

Paper Balloons

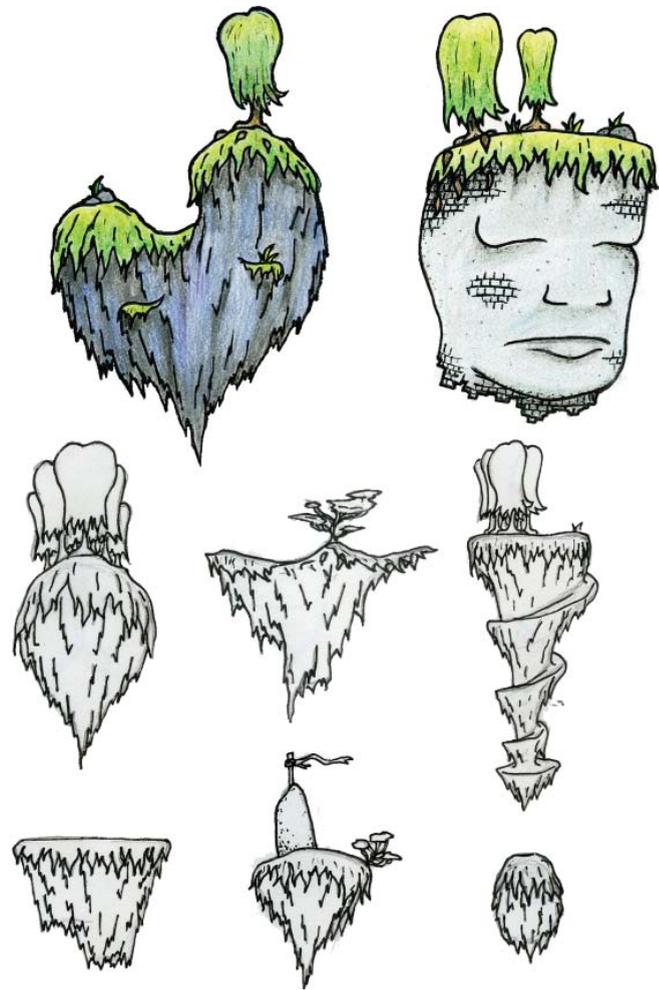
Sketches, Concepts, & Future Directions



The following ideas were created during Kylan Coats' M5 term (SU 09). Though the "Paper Balloons" iPhone App was successfully tested for a second round by over 25 users, the ideas in this booklet were unable to be implemented before then, due to constraints of time and/or finances.

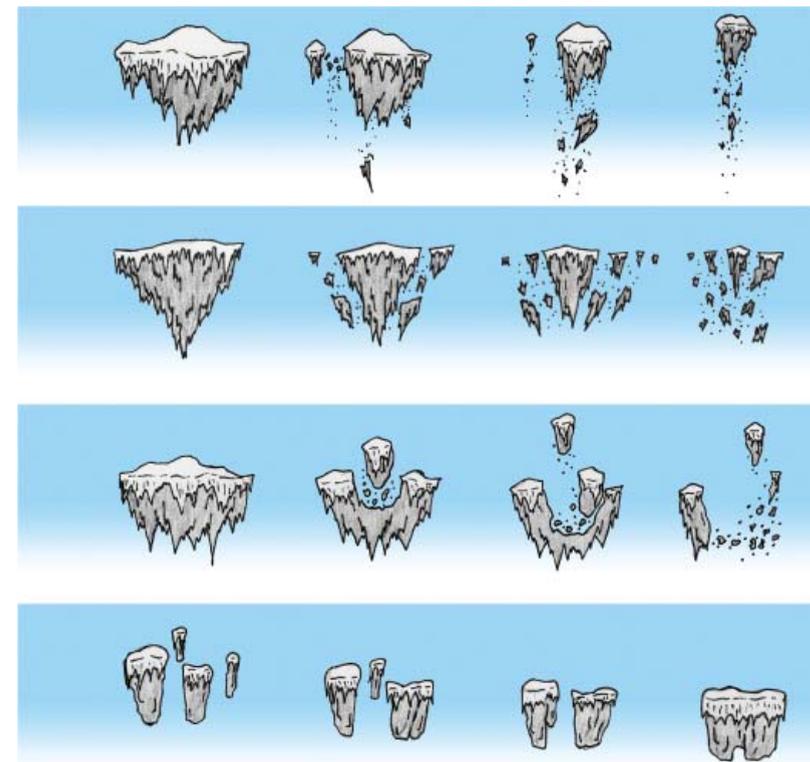
Different Island Types

Through the first two versions of the "Paper Balloons" App, the visual style stayed fairly simple and flat (see the weather sketches on pages 9-12). While the sketches on the right were made too late in the term to radically change the visual style, some of the island assets were able to be texturized a bit more in the second version. Future iterations of the App could see users having a larger variety of islands to choose from or be given.



Island Breaking Apart

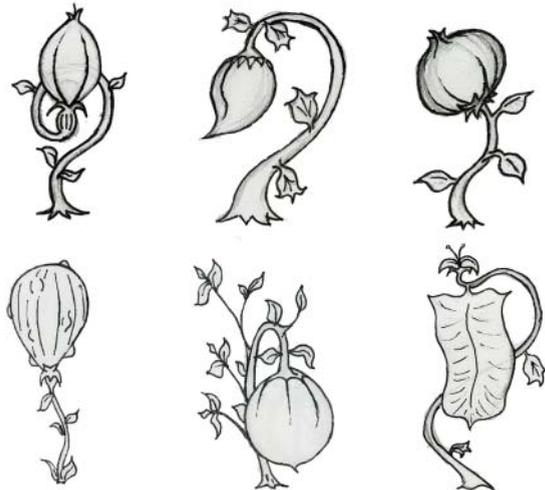
An idea that came up during an advisor meeting and from Yuka Izutsu's illustrations (seen later on) was the player's island breaking apart or degrading over time. One cause of this degradation could be lack of use of the App. For instance, if the user doesn't open the App for a month, when they return their island is in serious disrepair. The island could also fall apart and then reform in cycles, using the birth/rebirth as a metaphor for something intelligent (still to be discovered).



Ideas “Growing” as Flowers

One of the earliest concepts for the App was using plants and flowers as metaphors for ideas “growing” on the island. When these plants bloomed, a prompt or idea would appear to spur the user into a certain area of thinking. That area would hopefully be one of introspection and self-reflection.

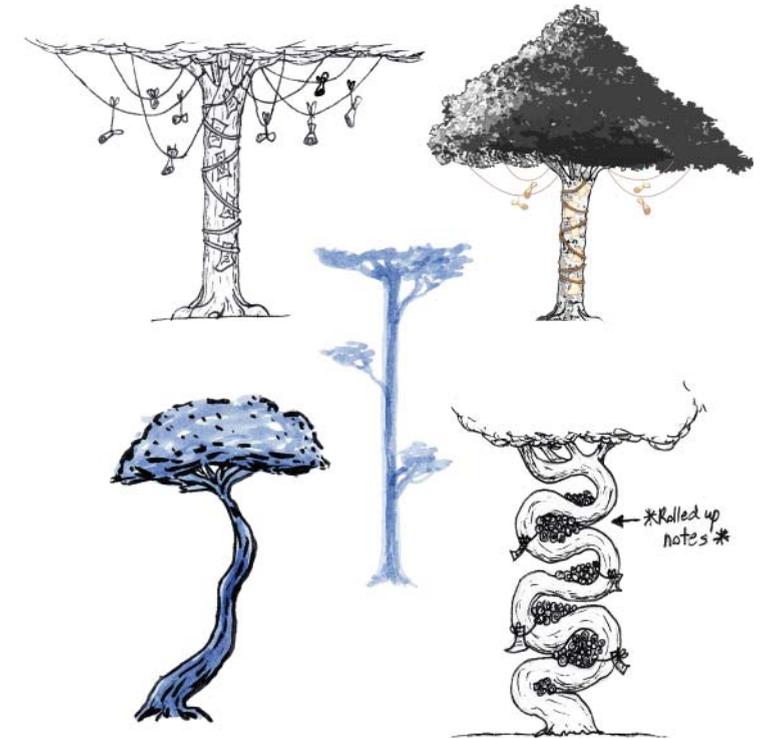
It was very enjoyable trying to imagine what an idea would physically look like growing. Does it float and appear lighter than air? Is it heavy and burden the plant with its emotional weight? Does it twist, curve, and meander as it develops before finally blooming? This is an area where it seems a lot of metaphors could be played with.



“Wishing Tree” as Save Feature

Another early concept which just barely missed being implemented was that of the “Wishing Tree.” This idea shows up everywhere from traditional Japanese folklore (of tying small pieces of paper to a special tree) to rural Scotland (where people stick coins into a lucky tree).

If a user opened a note that had special significance to them or was something that they wished to hold onto, they would be able to drag the note to the trunk of a special tree on the island to save it. These notes would appear tied up and available for the user to open again and release or re-save. The last version of the wishing tree can be seen in the upper right of the sketches.



Exploring Crags Beneath Islands

Dr. Richard Bartle, a well-known video game professor & researcher, classified users of MUD's (Multi-User Dungeons) into four categories: Achievers, Socializers, Killers, and Explorers*. While "Paper Balloons" is definitely not a MUD, I feel these categories can carry over to users of other types of online interactive worlds.

Allowing users to explore different areas of the island would give another level of mystery and involvement for the player, as well as satisfy the Explorer type user. A great portion of the island asset is used up by the craggy bottom of the island. An idea for future iterations would allow the user to find randomly discarded or older messages caught on these crags beneath the island, or smaller, less developed idea plants or something else entirely. Adding in the interaction of discovery could greatly add to the interactions of the App as a whole, as well as giving a metaphor for introspection (discovering items on the island along with things about yourself).



Island Creatures

Early on, I made the decision to not include any wildlife on the island to emphasize the isolation of the player (& hopefully add to a more introspective environment).

Creatures could provide whimsical interactions to the App, though, such as flying animals to deliver certain, special messages or eating some of the messages before they land. Though they'd need a lot more thought and development on where they fit into the big scheme of "Paper Balloons," self-inflating and flying animals seem to have the possibility of adding to the App as a whole.

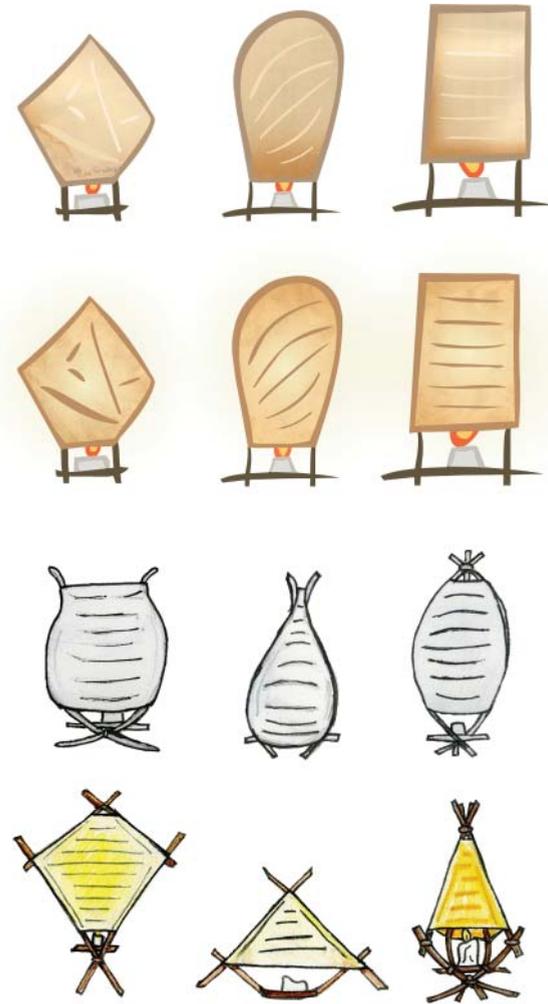


5 * "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUD's." MUSE, 28 Aug. 1996. <http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm#rBartle,%201985>

Folding Paper Balloons

On the right are a series of finished balloons (the top 6) and sketches of yet-to-be-implemented ones. As of the end of my M15 term, the paper balloons are randomly generated whenever a note is written. The same message may appear as a more square-like balloon when floating off on one user's screen, and as a rounder one when landing on another user's screen.

A suggestion from one advisor was to make the shape of the balloons a more direct result of the message written on it. Another suggestion was to make the manner in which the user folds the paper up affect the balloon's appearance. Would this affect the user's interactions at all; seeing numerous circular "happy" notes, for example, floating down? Or would the user simply not open certain types of balloons based on their shape (and content based on the shape)?

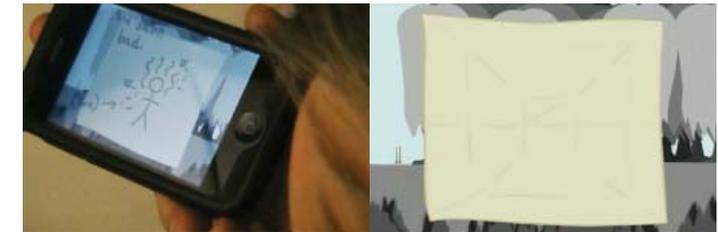
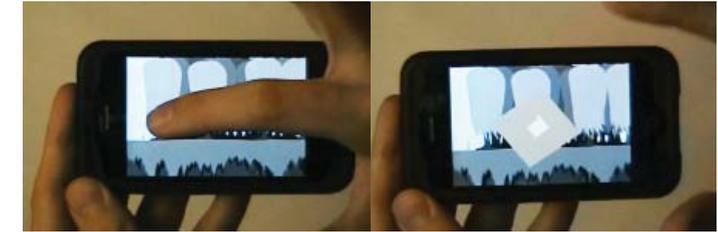


Blowing Inappropriate Notes Off the Paper

One aspect of the App that Ben, my programmer, brought up to me was what to do if inappropriate or obscene messages were sent to the user. If the App was submitted to the Apple store, then they would probably look for some flagging feature to take off those types of drawings or messages.

Since I've tried to stay away from buttons as much as possible with all of the "Paper Balloons" interactions, I looked at using the microphone on the iPhone device. If a user blows into the mic after a message is opened, the drawing and words will whimsically float off the page, leaving it blank. This lets obscene messages be deleted at any time by the user.

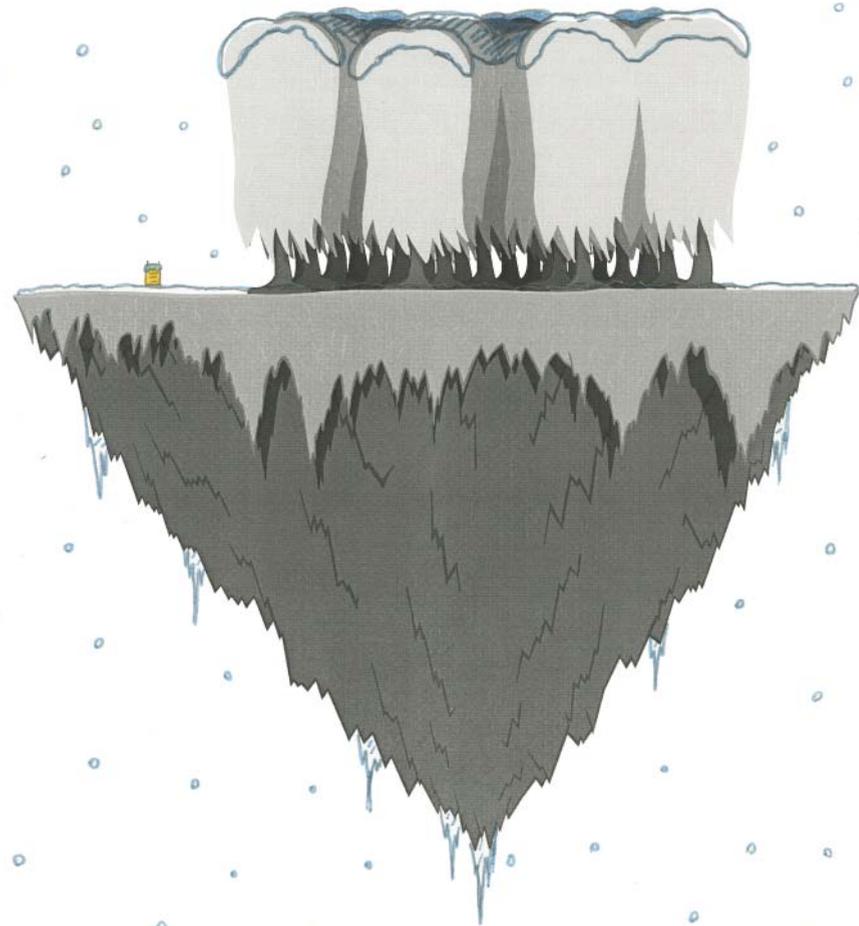
A mockup video of this interaction can be seen on the "Paper Balloons" development blog.



Island Weather - Snow

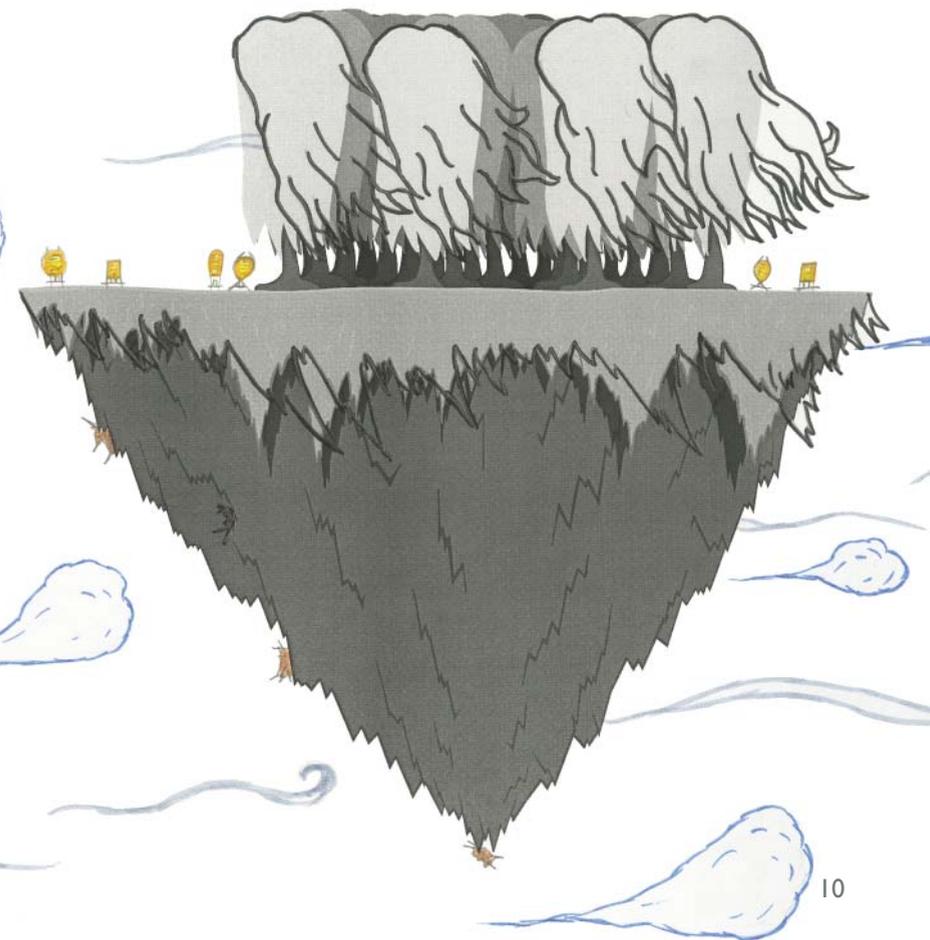
Similar to the game "Animal Crossing" where the in-game environment reacts to the actual world weather (raining in spring, leaves falling in autumn, etc) the world of "Paper Balloons" could also have weather which would affect the message traffic on the island, and possibly even the interactions available to the user.

When it's cold enough to snow, the powdery precipitation would hinder most messages from floating onto the island. Ice cicles would form beneath the island and only a trickle of paper balloons would appear.



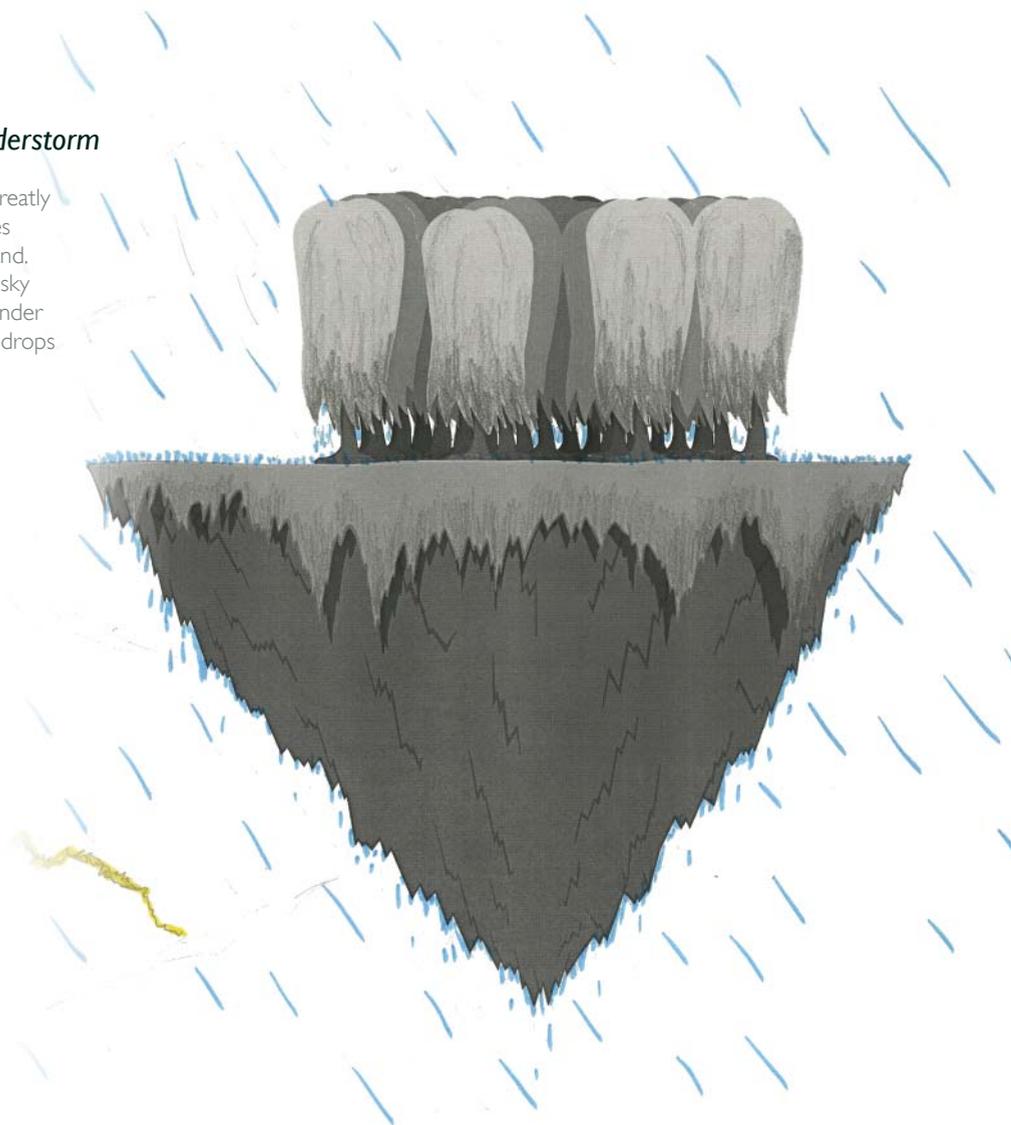
Island Weather - Strong Winds

Continuing with the weather patterns on the island, strong, gusty winds could cause a multitude of messages to appear on the island, covering it with paper balloons. The messages would float nearly horizontal instead of vertically and many would miss the island entirely, floating off into the sky.



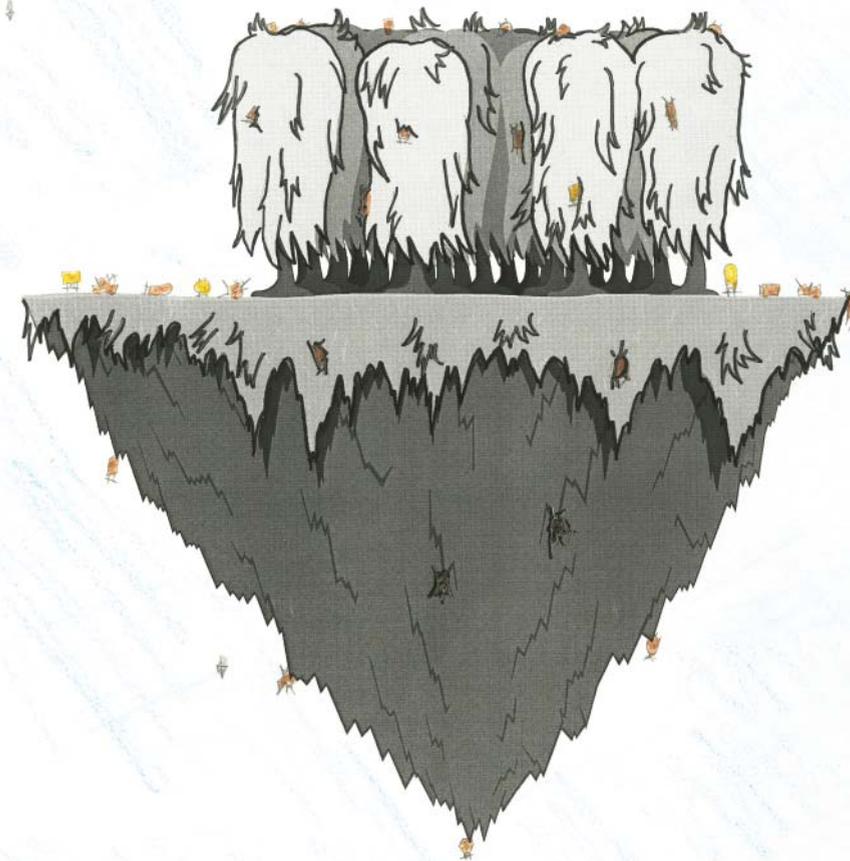
Island Weather - Rain/Thunderstorm

Much like the snow, rain would greatly decrease the amount of messages falling down onto the player's island. Storm clouds would light up the sky and notes written during the thunder storm could possibly have water drops or runny ink on the paper:



Island Weather - Hurricane

Stronger than a thunderstorm and more powerful than strong winds, a hurricane would leave the entire island disheveled. Notes would be scattered all over the island and stuck to the rocky crags beneath. Most of the balloons would be destroyed and unreadable. In this case, notes could even be deleted from the server, forever lost. Trees and the grass would be severely affected, possibly even losing leaves or branches.



Yuka Izutsu - Lantern Sketches

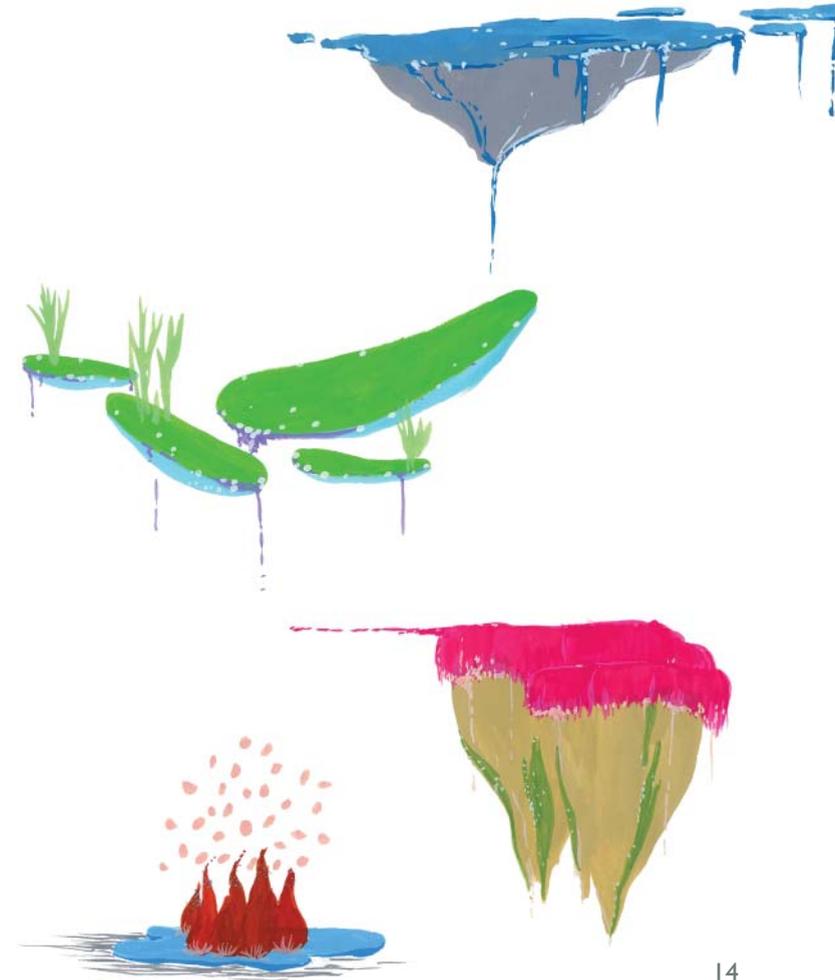
By Week 9 of my M5 term, I had hired a 4th term Illustration student named Yuka Izutsu to create some sketches of how she envisioned the visual style of the App were she in charge.

I had seen Yuka's work in the hallways at Art Center and loved her whimsical, colorful style. The next several pages are her sketches for lanterns, the island, and the wishing tree.



Yuka Izutsu - Island Sketches

Yuka's island sketches actually helped inspire the idea of the island breaking up over time (on page 2). I love the top two islands the best.



Yuka Izutsu - Tree Sketches

Apparently Yuka really enjoys making plants and trees as can be seen in the number of sketches she made for the "Wishing Tree." I really appreciated her creativity with the forms and colors the tree could take (from bright pink to neon yellow to browns, blues, and oranges).

My favorites are the blue trees with green leaves/powder floating off of them, as well as the dripping that can be seen in several of the other sketches. Why shouldn't the trees cry or melt?



Yuka Izutsu - Tree Sketches

