

the open space in a story

April 15 - April 19, 2013

**T**he Week in Review

With our soft opening just a week away, we spent much of the last seven days rushing to ensure we had a polished product to show faculty and get their feedback before we ship our exhibit to Texas.

Part of the rush was figuring out just how we would get our exhibit down to the San Antonio Children's Museum. Early on, we had decided to have heavy theming in the hope that it would attract kids to the experience. We designed a six-foot tall book in which a TV would be placed and a desk made of books in which a touchscreen would be placed. We asked Ben Carter from Carnegie Mellon's theater department to build it for us. This week, for the first time, we received the build and realized two things. First, it looks awesome. Kids will love it. Second, it's heavy—way heavier than we had originally estimated when budgeting for shipping.

This second realization prompted a mad rush to find a company that could get the exhibit to Texas on time and in a reasonable budget. After calling a half dozen companies, sharing weights, photos, and measurements, meeting estimators, and looking at every possible way we could save money and give us the time we needed to finish our work, we had a shipping company and a plan.

As this was going, on we ran our second full playtest. On Wednesday afternoon, half of a local second grade baseball team came to the ETC to try out our storytelling experience. The boys provided great feedback. This was the first time we had seen kids run through the



*At a playtest, second grade boys demonstrate they don't need parents (to understand our experience).*

experience without their parents and it went off without a hitch (that is, of course, aside from our story's distinct lack of evil hungry donuts named Sprinkles, as one kid pointed out).

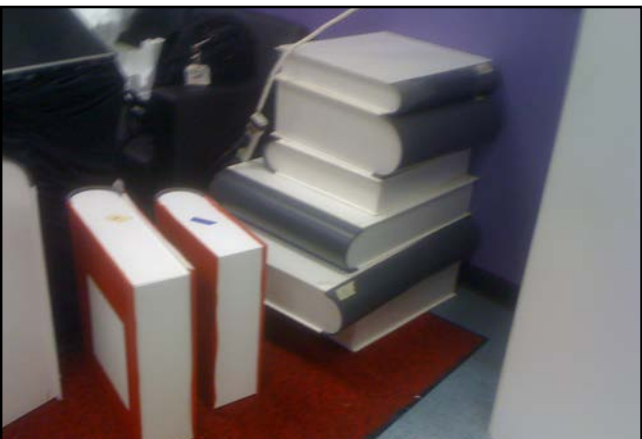
We also introduced a help feature. While we've designed our experience to be easy to understand for even the youngest kids, we know that kids won't always have parents with them to explain what to do. So, we designed a friendly onscreen character who would be available to act as a sort of surrogate grandpa and provide help if kids don't understand what they're supposed to do at any point. We recorded an actor (thanks, Paul), prepared animations, and introduced a green question mark button that could be pressed to call the character.

In the final weekend before Softs, we'll continue to polish and run our last playtest at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. We hope to test our latest build, especially our help function, and get any last-minute feedback from kids.



## Week 12: Rush to Softs

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### We Suggest

- Reaching out to Kim Hyatt from Heinz College. Not only did she provide great feedback as a career educator, but she provided her son and her son's baseball team as playtesters. Thanks, Kim. Thanks, little dudes.
- Asking a professional to sit in as co-director for voice over sessions provides a great learning opportunity (and hopefully saves you from recording pickups later). Thanks for helping us, Brenda!
- For teams with physical exhibits that require shipping, Pak Mail Pittsburgh provided superior customer service and the best price around. Look them up ([www.pakmailpittsburgh.com](http://www.pakmailpittsburgh.com)). Thanks, Mike!

### The Week Ahead

- On Monday, we present our experience to the faculty at Softs. We'll also be:
- Running a final playtest at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh
  - Placing vinyl on the exhibit to give it color.
  - Preparing the exhibit to be packed and shipped to San Antonio
  - Recording a final version of our narration and adding more sound effects.

*Big is beautiful. This week our physical build arrived and we realized just how heavy it was. After a lot of phone calls, we found a company that would help us ship it all to Texas on time and on budget.*

