# Doki Doki Literature Club Analysis

## *Background*

In the world of Doki Doki Literature Club, all of the characters seem to be at least partly self-aware. This is important, as the *real* plot of DDLC revolves around Monika becoming completely self-aware, seeing past the in-game Protagonist you are playing as, and becoming obsessed with the Player, and manipulating the game's code behind the scenes in order to try to make Sayori, Yuri, or Natsuki seem unlikable and convince the Player to be with her instead. However, Monika is not a game developer, so the best she can do is change variable values or delete parts she deems to be in the way of being with you. If you have ever messed around with someone else's code before learning a programming language, you'll know that this is a great way to have unintended consequences.

## *Visual Imagery*

Doki Doki Literature Club does an incredible job of switching between two genres on the fly: (a) run-of-the-mill dating simulator, and (b) psychological horror. As you progress further into the game, it begins to feel as though the former was simply a ruse to lure you in for the latter. The visuals for the game also fall into these two categories. The short skirts and schoolgirl uniforms lean on a trope that any fan of anime or dating simulators is all too familiar with, that being fan service. The first playthrough is almost exclusively this kind of imagery: Cute girls in cute situations talking about love poems and trying to romance the player. Every so often there is a glitch or a suspicious line of dialogue to let you know that things are not quite as they seem, however it is relatively tame for the time being. It isn't until the end of the first playthrough that the tone of the game does a complete 180° turn.

Throughout the first playthrough, Sayori seems to be going through something that she's not telling you about. After not hearing from Sayori for a few days, you begin to get worried, so you go to check on her. As you knock on her door, her silence is a sign that something is seriously wrong. This is amplified by the soundtrack cutting out, leaving a deafening silence where you hear nothing except your own anxieties. As you open the door, your screen cuts to a close-up of her limp body hanging from her ceiling fan. The entire screen is black and white, and the background is white static instead of the bedroom you found her in. A corrupted, glitching version of the game's main theme plays in the background, seemingly taunting you. The image of Sayori's body glitches on screen, searing itself into your brain, and establishing computer glitches as a symbol of something being *wrong,* in a way that will certainly scare you now, if it didn't before. It is genuinely one of the most haunting scenes I have ever experienced in any form of media. Especially because Sayori was admittedly my favorite of the cast.

When you are returned to the title screen, the photo containing the main cast has the photo of Sayori replaced with a corrupted image file of her, similar to what you would see if you deleted her file and tried to run the game without it. Turns out, this is exactly what Monika did to the file containing Sayori's character, as she was jealous of how close you were to Sayori. When you are inevitably compelled to do a second playthrough of the game in it's broken state, the entire game tries to run without Sayori. This second playthrough is where the game earns it's "Psychological Horror" tag on Steam, as Monika alters the character files of Yuri and Natsuki to make them the worst versions of themselves so you will be more attracted to her. This further corrupts both Yuri and Natsuki, with Yuri turning to self-harm as a way of relieving herself from overwhelming obsession with you, and Natsuki becoming much more possessive, and getting incredibly jealous of Yuri and Monika, even if you spend most of your time with her.

Eventually, Yuri will confess her love for the protagonist, and no matter whether the protagonist accepts or rejects her offer, she will become so overwhelmed with emotion that she impales herself multiple times with a kitchen knife in front of you, and bleeds out in the classroom. The game then has you sit there in shock, staying with her for three days, and as you click (or skip) through hundreds of corrupted dialogue lines, you watch her body decompose as the sun rises and sets for three days. Not only does DDLC shock you, but it forces you to sit there and accept the consequences of every single horrific event that happens throughout the course of the game.

## Language

The literary device used most effectively throughout DDLC is the fourth wall break. While Sayori, Yuri, and Natsuki all spend the game falling for the Protagonist, the character you give a name at the beginning of the playthrough, Monika sees past that character, and falls for you, the Player. In one of the most "*oh f\*\*\**" moments I've ever had, she makes this incredibly clear by ignoring the name you gave to the Protagonist, and referring to you by the name registered to the User on your PC, which is most likely your real name. Sayori, Yuri, and Natsuki never are able to see past the Protagonist, even as they realize something is seriously wrong with Monika and the literature club. Monika's ability to see past the confines of the world she is in defines her character, as it is why she feels so lonely, and what ultimately motivates her to mess with the game files in an effort to be with you forever.

This fourth wall break is the most effective literary technique used in the game, and is used for a variety of different effects. Primarily, it is used for horror, as most of the scares in-game are targeted directly at the Player, instead of the Protagonist. My favorite example of this is when, in the latter portion of the game, Monika will detect if you have any recording or streaming software on your laptop, and say hello to anyone watching, before giving you and your

viewers a heart attack with one of the best jumpscares in the game. The fourth wall break is also used for character development. There is a chance you can get a line of dialogue where Monika mentions she has a twitter account, and gives you her username: [@lilmonix3](). A real account, that was regularly making posts. Not only is Monika aware of the real world, she has a direct influence over it. This is emphasized when it is later revealed that she authored the Steam description for the game.

## Interaction and Mechanics

DDLC is a visual novel, so *most* of the gameplay is clicking the "Next" button, and reading the line of dialogue that comes up while admiring the art of the characters on screen. Every so often, you will be asked to make a decision between two or more of the four girls in the club. Generally, this will positively impact your relationship with one of them, and negatively impact your relationship with another. Choosing options that get you on a romantic path with your desired girl is the focus of the game, at least for the first playthrough.

As you talk to each of the girls, you start to get an understanding of the kind of literature that they enjoy; Sayori enjoys adventurous and fun literature, Yuri enjoys intensely emotional literature, Natsuki enjoys cute things and baking, and Monika enjoys anything that is particularly artistic. The one other way to convince certain girls to like you is through writing poetry to appeal to the girl of your choice. You are given a selection of ~25 word choices, each of which will appeal to one of the girls. You select one, an avatar of the character that will enjoy it does a cute little dance, the page will refresh, and you can choose a new word. This repeats until you have a finished poem. Depending on which words you chose, different characters will respond positively or negatively to your poem when they read it the next day. This actually is another way language is used in-game, as the relationships between the words and the characters that the words appeal to is one of the most interesting ways to learn some deeper aspects and nuances of each character. For example, even though words that appeal to Monika are rare, words like "Self-Aware", "Envy", or "Help" foreshadow struggles she is going through before they are made apparent to the Player.

This is when a lot of players, particularly those partial to Monika, will notice that words that appeal to her are significantly more rare than words appealing to other characters. The words that *do* appeal to her, are mostly words relating to types of literature, as well as a few referencing her true nature. This is part of Monika's motive, as she started altering the game code after she discovered that there is not a path to romance her programmed into it.

There is one more mechanic, my personal favorite, that appears once, during the true climax of the game, at the very end of your second playthrough. After Monika has gone completely trigger-happy, and destroyed the entire game world except for you and her, forcing

you to be together forever, she offhandedly mentions that the only way to end it would be to delete the file containing her character, like she did to Sayori. To do this, you actually have to leave the game, open up your file explorer, and navigate through your system files in order to find where Doki Doki Literature Club is stored, and find the file titled "Monika.chr", and delete it. This level of interaction is not seen anywhere else in the game, and truly solidifies the feeling that all the events that have unfolded thus far are a result of a character becoming self-aware, and being driven mad by the lonely existence they will be forever trapped in.

## *Summary*

Doki Doki Literature Club is a masterpiece in storytelling. It perfectly sets the expectation of the player, who is either underestimating the apparent dating simulator, or is suspicious because they saw the "Psychological Horror" tag on Steam, and turns this cutesy game about romancing girls in a literature club, into a story of a sentient character trapped in a hell of her own creation, with her loneliness turning her into a monster of her own creation.

After you finish the true ending of the game, the game resets without Monika. Nobody has any memory of the events that have transpired, and Sayori becomes President of the literature club. However, she becomes aware she is in a game, just like Monika did. Seeing this, the small amount of Monika still left in the game's code decides to delete the entire game, including the final remaining part of herself, in order to save you from reliving everything you just went through, and as every single file is deleted one by one, the full credits roll.

And if Monika's final act of sacrifice wasn't enough to make you sob, the track playing over the credits is "Your Reality", a song Monika wrote for you on the school piano. One final poem before she says goodbye.