may feel limiting, but can also inspire creativity.
- The design process also involves a lot of testing and refining. While designers in this program won't have a lot of time to test and refine (particularly if you stick to 4 hours), encourage them to think in terms of drafts and revisions rather than simply being "done."
- Designers will, to varying degrees depending on the length of the program, have opportunities to give their peers feedback. Consider discussing with the group how to give and receive constructive and respectful feedback.
- Encourage designers to learn from each other—ask each other questions when they get stuck, and share what they learned when they fixed a problem. Consider facilitating these exchanges by sending designers to seek advice from others who overcame the same issue earlier.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

To enable you to make the best use of your program time, you should do the following before your game designers arrive:

Room set up:

- 1 table for each pair of designers, with chairs. Tables may need to be located near outlets, if the computers will need a power source during the program.

- It is also helpful to have a central gathering area away from the computers for group discussions. Actual layout will vary by space.

Mobile devices:

- Should be fully charged, with TaleBlazer downloaded and the tutorial game (located at your site) downloaded.
- It is helpful to have the media **volume** set to a moderate level and the **screen brightness** increased for outdoor viewing. You may also want to **extend the “screen timeout” time** until the device goes to sleep, so that people don’t have to constantly wake the device to continue with their game.
- It is helpful to have the camera easily available to designers on the device’s homescreen.
- Bring power cords to your classroom for mid-program charging and transferring photos from the devices to computers. Power strips can also be helpful for charging more devices at one time.

Computers:

- Complete all required updates on computers to reduce the number of notifications designers receive during the program.
- Make sure an internet browser is installed (Firefox or Chrome are recommended for use with TaleBlazer). Set TaleBlazer as the home page or as a bookmark to ease access.
- If you are using laptops, make sure they are fully charged, and consider bringing mice to help with the drag-and-drop interface used by TaleBlazer.
- You may also want to create folders on the desktops for game designers to keep their game images in.

Printed materials:

- Print at least one copy of the game designer tutorials for each pair, as well as any worksheets or peer review guides you might be using.

TaleBlazer accounts:

Creating accounts for your game designers to use during the program will save time and allow you to access the games easily during and after the program. Keep the following in mind:

- Write down the usernames and passwords for any accounts you create. TaleBlazer allows you to sign up for multiple accounts using the same email address, although doing so means that you won’t be able to use the password recovery function if you forget your password.
- Multiple designers can be working on *different* games in the same account at the same time,

but each game should only be open on one computer at the same time. Having a different account for each team prevents some potential overwriting mistakes, but having everyone work in the same account can be easier to monitor and track. Do whatever makes the most sense to you.

- To save time during the program, you can copy the template game into the account before the program starts.