

## LESSON PLAN

### Video Game Verbs

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



**LEVEL:** Grade 4 to 8

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** MediaSmarts

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#### Overview

In this lesson, students learn that video games are unlike other media because they are interactive, allowing players to do things and make choices. They then explore the idea of affordances and defaults by considering the “video game verbs” that different games allow you to do. They consider the commercial, technical, and genre reasons why some verbs are more often possible than others and then create a simple design for a video game in which players are able to do a wider variety of things.

#### Learning outcomes

*Know:* Students will learn the following essential domain knowledge:

- Reading media: Codes, conventions, affordances and defaults of video games
- Ethics and empathy: Impacts of video game design on ethics
- Making and remixing: Video game construction techniques

*Understand:* Students will learn the following key concepts/big ideas:

- Media are constructions
- Media have social and political implications
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form
- Digital media experiences are shaped by the tools we use

*Do:* Students will *use* tools to create a media work, *understand* how media makers’ choices, media codes and conventions and the affordances and defaults of digital tools influence how works are made and experienced, and *engage* with issues of ethics and agency in games.

## Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the following student handouts:

- *Video Game Verbs*
- *Variant Verbs*

## Procedure

### WHAT ARE VIDEO GAMES?

Start by asking students how many of them play 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.) Ask students to name some of the video games that they play, in particular their favourite ones, and write them on the board.

Now ask students which of the games on the list they are familiar with. Try to identify five games that most of the students are familiar with, and ensure that every student is familiar with at least one of those five games.

Explain to students that one way that video games are different from other media is because they are *interactive*: unlike in media such as movies, TV or comics, games let you do things and make choices about what happens. (There are some exceptions, such as “Choose Your Own Adventure” books and interactive videos on streaming services like Netflix, but these are unusual, whereas a game where you can’t make choices wouldn’t really be considered a game.)

### GAME VERBS

Remind students that the part of speech that describes things we do is the *verb*. Ask students for some examples of verbs: walk, climb, think, and so on. Now choose one of the top five video games from your list that you are also familiar with and ask students to tell you what *verbs* it is possible to do in that game. Write their suggestions on the board.

For instance, if one of the games is *Minecraft* you might get a list of verbs like:

- Build
- Dig
- Walk

- Hit
- Swim
- Eat
- Craft [i.e. combine things to make something new]
- Read

Remind students that all verbs have a *subject* (who or what is doing it, or having it done to them) and many verbs have an *object* (who or what they are being done to.) For example, *walk* does not have to have an object (unless it's in the sense of walking a dog) but *hit* does.

Now ask students which of the verbs in the list can have *objects*: which can be done *to* someone or something? For those *transitive* verbs, ask who or what they can be done *to* in the game. Write their suggestions on the board.

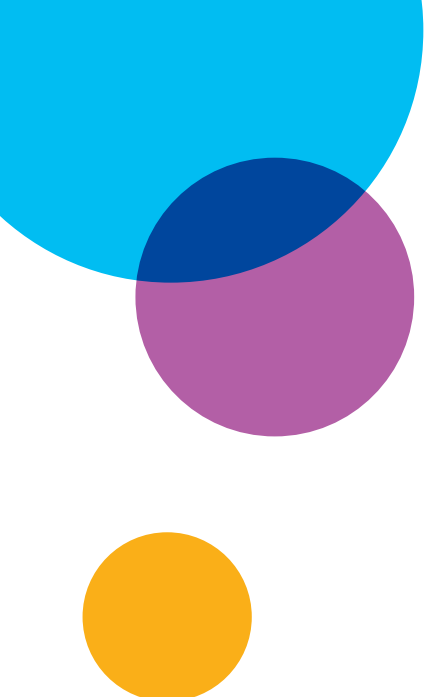
For *Minecraft* you might get the following:

- *Build* **a house**, or **a fortress**, or **a wall** or...
- *Dig* **a hole** or **a trench**
- *Hit* **a creeper** or **a zombie** or a **dirt block** or a **tree** or...
- *Eat* **a cake** or **an apple** or **a cookie** or...
- *Craft* **a pickaxe** or **armour** or **a book** or...
- *Read* **a book**.

Point out that some of these like *hit* can be done to many different things, while others like *read* can be done to just one or a few things. Some of the *objects* can have more than one thing done to them (a book can be *crafted* or *read*) while other things only have one thing that can be done to them (a creeper or other hostile creature can only be *hit*, or possibly *run from*.)

### THINGS TO VERB OR BE VERBED BY

Now tell students that the other element that is different about game compared to other media, even “open world” game that you can’t really win or lose like *Minecraft*, is that there are obstacles you have to overcome.



Ask students: What are the obstacles in the game you've been discussing? For *Minecraft*, some answers might be:

- Hunger
- Hostile creatures
- Lava
- Lightning
- Not having the resources you need
- Other players (in player-vs-player or “PVP” games)
- Once you have a half-dozen examples, ask: What verbs can you do in the game to overcome those obstacles?
- For example, in *Minecraft* you overcome hunger by eating food; you overcome hostile creatures by hitting them or running away from them; you overcome not having resources by mining or collecting them or by trading with villagers, and so on.

### VIDEO GAME VERBS

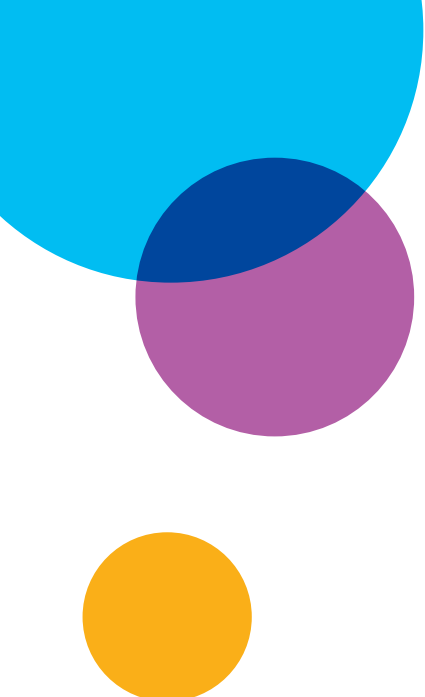
Now divide the class into groups. Have each group choose one of the video games from the top five, other than the one you have already discussed, or alternately another video game that everyone in the group is familiar with. (More than one group will end up analyzing each game. This is fine because you will be able to compare the results of their analysis in this activity.)

Distribute the handout *Video Game Verbs* and have the students use it to analyze their game in terms of verbs and obstacles.

Once the groups have finished their analyses, have them share the results with the class. Keep a running list of verbs on the board, indicating with a tally mark or something similar each time a verb is mentioned more than once.

When all of the groups have shared their analyses, ask them to look at the tally on the board:

- Which verbs were mentioned most often?
- Which were only mentioned once or a few times?
- How common were verbs that can be done to someone or something?
- How common were verbs that involved violence of some kind (hurting



a living thing or taking something from someone without their permission)?

- Now ask students: why do they think the verbs that were mentioned most often were so common, and the ones mentioned infrequently so uncommon? Let students discuss for a few minutes and make sure the following points come up:
- Most video games fall into genres that have standard conventions about how you play them, such as platformers, shooters, puzzle games, etc.
- Some actions are easier to code in a video game than others, especially because many games are made using premade *engines* (such as Unity or Unreal) that have some actions already coded for you
- Many people who make video games grew up playing them, and want to make games that are like the ones they played growing up
- Companies market games at particular *audiences* and give them what the companies think they want in the game.

### **ASSESSMENT: VARIANT VERBS**

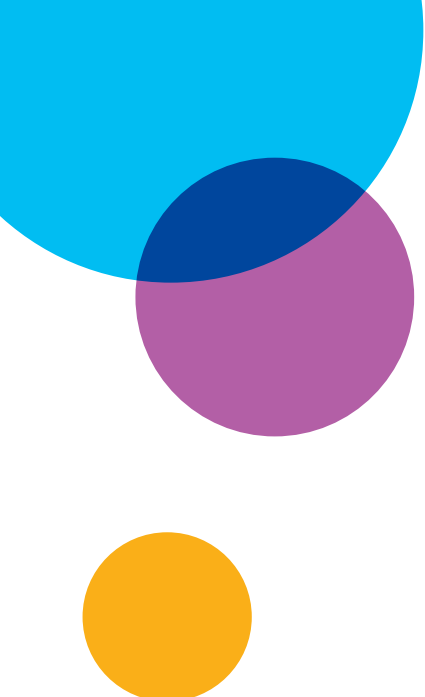
Have each student take out a piece of paper and fold it into five horizontal sections. Have them write on each of the sections any verb that is *not* on the list on the board (total of five verbs for each student.)

Next, have students cut or tear their pages so that the five sections are separate. Have students give you their sections and, after removing any that may be inappropriate, mix all of the sections together and give each student a random selection of five sections.

Now distribute the assignment sheet *Variant Verbs* and have students create a video game design built around at least *three* of the five verbs they received. Have students share their designs with the class.

### **REFLECTION**

Ask students to do a five-minute quick-write on this question: Should video games use a wider range of verbs? Why or why not?



When students have finished writing, ask if they would like to share their reflections.

### **EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

If you have the time and facilities, encourage your students to

If you have the time and technology available, you can have students use a game-making app or program to actually create a simple version of their *Variant Verbs* game.

Here is a list of game creation resources for you to explore:

- Scratch <https://scratch.mit.edu/educators/> A very versatile tool that lets students create games and animation while learning coding. For resources on how to learn and use Scratch, see <https://kidscodejeunesse.org/resources-for-educators?subject=scratch>.
- Sploder <http://www.sploder.com/> A free online game maker that allows students to create custom games in several different genres.
- Stencyl <http://www.stencyl.com/> A game creator based on Scratch. The free version only publishes to the Web and places watermarks on games.

# VIDEO GAME VERBS



## Video Game Verbs

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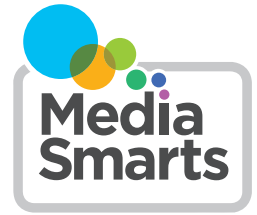
Choose one of the video games from the top five list, or another video game that everyone in your group is familiar with.

List at least five *verbs* (things you can do in the game):

List at least five *objects* (things that verbs can be done to):

List at least five *obstacles* that you have to overcome in the game:

# VIDEO GAME VERBS



## Variant Verbs

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For this assignment, you will design a video game that uses at least three of the five verbs you were given.

Your video game design should include:

A title:

A genre (what *kind* of game it is):

A playable character or characters:

A goal:

Obstacles to the goal:

Three or more verbs that the playable character can do (either to other characters, to the environment, or to themselves):

Write or draw a description of a typical level or environment's gameplay, showing how at least two of the verbs are used.

What about this combination of verbs and obstacles would make this game fun? Explain in a short paragraph.