

Multimedia Primary Source Discussion Set

The Rise of Video Games in the 1980s: Pac-Man, Mario, and Moral Panics

URL: https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/video-games

Teaching Tips

This set offers insights into key moments of early video games and media culture more broadly during the 1980s. As the popularity of video games increased, so too did the debates about their social and cultural impact. This set offers insights into ways video games were understood technologically, economically, and socially during this critical period in the history of the medium. These resources may be useful in helping students understand the multilayered aspects of how a new technology becomes mainstream and the way new tech is often met with simultaneous discourses of excitement and concern.

Background Information

Before engaging with this resource set, students should be familiar with the following:

- Basic understanding of technological advances in the late 20th century
- General knowledge of video games as a medium

Essential Question

How were video games understood technologically, economically, and socially as a form of entertainment in the 1980s?

General Discussion Questions

- How did video games differ from previous forms of entertainment in places like arcades?
- What were some of the concerns that accompanied the rise of this new technology?
- How has the design, play, and culture of video games evolved since the 1980s?

Classroom Activities

1) Ask students to watch/listen to the following sources:

- [Video Games Replacing Pinball Machines \(1980\)](#)
- [Video Game Arcades and Parental Concerns in New Jersey \(1982\)](#)

What major changes occurred to entertainment arcades in the early 1980s? Why were adults so concerned about them? Ask students to think of how video game arcades have evolved since then. What does the modern day equivalent look like (i.e. Dave & Buster's, local retro arcades)? Are there the same concerns from adults about arcades today? Why or why not?

2) Ask students to watch/listen to the following sources:

- [Sociologists on the Pros and Cons of Video Games \(1983\)](#)

Why did the video game industry contract so much in the mid-1980s, according to the interviews? What features did the Nintendo Entertainment System introduce that differentiated it from its competitors? How has Nintendo continued to innovate in the decades since it first became a household name?

3) Ask students to watch the following source:

- [Nintendo Goes Mainstream \(1988\)](#)

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