



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 4 to 6
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Duration:	1 ½ to 2 hours, spread over 3 sessions

Game Time



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 consider the positive aspects of video games as well as the ways in which games may take time away from other activities they enjoy. Students are introduced to the idea of balancing game and screen time with other parts of their lives and learn about the reasons why they may be tempted to spend more time playing games or find it difficult to stop playing. They then keep a diary of their game play (or another screen activity if they do not play video games) that prompts them to reflect on their gaming habits. Partway through that process, they are introduced to techniques that will help them moderate their game play and deal with the difficulties they may feel reducing game time. Finally, students reflect on the experience and develop a plan to make their game play more mindful.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- consider the role of video games and other digital/screen activities as part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle
- reflect on their experiences with games and other digital/screen activities
- develop an emotional awareness of the role of games and other digital/screen activities in their lives
- learn and practice strategies for moderating game play and other digital/screen activities

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the following handouts:

- *Game On*
- *Mindful Gaming*
- *Game and Screen Diary*



Procedure

Day One: Bet You Can't Eat Just One!

Start by asking students to write down five activities that they really enjoy. When they have had a few minutes to write, have them share some of the activities they named. After students have named 5 – 10 activities, ask students to raise their hands if any of the activities they wrote down involved video games: whether it was “playing video games” in general, a particular kind of video game (a particular game system, a genre like puzzlers or first-person shooters, or a series of games) or a specific game.

Tell students that playing games is actually the most popular online activity among Canadian kids their age, and that both boys and girls play games often. Ask students to name good things about video games and write their suggestions on the board. The list will likely include:

- Video games can improve your reflexes and hand-eye coordination
- Video games can help you learn how to solve problems
- Video games can give you a chance to be creative
- Video games can let you be part of telling a story
- Video games can teach you things about history, science, etc.
- Video games can teach you how to work with other people to get things done
- And most importantly, video games are fun!

Now ask students to go back to the list they made of activities they enjoy. How many of those can they do at the same time as playing a video game? Possibly some – like eating snacks or listening to music – but not most of them. (Even in some cases where it is possible to do both, it will be less fun – how much of a movie are you really getting if you're watching it and playing a video game at the same time?) What things are they *not* doing when they're playing games?

Ask students: is it sometimes hard to *stop* playing video games? How does it feel when you have to stop? Have you ever had arguments with friends or family members about playing video games?

Distribute the handout *Game On* and go through it with the class, explaining the different reasons why we may find it hard to quit playing games. Ask if any of the points in the handout also apply to other digital or screen activities besides playing games, for example:

- Duty: you may feel like you should be around if your friends need to text you or connect to you on social networks
- Random rewards: you may feel like if you aren't reading texts or on your social networks, you'll miss something important (something people will be talking about at school tomorrow, or something about you!). This is sometimes called FOMO (fear of missing out)
- Intermittent rewards: you never know when someone is going to post a funny tweet or video, or text you some juicy gossip
- Fantasy: you may be totally into the world of your favourite comic or video and want to read *just one more episode*



- Achievement: if you're making something online (a game, a story, a video, etc.) you may want to do just one more thing before you quit.

Point out to students that the different activities we do are like the food we eat: even if something is good, if we eat too much of it we don't have room for other good things. That's why we try to eat a *balanced diet* and why we need to *balance* our lives between things we do on screens, like playing video games, and other activities. Explain to students that the kinds of foods we're tempted to eat too much of have lots of things like salt, sugar and fat that keep us eating even when we know we've had enough. (Some companies even make a point of mentioning this in their ads, like the slogan for Lay's chips: "Bet you can't eat just one!")

Distribute the handout *Game and Screen Diary* and tell students to use it to keep track of their gaming for the next week. **Note: Make sure this period includes a weekend, since some students may not play games during the week.** (If students do not play video games, or do not play them very often, tell them to track another screen activity instead.)

Day Two: Mindful Gaming

Remind students each day to fill out their *Game and Screen Diary*.

Two or three days after distributing the *Game and Screen Diary*, distribute the *Mindful Gaming* handout and go through it with the students. Explain to them that the word "mindful" means you're doing something *on purpose* and that you're *paying attention to what you're doing*: the purpose of these strategies is not to get them to stop playing games or doing other screen-based activities, but to help them to make thoughtful choices about them.

Ask students to think about how the tools and strategies in that handout connect to their game play habits (or habits with digital activities) and to try applying those that seem likely to be helpful.

Day Three: Reflection

Remind students each of the remaining days to fill out their *Game and Screen Diary* and to think about how to apply the strategies from the *Mindful Gaming* handout.

When students have completed the *Game and Screen Diary*, have them share their experiences with the class. Did they notice any patterns in their game play? Did it feel different to play games, or to *stop* playing games, at different times? What mindful gaming strategies did they apply and what effects did they have?

Now have students complete the reflection activity on the other side of the *Mindful Gaming* handout and prepare a Mindful Gaming Plan according to the instructions there.



Game On

There are a lot of fun things about video games: the chance to explore a new world, to compete with other players, to be part of a story or part of a team. But there are also things that the video game makers do to make sure you keep coming back.

Understanding these things is an important part of helping you make sure that video games and other screen activities are part of a balanced life.

Achievement: One of the reasons we play games is because it's fun to get better at something. It makes us feel good just to know we're better at the game than we used to be, but a lot of games also give us little reminders that we've gotten better: you may get a badge, your name on a leaderboard, new items or options or even whole new areas of the game to play in. It can be hard to stop playing when you know you're close to getting one of these.

Random rewards: Most games also give you some rewards *randomly*, so that you never know what's going to be in the next treasure chest or around the next corner. These are actually a *more* powerful way of getting you to keep playing than achievements, because *any* time playing the game is a chance to get one.

Duty: If you're playing a multi-player game, chances are you're working with other people to get things done. When you feel like people are counting on you, it may seem like you're letting them down if you're not playing with them.

Fantasy: For a lot of people, the most important part of playing games is the feeling like you're in another world. These worlds are fun to explore, and it also feels good to be able to do things that we can't do in the real world. For some people games may feel like an *escape* from things in their lives they don't like. That's not a bad thing, unless it starts making you spend so much time gaming that it makes your life worse.

Penalties for quitting: In most games, quitting completely – or even for a while – can mean giving up everything that you've won and earned in the game. Even if a game stops being fun, the idea of giving all of that up can be enough to keep us from quitting.



Mindful Gaming

Video games and other screen activities can be a lot of fun, and an important part of our lives. But we need to make sure that *we're* in control of what we're doing and when we're doing it.

Here are some tips and techniques for making sure that you're using screens in a **mindful** way. They can help you balance your screen time with other parts of your life and also help you relax if the idea of being away from your screens is stressing you out.

Make a plan. Decide ahead of time when you're going to be gaming or doing other screen activities. Don't worry too much about how much time you're spending: just making the plan will mean you do it less. *If gaming or other screens are taking up too much of your time, this will show you pretty quickly. How does game time or screen time stack up against time you spend doing other things?*

Keep screens in one place. Part of making a plan is to treat your screen time as a "date." If you can, have just one place in your house where you play games or do other screen stuff. No matter what, *keep games and other screen devices – especially portable ones – out of your bedroom.*

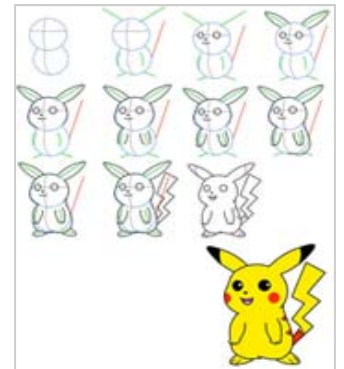
Take a tech break. Instead of doing everything at once, set yourself times of day when you use screens and times when you don't. When you aren't using them, put your screen devices out of reach and out of earshot (so you can't hear them ringing, buzzing or anything else.) *If screens are stressing you out, knowing that you have tech time coming up may make it easier to get through the no-tech time.*



Get active. Screens deliver so much stimulation to our eyes and ears; sometimes we forget that our bodies need something to do too! Make sure to take to walk around, dance, draw, etc. If you can, get outside or do something that stimulates your other senses like cooking. *If you feel upset or stressed when you stop gaming, doing something active can help you get over it.*

Get creative. If you're really into the world of the game, you can explore it in ways that are just as fun and creative too:

- draw characters and scenes from the game
- write stories about the game (imagine meeting your game characters, or having them meet characters from other games, shows or videos you like)
- make a board game or a playground version of your game (if there's anything like shooting or fighting in your game, change it to tagging in your playground version)



Relax. Games can stress you out because your brain doesn't totally "know" that they're not real. Take regular breaks to do relaxing breathing exercises (start by taking a deep breath with your nose and letting it out with your mouth: your parents or teacher can help you find more advanced exercises) or tensing and then relaxing your muscles one-by-one.



If you feel stressed when you stop playing, these can help too.

End on a high note. It feels great when you earn a badge, get a new power or unlock a new level of a game. That feeling can make you want to keep playing. Instead, make a habit of calling it quits after each major achievement.

Turn devices all the way off. When you're not using your screen device, don't just let it sleep, put it away or set it to buzz: when it's off, turn it all the way off. *If that's hard for you, you may have to give your device to someone else to hang on to when you're not using it.*



Mindful Gaming Plan

Now it's time to make a mindful gaming plan to help make gaming and other screen activities part of a balanced life.

1. Take a look at your *Game and Screen Diary*. Do you see any patterns? What games or other activities took up the most time? Did it feel different to play games, or to *stop* playing games, at different times?
2. Compare the days in your diary before and after you read the *Mindful Gaming* handout. Do you see any differences?
3. Write a paragraph responding to questions 1 and 2.
4. List the mindful gaming strategies you used and how they affected you.
5. Think back over the time when you were keeping your diary. Write a list of anything that you wanted to do in that time, but didn't have enough time for.
6. Reread everything you've written in steps 1-5 and then create a **mindful gaming plan**. Your plan should include:
 - A description of your gaming habits (or your habits doing another screen activity)
 - A list of at least **three** mindful gaming strategies and a short explanation of why you chose each one
 - A description of how your gaming habits will be different if your plan works



Game and Screen Diary

Name: _____

Dates: _____

This diary will help you become a more mindful gamer. Each time you play a game, fill out an entry in the chart below. As the chart fills up you can watch for patterns in how you play games.

When Did I Play? (day and time)	What Did I Play?	How Long Did I Play?	How Did I Feel While Playing?	Why Did I Stop Playing?	How Did I Feel When I Stopped?



When Did I Play? (day and time)	What Did I Play?	How Long Did I Play?	How Did I Feel While Playing?	Why Did I Stop Playing?	How Did I Feel When I Stopped?



Assessment activity: Mindful Gaming Plan

	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p>Use</p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p>experience oral, print and other media texts from a variety of cultural traditions and genres</p> <p>use information technology-related vocabulary in context</p> <p>identify risks that might be present if specific technological actions are taken and explore ways to manage them</p> <p>expand practices that provide safety for self and others</p> <p>explore the use of information technology in an appropriate, safe and responsible manner</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p>Understand</p> <p>Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p>identify and communicate values and beliefs that affect healthy choices</p> <p>use overt and implied messages to draw inferences and construct meaning in media texts</p> <p>evaluate effects of technology on lifestyles and environments</p> <p>identify the positive and negative influences of media and other sources on promoting active living</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p>Create</p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p>use own experiences as a basis for exploring and expressing opinions and learning</p> <p>communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as short reports, talks and posters</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

