



SHINE

A Journey Through Knowledge, Wonder, and the Islamic Golden Age

GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT - CONCEPT v0.1

A modern child enters a mysterious family book each night, meets scholars and makers across the medieval Islamic world, learns by solving real problems, and returns before dawn to record what he discovered.

Design direction: narrative adventure + exploration + hands-on discovery puzzles. History is experienced through play rather than delivered as a lecture.

1. High Concept

Premise. A young boy receives an old illustrated book from his family. One night the book begins to glow and pulls him into another age. Each journey takes him to a place, person, or problem connected to science, medicine, mathematics, engineering, astronomy, geography, literature, or art in the Islamic Golden Age.

Player fantasy. You are not reading about history. You are walking through it, touching its tools, asking its questions, helping its people, making mistakes, and carrying what you learn back into your own childhood.

Genre	Narrative adventure / exploration / light puzzle-discovery
Audience	Family-friendly; designed to work for curious younger players while remaining meaningful to older players
Structure	Modern-day childhood by day -> historical journey by night -> return and journal before dawn
Core emotion	Wonder: the feeling that knowledge is alive, connected, and inherited
Working theme	Knowledge shines when it is discovered, shared, questioned, and passed forward.

Design Pillars

- Discovery before exposition. The player encounters a problem before receiving the historical explanation.
- Knowledge as gameplay. Optics, navigation, mathematics, engineering and observation become interactive systems.
- A child, not a chosen warrior. Curiosity, confusion and growth are more important than combat power.
- Past and present connect. Night discoveries influence the boy's choices, conversations and understanding during the following day.
- Respect historical complexity. The game celebrates Muslim heritage without reducing other civilizations to caricatures.

2. Core Game Loop

The loop must create anticipation for night, meaningful play inside history, and visible personal growth after the player returns home.

1 DAY	Live. Explore home/school life, interact with family and friends, and encounter a question or everyday problem.
2 CALL	The book reacts. A page, symbol, object, or unresolved question begins to glow.
3 JOURNEY	Enter history. Arrive in a historical location with an immediate objective or mystery.
4 DISCOVER	Observe and interact. Talk, explore, gather clues, operate tools and understand the situation.
5 APPLY	Solve through knowledge. Experiment, build, calculate, navigate, diagnose, compare or test.
6 DAWN	Return. The approaching dawn creates urgency and closes the night's journey.
7 JOURNAL	Record. Sketch people, places, ideas, questions and conclusions. Some early conclusions can later be corrected.
8 CONSEQUENCE	Carry it forward. New understanding changes a later dialogue, puzzle, school task, relationship or choice.

Moment-to-Moment Verbs

- Explore and observe
- Speak and ask questions
- Collect contextual clues rather than arbitrary loot
- Manipulate instruments and materials
- Sketch and annotate
- Test hypotheses
- Repair, arrange, measure, navigate or construct
- Choose what the boy writes or believes in his journal

3. Narrative Structure

Act I - The Closed Book. The boy sees history as distant, old, and disconnected from his life. The family book appears valuable to the adults but boring to him. His first accidental journey changes that.

Act II - The Living Pages. Each night opens another field of knowledge. The boy begins noticing connections between the historical world and his modern life. Missing pages, unusual handwriting, and recurring symbols create a larger mystery.

Act III - The Relay. The player understands that knowledge does not belong to one civilization or one era. Ideas are translated, challenged, expanded and transmitted. The boy stops seeing himself only as a visitor.

Final idea. The last pages of the book are blank. The emotional payoff is not that the boy has memorized the past; it is that he understands he is part of what comes next.

“The book is not waiting for him to read the final chapter. It is waiting for him to write it.”

The book's supernatural origin should remain partly mysterious for most of the game. Avoid explaining the magic too early; the mystery provides narrative momentum between otherwise self-contained historical adventures.

The Dawn Rule

- Every historical visit occurs at night from the boy's point of view.
- Visual and audio cues gradually announce approaching dawn.
- Dawn is primarily narrative pressure, not necessarily a hard fail timer in every chapter.
- Important unfinished questions can persist into future nights, encouraging the player to return.

4. Worlds & Chapter Themes

CHAPTER	KNOWLEDGE	GAMEPLAY LANGUAGE
LIGHT	Optics, vision, experimentation	Dark rooms, mirrors, lenses, shadows, observation.
LIFE	Medicine, hospitals, pharmacy	Symptoms, records, preparation, care, hygiene and evidence.
NUMBERS	Mathematics and algebra	Real problems create a need for abstraction, measurement and calculation.
EARTH	Geography and navigation	Maps, routes, stars, distance, trade and cultural exchange.
MACHINES	Mechanical engineering	Water systems, mechanisms, automata, clocks and iterative construction.
WORDS	Libraries, translation and literature	Texts move across languages; meaning must be preserved, questioned and expanded.
SKY	Astronomy and instruments	Observation, time, celestial movement and instrument use.

Locations

Potential settings include Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Córdoba, Samarkand and other centers connected to the stories being told. Location selection should follow documented historical relevance rather than using a generic 'Golden Age city.' Architecture, clothing, language, tools and institutions require expert historical review.

5. Example Chapter - LIGHT

Modern setup. During the day, the boy becomes fascinated or confused by an image, shadow, camera, reflection or visual illusion.

Night arrival. He enters a dim historical space. A tiny opening casts an inverted outdoor image onto a surface. He initially has no explanation for what he sees.

Historical encounter. The chapter can connect the player with Ibn al-Haytham and the experimental study of optics. The scholar is a character and guide, not a stationary encyclopedia.

Playable investigation. The player changes aperture size, light position, reflective surfaces and materials; predicts an outcome; then observes the result.

Puzzle Rhythm

- See an unexplained phenomenon.
- Make an initial guess.
- Manipulate one variable.
- Observe the result.
- Receive character feedback, not a grade screen.
- Use the principle to solve a practical story problem.
- Journal the discovery in the boy's own words.

Failure Philosophy

Wrong experiments should produce understandable results rather than a red X. The system teaches by showing consequences. The player should be allowed to form an incorrect idea and revise it after new evidence.

6. The Journal System

The journal is the game's progression record, narrative memory and player-authored interpretation of the journey. It should feel personal rather than like an encyclopedia menu.

WHAT I SAW

People, instruments, places, sketches, diagrams and objects.

WHAT I THINK

Short player-selected reflections that shape the boy's voice.

WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND

Questions intentionally left open for later chapters.

WHAT I DISCOVERED

Principles learned through interaction.

CONNECTIONS

Threads linking one historical discovery to another and to modern life.

Progression

- Pages physically fill as the game progresses.
- New diagrams can unlock new interaction vocabulary in later chapters.
- Earlier notes may receive annotations or corrections.
- A constellation-like connection map can visually link people, places and ideas.
- The final blank pages reinforce the theme that the future is unwritten.

7. Historical Framing

The game can compare regions and eras, but the comparison should avoid a simplistic 'bright Muslim world versus dark Europe' binary. The term Dark Ages is historically contested and can flatten major differences across centuries and regions.

Better dramatic framing: follow the movement of knowledge. Show ideas being inherited, translated, tested, expanded and transmitted among Greek, Persian, Indian, Arab, North African, Iberian, European and other intellectual traditions.

This does not diminish Muslim achievement. It makes the achievement more specific: scholars and institutions in the medieval Islamic world preserved important works, created original research and technologies, built intellectual networks, and influenced later scholarship across regions.

Historical Integrity Rules

- Separate documented events from fictional connective scenes.
- Do not attribute a complex invention to one person when the historical record shows cumulative development.
- Avoid making every famous scholar personally meet the protagonist.
- Use historians and subject specialists during narrative and environment development.
- Provide optional source notes outside the dramatic flow for players who want to learn more.
- Treat faith, culture and historical people with respect while still allowing them to feel human.

8. Art, Audio & Presentation

Visual target. Stylized cinematic adventure rather than photorealism. Warm, luminous historical spaces contrast with deep blue night, but both worlds should contain nuance. The boy's modern world can gradually gain more warmth and visual detail as his curiosity grows.

Book magic. Flowing ink, geometric patterns, star charts, handwritten diagrams, illuminated dust, turning paper and lines of light become the visual language connecting eras.

Historical spaces. Markets, workshops, observatories, hospitals, libraries, courtyards and waterways should feel inhabited and functional, not like empty museum exhibits.

Audio Direction

- Quiet modern-night ambience before each transition.
- Paper, ink, whispering pages and subtle celestial motifs for the book.
- Location-specific environmental soundscapes.
- Music should support wonder and place without treating the entire medieval Islamic world as one interchangeable musical culture.
- Dawn develops its own recognizable audio motif.

9. Prototype Scope

Do not attempt the entire historical vision first. The correct prototype is one complete emotional loop.

Vertical Slice: LIGHT

- 10-15 min modern opening: introduce boy, family, book and a simple light-related question.
- 20-30 min historical chapter: arrival, exploration, character interaction and one layered optics experiment.
- 5 min dawn return: visual escalation and transition home.
- 5-10 min journal: player records and connects the discovery.
- 5-10 min next-day payoff: use the idea in a small modern situation.

Prototype Success Questions

- Is opening the book exciting enough that players want another night?
- Can the player explain the discovered idea without the game giving them a lecture?
- Does the scholar feel like a person rather than a quest marker?
- Does the modern-day payoff make the historical journey feel relevant?
- Is the journal satisfying enough to become a core progression system?
- Does the experience create curiosity to learn more after play?

10. Risks & Design Guardrails

RISK	FAILURE MODE	GUARDRAIL
Educational-game syndrome	Too much exposition, quizzes and fact collection.	Turn knowledge into problems, tools and consequences.
History as hero worship	A parade of famous names without systems or human stories.	Organize chapters around questions and fields, not scholar count.
Civilization scoreboard	Reducing history to 'we were advanced, they were backward.'	Follow exchange, context and transmission while documenting specific achievements.
Scope explosion	Many cities, centuries and mechanics create an impossible production.	Build one strong vertical slice before expanding.
Magic solves everything	The book becomes a shortcut around narrative logic.	Give the book clear rules: night travel, page-linked destinations, dawn return, limited intervention.
Passive protagonist	The boy only watches famous people work.	Every chapter requires observation, hypothesis and meaningful player action.

North Star

SHINE succeeds when a player finishes a chapter thinking: “I discovered something, and now I want to know more.” The goal is not to turn history into homework. The goal is to make curiosity playable.

Working document prepared from the initial SHINE concept. Historical figures, chronology, locations and scientific claims should be source-checked during full narrative development.