

Teaching with the *Betwixt Folly and Fate* Role Playing Game

WHAT IS BETWIXT FOLLY AND FATE?

In Colonial Williamsburg's new 3-D immersive role playing game, *Betwixt Folly and Fate*, students assume the roles of individuals from various levels of 18th-century Williamsburg society. Students will:

- Interact with an exciting portal to the past that fits today's learners, keeps them motivated, and helps them draw from prior knowledge
- Use gaming strategies in a virtual environment based on the daily lives of Williamsburg residents in 1774
- Explore how social class and customs operated in pre-Revolutionary War Virginia
- Build problem solving, sequence learning, deductive reasoning, and memorization strategies

DIGITAL ROLE PLAYING GAMES (RPGS) AS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

In America's technology-driven culture, educators face the extraordinary opportunity and challenge of using digital gaming as a classroom learning tool. For today's young digital generation, the virtual world is a familiar place. Most students are comfortable with online interactives and digital games. On the other hand, teachers have varying levels of gaming experience: many are learning about both the educational value of digital games and how they work.

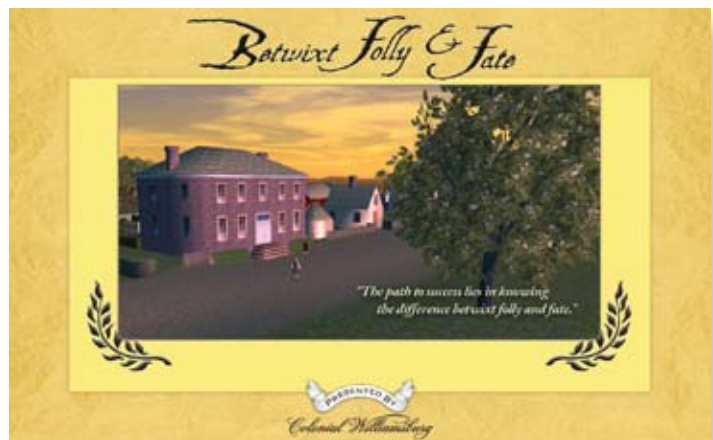
Scholarship in recent years suggests that computer games are effective tools for constructivist learning. Beyond the immediate experience, research indicates that games enhance motor, intellectual, affective, and social development. Well-designed digital games create virtual worlds through which students experience other eras and events from a different perspective. For example, students may learn that today's liberties and societal rules may not apply to the past.

Through role playing, students create or assume a persona or character, take control, overcome challenges, use creativity, try new skills, and see the consequences of their decisions. In well-structured history-based learning games, students' success hinges on using both related historical knowledge and gaming skills.

Games motivate and engage learners. As James Paul Gee notes in his 2003 book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, "This is what is magical about learning in good video games — and in good classrooms, too — learners are not always overtly aware of the fact that they are 'learning,' how much they are learning, or how difficult it is." Educators want students to absorb real-world content in an accurate historical context.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

In his research on students as digital natives of the twenty-first century, consultant Marc Prensky has zeroed in on a key difference between modern-day students and their teachers. Simply put, today's students think and process information differently. As Prensky explains in his 2001 essay, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*, instructors who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language. But as he also points out, it is the teacher's role as facilitator that is essential in today's classrooms. "Teachers needn't master all the new technologies," Prensky



states in his essay. “They should continue doing what they do best: leading discussion in the classroom. But they must find ways to incorporate into those discussions the information and knowledge that their students acquire outside class in their digital lives.”

Through role playing games such as *Betwixt Folly and Fate*, in which they become virtual citizens of Williamsburg, Virginia, students and teachers can integrate a variety of skills with the study of eighteenth-century life in the colonies.



TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Teachers new to the use of digital role playing games (RPGs) in the classroom may find the following tips helpful:

- Play the game yourself! This will help you to understand both the content and the skills needed to play *Betwixt Folly and Fate*.
- Time your game play to judge how using the game may impact your classroom schedule. Typically, it takes 40–60 minutes to play each of the four character quests in *Betwixt Folly and Fate*. Individual students will move through the game at varying speeds. The “save game” feature permits individual students to complete their game play over multiple sessions.
- Connect the game’s content to curriculum content. For example, *Betwixt Folly and Fate* links to specific state curriculum standards: http://www.history.org/history/teaching/eft_correlations.cfm
- Use the RPG to encourage class discussion about the challenges students encountered in their “virtual world,” as compared to their other study on the colonial period. It is helpful to place students in teams to facilitate discussion and peer-to-peer instruction.

GAME INSTRUCTIONS

Betwixt Folly and Fate follows many conventions of popular computer RPGs. Some students will already be familiar with these conventions, while others may need guidance to help them understand how to play the game.

INSTALLING THE GAME ON WINDOWS XP OR VISTA: On the CD-ROM menu, click on the “Install Role Playing Game” button and follow the onscreen instructions. In Windows XP, you must be logged in as the administrator. In Vista, you may be logged in as another user but must type in the administrator password when prompted. Once the installer is finished, the game may be launched using the Shortcut on your desktop or from the Start → All Programs → Betwixt menu. From that menu, you may also uninstall *Betwixt Folly and Fate*.

INSTALLING THE GAME ON MAC OS X: In the CD-ROM “Finder” window, drag the *Betwixt* icon and drop it on your computer’s Applications icon.

INTRODUCTORY SCREENS provide succinct information about the game setting (1774 Williamsburg) and characters. Players choose one of four characters to play. Some characters also have a choice of clothing. (Wealthy characters have more clothing choices than do poor and slave characters.) Each player-character must adhere to the rules of his or her social status while going about the town and the day’s tasks.

After selecting a character’s clothing, the full game loads. This will take between 10 and 60 seconds on most computers. If it takes much longer, the computer may not be able to run the game (see Computer Requirements at the end of this document). During loading, have students review the orientation screen that explains the game interface.

GAME ORIENTATION

Once the game has loaded, players may use a mouse and the W-A-S-D (or arrow) keys to walk around town and talk to people they meet. Players should choose *all* dialogue options when talking to other characters—otherwise, key information and tasks may be missed. Some conversations will be short; others longer. Conversations are also based on social status and levels of interaction: for example, gentlemen have little to say to slaves but have several topics of conversation with one another. Use these differences to help students understand the importance of social status in colonial America.



TASKS are what keep players moving through the game. Players receive tasks from other characters. These show up in dialog pop-up boxes, and are then listed in the lower-left Current Tasks list. Each task has a colored dot that corresponds to a dot on the map in upper-left, which indicates where in town the task may be completed. Players earn points for each completed task. These points are simply to help players track their progress and feel a sense of accomplishment.

REPUTATION AND SHILLING METERS show consequences of a player's choices throughout the game, and help players to understand the importance of both in colonial society. Only Henry has a critical need for shillings, but all of the characters may see their reputations rise or fall. Players' choices influence their characters' outcomes.

EACH PLAYER-CHARACTER has a **critical path** through the day. This path includes a number of ordinary tasks of daily life, a larger task for the day, a moral decision to be made, and a resolution to the day's events and decisions. The major goal for the day is usually revealed while completing the first few tasks. The major decision often crops up unexpectedly later in the day.



- **Chloe:** As a slave, she hopes to obtain better work. She must also make a major decision regarding her brother Pompey.



- **Mary Hubbard:** As a midwife's assistant, she hopes prove her abilities before the day is over.



- **Henry Wells:** As a free black carpenter, he must earn enough money to pay his mother's rent. He must also make a major decision about a lost pocketbook.



- **George Whitby:** As a young gentleman, he is assuming the responsibilities of a young plantation owner, and must decide how to protest Lord Dunmore's recent actions.

The colonial town in the game is a recreation of approximately one-third of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Historic Area. While the town is interesting to explore in its own right, after students become familiar with it they may tire of walking from place to place. The **"fast-jump"** method allows them to move quickly from task to task. To do this, click and hold the M key (on the keyboard) and then click on a Task dot on the map. The player-character will zoom to that location.

- Pressing the ESC key opens the **Options Menu**, where players may quit their game, start a new

game with a different character, save their game, reload a saved game, and adjust graphics settings.

- **Quit Game:** Close the game without saving your progress.
- **New Game:** Start the game over with the same character, or choose a different character.
- **Save Game:** Be sure to give each saved game a unique name (perhaps the student's name and the character they are playing, such as "Jasmine-Henry"). Games are saved to small text files in the Betwixt Folly and Fate folder in the Documents and Settings folder on your computer—do NOT move these files or you will not be able to reload saved games.
- **Reload Game:** Resume a previously saved game session.
- **Quality Settings:** If the game runs slowly or jerkily, try a lower graphics quality setting. "Good" is the default setting, so try "Simple," "Fast," or "Fastest." These will change the "Frames per Second" number. Please note that the "Fastest" and "Fast" settings use a simpler terrain, so you may notice some changes when switching from "Fast" to "Simple."



TROUBLESHOOTING

If the following tips do not solve your problem, please refer to our troubleshooting Web page for the latest information: www.history.org/dayinthelife/troubleshooting.cfm

The game runs slowly or jerkily. Your computer may be having trouble running the game. Try a lower graphics quality setting. (See "Quality Settings" above, in the Options Menu section.)

Erratic or unusual behavior. On rare occasions, the game may get stuck or display erratic or unusual behavior. If this happens, save your game [ESC → Save Game], then choose Quit Game. Re-launch *Betwixt Folly and Fate* and load your saved game.

You can't figure out what to do. Review the "How to Play the Game" section for guidance. Be sure to choose *all* dialog options when talking to other characters—otherwise, you may miss key information or tasks.

The game will not run on Windows Vista. There is a bug with several Vista graphics drivers for Intel Integrated graphics cards. For more information, see the troubleshooting page: www.history.org/dayinthelife/troubleshooting.cfm

Graphics irregularities. Your computer may have an outdated graphics driver. We have seen some specific problems caused by an older graphics driver for Intel 865G integrated graphics. If you are experiencing graphics glitches on Windows, do the following:

1. Find the "Betwixt" folder and open the Data/output_log.txt file. At the top, it will say what graphics is in the computer. Look for this line: Renderer: Intel(R) 82865G Graphics Controller.
2. If you DO see this message, then look for the driver version: Version: Direct3D 9.0c [ialmrt5.dll 6.14.10.3619]. (Please note: your number may be different). If your driver version number is *lower* than 14.17, you should update your driver.
3. To update your driver, go to the following Intel site: http://downloadcenter.intel.com/Product_Filter.aspx?ProductID=1044

Need to run game at different resolution.

Hold down the Option (on Mac) or Alt (on Windows) key when launching the game and select the preferred resolution. The higher the resolution, the more the quality setting may need to be reduced to maintain good performance. We recommend **not** checking “Windowed” mode, as it may cause problems with the cursor when switching between *Between Folly and Fate* and other programs. If that happens, right-click or press the comma key to regain control of the player-character. However, this method may stop working if used repeatedly to switch back and forth. Windowed mode is not a supported feature. It is strongly recommended that the game be played in full-screen mode.



DIGITAL GAME-BASED LEARNING: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a selected bibliography related to digital game-based learning, please go to: www.history.org/dayinthelife/biblio.cfm.

COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS

Windows

Windows XP Service Pack 2 or higher
(DirectX 9.0c or higher must be installed).
Vista is supported, but may exhibit video driver issues.
1.5 GHz Pentium 4 or higher
512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended)
1024 x 768 screen resolution
Graphics card: Radeon 9200, NVIDIA GeForce 3, or Intel 865 or better
250 MB available hard drive space

Mac OSX

OSX 10.4 or higher
1.0 GHz G4 or higher, or any Intel processor
512 MB RAM (1 GB recommended)
1024 x 768 screen resolution
Graphics Card: Radeon 9200, NVIDIA GeForce 3, or Intel 865 or better
250 MB available hard drive space

Note: As with all video games, more powerful graphics cards and CPUs allow higher screen resolutions and/or quality settings. Older video cards and drivers may exhibit rendering or performance issues.