Balance and levels

50 minutes · Ages 9 to 12 · Design a game · Free to print and share

Goal

Students design a game with difficulty that increases fairly, test it with several players and use feedback to balance it.

Vocabulary

- mechanic
- difficulty
- balance
- level
- feedback
- iterate

Materials

- Design document template
- Devices with a web browser, or paper prototyping supplies

Warm-up (5 minutes)

Show a game that's too easy and one that's too hard (describe or play briefly). What makes a game feel fair?

Activity

1. Students write a design document: hero, goal, core mechanic (jump, fly, steer), obstacles, rewards, how it gets harder.
2. Build a first version on paper.
3. Test with three players. Record where each one fails or loses interest.
4. Adjust one variable at a time (speed, number of obstacles, scoring) and retest.
5. Present: what the data showed and what was changed.

Talk about it

- Why change one thing at a time?
- What's the difference between hard and unfair?
- How did different players experience the same game?

Check for understanding

The design document shows at least two tested changes and the reason for each.

No devices?

Paper prototypes with dice and cards work for the full lesson.

Going further

Students who want their own characters can describe them in writing and swap descriptions to draw, using the prompt writing lesson.

Safety: students never type names, schools or other personal details into any tool. kidsgamearcade.com/schools · © 2026 SOEngineered LLC. Free to print and share for teaching; not for resale.