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From the FPS to the RPG:
Using Video Games to Encourage Reading YAL

The sound of rapid gunfire assaults my ears as I watch Jason deftly evade the mutants that are chasing him. He maneuvers around the edge of the building and picks up an assault rifle. He explains, "The weapon that I currently have does not have the range to reach the sniper in the tower. These guys are trying to invade us and take over Earth. I gotta make sure that this does not happen." Jason is immersed in a first-person shooter game, also known as an FPS. In these games, players assume the role of a character, and they experience the game through that character's eyes while utilizing ranged and melee weaponry.

Across town, Davis is deeply entrenched in a fantasy world. His avatar (a personally designed character for which the player can dictate the traits and characteristics) has the head of a lizard and the body of a man. He is roaming a fantastical land looking for a portal to another world so that he can gather more clues to complete the main quest. He is continually confronted with demons, dwarves, and various creatures that attempt to help him or thwart him in his mission. If he is successful in finding this portal, he will be that much closer to solving the main quest in the game. The game that Davis is immersed in belongs to the role-playing game genre, otherwise known as an RPG. This game in particular is a massively multiplay-er online role-playing game (MMORPG), which means that multiple people are online at any given time and can work to help, or frustrate, a player in his or her missions.

Both of the adolescents described above are good friends who spend a large portion of their time out of school invested in playing, researching, and discussing video games. The amount of time invested in their reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and presenting of video games through blogging, online chat, researching games through guides, and YouTube videos far outweighs the amount of time they spend each night on traditional schoolwork. In fact, in the classroom, they can often be found discussing the latest game and attributes of game play, often to the dismay of the classroom teacher and more often than not leading to reprimands to quiet down and focus on their schoolwork. However, the attention that they give to this pastime does not conflict with the traditional literary views discussed in many of today's English classrooms; in fact, these games can often help and enhance what is being discussed.

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Video games, a form of literacy that captures the attention of many of the youth in schools today, are not as detrimental to students' growth and reading habits as some pundits might have you think (Gee

7). In fact, video games can actually encourage students to read and write prolifically, with many gamers utilizing their knowledge of game environments to read multiple novels and even delve into writing of their own, including blogs, novels, and fan fiction (Gerber 119). In fact, the modern video game contains multiple story elements and becomes an interactive form of narrative, or rather an interactive experience (Gee 84), which is what we want literature to become for our students. Interestingly enough, video games can be used as a platform to engage students in today's classroom to develop a richer appreciation for another literary form: the young adult novel. Video games are a complete form of literacy as well, since many of the modern video games incorporate the multiple strands of literacy; reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and presenting are all engaged in when a student enters into many of today's game worlds (Gerber 123).

Just like there are multiple genres in writing, there are multiple genres of video games. Genre simply means categorization; however, categorization is different for video games than literature. In video games, genres are determined by the type of game play that is utilized by the players in the game. This is also known as interactivity; interactivity in a game is what is used to determine the game's genre (Wolf 194). Often a game will belong to a sub-genre of a larger genre, which is similar to the way that genres and sub-genres are determined within literature. Many gamers play multiple games, but have a preference for a particular genre or style of game, and just like each genre of novel draws a diverse crowd and diverse population of readers, so do video games. Gamers, like readers, are varied in their interests and reasons for investing time in a particular pastime.

Educators would be remiss to ignore the popularity and relevance that games hold in many students' lives. The game industry is a 65 billion dollar-a-year industry, which far surpasses any other form of entertainment; in fact, the majority of students in any given classroom play video games on a regular basis; according to the latest surveys, 97% of youth play video

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games (Lenhart i). But video games are not necessarily bad or detrimental to students and their reading habits. In fact, video games can be used to encourage students to explore new worlds through literature and to engage in a print-literate environment as well as their familiar and ubiquitous digital environment. The hook comes in helping students recognize how literature can be paired with their interests and affinities toward particular game genres and game experiences.

By conducting multiple case studies of gamers, speaking with active gamers, and being an avid gamer myself, I have compiled a list of video game genres and related young adult books that will interest even the most reluctant reader in your classroom. This article does not provide an in-depth discussion of each gaming genre; however, it will provide you with a basic understanding of gaming genres and some examples of games that fit into those genres. It is important to understand how video game genres and young adult books can fit together in order to foster reading habits in today's students. Just like the genres of books and films can overlap and enrich each other, so too can video games and the books that I have paired them with.

While I have classified the games into genres according to the interactivity required to play them, I have thematically paired the novels to the games based more on iconography, utilizing information on settings, characters, and plot in order to pair texts with similar games. Additionally, I have focused on the genres of games that have been found to be most popular with adolescents today: the RPG, the action-adventure, and the FPS. Other genres, such as simulation and strategy, are not included in the scope of this article. The lists provided are not exhaustive, but they should offer you a place to begin when helping your students to identify texts that they will enjoy.

The RPG

The RPG is similar to literature in many aspects. RPG simply means Role Playing Game; it is considered to be an interactive form of storytelling. There is a plot

with a compelling conflict that must be solved. In order to solve the conflict, the player must complete multiple quests. Narratives and cut scenes (mini movie-like scenes that occur during game play) help to support the plot and to create a fully immersive adventure.

When we think of students becoming invested in a piece of literature, we want to think of them as understanding and emphasizing the role of a character through their own eyes. In the RPG, the player assumes the role of a character and, through an avatar, completes quests, puzzles, and missions. Often in an RPG, the player is prompted to create his or her character's appearance, traits, strengths, and weaknesses. The character's identity and abilities are then merged with the player's identity and morals to form what Gee terms the "projective identity" (55). The projective identity becomes the identity that conducts quests and succeeds or fails based upon choices and actions. However, in an RPG, game the character is constantly evolving due to decisions and experiences. A player in an RPG game collects experience points and utilizes these points to modify or change the character during game play.

RPGs can be played in first- or third-person vantage points; this means that the player can play through the eyes of the character, or they can play through the eyes of an omniscient narrator. This choice slightly changes what they see on the screen during game play. RPGs can be played solo or online with others; this is called an MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game); the popular game *World of Warcraft* is a MMORPG. In these massively multiplayer games, social interaction and collaboration become important to success. However, in standard RPGs, collaboration with other players is generally nonexistent unless the player is in a co-op mode (co-operative mode where two players work together to complete a quest or mission).

The setting of most RPGs is fantastical, or set in a fantasy world. Dragons, elves, mages, and magic are common characters. Many are medieval and based on folklore. This genre pairs well with the young adult genre of fantasy. Some popular video game titles are the *Fable* series and the increasingly popular *World of Warcraft.* Table 1 pairs popular RPG titles with popular young adult fiction.

The Action-Adventure

Action-adventure games can be mistaken for RPGs by the novice due to similarity in game play; however, they are different than RPGs. Action-adventure means exactly what the title suggests: the elements of action games combined with the elements of adventure. It is a very diverse and broad genre, which is in part what might lead to initial confusion.

Again, like with the RPG, there is a plot with a compelling conflict that must be solved, but generally in an action-adventure game, the player does not have the ability to modify the character, although sometimes points are awarded and the player can make slight modifications or purchase needed items. The player must move through multiple locations, worlds, and places and solve several challenging puzzles in order to get through the game. Additionally, those puzzles are generally very logic oriented and require completing many steps in order to achieve the objective.

Action-adventure games take place in multiple settings and occur across many different time periods in history; however, some of the more popular ones today take place in the present as the protagonist, or the game player's character/avatar, attempts to escape from an unpleasant situation, such as running from a gang of thieves, finding treasure, or eradicating an evil group. Novels that provide a similar feel of action-adventure fall in the category of mystery or science fiction. Table 2 provides a list of popular action-adventure video games and pairs them with popular young adult literature titles.

The FPS

Also known as the first-person shooter, this genre of video game is exactly what it sounds like, players assume the role of first person and go on missions

Table 1. RPG titles paired with YA literature

RPG Title	YAL Title
Fable 1 & 2	*The Hunter's Moon* by O. R. Melling
World of Warcraft	*The Eye of the World* by Robert Jordan
Elder-Scrolls Oblivion	*Elf Realm* by Daniel Kirk
Final Fantasy series	*Manga* (various authors)

Table 2. Action-Adventure titles paired with YA literature

Action-Adventure Title	YAL Title
Kingdom Hearts 1 & 2	*Manga* (various authors)
Baldur's Gate	*The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan
Lara Croft series	*Steel Trap: The Challenge*
Assassin's Creed	*The Way of Shadows* by Brent Weeks

involving a ranged or melee weapon; the world in the game is seen from the perspective of their avatar, which makes it first-person. Many times, FPSs are played with multiple players via a broadband connection or on linked systems via a LAN (local area network), but they can also be played solo against the AI (artificial intelligence of the computer).

The tactics in FPSs are slightly different than in the other two mentioned genres. Players often must rely on stealth tactics in order to beat the game. (Stealth tactics means sneaking up on other characters in order to catch them off guard.) However, these games are still very action-oriented like the above genres. The FPS is deemed one of the more violent games due to the weaponry and war themes, and as a result, substantial negative press on FPSs influences how mainstream society views the gamer culture (Gee 10).

Again, like the RPG and the action-adventure, there is generally a plot with a protagonist or main character (the player's avatar) who must complete missions, quests, and puzzles in order to complete the game. Many popular shooters are centered around war and/or saving the world from organized crime. Novels that provide a similar feel deal with war and crime, science fiction, or an anti-utopian future (see Table 3).

Table 3. FPS titles paired with YA literature

FPS Titles	YAL Title
Halo series	*Feed* by M. T. Anderson
Bioshock	*Gone* by Michael Grant
Resistance Fall of Man series	*Everlost* by Neal Shusterman
Call of Duty series	*Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers

So What Now?

Given the prevalence of gamer culture and students who identify as avid gamers, it is of utmost importance to understand and utilize these students' interests in order to encourage and enhance their literary lives through literature. The answer is not cut and dried; one cannot simply assign books to students because they enjoy a particular gaming genre. However, it is a place to start and may provide a way to introduce your students to an author or particular literary work so that they might begin to understand how to select their own literature. It could even serve as a starting point for having students critically analyze and understand topics that are discussed in class: characterization, plot, conflict, etc.

Try having your students complete a beginning-of-the-year interest survey. This interest survey, however, will focus on aspects of game play rather than on reading and writing skills. Simple questions that ask students what genre of video games they enjoy, how often they play these games, and some of the titles that they play would offer terrific insight into their preferences. Figure 1 provides an example of

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Check each genre of video game that you play and indicate how many hours you play that genre each week.

	Genre	Hours played per week
____	RPG	_____
____	FPS	_____
____	Action-Adventure	_____
____	Simulation	_____
____	Strategy	_____
____	Action	_____
____	Music	_____

List titles recently played:
_____
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Figure 1. Video Game Survey

such a survey. By getting students to understand that the games they play are indeed valid forms of literacy, and by helping them to understand connections among the various forms of literacy, we help our students become immersed in a lifelong habit of reading and enjoying a variety of literature and literary habits.

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