



Game lesson title	Unpacking the Personal - Storytelling Through Objects in <i>Unpacking</i>		
Brief intro	<i>Unpacking</i> is a puzzle based game where players follow a character and unpack boxes on their behalf, placing objects in different rooms. As players progress through the game, a story is gently revealed through their interaction with various objects, and different spaces. The game designers describe <i>Unpacking</i> as a ‘zen puzzle game’, there are some restrictions on where items can and can’t go, but also a lot of freedom for players to organise and style as they desire. In this lesson students will either play in pairs, or together as a class, reflecting on this meditative mode of storytelling, and the personal nature of possessions. Students play the game and reflect on storytelling, change, and what we learn about character from the objects they carry with them.		
Lesson hook	Slow down and explore the personal with this gentle puzzle game, and reflect on the revealing nature of objects and how they tell our story.		
Suggested year level	7-10	Suggested age level	12-16
Suggested duration	1 x 50-90 minutes (depending on how far you want to progress in the game)	Costs involved? (detail below)	Game needs to be purchased and is around \$30
Author	You are free to copy, communicate and adapt this lesson plan which was created by Garry Westmore, Emma McManus, and Sophia Simmons, and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0		
Subject/s			
☒ English			
☒ Media Studies			
Curriculum/Capabilities Alignment (VIC/AC) and Skills			



VCAMAE033 - Experiment with the organisation of ideas to structure stories through settings, genre conventions and viewpoints, in images, sounds and text

VCAMAR038 - Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by genre and the values and viewpoints of particular audiences

VCELT437 - Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts

VCELT372 - Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts

VCELA370 - Analyse how point of view is generated in visual texts by means of choices, including gaze, angle and social distance

Game Used	Unpacking		
Game play required?	Yes		
CLASSIFICATION	CONSOLE	INTERNET REQUIRED?	COST (RRP)
<i>G – Very mild themes</i>	<i>PC (via Steam) or Xbox or Nintendo Switch</i>	No (once game is downloaded)	<i>\$28.95 on Steam</i>
Important note about Game Classification			
As classifications can change, teachers are responsible for checking the latest videogame classification and suitability for their class age group. Please visit https://www.classification.gov.au/ and https://www.commonsense.org/education/ to guide you.			
How are games used by students in the lesson?			
☒ Watchers – observing, analysing and evaluating. Learning about the world and ourselves through understanding the impact of games culture and industry. ☒ Players - learning by playing videogames - learning things applicable to life outside of (and in) the game e.g. flight simulators, esports, etc. ☐ Makers - learning through making games (coding, creative production, teamwork, leadership)			



☐ **Explorers** (Minecraft) – imaginative, self-directed, exploratory/sandbox learning.

Technical Notes

Ideally it would be wonderful to have students in pairs, on a computer each. However, as Unpacking is not a free game, you can instead engage in shared and classroom play. Have the game up on a projector or large screen for all to see.

There are 8 moves (levels) which get increasingly difficult in the sense that the spaces the character is moving into get larger, and there are generally more items to unpack.

Have one student play Level 1 (as it is quite short), and then for the subsequent 7 levels, we suggest splitting playing time evenly amongst your remaining students.

The students playing should feel free to talk to those observing, and seek advice when they want it (trying to unpack and place every item by committee will take forever) so establish the player/audience dynamic you think will work best.

Prior knowledge/skills (Required/Recommended/References)

Some students may have prior experience with the game - but it is not required.

Student outcomes

Learning goals

KNOW:

- about different methods of storytelling and narrative style
- that videogames can be a meditative experience
- about genre and style in videogames and how they influence themes

BE ABLE TO:

- relate and connect universal human experiences to familiar objects
- reflect on personal connection with objects and personal spaces
- pick up storytelling clues and formulate narrative based on observation

IMPROVE:

- imaginative and observation skills

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	- ability to fill the narrative gaps with their own ideas.
LESSON SEQUENCE	
Prep & introduction activities	Buy and install <i>Unpacking</i> on enough devices for each pair of students to have a computer to themselves. Alternatively, set up one device with the game, and connect a projector to play as a class (see Technical Notes for how to structure this.) As players and observers move through the game they will come across many retro items that they won't recognise (some teachers might not even recognise!) Encourage dialogue and see if any students can identify mystery items (think Nintendo GameCube, old school iPads, cassette players and tapes etc). If you have a second computer/device in the room, assign a student or students to research this technology and other items as you go. It can be fun trying to identify these items, and to share discoveries as a class as you go. There are 'teachers notes' for each level with questions you can put to the class as discussion points as the level is being played. After completing each level/move, engage in the questions and writing activities – you the teacher know your students best, but we have indicated what we suggest would be good for class discussion, and what could be answered individually/as a writing task. Before you begin gameplay you may want to introduce the game and discuss the style and themes: • Isometric layout style, 2D pixel art, not 3D • Not super high resolution adding to the nostalgic feel • point, click and drag mechanics forcing players to manually connect to each object. • The 'zen' nature of gameplay Encourage students to observe how these elements make them feel, and what the game is trying to evoke in them as players:

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Main lesson activities	Play the game! Students are free to explore the game at their own pace, but should take a similar time to complete each level. Use these questions to fuel individual reflection during gameplay, and class discussion between levels. 1997 – FIRST BEDROOM Teacher questions during gameplay: • Has anyone had to share a room with a sibling before getting their own room? Describe the feeling. Class discussion after completing the level: • What can we guess about this character? How old are they? Individual task to write in notebook: • Spoiler – the next move will throw us 7 years into the future. What items, if any, do you think the main character will bring with them? Pick 2-3 items and explain why. 2004 - UNI DORM Teacher questions during gameplay: • Where do you think the character might be now? Class discussion after completing the level: • What do you think the character might be studying at University? Are there any objects that give you a reason for that guess? 2007 – SHAREHOUSE Teacher questions during gameplay: • Is our character living with someone? Who? What can you tell about them? Class discussion after completing the level: • You couldn't move any of the housemate's things. What does this tell you about the dynamic of the house? 2010 – WITH PARTNER Teacher questions during gameplay: • Who is our character living with now? Class discussion after completing the level: • In this level, you could move (some, not all) of the partner's things. What does this tell you about the dynamic of their relationship? • How much space has the partner left for our character? • Compare the character's items to the partner's? What is similar? What is different?
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	Individual task to write in notebook: • What do you think could make the space feel more equal? • What do you think will happen next? 2012 – BACK HOME Teacher questions during gameplay: • Where are we? • What can we presume has happened? Why? • How has our character's bedroom changed since Move #1? Class discussion after completing the level: • Which rooms can we unpack items into? • What does this limitation on spaces tell you? • There's a photo we might have instinctively put on the pin board, but it doesn't belong here. Why not? What/who do you think the photo is of? Individual task to write in notebook: • 'This room used to feel bigger' - explain what the character means by this 2013 – OWN APARTMENT Teacher questions during gameplay: • Do you think our character has travelled overseas before? Where to? Think about some of the objects we've unpacked into the living room. Class discussion after completing the level: • In the last few moves we have seen new objects that suggest our character has taken up, and perhaps stuck with, some hobbies. What are these hobbies and how have they changed? 2015 – BACK FROM OVERSEAS Teacher questions during gameplay: • We're unpacking into the same apartment, but the boxes are quite different. What do you think is happening here? • Where from overseas do you think our character has been? Which objects have given you this impression? • We can probably guess this character has previously travelled to Europe (Italy, England, Netherlands possibly) before this journey to Japan – which trip do you think has been the most influential, and why? Class discussion after completing the level: • We might get the sense that professionally, our protagonist may have progressed in life. What gives this impression?
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Reflection activity	Getting to know the character We never get to meet the character to whom all these things belong, but we learn a lot about them through the objects they own, and the spaces they are moving into. We notice objects that get brought along from the very beginning, when the character was quite young – through to their adult life, and we also see objects get abandoned along the way and we make hypotheses about the character we are playing. What are some of the things you noticed that stayed or disappeared? What do you think the chosen objects tell us about the character and their journey? Themes In a film or novel, we can usually separate ‘plot’ (what happens) and ‘themes’ (what the story is really about, what it’s trying to say, the idea it is trying to explore). It might not be as easy with videogames, but we can try to separate the ‘aim’ or ‘goals’ of the game, from the game's themes. So first, what is the aim of Unpacking? To unpack! But we can safely say that outside of this goal there is a bit more going on – there are some deeper themes being explored. What are some of these themes? The places we live in, and the objects we bring along the way, say a lot about us. We never learn the name of the protagonist. We never meet them, or any of the other characters we know have been in their lives (parents, partner, housemate). However, it would be fair to say that we know them to some degree. We know their hobbies, we know the stuff they’re into, we kind of understand their fashion sense (maybe). • What sort of person do you think the protagonist is? • How do you imagine the other people in their life? • What sort of life do you think the protagonist leads? • What do you think your possessions would say about you to someone who has never met you?
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	The things we hang onto and the things we leave behind say a lot about the stages of our lives, and the way life changes. It's probably no surprise, but the things we love and cherish when we're in Primary School, might not be the things we love and cherish when we're 30! However, there are often things we hang onto from our childhood that we can't bear to let go of for whatever reason. And of course there are things we happily leave behind as we grow up. And then there are passions, hobbies, interests, we pick up along the way. In <i>Unpacking</i>, we see more plush toys come into the characters life than we see go! We see art and music become more important, we see a love of videogames and pop culture throughout, as well as some slight shifts in taste. • What are some objects that get carried through since the very first room? What do they tell us about the character? • What has the character picked up from the different house's they have lived in? • What changes about our protagonist's personality, and what things remain consistent? • What choices do you have to make as a player that might signal a change in priorities for our protagonist?
Differentiation: modification, extension and inclusion notes	Long response questions: In <i>Unpacking</i>, we the player act on behalf of the protagonist yet we never meet them, or learn their name. How does the game manage to teach us about this person? And what do we learn? Our life experiences and stages of growth are reflected through the objects we own, the things we hang onto, and the stuff we let go of. How is this idea explored in <i>Unpacking</i>? A review of the game states: "Unpacking is a nostalgia trip for those born in the late 80s early 90s, however, it has universal themes we can all relate to" - to what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Draw upon examples of objects and locations and what you see as the themes of <i>Unpacking</i>. The main game mechanic of <i>Unpacking</i> is to unpack boxes, and find a place for the protagonist's objects. However, there are some objects that belong in specific places, and there are often other character's objects that the player can, or cannot move. Think of examples and explain what the player learns about the protagonist and their relationships with others.



Student Homework/Further Work
Have a good look at your room. What objects do you think would tell someone observing from outside the story of who you are? Discuss answers in the following class - option to bring in objects.
Assessment
This lesson is achieved if students have discussed how the objects unpacked tell a story about the character and they have reflected on the personal nature of objects and what they say about us.

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