

Ayiti: The Cost of Life

Instructions

The point of this game is to manage a family. However, unlike in the Sims videogames where it's easy to get a job, make money, buy stuff & make friends, in this game it's actually HARD to even survive. The challenge of this role playing game is to figure out how you can get your family to survive for four years.

How to Play

To play, go to the games for change website:

<http://www.gamesforchange.org/main/GameList>

At the top of the page there are four bullet points, click on 'Play the Games'

The first game you'll see is called Ayiti: The Cost of Life. Click on the Url & then click on 'Play the game now!'

When the game opens, click Play

Next, you get to choose a strategy for how you want to play. Click one of the four boxes: do you want to play where health is the most important thing? Happiness? Education? Money?

Whichever goal you click, this defines your strategy for how you want to play. If you chose Happiness, then you're saying that you're going to make decisions based on your goal to make the family happy.

Whichever strategy you choose might direct the computer to interpret your actions differently (we'll ask you what you think about this later!).

Once you pick a strategy, click the PLAY GAME key (it's red)

You'll see pictures and a description of the backstory for the game. Basically, it's saying the different challenges you'll face while trying to figure out how to give the Guinard family a good life (where what a good life is, is based on your goal).

Click Continue (it's brown & in the lower right corner)

This next screen (titled Help) describes the rules the computer is using. These rules are rules that the game designer has chosen to simulate the life of the family. As you play, you might think about how-- if you were the game designer-- how you'd maybe make the rules different. But, as you play, you can also think about how the rules-- as they are-- make you experience a particular kind of experience & how that experience is the reason the designer designed the game in a particular way.

It is by bringing together lots of different rules that a computer is able to create a simulation.

On this help screen page, you can read about how there are parameters (or rules) that define the challenges you'll face, about how your family will be judged (which are also statistics that tell you how well you're doing in the game).

After reading through the rules, click continue (brown, lower right)

Okay, you're ready to play!

It starts out welcoming you to the rainy season & describing what things are like in Haiti during this season. Check out the family. They look ready to go! Click continue.

Now you'll see the five members of the family standing in a line. Also, there are five places where you can put your family members. Read through the choices & then decide where you want to put each person.

To move them, left-click on the person. This lights up the person. Then left-click on the place you want that person to go. You'll see the person go to the place. Once there you'll have choices to make. Click the box that you want (sometimes, like in the farm, there's only one box). Once you click the box, you're free to decide where to put the next person. Or, if after reading about the choice, you don't want the person to go there (for example, you don't need to go to the hospital or to stay at home & rest unless someone is sick) then click the "leave" button.

Figure out where to put the 5 members of your family. Once you have decided where to put everyone, click the 'Start Season' button.

Keep reading the updates until you get the screen that says that Year 1 of the rainy season is complete. When you click continue, you'll see the family lined up again. Guided by the updates you were given, figure out where to put the different family members for Year 2.

To assess how each person is doing, left click on them & you'll see a little box that says the name of the person & that gives representational bars, which say how well the person is doing in terms of health, happiness & education.

Play on!

Questions:

- If you have played the Sims before, how is this game different?
- Does this game seem like a more or less accurate simulation of reality?
- How would you change the game, if you were the designer?
- Why do you think the game designers chose to force players to choose a particular strategy?
- Can you identify three rules and explain how those rules contribute to the outcome of this simulation?

Note for teachers:

One goal of this activity is to help students understand that decisions made by simulation designers can shape the outcome of the simulations. Simply the fact that information is visualized or simulated does not mean that it is an accurate representation of the reality it seeks to simulate. Different simulations can have different strengths. This activity encourages students to consider how they might structure rules in different ways. They are also encouraged to consider how their own decisions, as simulation operators working according to limitations imposed by the designer, affect the insights they gain from this experience.

Other possible questions:

-Were you able to get your family to survive the four seasons? If yes, what did you do? If no, what happened that kept you from achieving your goal?

-Do you think it might be easier to survive if you had picked a different strategy? (happiness, education or money)

-If a game were designed as a simulation of **your life** do you think it would be easier to achieve your goal?

-Did you choose the same strategy in playing the game that you are choosing in your own life?