**Discussion and Debate in Practice: Engaging with Fundamental and Professional English Language Skills**

**An Eclectic Primer for Enthusiastic Learners**

**Week Nine: Reading Interactive Fiction**

**A Dark Room**

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Hello and welcome to the Discussion and Debate 1 workbook for week nine!

This week you should complete the following homework assignment (already posted on EClass). Please ensure you complete the homework below before reading further.

**BEGINNING OF HOMEWORK SECTION**

This week we are doing a very different type of reading assignment. This should be a very interesting and fun reading assignment so please do not worry too much if you have any troubles with it, and feel free to email me if you have any difficulties.

We are going to play a text-based game or read an example of interactive fiction that involves you reading and making some choices. This game is titled *A Dark Room*. You should simply go to the link below and start ‘playing’. This is a strange ‘game’ and you may think nothing is happening but you should continue to ‘play’ by clicking on the boxes provided, and see how the game develops. I am not going to explain more than that about this game because some of the joy of the game comes from discovering more about it.

You should play this way for more than 40 minutes, reading the very short texts provided to you and making decisions as you play this game. As you play this game please note any new vocabulary or language you encounter and bring these notes to class.

After 40 minutes, I would like you load a saved game and ‘jump ahead’ with this game and play for an additional 20 minutes. Please see my note below on loading a saved game. Also, see this note if you have played this game before. If you cannot successfully load a saved game, just keep playing.

Your homework assignment is to play this game for more than 60 minutes, writing down any language encountered in this game. **You should have a list of new and interesting language you encountered in this game ready for class as part of your homework assignment. This will also be part of your homework assignment.**

After you have played the game you should read the workbook to prepare for our discussions in class.

Thank you,

Michael

A Dark Room http://adarkroom.doublespeakgames.com/

Loading A Saved Game

**If you have already played this game before in another class then I want you to ‘jump ahead’ in the game by uploading a save file into the game.**

First go into EClass and open the .txt file named ‘A Dark Room Save File’. This should be filled with text containing strange letters and numbers. Click on this text and the hit board button ‘Ctrl’ and ‘A’ at the same time to select all of this text. Then copy this text by left clicking on your mouse and selecting copy.

Next open the link to A Dark Room. At the bottom of the righthand side of the screen is ‘save’. Click this and three tabs should appear, including one marked ‘import’. Click on the ‘import’ and a window should appear with the text ‘Put The Save Code Here’. Click in this window and ‘paste’ all of this text in that window. Then click ‘import’ and the game should begin.

**END OF HOMEWORK SECTION**

**Part A: What Happened in a Dark Room?**

With as much detail as possible, and using the language you noticed from when you played this game, describe what happened when you played A Dark Room. How did the game start, what happened in the first few minutes you played, what changes as the game continues?

Ensure everyone in your group describes what happened when he or she played or engaged with A Dark Room.

After everyone has described what happened when they played A Dark Room, discuss how you felt when you played this game. Discuss your feelings as the game began and as you continued to play this game.

**Part B: Describing A Dark Room**

A Dark Room is a very unusual videogame and when it was released it slowly became a bestseller and attracted some critical attention. Michael Thomsen wrote a review of A Dark Room for The New Yorker magazine which normally focuses on more on film, theater, literary fiction, and other creative endeavors with artistic merit. He wrote the following about A Dark Room.

After stoking the fire a few more times, you have a new option: collect wood, which can be used to build a cart. Once a cart is built, you can make traps and set them in the surrounding forest, and soon you’re collecting cloth and furs, which can be used to build more huts to attract others to join your small enclave, allowing for the collection of even more fur and meat. You can begin to see a structure emerge from the fragments, but where that structure will lead you remains impossible to predict, and so the compulsion to keep pressing little word buttons grows stronger.

What interesting language do you see in this text? Why do you think The New Yorker is writing about A Dark Room?

**Part C: Further Describing A Dark Room**

The article in The New Yorker continues discussing this game.

If you stick with it, you’ll uncover a game that blossoms out in interesting ways you probably never expected. A Dark Room isn’t for everyone. But if you can appreciate an adventure that shifts and expands as you play, you’ll find a lot to love here. If you’re still on the fence, you can play the game here in a browser window. I never played text-based adventures in my youth, but I got sucked up in the world of A Dark Room, and that’s more than I can say for most games.

What interesting language do you see in this text? How does the author feel about this game? Why does he feel the way he does? How do you think this game is similar and different from other games, novels, and films you know?

**Part D: What is Happening in A Dark Room?**

Use your imagination to provide the most creative answers possible to the following questions. Speculate and try to develop multiple answers.

Who are you in this game? How did you end up in a dark room at the beginning of the game? Who are the other people in the game?

How do you think this game ends? In what kind of world does this game take place? Who is the main character in this game? Who are the other ‘people’ in this game?

Does this game take place in the past, the future, an alternative timeline, or another reality?

**Part E: The Reaction to A Dark Room**

Why do you think some people enjoy playing this game? Why do some people not enjoy playing this game? How did reviews think of this game? If you were to write a review of this game for a local website or newspaper what would you write?

How could this game be improved?

**Part F: The New Yorker’s View of a Dark Room**

* A Dark Room is a “a strange hybrid, part mystery story and part smartphone productivity software, an app that inexplicably rocketed to the most-downloaded spot in the App Store’s games section in April and stayed there throughout the month. A product of a collaboration between two men who worked together without ever having met in person, the game evokes the simplest text-based computer games of the nineteen-seventies while stimulating a very modern impulse to constantly check and recheck one’s phone. It’s like a puzzle composed of deconstructed to-do lists.”
* -Michael Thomsen, The New Yorker

In your own words, paraphrase Thomsen’s description of this game. Do you concur with Thomsen? Why or why not?

**Part G: Living in a Dark Room**

Developing language skills requires repetition of important language items and ‘playing’ with that language in a variety of ways. In this roleplay you are to imagine you are a person living in the village of at the center of A Dark Room. Tell your partner about your life in this village, what you do everyday, and some of the special instances that can sometimes occur. You should imagine you are responding to someone saying, “tell me about life in your village”.

This should be a three, two, one exercise in which you repeat your answer in less and less amount of time in order to build fluency and familiarity with the language we are studying.

**Part H: Using our Imaginations**

What other kinds of text-based games would you want to play? What would those games be like? What would those games be about? Brainstorm some possible games you would like to play that are similar to A Dark Room.