**JOURNAL #9:** Describe a social "shock" in your adolescence, an experience with betrayal, exclusion, rejection, bullying or hurt or disillusionment.  How do these experiences stay with us into adulthood?

As a child and an adolescent, I was a combination of highly intelligent, socially awkward, and physically overweight, which were all causes for persistent ridicule by my peers, and drove me towards an attitude of self-consciousness, negative body image, and sometimes depression. In general, I coped by spending a majority of my time in the company of my teachers and other adults, by working especially hard on my academics, and thus gaining a sense of self-worth through the positive reinforcements I would get from my teachers. I also found a circle of friends that were similarly outcast as misfits in our social environment, and we tended to occupy ourselves in activities away from the other kids (such as playing with our computers, or playing Dungeons and Dragons in the library). Nevertheless, there were plenty of occasions in which I was cornered by a bully and his (or her) cronies, and picked on for my appearance (fatty), or for my academic success (nerd, know-it-all), and while I disliked those experiences, I became emotionally inured against them, and would recover quickly from any of those bullying sessions I would be forced to endure. The hardest moments of betrayal and rejection that I experienced were at the hands of adults and mentors in my life, and while I am certain as an adult that the slights were not intended by the deliverers in the way that I received them, the hurt was very real, and has stayed with me in my memories, and had lasting effects on my behavior after the event.

 One such moment that I can recall occurred at my sixth grade camp – our grade school would send all of the sixth grade students to a camp (Mount Hermon in the Santa Cruz Mountains), and we would spend the week exploring nature and participating in outdoor activities. In the sixth grade, I had very few friends, and even fewer that ended up going to this camp week. I cabined up with kids I knew from my classroom, but only one of them liked me enough to call me his friend. The counselors were all high school students, and while they were generally nice enough kids, they were not necessarily the most sensitive folks. During the week, the counselors led the kids on nature hikes, and during those hikes, they would ask questions about nature, such as ‘does anyone know what ‘bald’ means in terms of the bald eagle?’ – I was a smart kid that loved science, and I was quick to answer every one of their questions. At the end of the week, each cabin was to create a skit for the final campfire, and the final skit was created and performed the counselors. In this skit, they created a character they named ‘Webster’ that proceeded to mimic and ridicule me for being a know-it-all to all of their questions. I was mortified and crushed, feeling betrayed by the ‘adults’, who were always previously my allies in the scholastic setting. I got up and dashed away from the campfire in tears, but more importantly, I learned in that moment to moderate severely my willingness to offer answers to questions n group school settings, lest I open myself up to future ridicule. My trust had been broken, and it took me a long time to heal to the point where I could openly and eagerly participate in a classroom activity. It wasn’t until I graduated and ended up going to a different junior high than the rest of my classmates that I finally was able to participate more fully, and yet, I think the lesson remains with me even to this day not to be too willing to give the answers to questions in a classroom setting.

**JOURNAL #10:** Write an imagined conversation between you and a teen who asks you about sex or sexuality or relationships or intimacy.

JIM Hey, Mr. Archer, uhm, how’s it going?

ME Just fine Jim, how’s it going with you?

JIM Uhm, … pretty good. [long pause]

ME Seems like there’s something on your mind… Something that you’d like to talk to me about?

JIM Uh, yeah… maybe. I have this friend… and he was wondering, is it normal to have… feelings for another guy, and still be like… straight?

ME Well, Jim, that’s an interesting question. Feelings can vary a great deal and can manifest in many ways, and can mean a little or they can mean a lot. Since you’re asking me if your friend can have ‘feelings’ for another guy and still be considered straight, can I assume you’re talking about sexual attraction?

JIM Well, like… yeah. Like, he knows this other guy from his gym class, and they hang out during sports… they have fun together, and sometimes they wrestle, you know, just horsing around… And one time, when they were wrestling… he got, I don’t know…

ME …sexually aroused?

JIM …yeah…

ME Well, first off, bodies are funny things, and just because your friend was aroused during a physical exchange – wrestling is a close-body contact activity – doesn’t necessarily mean anything about his sexuality that is lasting. Sometimes we respond to stimulus, and our bodies can appear like we’re sexually attracted when we might not be. However, if that physical reaction is accompanied by an emotional attraction, or is persistent – meaning it happens more than once with the same person, or more than once with different people of the same sex, it might mean your friend has some attraction to members of the same sex. However, labels like ‘straight’, or ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’, etc. can be confusing, misleading, and can lead to anxiety about how one might be seen by others.

JIM …yeah…

ME Do you think that maybe your friend is worried a little bit about how others might view him? Maybe that’s why he had you talk to me instead of having him talk to me directly?

JIM …yeah, maybe…

ME Well, in my opinion, there’s nothing particularly special about being ‘straight’ – it’s just a label we use to say that a person is mainly or exclusively sexually and/or romantically attracted to members of the opposite sex or gender. Do you think your friend has a particular attachment to being seen as straight, or that maybe he wants to continue to see himself as straight for some reason?

JIM Well, yeah. I mean, he wants to be normal, you know?

ME I totally understand, and yet, let me assure your friend that it’s perfectly normal to be straight, gay, bisexual, or to assign one’s self any number of labels that better define how you feel about your own gender, and that better define your patterns of sexual or emotional attraction. It’s also perfectly normal at this age – I’m assuming your friend is about the same age as you?

JIM …yeah…

ME It’s perfectly normal at this age to be confused or curious about one’s own sexual orientation, and no decisions have to be made to a label, nor do any decisions that are made have to be permanent and binding. How you feel, and how your friend feels, really how any of us feel – is our own business, and belongs to us alone. Your friend might have some further thinking and personal exploration to do around the subject, but he doesn’t need to declare himself to anyone about his orientations and preferences until he is good and ready to do so. Once he does know, and he wants to share that information with others, he should feel confident that it’s okay and good and right, and no one can tell him otherwise.

JIM Yeah… he’s maybe afraid that others will make fun of him, or avoid him, or react badly to him if, like, he’s not straight.

ME Well, it’s true that others might react in a way that he’s not okay with, and unfortunately the world is filled with folks that don’t want to make room in their lives or their world view for things that are different and scary to them, but those that love your friend for who he is will ultimately come to understand and accept him, no matter what he decides for himself. Also, if your friend needs someone to talk to about this issue, please let him know that I am accepting and will not judge. In fact, I will celebrate any decision he makes for himself, as long as it’s one that he holds authentically – meaning, that it affirms him as he feels on the inside, and not just something he’s saying because he’s trying to be accepted by others.

JIM …yeah, thanks. I’ll let him know.

ME I hope that you’re a good friend to this buddy of yours and that you can be a support for him as he’s trying to figure all of this out – it’s a tough thing to go through and it’s incredibly brave of him to share this with you. He’s trusting in you deeply, and I’m sure he’s hoping you’re worthy of that trust. A lot of folks feel like there’s no one in their lives that they can turn to, and have to struggle with these ideas on their own. The truth is, it’s far more common that your friend probably imagines, and he’s not alone.

JIM Wow. Thanks. Uh, yeah, I support my buddy. I just want him to be… happy with however he is, and… like, not afraid.

ME Me too, Jim. Give him a hug and let him know he’s not alone, and let him know my door is always open, if he needs some advice. I will never share what is said between a student and myself, as long as his or anyone else’s health and safety are not in threat. This sort of thing is important and difficult, and a trusted friend or two makes it all that much easier.

JIM Yeah, it does… I guess.

ME There are some websites I’d like to write down for your friend to examine on this subject – can you give them to him for me?

JIM Yeah, thanks, sure!

ME You bet.

**Journal #11**: Describe a moral dilemma you faced during adolescence, and how you resolved it (if you did!).  Or, reflect on how your moral code has changed since then.

In my adolescence, probably the largest moral dilemma that I faced was trying to resolve the widening schism I was feeling between the ethical tenants of my faith as a Christian, and the way I was beginning to feel about certain things such as premarital sex, homosexuality, and other supposed ‘sins’ that were starting to feel like okay behavior in my own mind and experiences.

I was raised in a household with a strange combination of deep unquestioning religious faith and also a deep respect for science, as well as personal freedom of expression and personal choice. My father was both a fundamentalist Christian, and a scientist, and my mother had deep uninspected ‘articles of faith’, but also had a deep distrust of ‘the church’ and did not attend when my father took my sister and I to services. The church we went to was a ‘non-denominational’ (fundamentalist) Christian church, and I learned that doubt in God was given to us by Satan, and to question our faith was a bad thing. At the same time, my father held a modified creationist world view that was commensurate with the scientific view of evolution and the big bang theory, claiming that ‘God’s days are not the same as ours’, and quoting obscure passages in the bible to back up his claims. My father also taught me how to think scientifically, and to base my hypotheses on observed data and evidence. He also wanted religious faith to be a personal choice, but still insisted that my sister and I go to Church on Sundays for Sunday School and general services.

As I got older, I became involved with a group of kids that went to the Rocky Horror Picture Show, and through them, I also began to attend. The overt sexualized environment and the new pool of youth that I was now in contact with shared a very different set of background assumptions and had very different opinions on religion and faith. Many were still ‘Christian’ in name, but opinions on the issues of premarital sex, nudity, homosexuality, alcohol and drug use, etc. were far from what I had been taught in my church and in my home.

Slowly, over time, I began to form deep friendships and romantic relationships with members of this new community, and I eventually joined the cast of RHPS as well. I started to debate with myself the incongruities between my faith and my new, more existential opinions on what constituted ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Eventually, I stopped going to church when I was 16, and officially stopped being a Christian somewhere around 17 or 18, when I began to explore alternative faiths such as Wiccanism and paganism, which had a strong spiritual element, but did not frown upon sex or substance use as ‘sins’. My way to resolve my moral dilemma was to change my faith, and get rid of the cognitive dissonance.

**Journal #12**: Draw a "road map" (really) showing your religious or spiritual path from childhood to now, highlighting the adolescent years.



**Journal #13**: Describe a risk you took to your health or safety as a teen (or a sibling or close friend).  What prevented you (or them) from recognizing the risk?

As a teen, I owned a very fast car. My father collected classic muscle cars, and I inherited from him a 1965 Mustang fastback 2+2 with a small block high performance 8-cylinder engine. It was not uncommon for me to drive this car very fast, and because it was an older vehicle, its suspension and steering were not particularly solid. On one particular occasion, when I was alone, I wanted to see just how fast I could get the car to go, so I opened it up on a stretch of highway that was right on the eastern side of the Dumbarton bridge, at a time when there was very little traffic (but not completely empty road). I wasn’t overly concerned or aware of my safety issues at first, but I was very concerned about not being pulled over by the police.

 So, I pushed down the accelerator completely to the floor, and let the car slowly build up speed until the speedometer read over 130 miles per hour. It was at this point that the car started to exhibit a growing, oscillating vibration that shook the car gently at first, then more and more violently until I became frightened that I would not be able to control the car, and that I could lose control and crash with disastrous results, so I let my foot of the accelerator and let the car slowly coast back to a controllable speed, then I applied brakes and brought the car back to the legal speed limit.

 I believe that I recognized the risk in my behavior, but I felt that I could adequately control the car and that the risk wasn’t really great for me. Also, I really wanted to know how fast the car would go, and I was excited by the prospect of telling my friends the story of my epic adventure on the road. It was thrill seeking at its finest, and completely in line with my developmental stage. This wasn’t the last time I raced a car way over the limit, and it wasn’t until I suffered a few car accidents (not at high speed, thank goodness), and one particular accident where I was not the driver, but a back-seat passenger, in which a semi trailer rig ran over our car (fortunately the worst injury to anyone was a broken nose to the driver against the steering wheel, and a concussion to the girl in the passenger front seat) that I began to take seriously the possibility of a fatal car crash, and moderated my driving behavior significantly.

**Journal #14**: Make a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences between your adolescence and that of the character in your book. Instead of circles, use a symbol from the book (eg. Holden's cap, Junior's basketball, a tree for Melinda, etc.)



**Journal #15**: Would you relive adolescence if you could take knowledge of development...all we have discussed this semester...back with you?  Why or not? What is one decision or choice you might alter if I guarantee it won't upset the timeline?

While it’s an interesting fantasy to re-live my teenage years armed with all the knowledge of what it’s like to be a teen, and to understand the deeper processes happening (I assume this is the only knowledge we get, not the real foreknowledge of our lives as lived), I’m a strong believer in the idea that we are the sum of our histories, and for better or worse, I’m committed to the me that I’ve become. If I had known a little more about how little people noticed what I thought was embarrassing, or if I had been more perceptive to the opinions and emotions of the people around me (especially the girls that liked me), I would have likely had an easier time of it all. However, I think I turned out okay in the end.

 But, to indulge your game and to change one item or decision, I think I would have made a better decision around who I took to my senior prom. During my junior year, I started dating a girl a few years older than me (she was 19, I was 16-17), but after about a year, we broke up. I started dating a new girl in my senior year, very close to the date of my senior prom. This new girl and I were infatuated with one another, and in the throes of new love, but I had promised my ex-girlfriend that I would take her to the prom, as she was a teenage mother, and due to her pregnancy was not able to attend her own prom. During the same night as prom, Depeche Mode was putting tickets on sale to a huge concert, and both I and my new girlfriend were big fans. So, on the night of the prom, my current girlfriend stood in line all night to get tickets for herself and I, while I took my ex girlfriend to my senior prom. Not only did I fight with my ex-girlfriend all night long, as she wanted to have a romantic evening, and I was only fulfilling what I saw as a noble obligation, we ended up sleeping together at the end of the night despite my best intentions. So, I was now forced with the reality of having cheated on my new girlfriend with my ex, on my prom night, while my current girlfriend stood in line for tickets to a show that she and I were going to go to very soon. This was not a high point in my ethical decision making as a teen, and I’d love to take that decision back and bring my current girlfriend to prom instead.

**Journal #16**:

Friday, March 13th, 4pm-6pm

Today I observed my afterschool gaming group while I ran them through our ongoing adventure, which is a fantasy roleplaying game, where the players play adventuring heroes investigating an ancient crypt in the Egyptian style. At the table are Elijah (14), Matthew (15), Joe (14) and Everett (14).

 Today, during the game, as happens frequently, Elijah is arguing with Matthew because Matthew had performed some action in the game that does not fit in with Elijah’s perception of what Matthew’s character should be. Matthew has chosen to play a character type called a ‘paladin’, which is a holy knight, dedicated to good and lawful behavior, and Matthew has acted impulsively and charged into combat with some guards that he suspects of wrong-doing, but hasn’t properly investigated. Elijah argues that Matthew’s character has an ethical responsibility to stop and question the guards before just assuming they are bad people and up to no good. Matthew is just assuming the guards are bad people because they are guarding the passage to an underground hideout where a member of Matthew’s church might be being held hostage, due to instructions he received from a witness elsewhere. Both teens have a valid point of argument, but the exchange between them has become not one between their characters, but between them as players. This bogs the game down, and Everett, who is both someone of a kinetic kid, and who becomes frustrated bored by this exchange, has gotten up from his seat and is now lying underneath the table. It is my job, as usual, to try to get the group back on track. I gently encourage the arguing to stop, and I try to get the boys back into character, by asking them ‘is this what your character is saying?’. I have instituted a mechanism in the game just for this sort of breakdown, which are three little plastic coins that each player starts with at the beginning of the game, that they may ‘spend’ to either take back a comment they’ve made, or allow a comment to be made out of character. If the players can make an entire gaming session without breaking character and spending any of their coins, they get an experience point bonus. If they, on the other hand, spend all their coins in a session, and they say something out of character, I have the prerogative to ‘assume’ that the statement was made in-character, and to continue with the consequences rolling forward from their actions. This quiets the boys down, and I collect a coin from each of them, and we focus back on the game. In this case, both boy’s conception of the ethical system of the characters they are playing were in conflict, and Eli’s preconception that Matthew is not playing his character correctly was activated. It’s true that Matthew also has a problem with impulse control, and playing a paladin is proving challenging for him, but I’m desperately trying to make his attempts to play this difficult character to be his own, and to have him learn from his own mistakes, which Eli is having a hard time accepting. After the game, I have a conversation with Eli and try to get him to understand (again) that I would really like him to stay in character and let Matthew make his own mistakes. He begrudging agrees, but inside I know that this argument scenario is destined to happen more than a few times more in the future.

**Journal #17**:

Friday, March 20th, 4pm-6pm

Today I observed my afterschool gaming group while I ran them through our ongoing adventure, which is a fantasy roleplaying game, where the players play adventuring heroes investigating an ancient crypt in the Egyptian style. At the table are Elijah (14), Matthew (15), Joe (14) and Everett (14).

 Today our intrepid adventuring party has made it down into the secret hidden base of a local gang of thieves, and are in search of a kidnapped member of the Church of Pharasma, a group of priests that worship a deity in charge of the passage between life and death. While searching the underground passages, the group has accidented across a horrific undead creature, which is basically an animated canoptic jar full of bloody organs. After describing the creature in gory detail (at a level appropriate to the boys – I try to entice them with the description, but not actually gross them out. They are boys, after all), I tell them the creature surprised them and gets to attack them first. There is some quick discussion about who was actually the first person into the room, as Matthew is trying to argue that he’s not the primary target of the creature. In fact, Matthew is often the first person charging through doors and into battle, and last session we had left the game’s narrative right before this encounter, with Matthew barging right through the door of the chamber without any level of careful investigation. I am used to the boys disputing their previous actions, so I pull out my cellphone and show Matthew on my camera a photo that I have taken from last session which depicts the table map and miniatures that were laid out on the table from last session and indeed the picture shows that Matthew was the first person in the door. With a few grumbles, Matthew concedes, and we continue with the battle. In this exercise, I’m trying to get the kids to be accountable for their actions, and I’m trying to get them to exercise their long-term memory to recall the events in detail from the previous week. I’m also trying to give the kids opportunities to be honest and to assess their characters’ dispositions accurately. Matthew has a history of ‘cheating’, or misrepresenting either what his character is/was doing, or misrepresent the results of any die rolls in the game that don’t go his way. My intent is to help him understand that a good narrative doesn’t mean that you always get your way – events that may be detrimental to your *character* (as in, your imaginary persona), may ultimately be good for you as a player and for the story narrative as a whole. I am also trying to get them to understand that they are working together as an ensemble cast.

**Journal #18**:

Friday, March 27th, 4pm-6pm

Today I observed my afterschool gaming group while I ran them through our ongoing adventure, which is a fantasy roleplaying game, where the players play adventuring heroes investigating an ancient crypt in the Egyptian style. At the table are Elijah (14), Matthew (15), Joe (14) and Everett (14).

 Today, the group has made it through the encounter from last week with the living canoptic jar, and have fought several other enemies along the way, but now the group is faced with a puzzle that they have to figure out in order to proceed safely. They’ve opened a door and a few of the characters smell something acrid and chemical. Everett’s character identifies the smell as something poisonous. The players don’t know this, but the gas that they smell is a leftover from an alchemical lab accident that has permeated the room through which they must pass in order to gain the relevant clues to proceed with their adventure. Matthew’s character is immune to poison, and could potentially move through the area without a fear of succumbing to the gas, but Matthew forgets this fact, and expresses aversion to entering the room. The players discuss for a while what they think they should do, and Eli decides his character is going to hold his breath, and move into the room to investigate. Every round, I have him roll the dice to see if he accidently breathes in some of the gas, but he is lucky in his rolls, and safely navigates into the center of the next chamber, around a corner, and discovers the dead body of a cultist, and the remnants of the alchemical accident. Eli is tempted to investigate the room for treasure, and others encourage him to do so, but the knows that he has limited time, and his dice roll luck is bound to run out at some point in the future. So, exercising executive function, he decides the most expedient course of action would be to drag the dead body out of the room to a safe place, where he no longer has to hold his breath, and where he can search the body at leisure for any clues that might be found. If nothing is found, he or one of the other players can always come back in and look around some more, or they can try do discover how to neutralize the toxic gas. Elijah makes the remaining rolls without incident, and drags the body out into the hallway. In searching the body, the group finds a note that indicates this man was more than he seems, and was not a member of the thieves gang, but instead was a secret operative for a cult that was covertly infiltrating the gang and using it for their own nefarious purposes. There was the suggestion that some ancient artifact of power and evil was being search for by this cult, and they had to find it before anyone else discovered it. Now, the group was put on a new path, and they were all abuzz with what it might mean.

**Journal #19**:

Friday, April 3rd, 4pm-6pm

Today I observed my afterschool gaming group while I ran them through our ongoing adventure, which is a fantasy roleplaying game, where the players play adventuring heroes investigating an ancient crypt in the Egyptian style. At the table are Elijah (14), Matthew (15), Joe (14) and Everett (14).

 Today the group investigated the remains of the underground thieves guild and are still searching for the kidnapped priest, when they enter a room that has many structures, including a filled well, and four wells that appear to be empty. Matthew spots a door across the room, and rushes over to open it before any of the rest of the group can warn him and stop him. Matthew has poor impulse control, and I try to give him an opportunity to take back his move. “Is that what you really do, or do you want to think about it?” He states, no he really wants to go across the room and open the doors, and Eli immediately starts to criticize him for not waiting for the group to come over and at least check for traps. Matthew thinks for a moment, and then relents, and allows Eli’s character to come over and check the door for traps. Everett’s character comes up behind, and Joe’s character, in true form, wanders off to another part of the room. The group does not realize that the missing priest is actually at the bottom of one of the empty wells, unconscious and awaiting their discovery for aid. Eli’s character checks the door for traps, and finds none, but the group has made sufficient noise outside the door to alert the cult leader and several of his minions right on the other side of the door. The group doesn’t realize this, and when Matthew charges through the door, I lay out the figures of the enemies that they didn’t realize were there, and they wage a surprise attack on Matthew. He is surrounded, and starts to grumble, but he realizes that his actions have led him to these consequences. Eli, exasperated, declares that he’s not going to join the fight, and he’s going to let Matthew face these cultists on his own. While I have empathy for Eli’s frustration, I remind him that he needs to act in character, and what would his character do. He reluctantly says he’ll join the fight, but he’s clear that he’s unhappy that Matthew has once again just barged in without consideration for the situation. Everett launches into the attack as well, but Joe’s character continues to wander around in the other end of the room. The combat proceeds, and Matthew takes a mighty amount of damage. His character is in dire need of healing, and only Joe can provide it. He shouts for help, but Joe doesn’t respond. He decides instead to poke around, and I also ask Joe ‘is this what your character actually does?’ He says yes, since his character was too far away to see the initial engagement, and no one has explained what’s happening to him yet. I allow this explanation, and Joe decides to look in the empty wells. He discovers the body of their missing priest. “Hey guys, guess who I’ve found?”

**Journal #20**:

Friday, May 1, 4pm-6pm

Today, the kids normally at my gaming group table were on a full-day field trip with their school orchestra, so I was left without a table of my own, and I was able instead to listen in on the table that is run by my business partner, Bert. Since we have split our tables, I haven’t had a chance to run a game for these particular kids in a while, so it was nice to get a chance to view them in action. At the table were four of the five normal players: Luka, who is 14 and is also a tutoring client of mine during the week, Andrew, 14 years old, and is also a tutoring client of mine during the week, Jackson, 13, a precocious kid that lives on our block and used to be in cub scouts with my boys, and Grant, 13, long-haired and very cool; Grant came to the gaming group through Jackson.

 Today, Bert was running the kids in a game called ‘The Strange’, which takes place in an alternate universe to ours, parallel but a world in which there are alternative dimensional worlds that are accessible through special means, and which harbor either fantasy or science-fiction themed lands. The players (the teens) play ‘operatives’, or agents for an organization known as ‘the Estate’, which works to keep weird things from bleeding over from these alternative universes into our own on Earth.

 What I most love about this system, and what I think the kids love best, is the rules are loose and flexible and the resolution of any conflict, puzzle, or situation becomes a negotiation around what positive or negative influences might there be that will affect the possible results, and then a single die is rolled, to see if the task was completely successfully, was a failure, or perhaps lie somewhere in-between. This is in contrast with other game systems we use in our program, such as Pathfinder (a Dungeons and Dragons derivative) that is very rigid in the rules set, and takes away all negotiation in favor of having the rule set be the final arbiter of what is possible in an action. This makes for better peace between the game master and the players at time, but it can be at the sacrifice of fluid storytelling.

 Today, the kids were attempting to combat a strange ethereal spider-type creature, and Jackson was feeling very excited. He’s somewhat of a nervous kid, and when he gets really into his character and the game play, it can cause him to talk very fast, and step on other people’s toes in the game, meaning that he forgets to leave room for everyone else at the table to declare their own actions in the communal narrative. It’s something that Bert is working with Jackson about, and he employs the tricks he’s learned as a credentialed teacher to get Jackson to wait his turn. “I can only hear one of you at a time, and Jackson, you have to calm down and speak when it’s your turn. I see on my chart that it’s Grant’s turn. Please hold on to your idea, and I’ll call on you next.” Jackson, while excitable, is also eager to please and is a fairly compliant kid, so he immediately closes his mouth and wiggles around in his chair while he waits for his turn to speak. Jackson is a bit on the young side of development, and is still working on his impulse control, but with a gentle reminder, he is slowly learning the skills that others at the table have already mastered.

**Journal #21**:

Observations

Monday, May 4th, 2015

I’m sitting in on my partner’s class, and I’m observing four 10 and 11 year olds: Isaac, Eddy, Ezra and Simon.

The game we’re playing is Star Wars Edge of the Empire, and I’m sitting in somewhere in the middle of a narrative that pits the ‘heroes’ against a dark side spirit.

The kids start the day excited because it’s May the 4th (which is a star wars holiday)

The kids explain their characters in the game to me:

* **Eddy**: he’s playing a ‘Gand’, a bounty hunter. He doesn’t know his own history, as his mind has been wiped. His father was a Jedi assistant, Eddy has armor that used to belong to his father. His character is the ‘fighter’ in the group. He describes himself as impulsive ‘he gets out of control’, and he will rush into battle. Obligations: ‘Score to settle’ -- to find the people that killed his parents (revenge) and make them pay. Obsession – weaponry. Favorite weapon: blaster carbine.
* **Simon**: “Tar-Tar Lugrey” Jawa, mechanic. Obligations: to build the world’s best star ship (oath). Used to live on Tatooine. Befriended a Jedi knight, that had left the order and was in hiding. He was confronted by a Sith hand, and he was killed by the Sith. TarTar then caused an explosion that killed the Sith. ‘The Gand’ hunted him down (bounty hunter), but he wiped his mind (and accidently his own). Then went to Adooba 3, a colony. They went on their own mission. Character acts impulsively, does things without consent of the group. Picks up random parts and mechanical stuff for working on. Afraid of Minoks.
* **Ezra**: Cashar Cabdoon. Race: Given – exoskeleton (looks like a skeleton). The calm voice of reason to the crew. Obsessed with mathematics. He can survive in the vacuum of space (as long as they have air). Was a Padawan. Had to leave training when the temple was taken over. Greatest fear – being turned to the dark side. Obligations: oath to the Jedi code.
* **Isaac**: Darpoose. Wookie force emergent mechanic. His role in the group – a mix between impulsive and cautious. Obligations: family. Find his mom who went into hiding after the Jedi purge. Oath – find his father’s light saber and gear that was the end of line of the map that he left him. What makes him angry? When people he knows closely do things that he thinks are wrong (both making mistakes and ethically wrong). He has strong opinions and isn’t afraid to convince others that his opinions are correct.

The kids often talk over each other when they’re excited and want to have a turn in the conversation. Simon loves to talk over, and has a hard time controlling himself at times. Whenever one kid in the group shares a bit of their character or identity, the others chime in. they are quick to be corrected, however, and will focus when Bert asks them to focus.

They are on the surface of Kessel, and the atmosphere is toxic. Those with breath masks (everyone but Eddy) have only 10 minutes of air left.

The kids get chatty very easily, and talk over each other – Bert stops them and tells them ‘I’ll wait’ until they quiet down and listen. Bert tries to give a narrative, but the kids make jokes and laugh (giggle fest). He waits until they calm down and continues.

Ezra has the giggles so bad he has to excuse himself. Bert tells him to take his time and come back only when he’s ready.

Bert has to take a moment and tell the kids that we are a half-hour in on time and they have to find their focus or we wont have time to finish. He’s very calm and clear with the kids, and tells them to use their discretion.

He begins again and narrates. Ezra interrupts him briefly. The kids keep talking, and there’s nothing much to do but keep running forward. Bert tries to be dramatic but the kids keep filling in the quiet spaces with chatter. He works with it.

Isaac holds up his hand to get a word in. Ezra is confronted by the dark side spirit, and Ezra’s character starts to say he’s almost a Jedi [note to me: Ezra’s character shows an excess of pride].

When the story moves forward, some of the boys get fidgety and have to stand up.

The kids are really focused on the narrative, despite their physical energy and vocal outbursts. Sometimes they dispute the history and facts.

When rolling dice, the kids have to take turns. The dice have special symbols on them, but all the kids are proficient in the codes the dice represent. They are honest with the results of the dice (success or failure), but do show excitement and disappointment when they roll.

At one point, Eddy exclaims he can take another action, but can’t remember why. Bert makes him find it on his character sheet before he will allow it – this is pedagogy around researching capabilities.

At one point, the group tries to do a goofy maneuver (force throw the Jawa at the storm troopers) , and Bert asks them if they think that’s going to be effective. They think about it, discuss it, and retract the action.

One of the interesting artifacts of this game is that the dice can show a failure on the action attempted, but still have some net ‘advantages’ that can be spent and manifested by the players. The kids use these quite creatively, but making things happen in the game or giving each other boosts on their next die rolls.

Sometimes the kids can exclaim some discouragement when the dice don’t go their way. Eddy says “I’m gonna die!”, but it’s not a heavy level of negativity. He understands the context of the game, and it’s okay. His character is fine, actually.

Two hours is a long time for these kids to stay focus. Coming to 15 minutes before the session ends, the kids get restless. They wiggle in their chairs, stand up, dance or wiggle, and speak louder and over the top of Bert and each other. He has to continually tell them to ‘stop and listen’.

Nearing the end of the narrative for the day, the kids board a transport ship, quickly running from imperial forces. They end up in a light freighter, and the ship takes some damage. Isaac’s character goes to find and repair the hull damage. Simon’s character runs the astrogation calculations, and Eddy’s character pilots the freighter.

After a lot of dramatic rolls, the party activates the hyperdrive on their ship and gets away. The room explodes in excited cheers.

**Journal #22**:

Tuesday, May 5th, 2015

Observation: Andrew Dunn, 3:45pm-4:45pm

Andrew, one of my regular gaming kids is also one of my tutoring clients. I teach him computer programming, and this week is the second week we’ve engaged with HTML as a subject. Andrew is a quiet but very articulate and intelligent kid, and I’ve been tutoring him for a few years now. We were studying java programming for a while, and he engaged with the creation with an adventure game of his own design but I could tell his interest was flagging. With all of my tutoring clients, I hold an ethic of student-directed learning, and periodically remind the kids that they can at any time tell me they are interested in pursuing a new line of inquiry, and we can switch to new topics, either temporarily, or permanently. They can always return to something they’ve put down at a later date. Last session, Andrew decided that he’d like to put down the java programming for a while, and look into learning HTML. Fortunately, I know a lot of HTML, so I was able to switch subjects that very meeting, and this week I brought a curriculum that started with going through an online course, with the hope that if Andrew is still deeply engaged by the time our session finished, he’d continue to work through the website lessons after I was gone. As we work through each segment of the lesson, I allow Andrew to play around with the examples and tinker beyond the confines of the lesson, making changes and observing the effects of his changes. Normally, with other tutoring clients, I might encourage them to narrowly engage with the lesson, and follow it more to the letter, as to not confuse them with activities that the lesson doesn’t call for or explain, but I know that Andrew thrives on experimenting, and learns best when he can feel around the edges of a problem and see it from many angles. By the end of the lesson, we haven’t progressed as far as we might have in the actual lesson plan, but I am confident that Andrew has a deep understanding of what he’s learned so far.

**Journal #23**:

Tuesday, May 5th, 2015

Observation: Luka Bayon, 4pm to 5pm

Another one of my regular gaming kids and tutoring clients, Luka has been learning computer programming and other related topics from me for over three years. Luka has dyslexia, and his parents employed my help to get him interested in reading more consistently. I have used the roleplaying games to encourage him to research options for his characters in the gaming books I have, and it has worked well. I also have him read along with me while we read coding examples from books, and his parents report these activities have had a positive effect on his reading activities outside of our lessons.

 This week is the second week of a new set of curriculum with Luka as well, as he’s just completed a set of lessons on 3-D modeling, and now wishes to pursue learning C#, a windows-based programming language. I discovered an excellent book that uses a gaming library called XNA, which makes game development far easier, and which gives us a leg up in taking away the harder parts of game development, namely the interfaces and the underlying structures. Today, we’re launching into the use of a brand new book I found that has a better language style than the book I tried to start last week, which was far to academic and dry to fully engage Luka. This book is more conversational, and the instructions are easier to follow, so I make the switch, and let Luka know I want him to buy the book in paper format so he can use it as a reference while he programs. Usually we work from digital copies on my laptop, and he works the examples on his own computer, but in this case, I’m hoping to provide Luka with tools to continue his investigations when I am not present. Both Luka and Andrew show incredible intelligence, but I don’t see a lot of initiative from them to continue working out of my presence. This may be because they are typically overscheduled in their lives, but I also wonder if they are being engaged by other materials. I’ve noticed something in a lot of the students that I work with that they don’t have a particularly strong drive in their pursuits, and are likely in a period of identity moratorium, where they are trying on the identities related to the activities they are pursuing. One of my students, however, is committed to the identity of being a software developer, and isn’t one of my tutoring clients – he doesn’t’ really need to be, as he already knows a lot about programming and pursues his development on his own without instruction. He is, however, one of my regular participants in the after school gaming group.