



Overview

Types of Games

The specification **requires** teachers to select one video game from the list of set products in the action genre and a game from the list of set products in a different type of genre. These resources focus primarily on the set products but also reference other video games to enable learners to develop analytical skills and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the wider issues relating to the topic.

The broad term 'action genre' can be applied to lots of games, which in themselves can be arranged into subgenres. The term action is applied to the sort of game where the protagonist/player has to negotiate a variety of challenges which usually include violence, pursuit and physical confrontation. The sort of title that typifies the action genre is Grand Theft Auto with its gun violence and car chases.

Games in other genres:

Puzzle Games. Games such as Angry Birds are typified by bright colours, 'cute' iconography and gameplay that involves conundrums. These are generally not narrative based and are often played on mobile devices.

Sandbox Games. Games like The Sims and Minecraft are open ended video games wherein users interact with a fully developed 3D environment. The gamer may select a gaming mode or instead explore and create the world.

Simulation Games. Guitar Hero, Wii Sport and Cooking Mama are games that respectively simulate musicianship, sporting activities and cooking. These types of games often come with dedicated hardware to further authenticate the gaming experience (for example, Guitar Hero comes with a 'guitar'). Achievements are won when skills are displayed.

Introduction

In this section, we hope that you will find several starting points for the study of video games ('ludology'). Included is an article that provides a brief overview of the topic, with questions that pertain to the objectives of the WJEC specification. There is also a match up activity that contains relevant terminology and some discussion ideas that should hopefully allow students to begin to approach the topic by opening up specific debates about video games relating to audience and how users interact

On YouTube there are countless 'play-throughs' of games which will give any viewer an idea of how particular games work from a narrative, representational and ideological viewpoint.

Also, the following websites are useful for 'newbs'!

<http://www.ludology.org/2001/07/what-is-ludolog.html> an excellent blog that discusses the study of games.

<https://www.jesperjuul.net/ludologist/> you will find several academic studies of gameplay here, although several are rather dense.



<http://www.gamerwomen.com/> lots of entertaining and informative personal articles written by gamers which are useful when considering audience positioning.

<http://www.museumofplay.org/about/icheg/video-game-history/timeline> a timeline of video games, but we urge you look around the rest of this wonderfully enlightening site too.

<http://essentialfacts.theesa.com/Essential-Facts-2016.pdf> an exhaustive overview, which while U.S. centric is still useful.

Media Language

Technological advancements have allowed increased creative expression in how media language is used to create and present games. In this section you will find links to a Mass Effect 'play-through' along with relevant screen shots which will hopefully facilitate an analysis of how games use media language. Again, it may be useful to draw comparisons of how video game graphics differ from other visual media such as television and films. As an example of cross platform promotion, games often have trailers that are indistinguishable from their filmic counterparts, and are in fact often shown in cinemas. There is a Grand Theft Auto trailer task that enables a lesson on genre, and a Halo 4 task that looks at narrative.

The rewards that games offer range from skill building, competitive pleasures and interaction. However, a principle pleasure of gaming is narrative: the intrinsic motivation to get further in the game to see what happens next. Included in this section is a table for Halo 4 (but which could be adapted for other games) that looks at the byzantine narrative of the game. Please note that Propp and Todorov are **not listed as critical perspectives** by the specification, they are used here as a way of focus students' learning.

Students should apply learning from both Barthes, in terms of semiotics, and Baudrillard's postmodernism theories. Games necessitate gamers reading an image in a variety of sophisticated ways. Imagery in video games is polysemic and is often loaded with connotative meaning. Furthermore, as games increase in verisimilitude and present worlds that are weird and wonderful yet also bear structural relation to reality, Baudrillard's simulacra becomes pertinent.

As a plenary, there is a creative task that encourages students to create their own video game and story board a 'cut scene'. As the module progresses, student may wish to look back and consider how their game would be certified for age, and how it could be marketed.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2014/feb/21/writing-video-games-can-narrative-be-as-important-as-gameplay> an intriguing article about how narrative actively involves gamers

<https://www.digitaledge.org/5-ways-technology-has-changed-gaming/> a few pointers to how games have advanced.

<http://nvate.com/10291/video-game-evolution/> a potted history of how games have evolved.

<https://gitaartia.wordpress.com/2013/03/27/simulacrum-and-hyper-reality-in-video-games-the-sims/> Baudrillard applied to The Sims.



Audiences

The bond between video game media and audience is particularly powerful. To master even the simplest game, a player has to interact both physically by manipulating the game pad in response to on screen action and intellectually through figuring out challenges. Furthermore, players may respond in a personal manner to the narrative and representations depending on their identity and cultural capital. This is before we begin to consider avatars and the vicarious experience of gameplay: in certain games such as Wii Sports, players can design their own sprites to look like themselves, while in more advanced games such as Grand Theft Auto players can dictate the action to a certain extent (if a player so wished, they could turn their backs on the more paramount criminal narrative and simply play a more limited game as an ambulance driver, benevolently hurtling patients across the city to the hospital).

The area of fandom is particularly pertinent to gaming. Most gamers play alone physically, but are linked to infinite contemporaries through online gaming platforms. The competitive intensity necessary to successful gaming often gives rise to strong emotional bonds with video game media. This can manifest in creative outlets such as modding (where enterprising hackers rewrite gaming code and distribute games for the edification of other fans in a 'remix' culture) and video blogging, but can also exhibit in more negative ways.

The phrase Gamer-Gate is a blanket term applied to a loosely affiliated movement that pertains to feminist and progressive issues in gaming culture. Certain incidents involved in the events provide concerning accounts of audience responses to the changing cultural identity of the gamer.

Two articles that look at the positive responses of specialised audiences

<http://uk.businessinsider.com/video-game-modding-2015-7>

<https://mediaindustries1.wordpress.com/modmoddermodding/history-of-modding/>

More detailed accounts of the Gamer-Gate controversy

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/03/jonathan-blow-the-witness>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/17/brianna-wu-gamergate-human-cost>

Industry

Videogames are a leading media industry. Games like GTA sell more on release than the entire equivalent sales of music products. However, unlike the music industry, where popstars cross platform cosily to magazine covers and Saturday night television, the Video Game industry is more platform specific; occasionally converging with similar narrative media such as film (not to mention the various merchandising opportunities). The people behind video games are more anonymous than popstars, actors or even directors: it is difficult to apply an auteur theory to game production as the process is multifaceted. Included in the resource is a case study of the Grand Theft Auto franchise, which looks at the development of both the game's technology and narrative. Grand Theft Auto is an interesting case study as the notoriety of the game has meant that it exists outside the remit of its medium: there are lots of people who are aware of the game without ever having played it. In 1997, questions



regarding age restriction of the game were asked.

There is also a research task that asks students to investigate a game production company. There is an exemplar that is based on the company of Capcom. This task is designed to provide a starting point in exploring the Media Industries section of the WJEC specification.

<http://venturebeat.com/2016/04/21/video-games-will-become-a-99-6b-industry-this-year-as-mobile-overtakes-consoles-and-pcs/>

<http://www.metalinjection.net/videogames/grand-theft-auto-v-outsells-entire-music-industry>

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199798/ldhansrd/vo970520/text/70520-01.htm>

<https://tiga.org/about-tiga-and-our-industry/about-uk-video-games-industry>

Critical Perspectives

Critical theory regarding video games has centred upon the unique interaction between the medium and the fan, with Henry Jenkins extensive writings on fandom specifying video games (which could apply to the interactive nature of games like Minecraft and co-operative texts such as World of Warcraft). Other existing critical perspectives can be applied to the medium of video games: Gauntlett's theories concerning the fluidity of identification is useful when exploring the choice players make of what games to play, and even which characters they choose to play as (within such games as Mass Effect). The representation criticism as posed by Hooks and Hall may deconstruct the hyperbolic constructions of Grand Theft Auto and Final Fantasy while Van Zoonen could be used to tackle the female representations of Cooking Mama or Tomb Raider.

This task involves an open array of quotes that may be applied to several games. The quotes were chosen to be accessible to all case studies, although the suggestions above may be of use to help focus learners.