

LARPs for Learning

> Live Action Role-Play

By AARON VANEK

ISTE Standards for Students

1 Empowered Learner. Students leverage technology to take an active role in choosing, achieving and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by the learning sciences.

3 Knowledge Constructor. Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts, and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.

A timer ticks away precious seconds before the Praezorian warship recharges its primary guns and pummels us again. Our helm officer, normally a calm-faced Cetian, wrinkles her brow and pinches her lips in frustration—the ship’s engines are too slow to maneuver us out of their range. A red light shrieking on my console indicates that it’s damaged and inoperable. The shields are down. I draw a card out of the envelope for repair requirements: Engineering 3 skill and 1 Hyperonic Inductor. I bellow to the engineering section to bring an inductor to the bridge immediately or we’re stardust. While waiting for salvation, I think, “What if I instead had to solve a math equation to fix this?”

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Live action role-playing, or LARP (sometimes LRP in the United Kingdom), is an ancient, global art form with a terrible moniker, but we're stuck with it. Many people mistakenly think LARP descended from tabletop role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, which was first published in 1974 and is still popular in its fifth edition today. But there are examples of LARP-like activities such as mock trials, the Model United Nations, and military war games that predate *D&D*. In fact, the March 3, 1941 issue of *LIFE* magazine describes and photographs University of Nebraska students playing pretend in 19-year-old sophomore, Frederick Lee Pelton's imaginative planet Atzor, which he envisioned in 1934. Italy's Commedia dell'arte tradition of the 16th century could be considered LARPing, or a LARP precursor. I believe LARPs started when humans first donned animal skins and re-enacted the hunt.

LARP as an art form is different than traditional staged theater or role-playing games (RPGs), since, unlike theater, all participants are both actors and audience members, and everyone almost always has a degree of agency to alter the narrative outcome. For example, maybe Romeo and Juliet can live happily ever after in their LARP. LARPs are unlike tabletop RPGs since participants act out their deeds as opposed to narrating them to a gamemaster or as storyteller. In fact, some LARPs don't require a gamemaster at all. LARPs are not passive, but active—your experience hinges on the effort you and others put into it, as all participants work to create and sustain Johan Huizinga's "magic circle" (Huizinga, 1938).

Most LARPs around the world are created for entertainment purposes, like the introductory example, which I experienced in a Starship Valkyrie campaign. However, there's a growing international trend that uses LARPing to teach.

What is a LARP?

A LARP consists of two or more people each pretending to be someone or something else in a predetermined imaginary setting that takes place in a real location. These people interact with each other and the imaginary setting through improvisational acting for a set amount of time. In most, but not all, of these experiences, there is some degree of involvement from a gamemaster, who takes on a variable amount of control over the personalities of the pretend characters (who they are, what they want) and most of the imaginary setting (where it is, what it looks like, what's there). The gamemaster also may or may not be one of the characters. Through the interactions of everyone's imagination and improvisation, a narrative usually emerges. Participants don't do this for anyone other than themselves: there is no separate audience, everyone is a performer and a viewer (Vanek, 2009).

There are two fictions that participants need to make-believe to animate any LARP: an *external fiction* and an *internal fiction*. Believing an external fiction means you imagine that a classroom is an ancient Babylonian court, or a counter on a hexagonal grid indicates an alien spaceship circling for another attack. External fictions are what allow us to pretend we are not really where we seem, or the things we see, hear, and touch aren't what they are, but something else—something magical. It's much easier for most people to believe external fictions; we do it all the time when we watch plays or movies. Believing an internal fiction is harder. Internal fictions demand you believe that you're a starship captain, a valiant knight, a brilliant chemist, engineer, or President of the United States. Our characters might be ourselves but in a fictional setting. For example, you're you, but there are roaming zombies, or your character might be something entirely unlike you, like a plant creature that throws deadly spores when approached.

In a LARP, we wear a mask or a role to become a character that we briefly inhabit. These masks can be quite powerful for learning, since every mask bears at least some resemblance to the wearer, revealing what may be their best or worst qualities. Furthermore, walking, or role-playing, in another's shoes can be profound: the Crossroads Foundation (crossroads.org.hk) regularly runs simulations (LARPs under another name) for the World Economic Forum called *A Day in the Life of a Refugee*. According to one Ghanese refugee, "After watching TV, people may forget what they have seen. After doing this simulation, they will remember us" (WEF, 2014).

There are many different LARPs and types of LARPs that have occurred all around the world. Some are single events, like a movie—sometimes with reruns and sequels. Others are episodic, like a continuing story that occurs once a month, lasting years or even decades. The most popular genre of larp is fantasy, inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons*, but LARPS can also be post-apocalyptic, Western, horror, science fiction, historical, dramatic, comedic, satirical, musical, surreal, political, experimental, or combinations of these and more. Any topic suitable for a painting, novel, or song could be a topic for live action role-playing, as the breadth and depth of human experience is LARP-able.

Some LARPs persist merely five minutes in one sitting, others can last a month continuously, without breaking character. Most range from four to 48 hours. Live action role-playing is entering the mainstream with other fandom and gaming nerd cultural elements, so it should not be a surprise that this wonderful medium of expression is finally being acknowledged as an effective educational tool.

What Is Educational LARP, or Edu-LARP?

While live action role-playing has been used for centuries to instruct soldiers, the current use of LARP in curriculum is a recent development. While any experience can be educational, Malik Hyltoft draws a distinction between educationalLARPs, or edu-LARPs, and regularLARPs suggesting, “In order for a larp to be educational, we would demand that the organizers of the activity have a plan for acquisition of knowledge or skills or correction of certain behaviours in the target group through the medium of the larp. So whilst the participants may feel like it is, the activity cannot be solely recreational” (Hyltoft, 2010).

Live action role-playing, or aspects of it, are already in the classroom under different names: experiential education, self-directed learning, situated learning, problem-driven or project-based learning, progressive inquiry, and gamified or process drama. Many teachers are already using simulations—which I consider to be a LARP—or costumed roleplay in the classroom outside of drama classes.

In his essay Hyltoft argues edu-LARPs are an effective teaching method because of distraction, motivation, activity, and power.

Distraction

According to Hyltoft, “Edu-larp works because it manages to distract the student from his daily life, thereby giving him a greater chance to concentrate on the subject at hand.” In the same way that daily life can distract students from their schoolwork, participating in an edu-LARP can distract students from daily life (Hyltoft, 2010).

Motivation

Edu-LARP is effective because, “It places the students in situations where the motivation for doing school work is very clear and understandable” (Hyltoft, 2010). Hyltoft further breaks down this intrinsic motivation into three categories:

CHARACTER MOTIVATION

“It can be very hard to explain to a whole class of students with different interests and agendas, why some piece of abstract learning is relevant to them. It is much easier to create a character to whom it is relevant. As an example, most 15-year olds have no use for nuclear theory, but secret agents in the later part of World War II will memorize it gleefully” (Hyltoft, 2010).

NARRATIVE MOTIVATION

“A well made larp is like a good book, you cannot wait to see what is on the next page...when the subject matter becomes part of what they (students) need in order to act in the narrative setting, they are strongly motivated to learn it well and use it to the best of their ability” (Hyltoft, 2010).

META NARRATIVE MOTIVATION

This is when learning objectives can, be satisfied in the actual story or narrative, like math or algebra problems. In this case, “students are asked to participate in activities linked to learning objectives, and their performance in these activities is directly linked to some part of the edu-larp. For instance, on an edu-larp space journey, the navigation computer jams just as the spaceship is on collision course with an asteroid, and has to be reconfigured through the solving of vast amounts of relatively simple arithmetic so each student has to solve and hand in several pages of arithmetic” (Hyltoft, 2010). It should be obvious how this sentence in the essay was a eureka moment for me, who was already playing Starship Valkyrie.

Activity

The effectiveness of edu-LARP is in part due to its contrast to the traditional learning environment, where students are passively listening and reading. “Edu-larp works because it activates students in a school setting at an unusually high level (Hyltoft, 2010). Hyltoft further explains that the role and authority of the teacher in an edu-LARP is different than normal because “a teacher acting as a director cannot interfere with the actions of a student without breaking the narrative frame of the story solely because the actions of the students are not conforming to the ones expected or hoped for by the teacher—the interference has to be grounded in narrative modifications or game mechanics. The teacher/director has to conform to the frame of the narration and accept if the student tries out the boundaries of this frame, or even opts to fail within the context of the story” (Hyltoft, 2010). This allowance for failure is hugely important within the edu-LARP pedagogy.

Power

“Edu-larp works because it empowers the student, allowing him to make decisions and living with them. . . the student is given the freedom to act within the limits of the character” (Hyltoft, 2010). Allowing students to make decisions, and suffering the consequences of those decisions, is also a method of assessment, as teachers can gauge students’ decisions and their work on being informed or uninformed.

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Furthermore, a student might not acquire the knowledge until they fail, and learn why they failed: “making a wrong decision and subsequently failing is also being empowered and facilitates learning something, compared to being forced to succeed, but not really learning anything” (Hyltoft, 2010).

Hyltoft’s essay, and his work, is encouraging and what I learned from him through reading and then visiting a school in Denmark helped correct some of the mistakes I made with my first attempt at an edu-LARP: Star Seekers.

Star Seekers

Filled with vim and vigor to transform education using live action role-playing, I started to test my first LARP with a class of 21 sixth-graders for roughly 60 minutes a day, a few days a week for about a month. Less than \$200 was spent on materials, about a quarter of which was spent on photocopying colored cardstock for group handouts.

The teacher we were working with emphasized the need to differentiate problems within the same subject, say, fractions, with varying difficulty for different students. This played into Starship Valkyrie easily, since that LARP works with a crew operating different ship sections. Each student rotated between the bridge, engineering, stardusters (single-pilot spaceships without hyperspace capability), and science and observation. The class was divided into four color-coded sections based on the teacher’s recommendations for group dynamics and level of difficulty for their assignments. We gave each student a strip of colored fabric to indicate their group, and a light blue sash and a call sign name, like Hawk or Falcon. They wrote their code name on the sash and wore it as a makeshift uniform, keeping it after the LARP finished. Costumes and props, even simple ones, often go a very long way in LARPs, especially for children.

Each section had tasks for the ship’s mission: engineering had math problems that created power for the ship, observation used science to figure out puzzles, stardusters ran through a gauntlet of basic math flash cards, and the bridge guided the other three and corrected the problems from engineering. Ideally, the students would work together to complete the mission, and we’d assign more missions in subsequent classes.

The first trial failed. We underestimated the time it would take to move the student’s desks into a new “four-section” configuration, give them sashes and code-names, and explain the LARP idea. These flaws were easily corrected. The biggest

problem was an assumption that students would be relatively proficient in the problems we assigned, particularly those in math and engineering ones. When they couldn't do the problems, they couldn't power the ship's engines, and the narrative failed. Star Seekers wasn't introductory instruction—it was intended to be a fun way of reviewing what the students already knew. Unfortunately, we didn't check the math and science problems with the teacher to see if they were appropriate before we presented them in the LARP. Worse, we attached narrative progress too abstract, unrelated drill and kill worksheets—our version of the dreaded “chocolate covered broccoli.” Lastly, we grossly ignored the importance of social status among this age group, and giving the characters on the bridge authority over other students proved problematic.

But we learned, reiterated, and improved.

We set up each group to have a rotating leader; every time they would switch to a different section, which happened about every 10 minutes, they had a new group leader. This way each section only had one person to address. We readjusted the difficulty of the problems, and encouraged the group on the bridge to help engineering if they needed it. This worked well, as students proficient in the math would help those who weren't. They did this because they wanted the power boosts correct answers generated. We also gave the students more agency, which is a LARP term for the ability of your character to influence the narrative. For example, students could choose to increase shields or engine power, or maneuver to shoot an incoming asteroid or rescue someone in an escape pod. We added flashier props, and better graphics for the science problems. In the last class, we activated a video conference chat so the students could negotiate with an alien (played by an actor who donated his time to us) in real time. Although this was a highlight for the class, more students were interested in talking to the alien through the camera than the math problems.

After each run, we tried to assess results with help from the teacher. We estimated we reached 80% of the class at any one time; there were always a few who weren't participating or acted disruptive. They did learn some new material, but since this wasn't the goal, it was incidental. Some students improved on some tasks, but I believe the best result was that the teacher could tell which lessons she would need to review or not, and for which students. She had a better understanding of the class's proficiency for all the subjects we addressed, which she could work on before testing. Though Star Seekers was far from perfect, it still indicated to me that the concept of educational LARP is sound.



Scan the QR code or visit youtu.be/254TAJ8cxZs to check out a YouTube video of Star Seekers including student testimonials and examples of play.

Hit Seekers

I view edu-LARPs like tabletop role-playing games, where the lesson is the module or printed adventure, the teacher is the game master, and the students are the players. Most gamemasters customize and hack the published scenarios, or write their own to fit their players' wants and needs. It's easier to change words on a computer than ink on paper or, if the teacher isn't a programmer, coded software.

For this edu-LARP with high school students, the class was separated into groups. Each group representing a music company with \$1 million as starting capital. They needed to use this imaginary money to sign fictional artists, attach them to a fictional producer, and book them into a fictional recording studio to make an album. Each artist, producer, and studio had different costs, time to record, percentage take of royalties, and quality they could add to each album. The better the album, the more fans an artist brought to the table, the more sales were made, and the more money was earned. The goal of each group was to net the highest profit. To properly make an album, the students needed to do the accounting (addition and subtraction) for the artist, producer, and studio. They also had a daily overhead based on how many people were in their group.

The game lasted a few months, and, once it started, students could sign artists any time they were in class. Once the album was complete, I would run the numbers through a simple formula and generate a gross revenue and net profit for each company. I reported this information on Twitter, which the students could follow. Once a week, I would come to class to check on the teacher and students, and offer goodies: they could exchange bonus points that came with each album release for snacks or save them for gift cards at the end of the year. Bonus points went to the company, not to individuals, so they would have to manage each person's hunger—an exercise in deferred gratification. For the last week of the game, companies could gain extra sales if they booked their artists into clubs, and to do that they had to figure out how many tickets they could sell in each club by finding the area of, say, the Rhomboid Room, or a round arena with a stage in the middle (compute area of two circles, subtract smaller from larger).

Hit Seekers also had the problem of being a review; other than the new concepts of overhead and royalties, the math was earned addition, subtraction, percentages,

and basic algebra and geometry. In the first lessons we gave each company an accounting ledger book (a prop instead of a costume) to record their finances. One group was unresponsive. I checked on them and realized one student could not correctly read a six-figure number. They weren't sure if it was one million, six hundred thousand or sixteen-thousand—it was one hundred sixty thousand. Again, we based the mechanics of the game on assumed skill proficiency. When students lacked that proficiency, the game stopped. Fortunately, with help from their teammates, and myself, they were all able to operate slightly above the minimum. While this wasn't the last edu-LARP I made that focused on review, it is now my least-favorite option, especially when I'm unfamiliar with each student and his or her competency solving the problems needed to tell a story.



Scan the QR codes (or visit youtu.be/yk-ksF6LOLE and youtu.be/YjDVhmSeAuo) to view two short videos from Hit Seekers.



Download a free alpha version of Hit Seekers at drivethrurpg.com or by scanning the QR code.

Ancient Mesopotamia

Building an edu-LARP around a theme was a model I had viewed at a private school in Denmark. In this system, the LARP is one week, one theme, for all classes. For example, one week the students were asked to pretend they were staff on a cruise ship, and had to keep their passengers happy while on the journey. Another theme featured a police procedural like the show *CSI*, with students acting as police officers tracking a serial killer. Each week, all teachers worked together to attach their lesson plans to the same theme. For example, the killer leaves clues from classic literature that the officers need to read to create a profile, and one victim's body was dissolved in acid, so a chemistry expert, a.k.a. the science teacher, is called in as a consultant.

For the Ancient Mesopotamia edu-LARP the teachers delivered a traditional lecture presentation on Mesopotamian history and culture to get the students familiarized with the setting. We then gave students their characters, as a governor, astrologer, merchant, or priest from one of four ancient cities: Sippar, Borsippa, Dilbat, or Kish. Each character had two axes of potential alliances: with their role or their home city. We gave each character three goals, like host the

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biggest religious festival in the city, plus three academic goals for the player, which involved research and thought questions that could be easily turned into an assignment. The citizens of Dilbat all had a secret: they were time-travelers sent to study ancient Mesopotamia, and would be making a report at the end of the LARP. We did this to make things more challenging for the advanced students, and to provide another mode of instruction on the material, this time from peers.

Each day of the week had three basic periods, which matched the regular class structure at the school: one we called a “fishbowl,” when the characters could mingle in a freeform situation as their characters—trading goods, planning festivals, or moving armies on a map against aggressors to the empire. During the other two periods, one role would lead the others on a specific module activity, which they prepared in a prior class. The activities were:

- > **A market bazaar** where the merchants, used clay and small pencils to create symbols for trade goods like fish, grain, and cloth, and learned about changing market value of commodities (see Figure 2.1).
- > **Fortune telling** with the astrologers, who used a paper star wheel we created using the constellations and base-60 number system of the Babylonians.
- > **A courtroom** run by the governors under the Code of Hammurabi, with cases we introduced for them to adjudicate. Other players would pretend to be the litigants, not their own characters.
- > **Presentation of the “Epic of Gilgamesh”**, which the students turned into a call and response play with the other students.

By almost all accounts, this run went very well. We saw emergent gameplay when one character was caught trying to steal items in the bazaar. I suggested he go on trial the next day for the governor’s activity. That player went home and planned his defense, presenting a solid, yet ultimately unsuccessful, explanation. We also witnessed some intrinsic motivation, as one student researched the role of priests in this era. The next day, he delivered an impromptu presentation to the teachers that the priests’ income was too low, that they had many duties in that time and should get a higher daily income. The teachers, playing the Judges of Babylon, agreed. Within seconds, I was handing out the additional income to all the priests (see Figure 2.2). Could a video game alter that parameter so easily and quickly?

It also happens that one very cunning student, playing a governor with armies, arranged a coup d’état, overthrowing the Judges of Babylon, a.k.a., the teachers.

CHARACTER SHEET from Ancient Mesopotamia

NAME: **Gadatas**

GROUP: **Merchant**

CITY-STATE: **Kish**

INCOME: **2 Gur of Fish, 1 Gur of Meat**

You are a merchant who lives in the city-state of Kish in the land of Mesopotamia. Kish is about seven miles east of the holy city of Babylon, where Hammurabi, a fair and just King, reigns. Kish and Babylon, along with the cities of Sippar, Borsippa, and Dilbat make up the Babylonian Kingdom. If you make honest and profitable trades, you could be one of the city's wealthiest citizens one day.

Character Goals

These are goals for your character. Have fun with them.

1. **You want to sell all your goods in exchange for silver shekels. This will help you start your new import business in Kish.**
2. **You are trying to build a reputation as being the most fair of any merchant. The written contract is the foundation of commerce in Babylonia. Your contracts should be easily readable by others. That means making sure that everyone gets a fair deal, not just you.**
3. **You want to build a warehouse in Kish. This requires 1 Timber and 1 Stone. But the more you get, the bigger a warehouse you can build. If you could get 5 Timber and 5 Stone, your warehouse would be HUGE!**

Academic Goals

What are some of the ways people actually traded goods in Ancient Mesopotamia? We know they didn't have cars and planes, so how did they get their goods from place to place?

Why do you think cuneiform—writing—developed? What are the strengths and weaknesses of writing with these symbols? Can you think of an easier way to write things down that everyone can use?

Would you rather make a deal with a handshake or a written contract? Why?



Figure 2.1. Character sheet for Ancient Mesopotamia LARP.



Figure 2.2. Student after negotiating new income during Mesopotamia LARP.

Panicked at first, the classroom teachers rolled with it, and let them rule (not the actual class, but the fictional LARP). In this iteration, they allowed characters to petition the government for things like extra income. As soon as the new governors took power, the former Judges of Babylon began petitioning them, as did the other students. The usurpers learned very quickly that running a government is far more difficult than overthrowing one.

Would this be possible outside of a live action role-playing experience, where the unexpected is refused by a computer rather than handled by an adaptable human being? A teacher's ability to improvise is crucial in the classroom, and more so in edu-LARPs. While this may seem difficult to some teachers, improvisation is what, I believe, ensures that LARPing will always be a superior method of instruction than any locked curricula, whether locked in printed pages or locked in code.

Tips, Tricks, Techniques, and Expectations

Hopefully I made the obvious errors so you won't have to. Following are some things I've learned after five years of designing and running edu-LARPs. I'm still learning, and hope I'll get the opportunity to continue learning for the rest of my life. Hopefully I made the obvious errors so you won't have to. None of these define the only pathway for educational live action role-playing, but serve as helpful guidelines.

Use Narrative

I believe someone has a better shot remembering the quadratic formula because they used it at a dramatic moment to save a spaceship from plunging into the sun than if they got it right on a test. Stories connect unmoored facts to emotional foundations. Even a simple patina of fiction can change a traditional class: Østerskov Efterskole's police procedural LARP featured a "normal" chemistry lecture about acids and bases. But pretend the students are cops trying to catch a killer and the teacher is a consultant, and the knowledge becomes important—possibly more vital than remembering it for a test or course grade. Stories are powerful, and often stay with us throughout our lives.

Avoid Trivia

In Gamedesk's educational program, *Ancient Inventions*, students are asked trivia questions about a historical culture. If correct, students receive pieces to build an ancient invention, like a shaduf (lever for moving water). But why impose a barrier to doing something cool, like building a lever with Popsicle sticks? I revised the game so participants would get to build the machine first, then learn about the history and culture surrounding the device. Trivia is often the easiest way of presenting information, but I don't think it leads to a deep understanding—the knowledge is trivial and not relevant to what students want to do.

Don't Be Clever

Education should not be about showing off how smart you are. When designing edu-LARPs, what you think is neat might be dull dry toast to your students. Running games should not pit your brain against theirs; it's not that kind of competition. Let students have the thrill of discovery, encourage their own passion to learn more over inserting what you think is interesting. LARP gives people a heuristic chance to create their own story. Encourage them.

Allow for Character Failure

Allowing students to fail, learn from their mistakes, and try again is vital to learning. Video games inherently do this, LARPs need to as well. The mask of role-playing allows the character to fail, which isn't the same as the player. It's okay if students try new things that don't work. Give them the freedom to lose, ensure they know why they failed, and give them the chance to try again. In traditional teaching, wrong answers on homework and tests lead to lower grades and disenchantment with the subject. LARPs and games should allow students to learn from failures. For example, in *Ancient Inventions* we asked students to make the machine

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first and after their first attempt we explained the math and science behind it. Then we gave them the chance to improve their construct.

Break Bottlenecks

In traditional learning, one teacher or one textbook has all the answers, and student comprehension hinges on their ability to receive a strong signal through all the noise of modern schooling and, sometimes, inefficient teachers or worksheets. With edu-LARPs, there can be multiple sources of knowledge, including peer-to-peer learning. You can save time by explaining how to do something to one student, and they'll explain it to the others.

Manage Chaos

In most edu-LARPs, the classroom gets loud, and the energy rises. Students might be yelling, running around, and waving their arms. In most instances, this is good thing. If students remain focused most of the time, noise and activity are indicators of learning. However, unless you have administrative support and understanding, especially from classes adjacent to yours, plus the ability to rein in the group, chaos can be disruptive. There's a balance all teachers need to reach between a riot and total silence—both can be unproductive.

Competition Can Be Your Ally

Harnessing the competitive desire can be a strong motivator for learning. Most LARPs group characters into competing factions, though sometimes there are spies or traitors for one side or another. Students accept loss if the system is fair, they learned the reason for their failure, and they can play again.

Don't Assume

This is an obvious mantra for life, but as you probably noticed from my case studies, a critical error was assuming students already knew the material they needed to play the LARP. Even if you're the class teacher, students might have forgotten material you've already presented to them. Related to this, don't predict student performance, especially for the narrative. Like teaching in general, you have to be ready for anything. The show must go on; the narrative must keep rolling unless there is an emergency. In hindsight, when our first Star Seekers crew failed at their math problems, we should have switched groups, asked others to help them, or launched into a group training course on that material.

Integrate Topics

One of the joys designing edu-LARPs is bringing in material from multiple subjects. For me, it is easier to include history with science, a la The Great Phlogiston Debate, than separating them into individual topics, especially when different teachers are asynchronous with their lessons. Whenever possible, collaborate with other teachers so their lessons reinforce or assist the edu-LARP.

Have Fun in Your Role

Teachers should also have a character to role-play. This allows you to model enthusiasm and encourage others to join. It also gives you two avenues of engagement and discipline: that of the character and that of the teacher (if needed for discipline). Moreover, being in the role-play pool with your students affords a unique perspective to see the lesson through your students' eyes. You can enjoy the mystery and experience as much as they do, since you won't know how the narrative ends, which might help if you teach year after year.

Provide a Role or Duty for Non-Participants

Some students are unwilling or unable to participate in the LARP, for whatever reason. Often a LARP requires detailed accounting or tracking, and in the frenzy of role-playing, another set of eyes could prove invaluable.

Appendix

Sample Introduction to Live Action Role-Playing

Ideally, using live action role-playing for education will prompt a resurgence in curiosity, attention, and empowerment. This appendix provides a sample introduction to LARPS to get started.

1. Introduction: What is a LARP?

This should take 10 minutes at most. Teachers should explain that LARP stands for “live action role-playing” Some of the students might be familiar with the concept, or have participated in a LARP. Tell them it’s like playing cops and robbers, or tea parties with stuffed animals, or any kind of acting without a script or camera, where the audience is each other and no one else. If students react poorly, say it’s an acting game like the Model United Nations, or a historical simulation. It’s like *World of Warcraft*, but acted out in the classroom instead of played on a computer.

Tell the students they will each have a character they will pretend to be. Explain that the characters we play (and teachers will be characters as well) are not the people they actually are! If a character is angry with you, that person isn’t angry with you as a person. This is play-pretend.

2. LARP Exercise

Explain that you’re going to do a, very short, role-playing exercise, just to get the hang of it. Photocopy and randomly hand out the character strips listed in the next section, one to each student (and take one for yourselves). Explain that this is their character role. Give them two minutes to read it over, then look around, yell “game on!” and let them go. After 10 minutes, the game is over. Encourage students to be creative with their interpretation of the character sheets, even if the character is unfamiliar.

3. Review Exercise and Debrief

Explain that they pretended to be someone else. Obviously, no one was actually that character. The same thing happens in LARPs: they will all have a character to play, to interact together in an imaginary world based on real historical facts. Students should research their characters so they can pretend to be them. They can continue to do this out of school, during breaks, or during prep time.

Emphasize that there isn't a right or wrong way to play your character. If they fail, or don't complete their goals, or screw up—that's fine. It's just a play pretend character. You decide what they are like based on the information you get, but try to achieve your goals.

Characters for Live Action Role-Playing Exercise

Photocopy the following character strips and hand out randomly to players, including teachers. *Do not let anyone trade.* They can research the person quickly, before the exercise begins. Feel free to create your own characters following this model:

1. One sentence on who they are.
2. Name one person they know; this can be a friend or enemy.
3. One goal, piece of knowledge, or thing they want to do.

You are Harry Potter, a young wizard of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

You know Hermione.

You think someone here has a magical artifact. You don't have a wand.

You are Hermione Granger, a witch at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

You know Harry Potter.

You think someone here has a magical artifact. You don't have a wand.

You are Frodo Baggins, a hobbit.

You know Gollum.

You have the One Ring but want to give it to anyone EXCEPT Gollum.

You are Gollum, a deranged creature.

You know Frodo Baggins.

You want to get the One Ring from Frodo.

You are Kanye West, a superstar hip hop artist.

You know Rhianna, Lady Gaga, and Justin Bieber.

You want to find someone else to make a record with you.

You are Rhianna, a superstar singer.

You know Kanye West, Lady Gaga, and Justin Bieber.

You want to get Kanye West to apologize for something he did wrong.

You are Lady Gaga, a superstar singer.

You know Kanye West, Rihanna, and Justin Bieber.

You want to protest the cruel treatment of animals.

You are Justin Bieber, a superstar singer.

You know Kanye West, Rihanna, and Lady Gaga.

You want to show you are nice and don't want to be prosecuted on assault charges.

You are Santa Claus, a jolly fellow that brings toys to kids.

You know everyone here when they tell you their name.

You want to make sure you know what each person wants for Christmas.

You are Cookie Monster, a hungry Muppet.

You don't know anyone here.

You want to find cookies and eat them.

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