

# Analysis of Chicory: A Colorful Tale

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## Abstract.

“Chicory: A Colorful Tale” is a 2D adventure puzzle game with elements of exploration and creativity, set in the Picnic Province, a fictional world where color comes from a magical paintbrush. Each person holding the paintbrush continues a long tradition of renaming themselves after picking up the brush with their favorite food. Using the gameplay and rules as an entry point to analyze this game: In “Chicory: A Colorful Tale,” operational rules are conveyed to the player primarily through the context and intuitive design of the game. In summary, “Chicory: A Colorful Tale” creates a meaningful play through narrative depth, player agency, great integration of the mechanism and the theme, and broader cultural impacts. At the heart of meaningful play is a sense of purpose, discernableness, and integration.

**Keywords:** Chicory

## 1. Introduction

“Chicory: A Colorful Tale” is a 2D adventure puzzle game with elements of exploration and creativity, set in the Picnic Province, a fictional world where color comes from a magical paintbrush. Each person holding the paintbrush continues a long tradition of renaming themselves after picking up the brush with their favorite food. The story begins with the unexpected disappearance of Chicory, the current Wielder of the brush, and the simultaneous disappearance of all colors in the world. The player takes on the role of the new owner of the paintbrush, who was initially the janitor of the tower where the paintbrush was located and Chicory was living. The player is tasked with restoring color and investigating Chicory’s disappearance and Chicory’s secret, using the brush to paint, solve puzzles, and interact with the environment. The environment is filled with various terrains, towns, and intricate locations to explore. As the game progresses, the player encounters various eccentric characters and explores themes of self-worth, imposter syndrome, and artistic expression. The game has been praised for its heartfelt narrative and the creative freedom it offers through painting.

Using the gameplay and rules as an entry point to analyze this game: In “Chicory: A Colorful Tale,” operational rules are conveyed to the player primarily through the context and intuitive design of the game. There are two main ways of communicating the rules and mechanics of the game to the player: contextual cues and character dialog. To be more detailed, as the player travels through the Picnic Province, the game often provides visual cues and clues to guide the player’s interactions. For example, when the player enters a new puzzle or area on the map that requires a specific coloring action, the environment

may visually cue the player to the desired pattern or color. That is how contextual cues work. Meanwhile, character dialogs also contribute a lot to convey operational rules. As the player encounters various characters, they provide hints, suggestions, and context to help them understand what needs to be done next. Some characters may hint to the player how to use the brush, such as Z or the mouse wheel to cycle between colors, while others might tell the player how to complete the task. Like other games, Chicory: A Colorful Tale also conveys operational rules by using direct prompts and feedback loops. The game reacts immediately to the player’s action. For instance, coloring a specific object or area may trigger a change in the environment, indicating that the player has taken a correct/wrong action. This helps the player understand the impact of their actions within the game’s logic.

Unlike operational rules, constitutive rules of a game are “the underlying formal structures that exist below the surface of the rules presented to players. These formal structures are logical and mathematical.”(Pg 140, Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. 2004) Constitutive rules in games are not always explicitly stated to the player but shape how the game works at a fundamental level. In the game “Chicory: A Colorful Tale,” constitutive rules are mainly reflected in the color logic, brush power-up, ability unlock, puzzle structure, and save mechanism. Color logic sometimes works with the structure. When the player paints anywhere, specific colors appear. Specific colors or patterns are required to solve certain puzzles in most situations. This rule governs how different elements in the game respond to the player’s actions through painting. Some puzzles have a fixed solution of specific colors, patterns, and required brush ability. This constitutive rule ensures that the game responding system will react to the action once the correct solution is applied. For example,

when the player's bond with the brush powers up and gets the brush ability of the lighting paint, the player can enter the dark cave by painting the cave to light up the surroundings. The game operates its save-point system so that the player's progress can be saved at specific locations (telephones), but the player cannot save at any point.

## 2. Arguments

In-game "choice/action relationships" refer to the player's choices and the results or consequences of those choices. In "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," these relationships are largely influenced by the game mechanics. Here are some examples of the choice/action relationships when the player paints the environment using the brush:

- Choice: The player paints objects, characters, and the environment with any color.
- Result: The aesthetics of the world change based on the player's preference. NPCs may comment on or react to the colors applied to the environment according to their personalities.
- Choice: Paint a plant in the light.
- Result: The plant becomes smaller.

Here are some examples of the choice/action relationships of customizing settings and personal input in the game:

- Choice: At various points, players are given the freedom to name or label things. The player controls the protagonist to design a T-shirt.
- Result: These choices personalize the game experience and integrate player input into the narrative. Just like some NPCs wear the T-shirt designed by the player with certain patterns that the player just painted.

In "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," results from the player's choices and actions are conveyed in ways such as immediate visual feedback, auditory cues, NPC reactions and dialogues, and environmental changes that integrate seamlessly with the game world setting and the narrative, ensuring an immersive gaming experience. To be more detailed, when the player paints the environment, they see the color immediately applied. This direct visual change allows the player to instantly discern the outcome of the painting action and specific color choice. Moreover, if the player paints an NPC's home or surroundings in a particular way, that NPC might comment on the color and pattern, giving feedback according to the player's action and artistic choice through dialogues. Besides visual cues, the game system reacts to the player's choices and actions through integrated auditory cues. For example, certain actions, such as successfully solving a puzzle, will be accompanied by specific sound effects or musical cues, signaling the outcome to the player. The "Chicory:

A Colorful Tale" design ensures that immediate reactions and long-term outcomes are conveyed to the player in discernible and integrated ways according to the gameplay and narrative. This integration fosters a cohesive and unique gaming experience for the player since the player can personally see and feel the influence of actions and choices.

Results and outcomes are generated by cybernetic systems in the game as well. "The cybernetic conception of a system is based on the interaction of inputs and outputs with the internal mechanism of a system," said in Rules of Play (Pg 222, Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. 2004), inputs here are how the system monitors the environment while outputs are the ways that the system takes action. A cybernetic system contains three elements: a sensor, a comparator, and an activator. An example of a positive cybernetic system from "Chicory: A Colorful Tale" is the painting & NPC feedback loop I mentioned in the choice/action outcomes part: as the player paints the game world, NPCs will sometimes react to or comment on the color or pattern used by the player. In the game, the game system detects the timing and position that the player paints, along with the specific color or pattern chosen, and that is how the sensor of this system works. The game's mechanism evaluates the player's painting choices against the predefined criteria of the puzzle or NPCs' preferences, working as the comparator. Eventually, if the player's choice matches the NPC's preference set in the system, the game reacts positively to the player by using the NPC to give positive comments such as "I like this color very much!" That is how the activator of the system works. This positive feedback loop is utilized in some puzzle-solving parts of this game. Unless the player paints the color according to the NPC's preferences, the player can be seen as having solved the puzzle successfully. So, this positive feedback loop pushes the player forward to complete more and more puzzles successfully. When the player sees what their actions and choices lead to noticeable outcomes, they might be encouraged to do the next step or experiment with different colors and patterns to test how NPCs react to them. Positive feedback seems to be the right choice in the Chicory game world; since the game is designed to be a progressing adventure journey for the protagonist, making choices and getting positive feedback will encourage the player to try harder and explore more. The more the player acts, the more comments the player will get from NPCs (but notice that limited comment modes exist). In this way, the game enriches the player's gaming experience and the connection to the narrative, helping the game shape the characters and world. A negative feedback loop could discourage the player from freely painting the

surroundings and trying new patterns, which would not present the game's mission statement: Use your painting powers to explore new places, solve puzzles, help your friends, and change the world!

Then, in what situation will the player's state be defined as "win"? As mentioned in Rules of Play, victory and loss conditions directly shape the possible outcomes of a game. In "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," achieving 100% completion of the narrative, revealing the mystery behind Chicory's disappearance and the loss of color in this world, and solving all puzzles correctly are official forms of victory, or we can say the happy end of Chicory's story. Completing the exploration and discovery of the Picnic Province map can be another form of victory. However, failing to solve a puzzle does not result in a "game over" screen. The player still has chances to rethink their approach or return later with a powered-up brush to solve the puzzle again until they succeed. Some players might regard the inability to achieve the 100% collection as a loss condition, but that depends on the attitude of certain players. In "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," the story focuses more on an emotional journey, self-exploration, creativity, and aesthetic development instead of simply winning or losing states and pure competition. Chicory game encourages the player to relax in the painting process and may be healed from the sweet dialogues among adorable animal characters.

"Chicory: A Colorful Tale" is a casual adventure game with cute drawings and a healing narrative. The game narrative conveys several profound themes and meaningful messages to its players. When we interpret the game at a higher level, we can analyze the emotional thrust that the game is trying to express about the cultural schemas of the game. Looking into the definition of Culture Schemas, "The larger contexts engaged with and inhabited by the system"(Pg 28, Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. 2004), the fabric of the game world, the Picnic Province, is

cored with Art and Creativity. The Wielder, who colors the world, is highly esteemed, demonstrating a high respect for Art. The action of coloring serves not only as the game mechanism and operational rules but also as a cultural belief and a ritual of inhabitants in the game world. In the world of "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," color is a symbol of happiness, tightly related to well-being and emotions. When the color of the world disappears, inhabitants get anxious, uncertain, and unsafe. Therefore, the game reinforces the theme that color and aesthetics are important to cultural and emotional health.

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, "Chicory: A Colorful Tale" creates a meaningful play through narrative depth, player agency, great integration of the mechanism and the theme, and broader cultural impacts. At the heart of meaningful play is a sense of purpose, discernableness, and integration. The act of coloring in the game not only serves as the mechanical act out of the game context but also resonates deeply with the game's core themes of artistry, self-expression, and social restoration, making the player's actions and choices always feel meaningful and respond with a meaningful result. In "Chicory: A Colorful Tale," the player experiences a journey as an unexpected hero in the game world that has lost its color. The narrative conveys a lesson about whether, when facing a joint crisis in a society, the societal pressures of being the "gunman" and the importance of courage and determination. Meanwhile, saving the world is also a process of building strong self-esteem.

### Reference

- Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E., Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals, Pg 140, MIT Press, 2004.
- Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E., Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals, Pg 222, MIT Press, 2004.