

# PLAY THE GAME

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## OBJECTIVE

*Play the Game* by Charlene Allen is a novel that explores restorative justice and the need for restorative responses to incidents of interpersonal harm, community violence, and larger structural injustices. This activity is designed as a companion to the novel to invite learners to step into the shoes of different characters and develop an understanding of structural and racial injustices and how they impact the characters' lives. Participants will also develop an appreciation of the unique strengths and resilience that each character holds, and how the restorative justice processes in the book support each character's healing journey.

## MATERIALS

Pre-reading: *Play the Game* by Charlene Allen, (Katherine Tegen Books, 2023) (Learners need to read the first half of the book before Session 1 and the second half in advance of Session 2 – see details below).

[Slide template](#) for this activity.

Note: This activity can be done in person or online (these instructions describe an online class/training).

## INSTRUCTIONS

This activity utilizes concepts from video games to explore several characters' experiences at specific points in the book. Learners will study one character and use the framework of a video game health bar to analyze the character's health or well-being considering the impact of specific events and broader structural injustices on their lives. Learners will also use the framework of a video game inventory to consider the strengths and resiliency factors they possess.

This activity takes place over two classes or trainings, the first when learners have read approximately half the book and the second when they have completed the book. Prior to the first class or training, ask learners to have read through page 158 (the end of "The Devil's Daughter" chapter) of *Play the Game*.

## Session 1 (pre-reading: through p. 158)

Start by explaining the concepts of a “health bar” and “inventory” as they are used in video games:

*A “health bar” in video games is a meter that indicates a character's or avatar's health. This bar typically displays the amount of health a character has remaining, and as the character sustains injuries in the game, the health bar decreases. When the health bar is depleted, it often results in the character's death or failure in the game, depending on the game's mechanics. The health bar is a fundamental element in many video games, helping players monitor their character's well-being during gameplay.*

*An “inventory” in video games refers to the equipment bar or menu where players can access and manage various equipment, such as weapons, armor, and other resources that their in-game character possesses. The inventory menu allows players to equip, use, discard, or manage their items as needed to progress through the game. In this activity, we will be using the concept of an inventory to consider the specific strengths that a character has that can help them on their journey.*

Divide the group into smaller groups of 3-4 people each. Each small group will be assigned one character and will be answering questions about that character’s experience. Remind learners that they know more about some of these characters than others, and this activity will involve making some educated guesses in the interest of building their understanding of and empathy with the characters. We recommend assigning the following characters:

- VZ
- Jack
- Chela
- Diamond
- Junie
- Robbie

One person in each group will be editing a [Google slide](#) that has a template for displaying their character’s “health bar” and “inventory.” Health refers to their well-being, and inventory refers to their strengths and resources. Download or make copies of the linked slide and share it with each group of learners.

Each group will discuss their character’s health and strengths. They will reflect these discussions by setting up their character’s health bar and inventory on their slide to present to the large group. Provide the following questions to the small groups to guide their discussion:

1. How is the health and well-being of this character, on a scale from 1-10? On your slide, fill in the number of hearts to indicate their health level, with 10 being the healthiest. In your discussion, think beyond recent events to consider broader social determinants of health. Questions to consider when determining their health:

- What is the impact of Ed's murder on this character?
- How much social support do they have (from peers or adults)? Do they have people they trust, who have their back? Who?
- What is this character's experience related to their identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)?
- Consider other social determinants of health for this character in assessing their health and well-being, such as their income, education, employment, access to food, housing and basic amenities, early childhood experiences, social inclusion and non-discrimination, access to affordable health services, exposure to violence, etc.

2. What strengths does this character have? Write one strength per star to fill in your character's inventory of strengths. Questions to consider when determining their strengths inventory:

- What strengths or resources does this character have?
- Sources of strength to consider: support from family and friends, individual abilities, passions and interests, access to help, purpose and drive, prosocial choices, positions of leadership and influence, knowledge and skills, etc. Try thinking outside the box and get creative to identify strengths.

Give the groups approximately 15-25 minutes to work on their character's health bar and inventory of strengths.

Close the breakout rooms and bring everyone into the main meeting space. Ask each group to present their slide and their reasoning behind their character's health bar and inventory of strengths. After each group has presented, ask the following reflection questions.

- After doing this activity, how has your perspective of the story changed?
- Which character do you understand differently now? How has this activity influenced your understanding of that character?
- How has the activity changed your understanding of how identity and social conditions impact health? How does that understanding influence you as a restorative justice practitioner?
- How can you apply or relate this activity to real life?
- How does using the health and inventory framework affect how you think about yourself?
- How does this activity affect how you think about others (peers, clients, neighbors, colleagues)?

Prior to the second class or training, ask learners to have finished reading *Play the Game*.

## Session 2 (pre-reading: p. 159-end of book)

Ask learners to return to the same groups from the first class/training to consider the experiences of their assigned character again. Ask them to look at the slide where they previously assessed the health bar and inventory for their character and consider the restorative justice processes that took place in *Play the Game*. Provide the following questions to the small groups to guide their discussion.

1. How is this character's health and well-being at the end of the book compared to when we last considered it?
2. What was the impact of the restorative justice process on this character? What changed for them as a result of the restorative justice experience?
3. What was the impact of restorative justice on their health and well-being? What specifically accounts for this impact?

Ask the groups to update their character's health bar and inventory based on their discussion.

Give the groups approximately 15 minutes to do so.


Close the breakout rooms and bring everyone into the main meeting space. Ask each group to present their slide and their reasoning behind their character's updated health bar and inventory of strengths. After each group has presented, ask the following debrief questions.

### Debrief


1. How has returning to your character's "health bar" and "inventory" impacted your understanding of restorative justice?
2. How can you apply or relate this activity to real life?

# LESSON


There are many influences affecting a person's experience, choices, and actions at any given time. Some of those influences we see, some we might be able to take guesses about, and others we will never fully understand. It's important to recognize that every person does not have equal access to rights and opportunities due to personal, societal, and structural conditions. We can use characters in this story to make educated guesses about the factors and forces at play in their lives, and begin to understand how equity impacts their health and agency. We can also see how restorative justice contributes to healing and change on individual and collective levels.

 CHARACTER: CHELA

HEALTH BAR



INVENTORY



FRIENDSHIP VZ      MOM      RJ CLUB