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“ *Esagil really is a family game, as shown by the fact that three generations often played and enjoyed the game together.* ”

Research

Martin and Marie-Françoise research the languages and cultures of Ancient Mesopotamian civilisations (modern Iraq). In particular: Babylonian and Assyrian grammar, literature, medicine and divination (the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means).

Target Group

Family audiences.

Reasons to Engage

Martin and Marie-Françoise are enthusiastic communicators of the civilisations they study. From *Teach Yourself Babylonian* to other projects they are always inspired by the public's interest in Ancient Mesopotamia, and constantly on the look-out for new forms of outreach.

Public Engagement Project

The board game *Esagil: Treasure Hunt in Babylon*.

Project Objectives

- Showcase Mesopotamian culture to family audiences
- Provide an entertaining and educational resource for learning about the history of a little-known ancient civilisation

Planning and Process

Marie-Françoise invented Esagil, an entertaining and highly educational resource for families, and Martin helped her make it become a reality.

The rules were finalised through test games with families and 6th form students. The game uses authentic Mesopotamian materials: the board is a real-scale map of Babylon; the treasures are objects from the Fitzwilliam Museum; the 'omen' and 'incantation' cards are quotations from real Babylonian omens and incantations.

Three game sets were produced, involving a graphic designer, illustrator, printer and toymaker. The final version looks both professional and attractive.

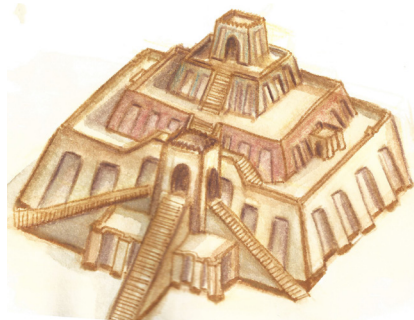
The game was presented at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas 2016 and Cambridge Science Festival 2017.



Esagil game view

Families hugely enjoyed playing Esagil. The game also led to conversations about various aspects of Mesopotamian culture. The booklet attached to the game proved ideal for sparking conversations about Ancient Mesopotamia with and between the players.

“The Esagil project has shown that, though the general public knows little about Ancient Mesopotamia, it is keen to learn more about it. Esagil does much to foster such interests.”



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Evaluation was performed through direct conversations with parents, postcards for children and 'the pizza of opinions' (which also attracted children to play the game).

These events helped discover that the target audience was larger than initially suspected, and showed how to improve the game for future outreach events allowing more opportunity for knowledge sharing.

Key advice

“Working with the public is very invigorating. If you build your outreach around something you really enjoy, you will enjoy it all the more after they become involved!”

“Sharing our research with a large audience is a challenge, but so rewarding when you see sparkling in the eyes, and get plenty of questions. Awesome!”

Outcomes

For Marie-Françoise and Martin

- Generated partnerships with museum staff
- Established educational games as a successful medium to engage family audiences with research
- Planted new ideas for future projects presenting Mesopotamia to children through books and other educational games
- Led to engagement with primary school teachers to offer sessions about Ancient Mesopotamia within their classrooms (see esagil.co.uk)
- Led to commercialisation of the game (see esagil.co.uk)

For target group

- Aroused players' intellectual curiosity about ancient Babylon and its culture
- Absorbed information through playing, without asking questions
- Sparked interest in visiting the Ancient Mesopotamia exhibits in the museums