Making a Tabletop Roleplaying Game for YOUR Library
My background

● Founder of TTRPGkids.com
  ○ 350+ articles
  ○ Resources for facilitators
  ○ 2023 ENnie: Best Online Content
● TTRPG and website writer
● TTRPG publisher
● Engineering professor
Comment in the chat:
1. Do you know what a TTRPG is?
2. Can you name a TTRPG?
3. Have you played in or run a TTRPG?
What is a TTRPG?

- TTRPG = TableTop RolePlaying Game
- Tabletop = physical game or virtual game table
- Roleplaying = playing as a character
- Game = play, randomization, and goals
Examples of TTRPGs

Big names:
● D&D (Dungeons and Dragons)
● Pathfinder
● Avatar Legends

Indie:
● Inspirisles
● Starsworn
● The Library Game
Our focus today is...

- Making a TTRPG that is specific for YOUR library
- Choosing mechanics
- Making a story with players
- Creating a safe game space
- Time and energy saving tips
Webinar roadmap

- Recruiting players
- Safety tools
- The story
- Mechanics
- Preparing the table
- Running the game
- Additional resources
Recruiting players

- Determine your audience
  - Kids, teens, and/or adults?
- Gain buy in from the community
  - Advertise benefits
  - Spread the word
Recruiting players

● Determine your audience
  ○ Specify age limits/requirements
  ○ Keep in mind complexity
Recruiting players

- Determine your audience
  - Specify age limits/requirements
  - Keep in mind complexity

Are you OK GM’ing for young kids or teens?

Will a teen and a 6yo be able to play the same game?

Are grown ups allowed to play in the same game as their kid?
Recruiting players

- Gain buy in from the community
  - Parents may need to see benefits
  - Get endorsement by schools
  - Use D&D name
  - Spin as group storytelling
Recruiting players

- Gain buy in from the community
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  - Get endorsement by schools
  - Use D&D name
  - Spin as group storytelling

Problem solving
Leadership
Group speaking
Math
Reading
Writing
Recruiting players

- Gain buy in from the community
  - Parents may need to see benefits
  - **Get endorsement by schools**
  - Use D&D name
  - Spin as group storytelling

Advertise in weekly bulletin
Talk to a teacher to advocate
Recruiting players

- Gain buy in from the community
  - Parents may need to see benefits
  - Get endorsement by schools
  - Use D&D name
  - Spin as group storytelling

Use the recognition!

"Have you ever wanted to play a game like D&D?!"
Recruiting players

- Gain buy in from the community
  - Parents may need to see benefits
  - Get endorsement by schools
  - Use D&D name
  - Spin as group storytelling

Story games
Group storytime
Tabletop story games
“Play out stories from books!”
Recruiting players

HATCHLINGS GAMES

TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES

What to expect?

Make new friends and work as a team to overcome dungeons filled with devious traps and deadly monsters. Play through a story shaped by your actions and feel your creativity and confidence grow with every session. Above all have fun!

What are the benefits?

Friends: empathy and social skills.
Team: problem solving and communication.
Play: performance and imagination.
Actions: numeracy and literacy.
Creativity: storytelling and improvisation.
Confidence: finding your voice.
Fun!
Safety tools

- Ground rules are critical to TTRPGs
  - Unpredictable players
  - Different boundaries
  - Different expectations
  - Mixed age groups and XP
Safety tools

- **GOALS:**
  - Get on the same page
  - Respect boundaries
Safety tools

- GOALS:
  - Get on the same page
  - Respect boundaries

- BECAUSE:
  - Want people feeling safe at the library
  - Want people coming back
Safety tools

- EXAMPLE:
  - Group of 4 players ages 8, 10, 13, 17
  - Agree on zombie setting
Safety tools

- EXAMPLE:
  - Group of 4 players ages 8, 10, 13, 17
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Expectation for 8, 13, and 17yo: Expectation for 10yo:
Safety tools

● EXAMPLE:
  ○ Group of 4 players ages 8, 10, 13, 17
  ○ Agree on zombie setting

Experience for 8, 13, and 17yo:               Experience for 10yo:
Safety tools

- Get on the same page
  - Lines and veils
  - X-card
  - Other methods
Safety tools

- Get on the same page
  - Lines and veils
    - Lines = don’t include
    - Veils = non-interactable
  - For players and GM
  - 5-10 minutes
  - Pre-game tool
Safety tools

- Get on the same page
  - X-card
    - Pause
    - Discuss
    - Rewind
    - Covers missed lines/veils
    - Mid-game tool
    - NOT for poor rolls
Safety tools

- Get on the same page
  - Other methods
Safety tools

ALSO set general public space rules:
● Children must be supervised by their adult
● Reporting procedure
● Clear consequences if in violation
Safety tools

ALSO set general public space rules:
● Children must be supervised by their adult
● Reporting procedure
● Clear consequences if in violation

Set these expectations UP FRONT
Gaming space rules

1. Players under the age of 13 must be supervised by a guardian

2. Safety tools (like the X-card or Lines and Veils) are recommended for all games

3. Noise level is to be kept at a level that does not disturb others at the library

4. All game pieces are to be returned to the library in an orderly manner

5. Report any concerning behavior to the library front desk

6. Violation of the above rules, bullying at the game table, disruption of library activities, or other conflicts may result in the following, at the library’s discretion:
   a. Library supervisor required for future games (must book by schedule)
   b. Limited or removal of access to booking the TTRPG room
Safety tools

Enforcing safety tools

- Reminder during game
- Not following = pause, break, or reschedule
The Story

Where to start?!
- One shot?
- Campaign?
- Pre-made?
- Homebrew?
The Story

Where to start?!
- One shot - one session, best for variable groups
- Campaign?
- Pre-made?
- Homebrew?
The Story

Where to start?!

- One shot - one session, best for variable groups
- **Campaign** - many sessions, best for return players
- Pre-made?
- Homebrew?
The Story

Where to start?!

- One shot - one session, best for variable groups
- Campaign - many sessions, best for return players
- Pre-made - using existing game setting
- Homebrew?
The Story

Where to start?!

- One shot - one session, best for variable groups
- Campaign - many sessions, best for return players
- Pre-made - using existing game setting
- Homebrew - creating your own setting
The Story

- Pre-made setting (D&D, Starfinder, Inspirisles)
  - Game library
  - Existing story/world
  - GM reads module before session
  - Play from a book
# The Story

Pre-made setting (D&D, Starfinder, Inspirisles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PROS</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low prep</td>
<td>Less options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference material</td>
<td>Less flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to GM</td>
<td>Locked in themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Story

Homebrew setting (make your own)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● No limits</td>
<td>● No limits (too much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Tailor to players</td>
<td>● May need prep/time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Story writing = fun</td>
<td>● Decision paralysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Story

- Homebrew setting
  - Build from player interests
  - Build from existing media
  - Build from original ideas
The Story

- Homebrew setting
  - Build from player interests
  - Build from existing media
  - Build from original ideas

Prep on your own ahead of time
OR
Prep with players before session (budget time)
The Story

- One shot homebrew setting (10-20 minute prep)
  - List ideas
  - Choose 1-2 themes
  - Choose 1-3 challenges
  - Outline 3 NPCs
The Story

- EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
  - List ideas
  - Choose 1-2

- Bluey
- Star Trek
- Gardening
- Cars
- Unicorns
- Zombies
- School
- Superheros
- Pokemon
The Story

- EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
  - List ideas
  - Choose 1-2 themes

Bluey   Cars   School
Star Trek Unicorns Superheroes
Gardening Zombies Pokemon
The Story

After discussion with players:
Superheroes
Fighting rapidly growing plants
The Story

After discussion with players:
Superheroes
Fighting rapidly growing plants

Safe for kids AND fun for teen/adults
The Story

● EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
  ○ Choose 1-3 challenges:
    ■ Must clear the streets for town festival
    ■ Scientists lost control of growth serum and need ingredients to reverse it
    ■ Plants grew into magic reserve below city and need to find it
The Story

- EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
  - Choose 1-3 challenges:
    - Must clear the streets for town festival
    - Scientists lost control of growth serum and need ingredients to reverse it
    - Plants grew into magic reserve below city and need to find it
It started two days ago when I was watering my plant.
The Story

- EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
  - Outline 3 NPCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/pronouns</th>
<th>What do they do?</th>
<th>How do they look?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**The Story**

- EXAMPLE: 15 minute setting with player input
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<th>What do they do?</th>
<th>How do they look?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Zee</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>Dr. Doofenshmirtz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Jack</td>
<td>Gardening expert</td>
<td>Older guy in overalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petal</td>
<td>Sentient plant</td>
<td>Giant pink flower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Story

We now have:

- Story material for 1-3 hour one-shot
- Direct player interests
- Player investment in world
- No prep from the GM
The Story

Can use the same method to:
● Prep ahead (control, time)
● Scale to a full campaign:
  ○ Add bigger challenges
  ○ Add more NPCs
  ○ Plan 1-2 longer plots
The Story

Can use the same method to:

- Prep ahead (control/time)
- Scale to a full campaign:
  - Add bigger challenges
  - Add more NPCs
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Consider no-shows or drop-ins
Mechanics

Choosing a system that fits your plan:

- One-shots
- Campaigns
- Time limit
- Player skills
### Mechanics

Choosing a system that fits your plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rules lite</th>
<th>Rules heavy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best for</strong></td>
<td>One-shots</td>
<td>Campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short time</td>
<td>Longer sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New players</td>
<td>Interest in known systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drop-ins</td>
<td>Experienced players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
<td>Stories RPG</td>
<td>D&amp;D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roll 1d6</td>
<td>Pathfinder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(see supplement list)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mechanics

Rules-heavy systems:
● Pre-session reading OR help from GM
● Budget 30-60 min to teach
● May draw more crowds if well-known
● May not be accessible to all due to math/reading
Mechanics

Rules-lite systems:

- Low entry barrier
- Budget ~10 minutes to teach
- Might not draw a crowd
- Accessible to wider audience
Mechanics

Rules-lite systems:
- Low entry barrier
- Budget ~10 minutes to teach
- Might not draw a crowd
- Accessible to wider audience

Roll 1d6 and 3+ = success is an acceptable mechanic
Mechanics

The in-between space: **D&D rewrites**

- Family Fantasy RPG
  - Tiered mechanics
  - D&D compatible
- DnD Adventure Club
  - Simplified D&D
  - Mini booklet
  - Pre-made characters
If players are struggling with mechanics:

- OK to change the system
- OK to take out certain elements (ex: status effects)
If players are struggling with mechanics:

- OK to change the system
- OK to take out certain elements (ex: status effects)

Be transparent and clear about changes. Value overall game versus a particular system.
Preparing the Table

Do you need:
● Printed character sheets
● Pens, pencils
● Dice, cards, or coins
● Space, table, chairs
● Game books
● Maps
● Minis
Preparing the Table

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• Maps
• Minis

Almost always necessary
Preparing the Table

For maps and minis:
- Pre-made adventure
  - Optional to prep
  - May come with module
- Homebrew
  - Optional to prep
  - Might not be able to predict if improvising
Preparing the Table

For maps and minis:
- OK to draw maps as you go
- OK to use sticky notes for minis
- OK to use “theater of the mind”
Preparing the Table

For maps and minis:
- OK to draw maps as you go
- OK to use sticky notes for minis
- OK to use “theater of the mind”

Have paper and notes available
Running the game

You’ve set up on your own or with players:

- **Safety tools** (10 minutes)
- **The story** (15 minutes)
- **Mechanics** (10-60 minutes)
- **The table** (prepped ahead of time)

Now to run the game!
Running the game

Your job as the GM:

- Describe
- Ask
- Prompt
- Support
- Moderate
Running the game

Your job as the GM:
- Describe
- Ask
- Prompt
- Support
- Moderate

NOT your job as the GM:
- Railroad
- Monologue
- Defeat players
Running the game

What to focus on:

- Having fun
- Telling a story together
- Safety at the table
Running the game

What to focus on:
● Having fun
● Telling a story together
● Safety at the table

Keep in mind:
GM’ing is a skill that takes time to develop.
Running the game

If you’ve never played/GM’d a TTRPG before:

● Watch and listen to others to learn
  ○ Critical Role (18+)
  ○ High Rollers - Bauldur’s Gate 3 cast (13+)
  ○ Deck of Many Aces (PG)
  ○ Almost Bedtime Theater (E)
Running the game

If you’ve never played/GM’d a TTRPG before:

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  - Deck of Many Aces (PG)
  - Almost Bedtime Theater (E)

Experienced GM teaching 1st timers and explaining steps very well
Running the game

If you’ve never played/GM’d a TTRPG before:

- Watch and listen to others to learn
  - Critical Role (18+)
  - High Rollers - Bauldur’s Gate 3 cast (13+)
  - Deck of Many Aces (PG)
  - Almost Bedtime Theater (E)

GM’ing a variety of different games (D&D + indie) with young players
Running the game

If you’ve never played/GM’d a TTRPG before:
- Try to play in a game first
  - Contact other librarians
  - Works in-person or online
Additional Resources

Books:
- Let's Roll: A Guide to Setting up Tabletop Role-Playing Games in your School or Public Library
- Rolling with the Youth
- Hatchlings flier
Additional Resources

TTRPGkids articles about:

- Safety tools
- Creating a setting
- Creating NPCs
- Adjusting mechanics
- Single page TTRPGs lis
- “Villain Mode” players
- The “good enough” session
- Running encounters
Additional Resources

Making a TTRPG for YOUR Particular Kid Guide:

- 3 page PDF
- 1 page worksheet
- Walkthrough article
- FREE RESOURCE
Closing words

- Running a TTRPG at your library can seem like a big task
- Break it down and reduce your prep so it’s manageable
- Allow yourself to have fun with it - enjoy the learning process!
Thank you!

- Do you have any questions?
- Additional resources available in PDF handout
- Feel free to email hello@TTRPGkids.com for post-lecture assistance