

Table of Contents

Fall Semester: Dear Em Graphic Memoir					
Premise and Research4					
Artistic Inspirations and Moodboards6					
Process: Script10					
Process: Characters15					
Process: Page Production18					
Final Novel Design22					
Spring Semester: Stash Buddy App					
Premise32					
Research34					
Artistic Inspirations and Moodboards41					
Process: Low-Fidelity Wireframes and Sketches42					
Process: High Fidelity Final Screens46					



Dear Em

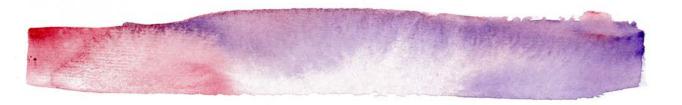
Fall 2022 Thesis

The Premise & Summary

Dear Em is an 8-page graphic memoir that explores a friendship from youth through college age and the complications that adulthood brings to what we define as a "friendship" compared to when we were younger.

The summary of the story is about Emily (the author) writing a letter dedicated to her long lost friendship/acquaintance with her best friend, Emmalyn. We see the beginning of their bond with a best friend necklace, to the fight that split them apart. However that's not where the story ends. A few years later into college age Emmalyn reaches out to Emily and they reconcile and reconnect somewhat. The letter ends on an ambiguous but not bitter end and as a reflection of growth between the both of them and how change isn't always bad.

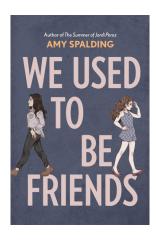
The project aim was to create a short graphic memoir of 8 pages and a cover, utilizing color and cinematic sequential techniques to best tell an otherwise simple non-action story. I hope that readers that have grown up and experienced the odd transition of friendships into adulthood will find comfort in reading another's experience, but it also provided me an avenue of personal healing by giving me the opportunity to write this personal essay.



Market Research

The market tends to only focus on friendships during youth and teenage years, but in reality, relationships can and do develop into adulthood. A lot of stories also force unnecessary plot points to the stories, like romances.

From the media I could find that focused more on the friendships better, I was only able to find novels instead of any graphic novels, so not only is there a hole in the story, but there isn't much graphic novels surprisingly on the topic either.





Target Audience



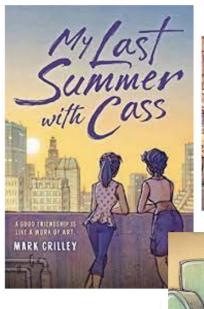


Aimed towards:

- 17-25 year olds
- To adults that have experienced similar situations

Mark Criley

- The biggest influence on the comic's style.
- His graphic novel My Last Summer with Cass featured a sketchy, washy rendering style, and is also a novel about friendships and somewhat of fallout recovery.
- He has many styles but these are a few of his more watercolor wash and line styles I could find.















Minna Sundberg





- The way this artist utilizes panel shaping influenced the way I created panels for my story. At first I was thumbnailing regular square panels but finding this webcomic showed me how important to story telling it was.
- Art style is remotely watercolored, and very nicely rendered. Not as direct style interpretation but comic inspiration.







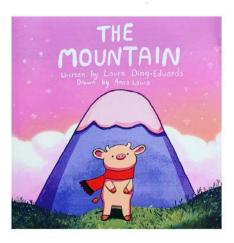


Anna-Laura Sullivan

- Does watercolor comics dealing with hard topics in an endearing style
- Often uplifting and sweet
- Despite the more intense subjects, the comic is cute and makes it easier to digest





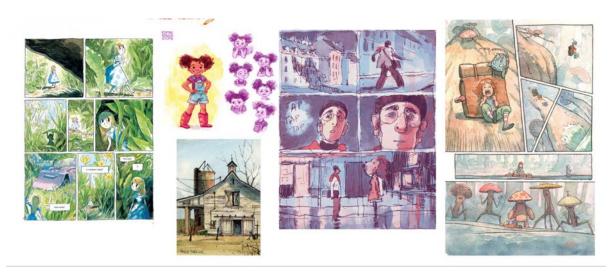


Beatrix Potter

- Not direct styling, but studying her watercolor techniques to apply digitally
- A general inspriration for my work



Other small inspirations



Process

I began with concepting, which in this non-fiction story was more so interpreting memories and how I wanted to portray them as well as how to tell the story in a short story.

This included less exact depictions but rather focused on the important core of the project: the emotions and sentiments.

I began with writing personal essays and "letters" for real in my notebook to help recall the thoughts and memories as a lot was quite fuzzy. The more I wrote, the more clear my message became. After writing a few, I took the most important parts of the letters that I could fit on 8 pages and converted it into a script.

Here is the most recent revised script (may still differ from final)

Page 1 (4 panels)

Panel 1: Long panel across the top, I'm sitting at my desk with a window shining light onto me and what I'm writing, nothing else is on the desk except a gift box with the lid open, and I am surrounded by other boxes. A label on one says "to apartment". The boxes are stacked a bit unevenly. A view out the window from within, there are two little girls playing on the sidewalk outside my house.

ME (narration): Dear Emerson, a name I haven't spoken in so long.

ME (narration): Things have changed a lot over these years, but maybe that isn't so bad.

Panel 2: frontal establishing shot of Em, the main character and writer of the letter. She is beginning to write the letter.

ME (narration): It was hard to write this. I almost forgot what we were like.

ME (narration): For the longest time, thinking about us hurt. A lot.

Panel 3: Close up of the open gift box, there are some old photo strips and a half open jewelry case inside. The pictures are somewhat faded, like a nostalgic memory, and the jewelry case has plastic beads like elementary school jewelry. A small half heart metal necklace has slipped out completely, laying on top of the photo strips.

ME (narration): I had spent so long ignoring all of the memories of our friendship.

ME (narration): But with how much of my childhood was spent with you, forgetting you was like forgetting me too.

Panel 4: View from behind, I picked up my phone, a smartphone in this panel, holding slightly to the side and typing something.

10

ME (narration): However, every friendship has its flaws, and we were just young and naive. But that doesn't change the fact that...

Page 2 (6 panels)

Panel 1: Similar view and pose to previous page except I'm now young, middle school age. I'm holding a wireless landline home phone. There are no boxes in the room, instead it's a fully furnished bedroom and instead of a desk I have a bed in place. The jewelry case can be seen sitting on a dresser to the side.

ME (narration): ...you taught me what a best friend was.

EMERSON (speaker): Hey, do you wanna have a sleepover later this week Em?

Panel 2: Front view of me, surprised by the proposal.

ME: Oh, um, really? You... want to hang out? Like outside of school?

Panel 3: The phone line connects to Emerson's phone. She is pictured laying in bed, different demeanor to her request to sleep over.

EMERSON: I mean, yeah! We hang out all the time in school, so why not after?

Panel 4: I grip the line with my other hand, a bit shy at the request.

ME: Well, I guess that's true... Sure, lemme ask my mom first.

EMERSON (speaker): YAY!

Panel 5: Me in my open door way, smiling. Emerson has a big box wrapped with a bow and a bag.

ME (narration): I rarely asked to hang out with friends, at mine or anyone else's house.

ME (narration): But you were one of the firsts for me.

EMERSON: Surprise!

Page 3 (6 panels)

Panel 1: We are inside now, hanging out on the living room couch. I am sitting down and holding a handheld game system and she's holding onto the box. Blankets adorn the upper edge of the couch and our bags are set aside. Emerson is gesturing the box towards me.

EMERSON: Okay, okay, time to open!

Panel 2: I open the box and inside is another box, slightly smaller. I am glancing annoyed while she's giggling at the prank.

SFX: *snicker* *snicker* *snicker*

Panel 3: A larger stack of boxes going from large to smaller is now piled on the floor with a bunch of wrapping paper. Emerson is now laughing harder now as I hold a small handheld sized box at last, ripping it open impatiently.

EMERSON: Ha ha ha ha!

Panel 4: A closer up view of the small box open. Inside is a metal necklace, half a heart with a puzzle piece cutout in the middle, The letters say BF on it.

ME: Oh, it's so pretty!

EMERSON (off panel): Yeah...

Panel 5:A view from behind us, we are holding our necklaces together.

EMERSON: I have the other half. It says "Best Friends Forever" because you're my best friend.

Panel 6: We hug, both wearing the necklaces.

ME (narration): And I did think that we'd be best friends forever.

Page 4 (4 panels)

Panel 1: Color shift again, now we are teens. Me and Emerson are next to each other but she's not as interested in me. She isn't wearing the necklace but I am. I'm looking at her but not saying anything.

ME (narration): But nothing's actually forever. Maybe you figured that out sooner than I did.

Panel 2: Emerson walks a different direction and catches me by surprise.

ME (narration): You began to pull away, slowly but surely...

Panel 3: Side profile, I'm reaching out towards Emerson, walking away from me.

ME (narration): I still tried to hang on, despite it all.

ME (narration): Through all the ignoring...

ME (narration): Through all the secret distancing...

Panel 4: She turns around, angry, yelling at me. I stumble back in shock.

ME (narration): But in the end, you told me that nobody likes me.

ME (narration): I was annoying.

ME (narration): That everything was my fault.

Page 5 (3 panels)

Panel 1: Now I stand alone, hand pulled back slightly and pose more neutral now. The color has shifted to fully blue.

ME (narration): Everything changed.

ME (narration): Everything I did was wrong.

Panel 2: My back is turned, not wearing a bookbag anymore, I'm just hunched over myself, wearing a grad gown and cap.

ME (narration): Honestly, I didn't know if I could figure it out again. How to be a friend.

Panel 3: Faced forward, a close up of my bust below the chin, no necklace now, hand reaching towards my bare neck.

ME (narration): After all that, I felt like I never figured it out at all.

Page 6 (5 panels)

Panel 1: Color shift again, vibrant, I'm forward again but changed. I've grown up a bit, my hair cut much shorter and colored, Different colored silhouettes surround me, happy and inviting. I finally smile again

ME (narration): Nothing is forever, but I would eventually learn that change is okay.

ME (narration): Actually, change can be great sometimes.

Panel 2: View of phone with a notification on it. The contact has a capital E in the circle.

Panel 3: The colored silhouettes drift off as I take a look at the message that popped up. My shoulders are drooped further down than before.

Panel 4: Close up of the phone screen. It's a text message from Emerson.

EMERSON (text): Hey Em, it's been a while! I recently got my own game system and was wondering if you maybe wanted to play together?

ME (narration): But nothing is forever.

Page 7 (6 panels)

Panel 1: I'm sitting on bed, holding a switch game system in my hands with my phone next to my bed. The room is dark but the game light is bright and somewhat colorful. My shoulders are tensed.

ME (narration): We hadn't talked in over two or three years or so, but there we were, playing video games together like nothing happened.

ME (narration): But I was never really sure why.

Panel 2: Similar view, but my phone lights up and vibrates. It catches my attention from the game.

ME (narration): Until one day, you sent me a long paragraph while we played.

Panel 3: Close up of my face with the phone in frame. A rough reflection of a long paragraph can be seen in the reflection of my glasses.

ME (narration): You apologized for how you treated me in high school, and that I really was a good friend after all.

Panel 4: Close up of my hand putting the phone back down, but this time the screen is face down.

Panel 5: Zoomed out, I stare blankly into space, my hand still resting on my phone. The game screen is still shining up into my face from my side. My shoulders are drooped.

ME (narration): At that moment, a weight slipped away from my body.

Panel 6: I look out the night window, the reflection of me is my younger self looking back.

ME (narration): All the guilt I carried these years was just gone.

ME (narration): You gave me closure that I didn't even realize I needed.

Page 8 (4 panels)

Panel 1: Present. My hand is on the window and reflecting back is teenage Emily. She is sad and unsure but meeting my real palm. It is orange outside again

ME (narration): I know I wasn't perfect back then, but it wasn't all my fault.

ME (narration): And I can finally let go of the tension I held on to.

Panel 2: I put the letter in the envelope.

ME (narration): Instead of lamenting, we should keep looking forward instead of back.

ME (narration): We still don't talk too often, but you'll always be a part of me.

Panel 3: Now I'm sticking my hands into the giftbox, organizing the old memories a bit. One hand is seen picking up the metal chain.

ME (narration): I hope you're doing well.

Panel 4: My back is turned, now I am walking out the room with a box, blurred to the background. In focus in the foreground is the necklace now neatly hanging front and center of the jewelry case door.

ME (narration): Signed, Em.

9	Memory withy
	Before I had a phone we called as build thes
	hunger he truly become normally to order the first friend are over at my
	house. We truth become normally together, sing comes together, Animal cross the first friend our over at my has a house in my town. She taught are how to be a best friend, what it's like to be gorrowful with friendship despite being kind at alone. Little did I know that she wall
	be gorrowded with friendship despite being kind of alove. Little did I know trad strength
not	
	"Even it we weren't follows arymae, I'd cheer you on at the Olympics."
	Though or relatingship was flaved over they all? We were young, maybe too have to me grow our values charget. I didn't know at he the but I know now that's okay. I know so little. I didn't think I would be okay. For a while I telized it was all my for it of I there is now to be a the standard of the s
	and the fire and values chayer. I didn't know at the time but throw
	a while I teliced it was all my for It at I there I would be okay. For

"Even if we weren't friends, I'd still cheer you on at the Olympics."

Though I had to cut this line since it didn't fit, this was the most intriguing thing I remember her saying, before our friendship fell aprt. This made me wonder if she knew.

I	want think I would be oppy. But I didn't believe inchine	I've changes
R.	and a house in ablate days. The write around a	we are differe
but	my personal security was two. Gove were the days I let by oddly enough I am free. And I hope you are too.	
MA	but oddy enough I am tree. And I hope you me 100.	
A to	hile mas a should Ade I Crossin week except row you	here year or
11	hile ago, we played Anny Crossin again, except now you all We played like nothing ever happened, must like be	efore. Instead
600	S IN MINER ON SILVENIA MILES GRANT LOW THE MENT OF THE PROPERTY OF THE PROPERT	1000
Shr	add too but that despite what was that I was a good	STONY BIACT
Su	dealy. The twowil inside we at peace. Closure I dishot know	w I neded.
I	treesure what used to be but I appreciate now that may be	400 000 1 m
40	be totally at or in the diplot quite grow on , but parker or	an inter a
4	of on what south been up to since, but I can office, all	a And I you
ha	t to play annul crossing again just let me know.	

The original handwritten letter. The handwriting is hard to read but the most important memories are in the script.

Initial Concepts

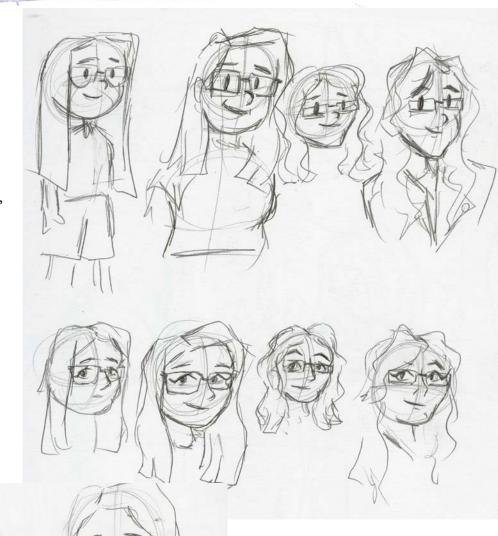
This was the initial style I tried out with reinterpreting the characters. While I did like it at first, it felt like it was walking the line of realistic and cartoony at the same time which made it feel inconsistent.

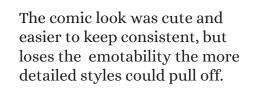
As I sketched, I figured that exact representations were less important as these first sketches felt, so after these I began to stylize and simplify.



Further Concepting

These were a few style tests, each line being one style with all 4 characters, and the bottom was refining the original as I still liked that one. One more cartoony, one more realistic.



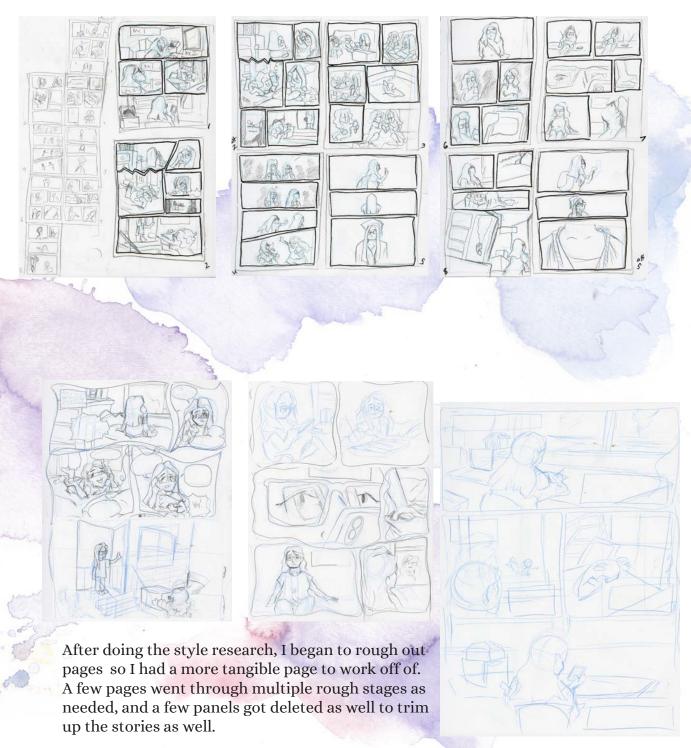


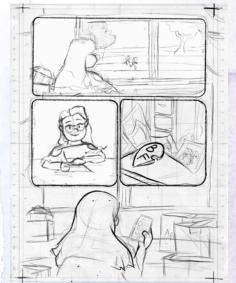
Instead, I ended up compromising and combining the styles. I decided the cartoony look went best with the children, and to make it slightly more detailed when we aged. Another detail I wanted to subtlely hint at was our personality differences in our shape language. Emmalyn was pointy, sharp, and extroverted (comparatively), while I was rounder and square, friendly but very shy. As I grow older I adapt the energy of her hair, squareness of her glasses, and more detailed clothing instead of a hoodie. However despite the changes, I still maintain the core roundness of my original character. Even though we weren't friends anymore I wanted to show that the relationship still had an impact regardless of whether it was active or not.

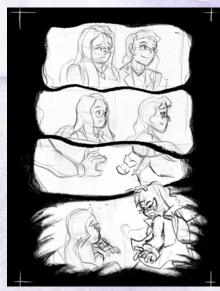


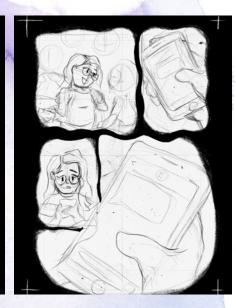
Page Production

As I scripted the pages, I would thumbnail alongside the writing as when I write scripts I think visually to make sure the pages layouts for sure work with the script.









Once I was satisfied with the roughs, I moved on to penciling. My pencils started as blue on traditional paper, then scanned into the computer and continued digitally. The original plan was to fully pencil traditionally, but I felt it was easier to correct and changed digitally so I moved my workflow there. I was also able to block out gutters to focus in the work of the pages.

I also worked on color comps while roughing and penciling so that I had an idea down since the color story was so important. Some pages were clearer than others, but a lot of the story's colors ended up changing upon the final renders. The color comps also solidified my decision to color digitally as well, since I felt I may need the flexibility of change in the coloring.





References







Since my pencil stage tends to be rough, I utilized references I took of my friends, It helped me get the proper camera angles and closer poses to what I needed in my story.

I didn't stress too much about the cleanliness of the pencils since they were for me. I included enough information for myself to move on to my final stages of rendering

Typography













Typography was also key in the storytelling as I wanted the text to also feel like it was written in a letter. I researched several handwritten style fonts and comic fonts, and explored possibly using my own handwriting and converting it into a font.

In the end, I ended up going with:

Felt Tip Roman, lacks italics but has bold and heavy

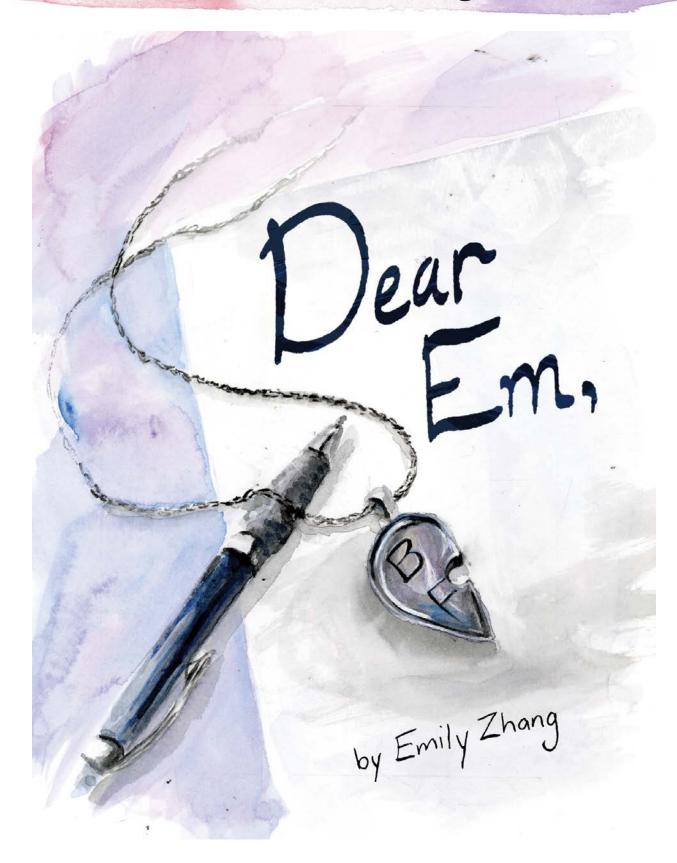
I took note of which fonts had what features and what lacked features. Some fonts were really good but had neither italics nor bolds, but Felt Tip Roman despite lacking italics, was the best feeling font that had at least one feature, was readable, and felt like it was handwritten.







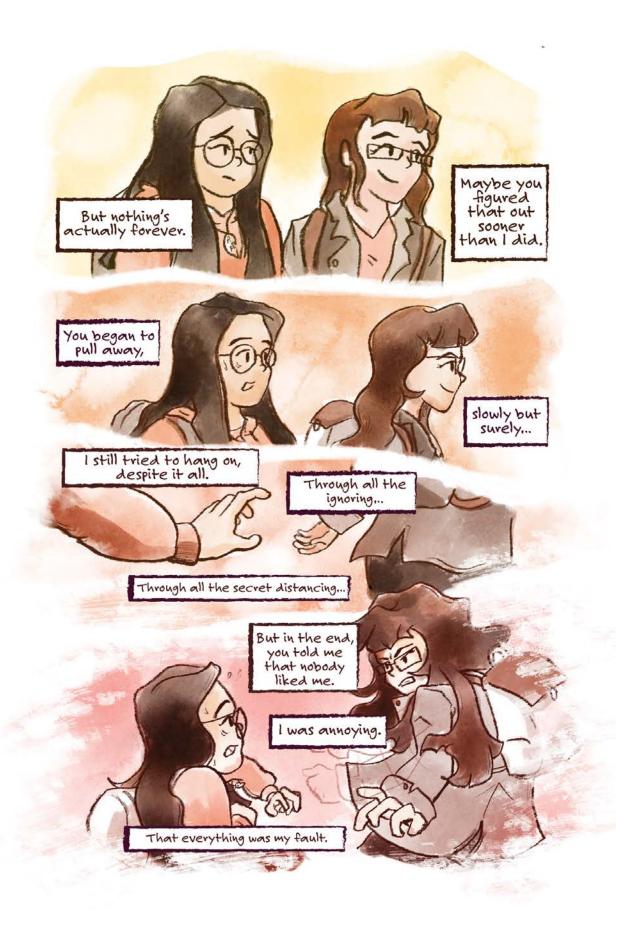
Final Novel Design





















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Stash Buddy

Spring 2023 Thesis

The Premise

Stash Buddy is a visual design app project for an all-in-one resource for crocheters and knitters of all experience levels, from beginner to expert. The app acts as a single place for beginners to find all the information they need instead of browsing the web for skills they are unaware of, and a place to save patterns and resources for more seasoned crafters. It contains lessons of different difficulty levels, a pattern search and log system, achievement reward badges, and a frequently asked question page for common troubleshooting in the crafts.

When first learning new crafts, it is hard to know what information to look for, so having lessons and pattern resources all in one place makes the craft more accessible to newer artists as the popularity of crochet and knitting continue to trend upwards. It also acts as a pattern and project saver like other websites like Ravelry for the experienced users that do multiple projects at a time as a local application than a less accessible website. The app prototype is the current proof of concept that can continue to expand to include more functions and flesh out the features of current proposed functions as well.

Over the last two years, I began to crochet for the holiday sale to fill out my table. Little did I know that I would fall in love with it and start creating my very own patterns. For the longest time I thought that crochet was scarier than knitting until I finally tried it and found it easier.

However, my experience in learning was not the most efficient. I was taught by my mother, who is not very fluent in English and has a hard time reading English patterns and was much more comfortable with universal diagrams instead. The books we found did not have any diagrams though, putting me in the position to translate to her and then demonstrate to me what that meant. It was a learning experience for the both of us, but I knew there were better ways to learn. Trying to search online would have been overwhelming and unorganized for someone with absolutely no one else to guide. When I tossed around the idea of an app, I realized that I could make something educational and fun by tying in this fun hobby craft into my project. I could create something that would make it easier for someone to learn a new craft by providing resources in one place.



Research

Despite being a visual design-focused project, doing research and emphasizing with users is an incredibly important aspect of the user experience process. Without actual feedback, it is easy to fall into designer bias.

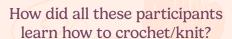
Throughout this project I constantly put the app through feedback. At the beginning, I conducted an online survey within the crochet and knitting Reddit communities. Due to community rules, the demographics are not completely equal in spread, but more research can be performed in more areas to find more feedback.

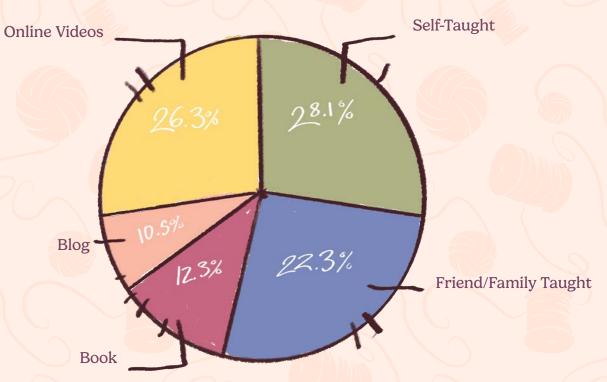
I also interviewed different levels of experienced crafters on their specific experiences learning how to crochet and knit, and further used that to analyze the survey results and group certain pain points into different persona groups.

Age Groups Surveyed* Gender of Participants* 30-45 30-45 19-29 54.2%

Results







0% learned from an app

While many people had very different strategies and preferred learning methods, there were trends among the majority of answers.

I found that many people liked visuals best to learn techniques and vocabulary overall, and text alone the least. However, some felt pictures were sometimes still not enough alone without text/motion visuals, and that videos were sometimes hard to rewind and watch a specific step. Taking in all the feedback, I decided that the app would have a lesson screen that had both text and short loopable gifs that were separated into steps to best demonstrate the techniques.

A very common pain point in learning also involved reading patterns and their inconsistencies. While I do not have the time to write a curriculum, within intro lessons it would connect words to common pattern lingo, and with further development, adding a general yarn/vocabulary reference lesson for beginners can be implemented.



As insightful as research was, I received less productive feedback into functions that moreso questioned:

Why use an app when you can search the web for anything you need to know?

Of course an app isn't necessary for every person. But being able to have resources in one place makes the learning process more efficient and streamlined. There are skills that I still don't know that are considered basic, but I can write patterns. But I am self/family-taught, having to search things on my own meant I could only search what I know. But when someone doesn't know, how would they search?



Personas



Susan Lei is a nearly retired chemist researcher by day, and spends time with her family at night. As a child, she used to crochet and knit all the time, and for a while did so to make a living for a bit after first moving to America. However, after starting a family and new job, she had little time to devote to her old hobby and lost some of her knowledge. As she begins to wind down, she wants to find things to do to stay off her phone more when she finally retires, so she picked up crochet again. However, language barriers and lack of text fluency is holding her back from her former level of skill.

Name: Susan Lei

Education: Master Degree

Family: Husband with 3 children

Occupation: Chemist

Pronouns: She/Her

Age: 64

Goals

- To relearn how to craft again
- Be able to understand the newer terms and language
- Accessible features so she can still use it as she ages

Frustrations

- Most tutorials talk much too fast to understand what is happening
- Many icons and buttons are not as universally understood to her
- Inconsistencies between sources confuse the information

Casey Gray is a current college student looking for a fun hobby to unwind with when studying gets stressful. They enjoyed watching people make crochet crafts, inspiring them to want to learn how to do it themselves. The short-form videos they watch though, are not informative and too fast to process mentally. They also are not sure where to start and what to look for to begin either.

Goals

- · Get started on a new hobby
- To make little crafts of toys and amigurumi type toys
 - To unwind with a fun hobby every now and then

Name: Casey Gray

Education: Bachelor in Progress

Family: 2 Parents and a brother

Occupation: Full-Time Student

Pronouns: They/them

Age: 22

Frustrations

- Some videos move too fast and are nearly impossible to try an learn from
- Can't figure out what exactly to look up beyond the starting skills
- Other skill apps don't have the fun energy of the short videos



The Current Market

Most apps for crochet and knitting are mainly function apps than resources. The current programs/apps are either too broad, not as functional, or lack visual appeal.

Too broad, very clinical in style

SKILL SHORE.



ravelry

Ravelry's website is the closest site to this app concept. It's one of the most popular gathering websites for yarn crafters of all kinds. However, it doesn't have an app, making mobile access a bit harder, and despite having fun illustrations at the login and loading pages, the usable site areas themsel

duolingo

Duolingo is the best example of an app for the kind of style I was hoping to achieve and emulate. It tries to make learning feel fun and exciting, rather than a chore. Obviously this app is a language app, but elements of this app were important to the development of my project.

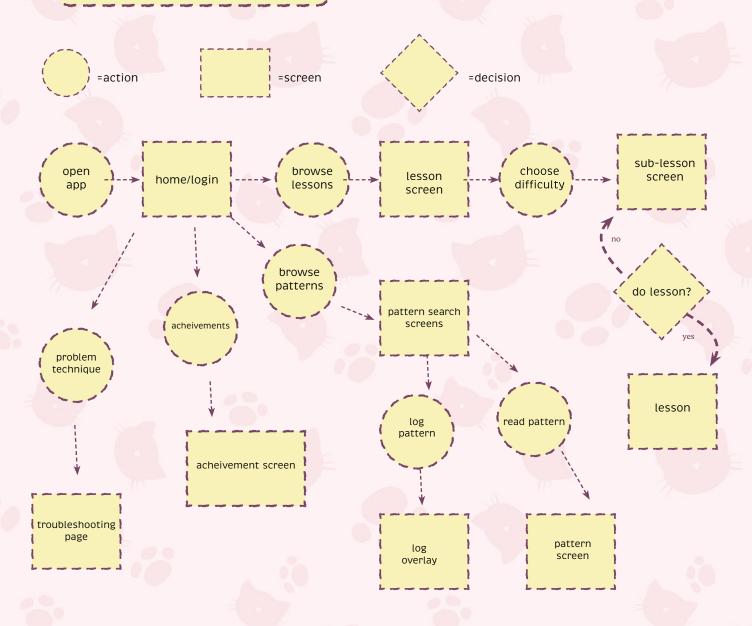
Mobile Games Visual Research

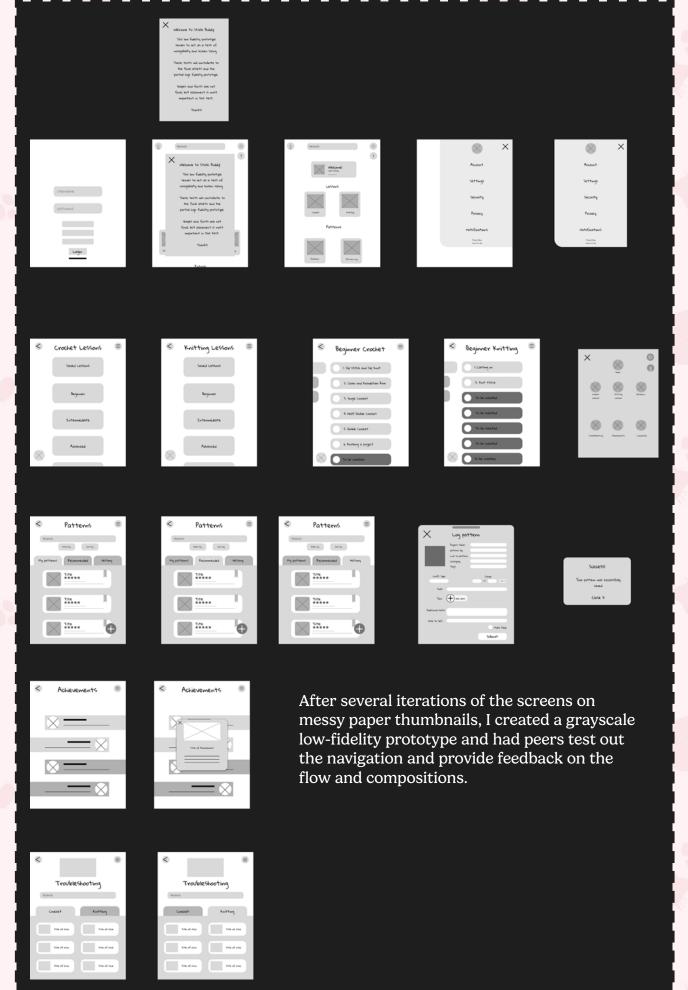
Since many learning apps lack the kind of style I was looking for, I turned to mobile games to get inspired on more illustrative assets and UI design. Nothing is wrong with cleaner app visuals, but with crochet and knitting being a hobby for most, the app should also be fun and inviting to users so they feel less like chores and tasks.



Planning and Low-Fidelity Wireframes

Basic Userflow







App Icon Ideation





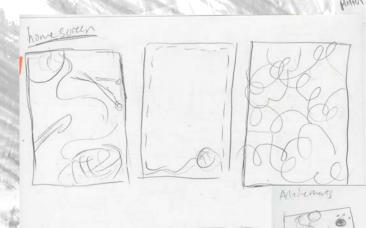
Asset Ideation

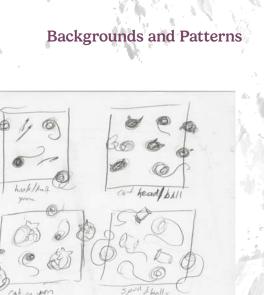
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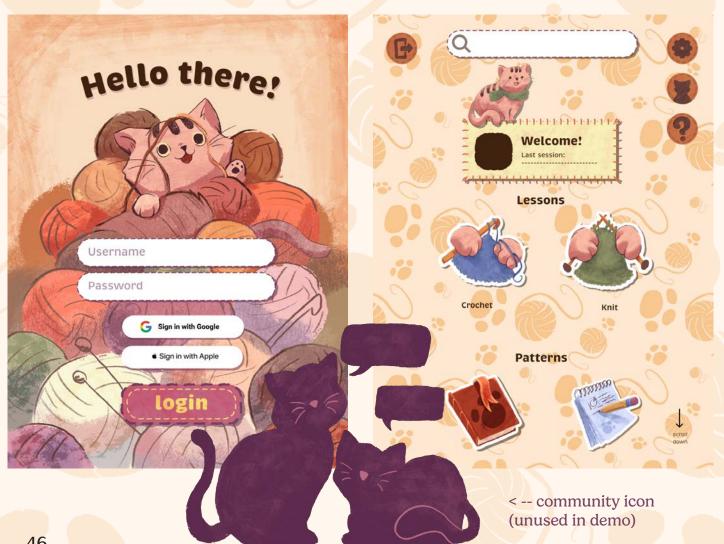




Hi-Fidelity Assets and Screens

Access the full prototype and play around with this link:

https://www.figma.com/proto/aMrt8YcsO13aRr67eS8192/ Stash-Buddy-App-Prototype?page-



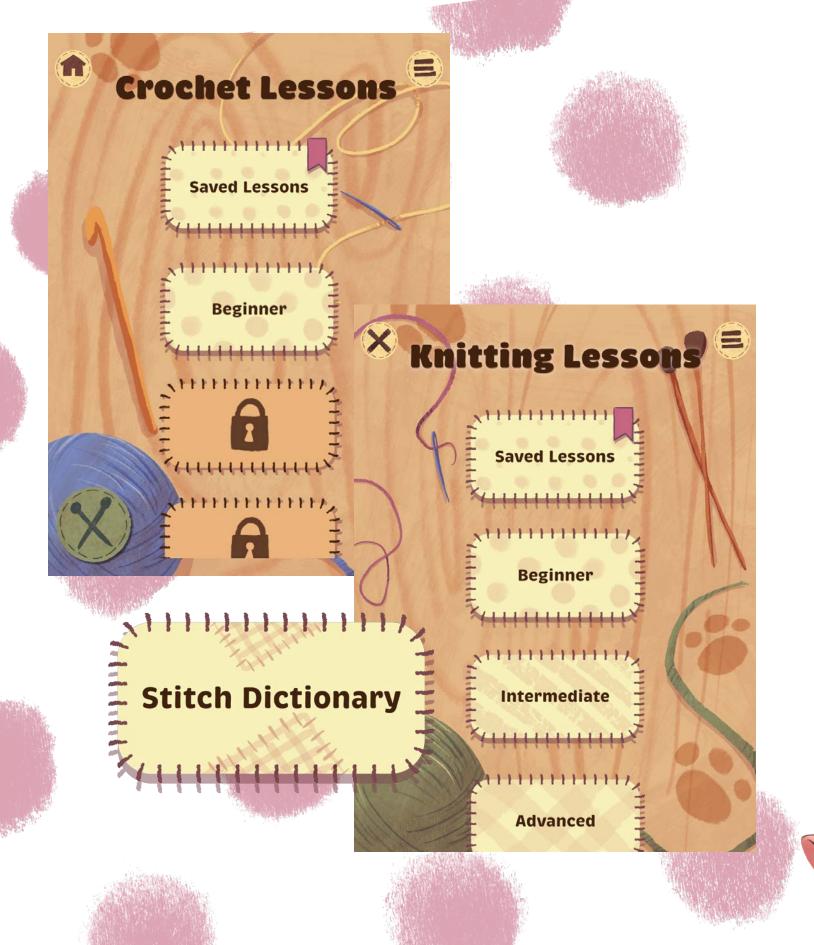


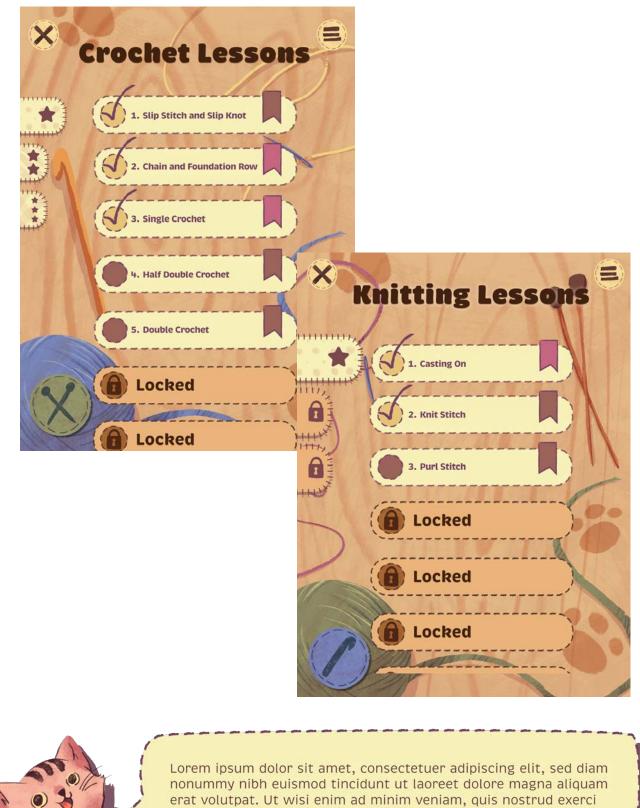


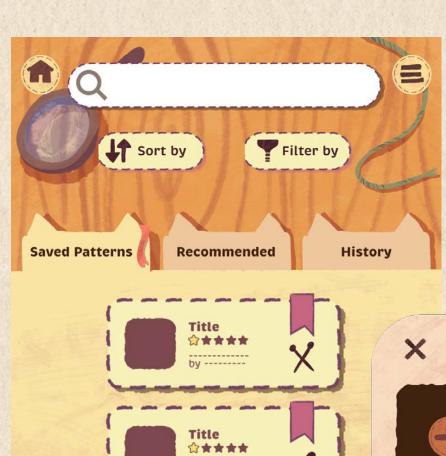


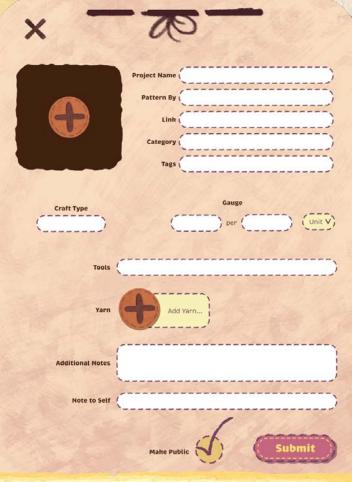




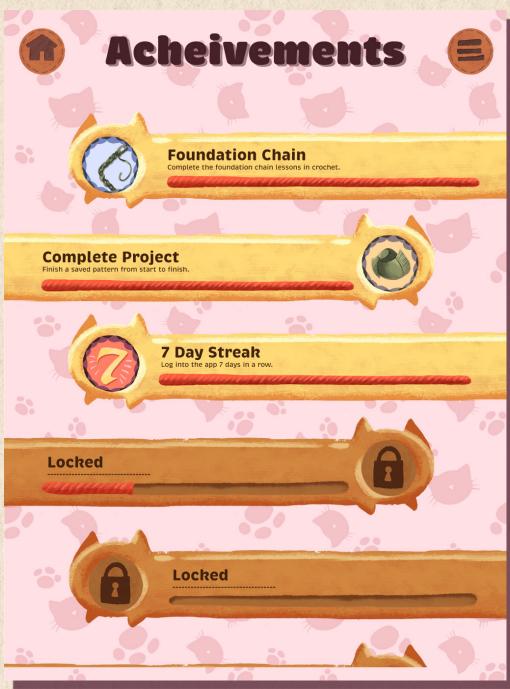






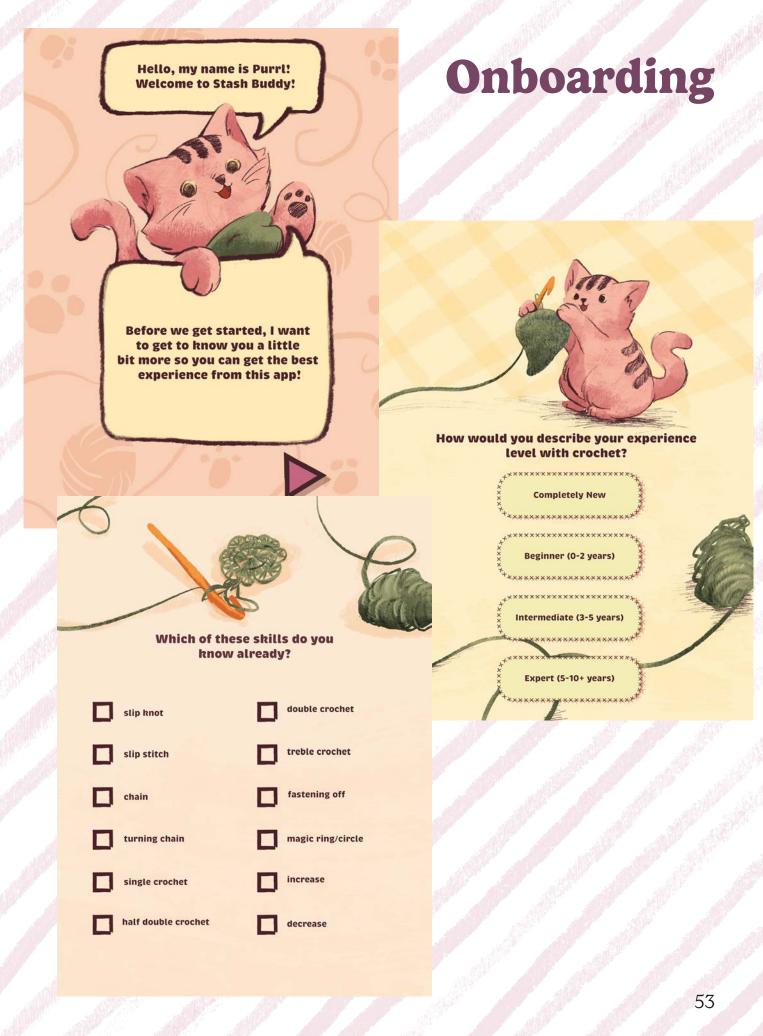


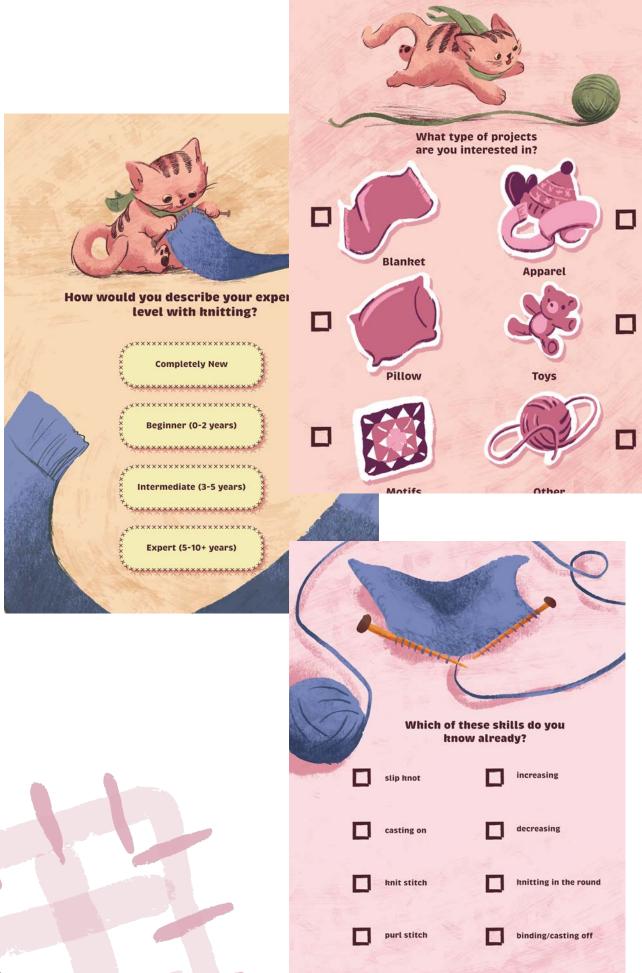




Troubleshooting







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