

How Mortal Kombat (and moral panic) changed the gaming world

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Why do young people often want to do what they are told not to do?
2. Name some moments when young people do the 'wrong thing' for fun.
3. Which products are marketed at young people looking for the 'wrong thing' to do?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context. Some of the words may appear in a different form in the article.

fight

arcade

extreme

console

industry

1. an electronic device used to play video games _____
2. very large in amount or degree _____
3. to use physical force to try to defeat someone _____
4. a place with many coin-operated games you can play _____
5. all the companies involved in a particular type of business _____

version

moral panic

opponent

violence

shape

6. a strong fear that something is dangerous for society _____
7. one form of something that is a little different from other forms of the same thing

8. action that hurts people or damage things _____
9. the person or team you are playing against _____
10. to influence the way that something develops _____

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Some parents worry about there being too much _____ in video games.
2. I play video games with the family on my new _____ at home.
3. I downloaded the new _____ of the game because it has better graphics.
4. Some games have _____ scenes, with fast action and big explosions.
5. In this game, you _____ the biggest enemy to win the level.
6. There was a(n) _____ when people thought games were too violent.
7. We all went to the _____ to play old games like racing and shooting games.
8. This game helped _____ the way that all modern games are made today.
9. The video game _____ makes millions of games every year.
10. In each round, you must beat your _____ to move on.

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On its release in 1993, Midway's gore-filled fighting game ushered in a new era of hyperviolent gaming that continues to influence the industry to this day

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- 1 In December 1993, a U.S. senator named Joe Lieberman spoke in a government meeting about the violence in video games, especially the fighting game Mortal Kombat. In that game, the player can hurt the opponent in very violent ways, like pulling off a head or taking out a heart.
- 2 Lieberman wanted the game industry to make a ratings system to stop young children from buying violent games. That government meeting created his rating system, but in addition to the system, it also started a moral panic about video game violence. The arcade version of Mortal Kombat came out in 1992, and the home console release in 1993 made people worry more.
- 3 Now, those early games seem simple and old-fashioned. Mortal Kombat: Legacy Kollection includes the first four games in the series. The digital visual effects, created by videoing actors and turning that video into animation, look low-quality now. As a result of this animation, the infamous "fatalities", or special killing moves, now look funny instead of scary.
- 4 The company Midway first wanted to make a game with the action star Jean-Claude Van Damme, but when that didn't work, the two creators, Ed Boon and John Tobias, decided to make a new fighting game to compete with Street Fighter II. They wanted to make a game like "the MTV version of Street Fighter," with fast action and a lot of blood. Their boss told them to get even more extreme.

- 5 The moral panic around Mortal Kombat in the early 1990s was similar to parents worrying about violent movies in the 1980s. But owing to this panic, Mortal Kombat became a huge success and it sold millions of copies.
- 6 On top of fear making it successful, Mortal Kombat also became part of the "console wars" too. Sega allowed players to use a secret code to see all the blood. Nintendo, however, removed the blood to look more family-friendly. Of course, it was the Sega version that sold more.
- 7 Since then, many games have been blamed for harming young people, such as Doom, Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty, and even Fortnite. But Lieberman's speech about Mortal Kombat is still remembered.
- 8 After this moment, the video game industry changed. Games began to focus more on teens and adults, with more action and realistic graphics. Midway's choices helped shape modern games.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Joe Lieberman talked about violence in video games in 1983. True / False
2. Mortal Kombat first came out on home consoles, not in arcades. True / False
3. Lieberman wanted a rating system to stop young children from buying violent games. True / False
4. The old Mortal Kombat games look simple and old today. True / False
5. Midway wanted to make a game with Jean-Claude Van Damme at first. True / False
6. Nintendo kept the blood in its version of Mortal Kombat. True / False
7. The worry about Mortal Kombat helped the game become very popular. True / False
8. Mortal Kombat helped change the video game industry. True / False

4 Key language

a. Read the sentences and complete the table with the expressions in bold.

1. **On top of** fear making it successful, Mortal Kombat became part of the 'console wars' too.
2. But **owing to** this panic, Mortal Kombat became a huge success, and it sold millions of copies.
3. **As a result of** this animation, the infamous 'fatalities', or special killing moves, now look funny instead of scary.
4. **In addition to** the system, it also started a moral panic about video game violence.

Reasons	Examples

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b. Complete the sentences using the expressions from the table.

1. _____ to its simple controls, the game is easy for beginners.
2. _____ of playing games, I also like watching gaming videos online.
3. _____ to my console, I play games on my phone, too.
4. _____ of playing too long, I felt tired.
5. _____ of good graphics, this game also has fun characters.
6. _____ to the long update, I had to wait before I could play.
7. _____ of the new controls, the game now runs better.
8. _____ to the main story, the game has many mini-games, too.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Video games should be for everyone, no matter how violent they are.
- There is no positive way to use video games.

6 In your own words

a. Think of something you did as a child that was considered dangerous by your parents. Write notes describing what it was, what the worry was and how it impacted you.

The activity / movie or game:

When you did it:

Why parents worried about it:

How it impacted you:

If you agree it was dangerous:

b. Work in groups. Use your notes to tell your group about the 'scare' of your childhood.

c. Discuss as a class. Are any of your experiences similar?