

The Libretto for 'Sign'

The following is a sample libretto for a real submission to Golden Cobra 2015, Hakan Seyalioglu and Kathryn Hymes' beautiful game Sign. The libretto is written based on the iteration that was made after feedback from the Golden Cobra mentor.

The Pitch for Sign

Nicaragua in the 1970s had no form of sign language. If you were deaf, you had simple gestures with a trusted few, likely nothing more than a form of pantomime you negotiated with your family to meet basic needs. In 1977, something happened. Fifty deaf children from across the country were brought together to an experimental school in Managua. Without a shared language to express themselves, the children did the only thing they could -- they created one. In Sign, we follow a small piece of their journey.

The Libretto for Sign

This libretto maps exactly to what we're looking for in Golden Cobra 2017.

Our first major iteration of Sign came after Evan Torner volunteered to be our Golden Cobra mentor.

Originally, players did not have assigned characters; instead, they were asked to develop one based on prompts. Evan observed that it takes effort to build a character. With loose prompts like ours, character building would still be ongoing throughout play while players solidify their characters. He warned that this process might detract from the rest of our design goals.

We agreed and incorporated pre-written characters to relieve this pressure.

Following up, we asked ourselves what players should be focusing on during play. We became worried that players would feel like they needed to define motivations and goals on their own for their actions. We didn't want this outcome, players should be focused on the characters' journey through language. We introduced truths and relationship goals to address this design principle. These additions gave players both small achievable objectives and longer term goals to inform why they're building out the language.

In addition to playability testing, we also have solicited native speakers of the language and communities involved in the story for critical input. Development has been a journey and these were our first steps.

