

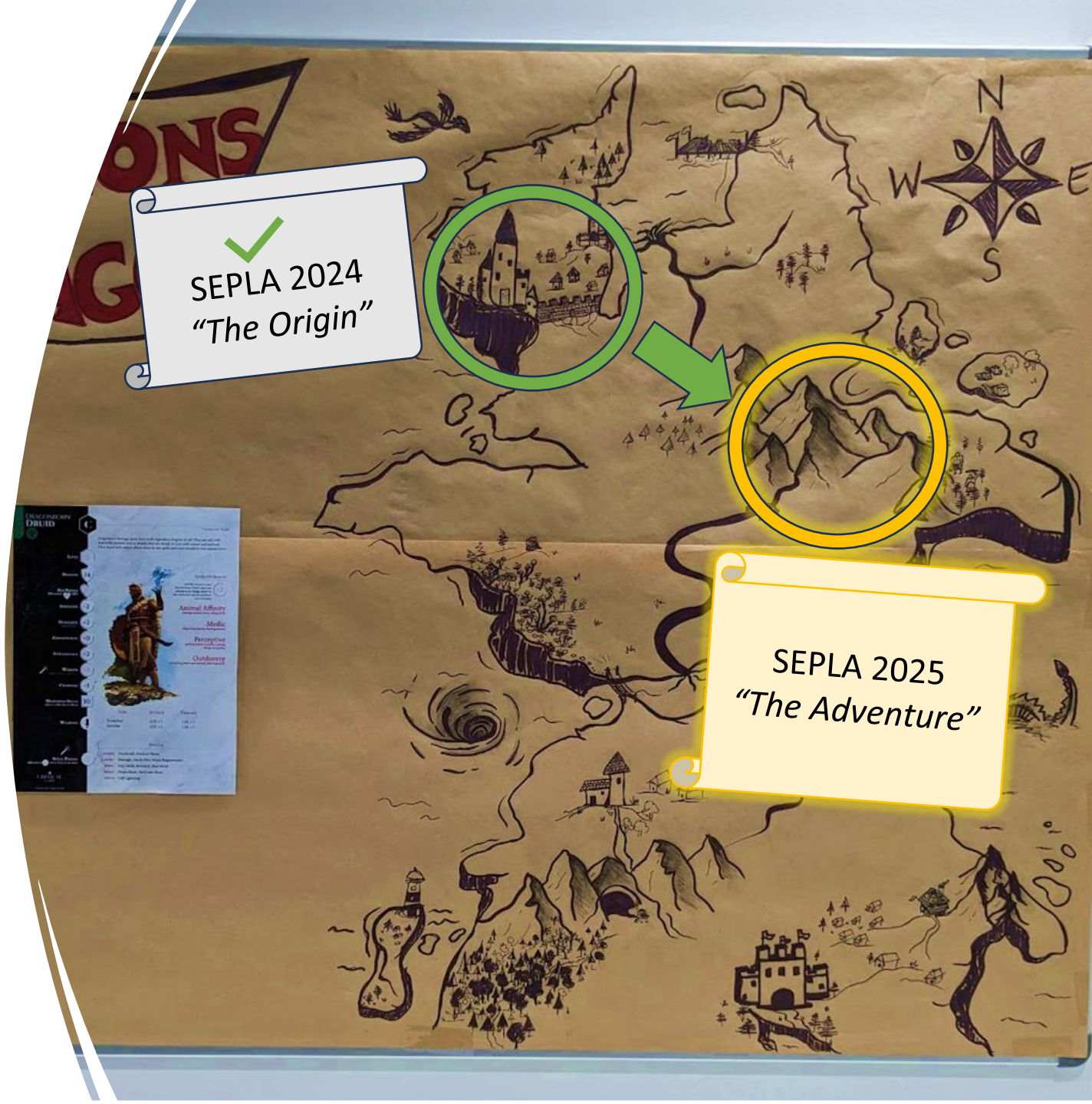
Beyond the Dice: Unlocking Creativity and Critical Thinking Through Collaborative Storytelling Games



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Workshop Plan

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Critical Core Program at Ajuga
- 3) Short Game Experience
- 4) Questions



Andrew Kingsford-Smith

Teaching:



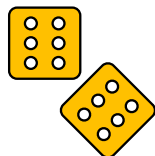
- **English, Drama** (since 2017)
- **Ajuga School** (since 2024)

Research:



- **Masters:** Student engagement
- **PhD:** Teacher wellbeing
- Published **academic articles**
- **CESE** (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation)

Collaborative Storytelling Games Programs:



- **Student wellbeing programs:** Special education contexts, online program, outdoor education program
- **How-to workshops for staff/parents**
- Completed training through **Game to Grow**
- Currently writing a **book chapter** on this area

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Feature / Postgrad Study

DO YOU HAVE
A STORY?

Email andrewkingsfordsmith@ajuga.com.au or andrewkingsfordsmith@ajuga.com.au to start writing your article.
We accept contributions from around Australia and publish the best in Australian Teacher Magazine.

Beyond compliance and into engagement



"... teacher needs
skills and wellbeing
to cope of the biggest
... challenges we
face right now."

"There is a great
feeling when
you're teaching"



Collaborative Storytelling Games? Tabletop Role-Playing Games?



Critical Role: 19th June 2025, Sydney's ICC



Tabletop Role-Playing Game (TTRPG)



Collaborative storytelling game



Players role-play as fantasy characters (*any genre*)



Every character has strengths & weaknesses



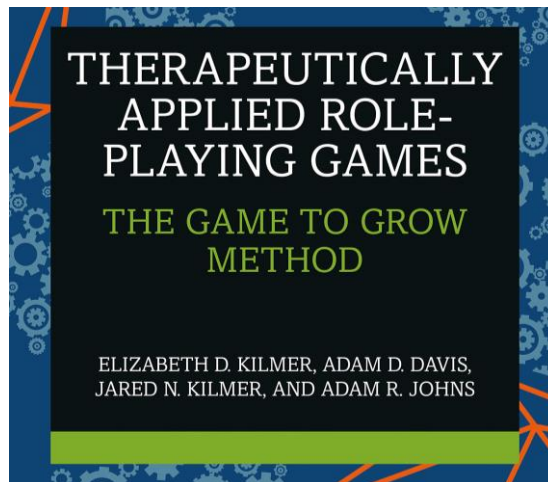
Players collaborate to overcome obstacles



Games master (GM or DM): improv, rules & dice

Critical Core Program at Ajuga School

- **What is it:** Wellbeing and engagement program that supports academic skills
- **Evidence base:** Research studies, the Game to Grow Method
- **Format:** Small groups (1-4 students); weekly 30-90 min sessions
- **Supported students:** At risk of disengagement; neurodivergent



Critical Core Program at Ajuga School

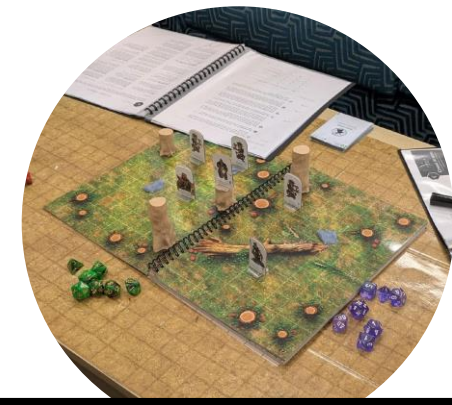
*“The Critical Core Program has demonstrated remarkable success in **engaging students of varying abilities** and learning styles... Many participants who **typically exhibit a lack of interest** in traditional classroom settings have **shown newfound enthusiasm** during the sessions”*

– Ajuga School Assistant Principal

Student reported outcomes:

- ✓ Enjoy and want to come to school
- ✓ Sense of belonging
- ✓ Regulate emotions
- ✓ Build self-confidence
- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Collaboration skills
- ✓ School relationships

Students have fun while practising skills and working towards syllabus outcomes



Skills

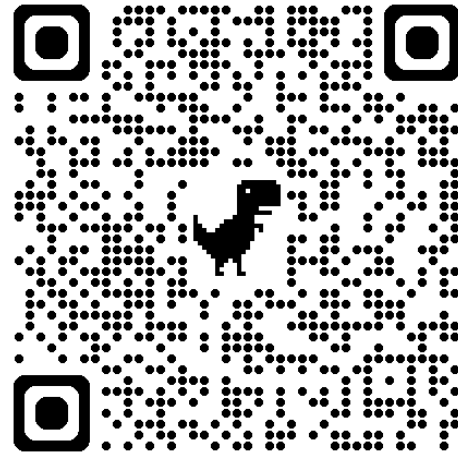
- **Literacy:** *listening, speaking, storytelling*
- **Numeracy:** *addition, subtraction, dice-based probability*
- **Engagement:** *focus, participation, turn-taking*
- **Self-Regulation:** *supported success and failure*
- **Collaboration:** *advocacy, consideration, compromise*
- **Planning:** *identifying goals, obstacles, discussing plans*
- **Perspective-taking:** *empathy, considering different points of view*
- **Pretend play:** *creativity, imagination*

Example Syllabus Outcomes

- **English:**
 - **Stage 3 (EN3-VOCAB-01):** extends vocabulary
 - **Stage 4 (EN4-ECA-01):** creates creative texts
- **PDHPE:**
 - **Stage 3 (PH3-SMI-01)/ Stage 4 (PH4-SMI-01):** applies and refines interpersonal skills
 - **Stage 4 (PH4-RRL-01):** applies strategies for safe and respectful relationships
- **Creative arts:**
 - **Stage 3 (CA3-DRA-01):** makes and performs drama to shape meaning
 - **Stage 4 (DR4-PER-01):** uses performance skills to communicate meaning
- **Mathematics:**
 - **Stage 3 (MA3-AR-01):** applies appropriate addition and subtraction strategies
 - **Stage 4 (MA4-PRO-C-01):** probabilities of simple chance experiments (e.g., dice)

Short Game Experience

<https://www.dndbeyond.com/posts/1625-peril-in-pinebrook-a-free-introductory-adventure>



Our Adventurers

Elf, Wizard

- Magic user
- Intelligent
- Knowledgeable
- Can do magic attacks



Human, Cleric

- Divine magic wielder
- Wise
- Perceptive
- Can heal others



Halfling, Rogue

- Stealth expert
- Cunning
- Acrobatic
- Can do powerful sneaky attacks



Dwarf, Fighter

- Skilled warrior
- Strong
- Outdoorsy
- Can heal self



The Rules

RULE 1

Work together



RULE 2

Your characters want to help people



RULE 3

We are telling a PG-rated story



RULE 4

You control what your character **tries** to do



RULE 5

Embrace the dice results



RULE 6

The GM has the final say



RULE 7

This a safe space



RULE 8

Use the X-card if you feel unsafe



Story Introduction



TASK: Describe your character

- **Teacher Goals:**

- Engage students
- Worked example of storytelling and role-play
- Promote self-expression

- **Students practise:**

- Listening
- Turn-taking
- Creative expression
- Vocabulary

<p><u>Human, Cleric</u></p> <p>Graceful OR Clumsy Silly OR Serious Polished Armor OR Tarnished Armor Peaceful OR Warlike</p>	<p><u>Elf, Wizard</u></p> <p>Very Young OR Very Old Absent-Minded OR Focused Silver-Haired OR Golden-Haired Soft-Spoken OR Loud</p>
<p><u>Halfling, Rogue</u></p> <p>Excited OR Calm Barefoot OR Fancy Boots Timid OR Brave Selfish OR Generous</p>	<p><u>Dwarf, Fighter</u></p> <p>Grumpy OR Enthusiastic Unkempt OR Well-Dressed Long-Haired OR Bald Proud OR Humble</p>

Encounter 1: A Surprise



- **Teacher Goals:**

- Introduce dice mechanics
- Encourage role-play
- Pique interest

- **Students practise:**

- Addition
- Perspective-taking
- Role-play and pretend play

TASK: Roll a perception check

<p><u>Human, Cleric</u></p> <p>Perception (+ 5)</p>	<p><u>Elf, Wizard</u></p> <p>Perception (+ 3)</p>
<p><u>Halfling, Rogue</u></p> <p>Perception (+ 3)</p>	<p><u>Dwarf, Fighter</u></p> <p>Perception (+ 3)</p>

Encounter 2: The Icy Cliff



- **Teacher Goals:**

- Promote collaboration
- Support experiences of failure and success
- Support agency

- **Students practise:**

- Problem-solving and creativity
- Collaboration
- Self-regulation

TASK: Get to the top of the icy cliff

<p><u>Human, Cleric</u></p> <p>Skills: Athletics (+3) Perception (+5) Religion (+5)</p> <p>Item: Rope (+3)</p>	<p><u>Elf, Wizard</u></p> <p>Skills: History (+5) Nature (+5) Perception (+3)</p> <p>Spell: Fire Bolt (+5)</p>
<p><u>Halfling, Rogue</u></p> <p>Skills: Acrobatics (+5) Investigation (+3) Perception (+3)</p> <p>Item: Climber's kit (+5)</p>	<p><u>Dwarf, Fighter</u></p> <p>Skills: Athletics (+6) Perception (+3) Survival (+3)</p> <p>Item: Crowbar (+6)</p>

Encounter 3: The Cave

Ice monsters

Armour: 10

7 hp

Claws (+2): 1d6



TASK: Defeat the ice monsters

• Teacher Goals:

- Encourage engagement with written text
- Promote collaboration
- Support experiences of failure and success

• Students practise:

- Addition and subtraction
- Self-regulation
- Collaboration
- Storytelling

<p><u>Human, Cleric (11 hp)</u> Armour: 14</p> <p>Mace (+3): 1d6 + 3 damage</p> <p>Special: Heal an ally 7 hp</p> <p>Item: Rope (+3)</p>	<p><u>Elf, Wizard (9 hp)</u> Armour: 12</p> <p>Fire Bolt (+5): 7 damage</p> <p>Special: 3 magic darts (3 damage each)</p> <p>Item: Mirror (+3)</p>
<p><u>Halfling, Rogue (11 hp)</u> Armour: 14</p> <p>Shortbow (+5): 1d6 +3 damage</p> <p>Special: First attack does 1d6 extra damage</p> <p>Skill: Climber's kit (+5)</p>	<p><u>Dwarf, Fighter (13 hp)</u> Armour: 16</p> <p>Handaxe (+6): 1d6 +4 damage</p> <p>Special: Heal self 6 hp after attacking</p> <p>Item: Rations (+3)</p>

Check-Out Questions

1) Who would you like to **spotlight** and why?

- *Purpose: Support positive connections and positive affect*

2) What was **challenging/interesting** about this?

- *Purpose: Reflect on experiences, support challenging feelings*

3) What do you **hope** will happen next in our story?

- *Purpose: Build excitement for next sessions (and get ideas!)*

Resources



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- **Game to Grow (Critical Core):**
www.gametogrow.org
- **Research on the benefits of tabletop role-playing games:** <https://gametogrow.org/resources/research/>
- **Video - “Levelling Up Reluctant Readers With Dungeons & Dragons”:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGiVT4dIHNY>
- **D&D Educator Resources:**
<https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/educators>
- **Free Game Resource:**
<https://www.dndbeyond.com/posts/1625-peril-in-pinebrook-a-free-introductory-adventure>

