

Grief and loss

Previous compulsory steps / Prior students' knowledge	None
Learning objectives	Developing an understanding of the five stages of grief by Kübler-Ross
Subjects	Psychology, Social sciences
Recommended Age	15 - 18
Material needed	Video game Gris
Sequence duration	120 - 180 minutes
Individual or group activity	Individual activity or in pairs
Inclusion best practices	The game has no dialogue, so it is appropriate for students will all levels of English language skills
Expected production	Written assignment based on the game, visual representation of the grieving process and players' experience
Skills developed	Empathy, Social skills, Critical thinking
Price range of the game	<20€
Similar games to use with the approach of the sequence	Before your eyes, Life is Strange, Ori and the Blind Forest

Step by step: how to implement the sequence

- **Step 1: Introduction of the topic (5 minutes)**

To consider: This topic may be sensitive for some students and playing can be very emotional, especially if students are grieving.

In this pedagogical sequence, we will use the game *Gris* to explain five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. As death, grieving and mourning are complex subjects to deal with and they are surrounded by taboos (Annart, 2019), you can use this game to address them in a playful way.

Painful experiences often lead to a process of grieving and, according to Kübler-Ross, this process has five stages.

- **Step 2: Explanation of five stages of grief (15 minutes)**

During this step you should introduce the five stages of grief model to your students. Below you can find a description of the stages which you can use.

The Kübler-Ross model of five stages of grief was first introduced in 1969. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), these stages are:

1. **Denial:** the first stage of grieving, which is usually only a temporary defence. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless, and it can be characterized with the phrase **“This cannot be happening to me”**. This stage helps us to cope with overwhelming feelings of loss.
2. **Anger:** The feelings you were denying begin to come to the surface and the person recognizes that denial cannot continue. Anger is a necessary stage of the grieving process, and it can be characterized with the phrases: **“How can this happen to me? Who is to blame for this?”**

3. **Bargaining:** In this stage, we want to go back in time. This stage involves the hope that we can change or postpone what has happened and we want life to return to how it was. It can be characterized with “**If only**” and “**What if**” statements.
4. **Depression:** At this stage the grief becomes more present, and it is important to remember that this depression is not a sign of mental illness but an appropriate reaction to a loss. This stage is an important part of grieving, and it should not be rushed. It can be characterized with the phrases “**I miss my loved one, why should I go on?**”.
5. **Acceptance:** This stage is about accepting reality and learning to live with it. This last stage can be characterised by the phrase “**It is going to be okay.**”

It is also important to acknowledge that grief is an individual process and not everyone will experience the grieving process through those five stages, or in this particular order. According to Kübler-Ross (2005), people can often experience these stages in a “roller coaster effect”, which means that they switch between the stages.

- **Step 3: Introduction to the game and playing session in the classroom (60 minutes)**

Following the introductory explanation of the five stages of grief, introduce the game *Gris* to students. By playing the game, they will explore the five stages and see how grief is represented in the game.

Before starting the gameplay, ask the students if they understand how the game should be played. The whole game takes about 3 hours to finish, however, you can adapt the play time and even tell your students to finish the game as homework.

Ask your students to pay attention to different aspects while playing:

- What is the game about?
- Can you recognise the stages of grief in the game? How are they portrayed?
- How does the music change with the game development?

Description of the game:

Gris is an adventure game that deals with the process of grieving and features beautiful images and music. The player passes through the different stages of grief, which are illustrated with colours, solving small puzzles along the way.

In the beginning, the game environment is grey and gradually, as the character gains skills, more and more colours emerge.

- [Gris – Launch Trailer](#)

• Step 4: Written assignment – individual reflection paper (20 minutes)

Following the gameplay, you can ask your students to write down their thoughts on the game and the symbolism of the game. Since they had instructions on what to focus on during the playing session, they could also add details about the colours, music, and overall experience of the grieving process in Gris.



Image 1: First stage. Source: <https://nomada.studio/>

- **Step 5: Debrief (20 minutes)**

As mentioned, this topic may be very sensitive, and it is necessary to check on students and give them support while they are playing and writing their assignments. Once the students finish their written assignment you can have a discussion as a group in the class. You can ask the students to share their thoughts on the visual representation of the grieving process in the game, which stages of grief they recognized, and how their overall experience of playing was. You can also ask them whether they think games like this are useful for individuals going through painful experiences.

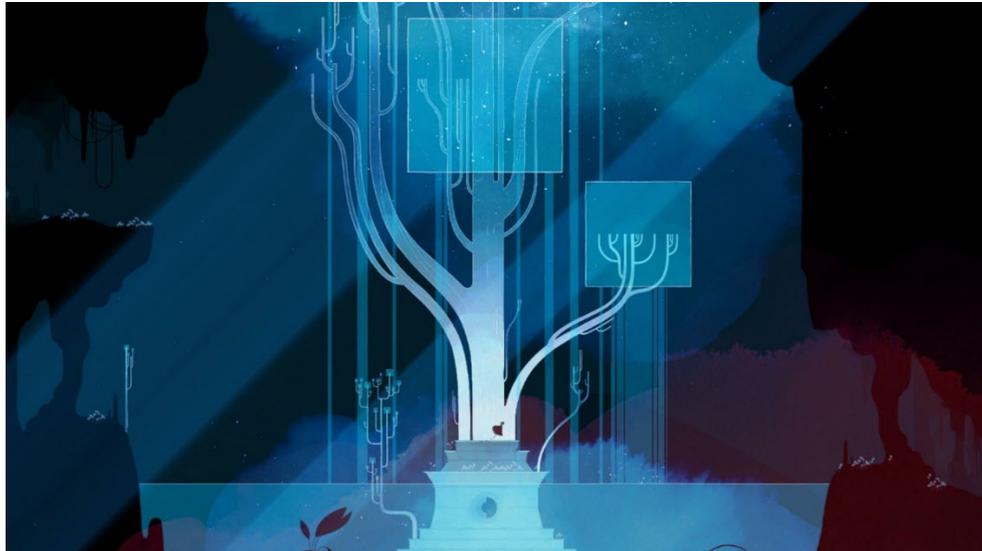


Image 2 : Fourth stage. Source: <https://nomada.studio/>

References

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Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2009). The five stages of grief. In Library of Congress Catalog in Publication Data (Ed.), On grief and grieving (pp. 7-30).

Nomada Studio (2018). Gris [Video Game] Devolver Digital.

Gris Official Website: <https://nomada.studio/>

PlayStation (November 22nd, 2019) 'Gris - Launch Trailer | PS4' [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRiKQIVo7ao>