

Course Description

The Infinite Library: Interactive Fiction Summer School

Dates	Monday 17 to Friday 21 July 2017
Times	10.30–16.30 (Friday 10.30–19.00)
Location	Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre
Class size	Maximum 16 participants
Level	Our summer school is designed for anyone with an interest in interactive literature, experimental storytelling, and the possibilities of working digitally. No programming experience is required.

Course description

Develop your writing and experiment with nonlinear storytelling at our Interactive Fiction Summer School. Led by multi-award-winner Dr Abigail Parry and a host of specialists in fiction, interactive fiction and games writing, you'll learn the skills and techniques to work within a dynamic form – one that allows the reader to choose the direction of the narrative.

Writer Jorge Luis Borges conceived an infinite library, in which every possible narrative was housed; this is one way of understanding the potential of interactive fiction, and will act as our starting point for the course. Over five days, we'll guide you as you build your own immersive libraries for your readers to explore. We'll embrace collage and homage as well as original storytelling, and provide the technical support needed to explore the possibilities offered by Twine, a simple open-source programme for managing branching texts.

With our expert guidance you'll tackle dialogue chains, reader choice and multiple endings, as well as the staples of traditional fiction. We'll bring you together with leading specialists in a range of fields, and our Digital and Emerging Media curators will introduce you to examples of nonlinear and interactive fiction from the British Library's collections.

Contributors

Our summer school is convened and led by multi-award-winning poet **Dr Abigail Parry**.

Session contributors include:

Dr Greg Buchanan, Writer of *Paper Drumpf* and *No Man's Sky*

Jerry Jenkins, Curator for Emerging Media, British Library

Rob Sherman, Writer and Games Designer

Richard Skinner, Director of the Fiction Programme at the Faber Academy

Jon Stone, Writer and Games Researcher

Stella Wisdom, Digital Curator, British Library

Olivia Wood, Narrative Editor, Writer and Content Manager at Failbetter Games

Day 1: Interactivity and tools for writing

We'll start our summer school with a short overview of interactive fiction and a rare opportunity to see and discuss inspiring items from the Library's collections, with **Abigail Parry** and curators **Jerry Jenkins** and **Stella Wisdom**.

After lunch you'll learn more about the interactive form: its idiosyncrasies, what differentiates it from other forms of narrative, and potential pitfalls for the writer. **Olivia Wood** will talk about her award-winning work, including *Fallen London* and *Sunless Sea*, and Abigail will introduce you to Twine, the online programme we'll be using to build our branching stories.

By the end of our first day, you'll have learned about the mechanics and history of interactive fiction, and understand the ways in which it differs from other forms. You'll also be familiar with the basics of Twine, and will be ready to create your library of infinite possibilities.

Day 2: Dialogue and choice

We'll begin to populate our infinite libraries on day two, with short writing exercises led by **Abigail Parry**. You'll learn how to provide your reader with choices in Twine, and how to manage a simple branching text.

We'll spend the afternoon exploring dialogue and reader expectations in games with writer and games expert **Jon Stone**: he'll introduce his own work and share examples of both successful and unsuccessful attempts to manage dialogue and choice in a naturalistic way. You'll also learn how to set up a conversation between your reader and your text in Twine.

By the end of day two, you'll have learned about effective dialogue, choice and continuity, and be able to construct and manage a branching text in Twine. You'll have the structure you need to begin work on plot development.

Day 3: Plot development

Richard Skinner will start our third day with a masterclass in fiction writing. We'll discuss goals, conflict and the effective use of plot devices, and Richard will offer advice on your developing narratives.

In the afternoon, Abigail will help you put Richard's expertise into practice with a guided writing workshop. We'll introduce the techniques learned earlier in the day, and discuss the role of withheld information in plot development.

By the end of our third day you'll have developed a better understanding of effective plot development, and be able to apply various techniques to create a dynamic and engaging narrative.

Day 4: Conflict

On day four we'll introduce a key antagonistic element into our stories – a villain or adversary – in response to a mystery prompt sent from a special guest. **Abigail Parry** will help you experiment with some of the more advanced functions of Twine, and how they may be used to enhance your stories. Day four is about refining your stories, so there'll be a chance to play each other's projects, and receive feedback on your work so far.

In the afternoon, **Rob Sherman** will talk about narrative resistance in interactive stories, and introduce you to some of the devices he's employed in his own work.

By the end of the day, you'll be familiar with some of Twine's more advanced functions, and the possibilities they provide for formal play. At this stage, you'll have a project nearing completion.

Day 5: Resolutions

Nonlinear narratives tend to yield multiple endings and on our last day, writer **Greg Buchanan** will take us through managing multiple outcomes. Greg will introduce his own work, both in interactive fiction and videogames, and you'll have time to discuss your endings with him before making your final edits. During the afternoon, we'll show you different ways in which you can publish and share your stories.

By the end of the day, you'll have a completed or near-completed project, and will have learned how to publish them online. You'll possess the specialist knowledge and skills to write your own interactive fiction from scratch, and share them with your readers.

Our summer school culminates with group reflection and a chance to play each other's projects, celebrating our work with a glass of wine.

Contributors' biographies

Dr Greg Buchanan is a British video games and comics writer. After completing a PhD in identification with characters across novels and games, Greg has worked on a range of projects including the political indie games *Paper Brexit* and *Paper Drumpf*; narrative design for the BAFTA award-winning studio Supermassive Games; and most recently *No Man's Sky*.

Jerry Jenkins is Curator for Emerging Media at the British Library, working within Contemporary British Collections – a rich resource for understanding British life from the post-War period to the present day. As well as curating British publications and emerging media, he has worked with North American official publications and international organisations collections.

Dr Abigail Parry is an award-winning poet with a PhD on play in contemporary poetry. She was Poet in Residence at The National Videogame Arcade in 2016; during this time, she developed a series of poem-game hybrids, including textual mazes and digital 'translations' of poetic forms. She is also a judge on the *Off the Map* competition, run between The National Videogame Arcade and British Library.

Rob Sherman is a writer, musician, games designer and coder. He developed the *Black Crown Project*, a web-based choose-your-own-adventure published by Random House; *The Spare Set*, an interactive fiction for the charity Shelter UK; and *On My Wife's Back*, originally developed while Writer-In-Residence at the British Library. His PhD at Bath Spa investigates techniques for creating resonant characters in videogames and other computational media.

Richard Skinner is a writer working across fiction, life writing, essays, non-fiction and poetry. He has published three novels, three books of non-fiction and two books of poetry. His work has been nominated for prizes and is published in eight languages. He is Director of the Fiction Programme at Faber Academy.

Jon Stone is an award-winning writer and games researcher, and the co-founder of Sidekick Books, a small publisher specialising in collaborative and interdisciplinary work. He has written on games culture for *The Guardian* and *Eurogamer*, and co-hosted literary games workshops and events at the National Videogame Arcade.

Stella Wisdom is a Digital Curator at the British Library, promoting new methods of research using both born-digital content and digitised collections. In 2013 she co-founded Off the Map with GameCity: a competition for videogame design students. She previously worked at the Library and Information Statistics Unit based at Loughborough University, the Warburg Institute and National Library of Scotland.

Olivia Wood is Narrative Editor, Writer and Content Manager at Failbetter Games. In addition to supplying in-game content and ensuring a constant flow of writing, her roles include checking the design and continuity of stories, ensuring that work includes meaningful player choices, and maintaining the style and standard of written content.

Previous skills, knowledge or experience

None required. Our summer school is designed for anyone with an interest in interactive literature, experimental storytelling, and the possibilities of working digitally. No previous programming knowledge is required.

Equipment and wifi

A laptop or similar device is required. If you'd prefer not to bring your own device, we will provide Chromebooks for you to work on while at the Library. We'll connect to the Library's public wifi.

Facilities and refreshments

Please note that the Learning Centre will open to participants 15 minutes before the stated start time. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided at each morning session. Wine and nibbles will be provided during the final session.
