

When Are Video Games a Waste of Time?

All things are a waste when they aren't used properly. But all things have a time and place when they are the thing for someone to do.

Video games were a big part of my childhood. Even though I sometimes wonder why I spent so many hundreds of hours playing them when I was younger, I still look back on many of the game titles fondly. I have some good memories and great feelings attached to games from *Krash Bandicoot* to *Harry Potter*.

The clear wastes of time were times in which I failed to better myself, push myself, forge new friendships, create wealth, or get out of my comfort zone because of the crutch of video games. So many people use them this way. And with video games becoming more and more lifelike, the risk of falling into an unfulfilling but easy virtual existence becomes greater for many people. That's why the question of our relationship to video games matters so much.

Video games like the ones I played were at their best when they didn't substitute themselves for real adventure. They called me to it. And they did that by using all the best art, music, storytelling, and characterization to show us what the world outside could be like. Even when I was shy, unformed, and unskilled, the games fueled my imagination and my desire for something more.

All those hours I spent playing Pokemon weren't a waste. Those wonderful games showed millions of kids the thrills of adventure through their gameplay characters and journeys. *Medal of Honor* showed me the adventure of facing down evil. *Lord of the Rings* excited in me a desire for the mystery and beauty of the world.

Hours playing games like these weren't necessarily wasted, then. But I do know if I spent the same hours today, they would be a loss. I have learned the lessons these stories (acted out through games) have to teach. I live in a world where I can go anywhere, on my own, with near-complete freedom. I have every opportunity to save the world and make it better. It's only up to me to take those opportunities.

These games are just the guides that bring you to the beginning of your journeys in the non-digital world. The sooner you can step out unaided, the better. But until then, they can be powerful steps toward adventure.

From time to time you may bring myself back to the gaming world. Sometimes it's appropriate to remind yourself of what you're aiming for. You might replay a game for the same reason you re-read an influential story. Or you might share a game with someone else, or for old time's sake. But I must never forget that most of the real substance I was

seeking in games as a young boy are available to me now in reality as a young man.