



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 7 to 9
About the Author:	Thierry Plante, Media Education Specialist, MediaSmarts
Duration:	1-1 1/2 hours

Video Games



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson, students are introduced to the ways video games may impact their mental and physical health. Students start with a reflection on their use of video games, specifically the amount of time they play and the role of games in their lives. This is followed by a class activity based on several key questions relating to the positive and/or negative effects video games may have on our health. Finally, students will be given an opportunity to debate key claims on the health effects of video games.

In approaching this topic in the classroom, teachers should encourage students to explore their own attitudes towards the issues surrounding the games that they play - without condemning the games themselves.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- begin to develop an awareness and a critical evaluation of the potential risks and benefits inherent to their particular video gaming habits
- develop an understanding of the debates surrounding the influence of video games on physical and mental health
- apply their learning through a debate

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to project or display *Video Games Can Do What?*

Photocopy the handouts *Video Game Journal* and *Video Games Can Do What?*

Arrange Internet access for Activity 3



You may also want to preview the MediaSmarts website section on video games (<http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/video-games>) for background information on video games and to get a sense of the kinds of arguments students will find for their debate in Activity 3.

Procedure

Activity 1: What is the importance of video games in our lives?

At the beginning of the class, ask students to raise their hands if they have ever played video games. Make sure to define “video games” broadly, so that it includes virtual worlds and short casual games or apps that might be played on a smartphone or a social network. Ask each student who raises his or her hand to name a game they have played and briefly describe it.

Distribute the handout *Video Game Journal* and ask students to take a few minutes to fill it out. (If you prefer, this can be assigned the day before as homework.) Once they are finished, ask a few of the students to share the number of devices they wrote down and the total number of hours they played. Write these in two columns on the board.

Explain to the students that there is no “right” or “wrong” number here; the activity is simply intended to show how common video game playing is and to give them the data they will need to evaluate whether various claims about the effects of video games might apply to them.

Also point out that given the huge popularity of video games all around the world, there are hundreds of thousands of games catering to all sorts of tastes and desires to choose from. And, as they are about to see, there is much confusion and little agreement – in the media and even amongst experts – on how these apps and games affect us.

Activity 2: What mass media and researchers have to say about video games

Project the document *Video Games Can Do What?* and explain that these are all titles of published articles reporting on video game research.

Have students form pairs and go through the list together. As they read, have them identify and write down any themes they see emerging from these titles. Once they have finished, have each pair join another to form a group of four and then compare their two lists. Make sure students understand that they’re not discussing the accuracy or validity of these articles, just finding common themes in them. Have each group share their themes to the class and write them down on the board. Once all of the groups have shared their findings, group the themes under the following four general categories:

- Effects on emotions/mental health
- Effects on physical health
- Effects on attitudes and behaviour
- Effects on skills and learning



Activity 3: Debate

Assign each of the 4-person groups from Activity 2 one of the resolutions below:

- Parents should limit their children's game time.
- Teachers should use video games in the classroom.
- Young children should not play video games.
- Kids should not play violent video games.
- Video games should have more female characters and/or more visible minority characters.
- Video games should not be allowed to contain advertising or branded content (mascots, brand names, etc.).

In each group, have students go back to their original pairs and have each pair research and prepare a two minute argument for **both sides** of their resolution, with at least three supporting points. Have the students conduct their research using the following website: <http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/video-games>.

Finally, have students return to their groups of four and have each group toss a coin to determine which pair will debate the “pro” and “con” sides of the resolution. After each pair has presented the arguments they prepared for that side of the resolution, have the class decide by a show of hands which side was more convincing. If time permits, ask a few students to explain why they felt one side was more convincing than the other.

Activity 4: Reflection

Have students look over their *Video Game Journal* in light of the points made in the debates and reflect on whether or not they feel they need to make changes. Ask them to consider the following questions: “How can you tell if video games are affecting you (positively or negatively)? How can you tell that a particular video game (or games) is having an effect?” Let them know that if they have any questions or concerns, they should talk about it with an adult they trust.



Video Games Can do What?

Effects on emotions

- **Studies find video games can help individuals who have depression, anxiety and autism**, *Autism Daily Newscast*, January 23, 2015
- **New video games may improve mental health**, *King5.com*, July 28, 2014
- **Can buying video games make you happier? Science says yes**, *Tech Time*, August 28, 2014
- **Violent video games can cause depression in children, new study finds**, *News Medical*, August 19, 2014
- **Violent 3D video games can make players angry, new study reveals**, *The Economic Times*, October 22, 2014

Effects on physical health

- **Excessive Video Game Playing Can Be Bad for Your Health**, *WTVY*, December 24, 2014
- **Screen time may damage teens' sleep**, *Reuters*, February 3, 2015
- **Gaming to death: What turns a hobby into a health hazard?**, *CNN*, January 21, 2015
- **Video games make kids fat – study**, *News24*, May 4, 2011
- **How playing video games can help stop you from going blind**, *Daily Star*, March 5, 2015
- **Video Games Can Up Kids' Physical Activity, Reduce Obesity**, *PsychCentral*, January 11, 2013

Effects on attitudes and behaviour

- **Racing video games may influence later behavior**, *Fox News*, January 8, 2015
- **Risk-Glorifying Video Games Increase Deviant Behaviors in Some Teens**, *Science World Report*, August 4, 2014
- **Playing Violent Video Games Can Reduce Prejudice, Study Suggests**, *TechVibes*, November 7, 2014
- **Video Games Make You More Racist, Study Says**, *CinemaBlend*, March 2014

Effects on skills and learning

- **Action-Packed Video Games Really Do Help Us Learn Faster, Study Finds**, *Popular Mechanics*, November 10, 2014
- **Yes, Video Games Really Are Ruining Your Kid's Social Skills**, *The Fiscal Times*, September 12, 2014
- **Study Shows Video Games Can Help Kids' Social Interaction**, *Newsplex.com*, August 8, 2014



- **Playing video games can boost exam performance, OECD claims**, *The Irish Times*, March 10, 2015
- **Video Games Improve Sensorimotor Skills in Students, Study Finds**, *Education World*, March 10, 2015

Effects on brain development

- **Violent video games leave teens 'morally immature'**, *BBC News Education*, February 4, 2014
- **A little video gaming 'linked to well-adjusted children'**, *BBC News Health*, August 4, 2014
- **How gaming can help with your child's development**, *Denver Post*, September 25, 2013
- **Violent video games can actually increase a player's moral awareness**, *VentureBeat*, July 2, 2014



Video Game Journal

You're probably never really far from a device that can play video games. How often do you play? It's important to remember that there's no "right" or "wrong" answer here; you are simply getting real data to help you make decisions later if you feel you need to.

1. Write down all the devices on which you have played video games. Don't be afraid to be specific and name all the consoles (Xbox One, an old Nintendo, an arcade machine at the movies) and machines (my Dad's laptop, my iPad) that you can think of. A video game is any type of game you play on an electronic device with a screen: it can be a very casual paper doll app or the latest big budget adventure game. Once you are done, please write down the total number of devices you listed here.

2. Write down when you played video games during the last week and for how long (as best as you can remember). Once you are done, please calculate and write down the total amount of time (in hours) you played.



Video Games Can do *What*?

A little video gaming 'linked to well-adjusted children'

Action-Packed Video Games Really Do Help Us Learn Faster, Study Finds

Can buying video games make you happier? Science says yes

Do Video Games Make Kids Saints or Psychopaths (and Why Is It So Hard to Find Out)?

Excessive Video Game Playing Can Be Bad for Your Health

Gaming to death: What turns a hobby into a health hazard?

How gaming can help with your child's development

How playing video games can help stop you from going blind

New video games may improve mental health

Playing video games can boost exam performance, OECD claims

Playing video games is good for your brain and here's why

Playing Violent Video Games Can Reduce Prejudice, Study Suggests

Racing video games may influence later behavior

Risk-Glorifying Video Games Increase Deviant Behaviors in Some Teens

Screen time may damage teens' sleep

Studies find video games can help individuals who have depression, anxiety and autism

Study Shows Video Games Can Help Kids' Social Interaction

Teachers reject 'educational' video games claim

Video Game Lowers Stress Hormone

Video Games Can Up Kids' Physical Activity, Reduce Obesity

Video Games Improve Sensorimotor Skills in Students, Study Finds

Video games make kids fat – study

Video Games Make You More Racist, Study Says

Violent 3D video games can make players angry, new study reveals

Violent video games can actually increase a player's moral awareness

Violent video games can cause depression in children, new study finds



Violent video games leave teens 'morally immature'

Yes, Video Games Really Are Ruining Your Kid's Social Skills

Write down themes or common ideas shared by these media article titles about the effects of video games. Try to go beyond the basic ideas of "Video games are good for you" and "Video games are bad for you" and identify what parts of our lives each effect above might apply to.

Example:

Title: Video games make kids fat – study

Theme: Effects on health

