

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional comprehension activity based on the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (computers).

Read the article

Girls' games

by Nik Peachey

Computer games have been criticised for quite some time over a whole range of issues. Some people say they are overly violent and encourage violent behaviour particularly in children. Others say that they make children hyperactive, unsociable and are bad for their eyes. Some have even attributed falling standards of literacy and a lack of interest in reading on them. Now, however, it seems that computer games have also become a feminist issue.

Game manufacturers have, for some time, been looking to increase the number of female game players. The vast majority of computer games still sell to a mainly male market. Perhaps this is because the violent nature of many of the games appeals more to males or perhaps because many of the main characters in the games are male. Manufacturers' attempts to produce more female characters and so increase their share of the female gaming market have met with serious criticism from many women's groups.

Whilst heroines such as Lara Croft of the Tomb Raider game are seen as providing positive role models of strong women, many believe that the character's unrealistic Barbie like proportions are subconsciously setting unattainable standards in the minds of young women. Perhaps a stronger criticism is that although many games now include female characters, their role is often secondary and they support the main, male, action characters within the games. Of course the nature of many of the games remains violent and destructive and this in itself could well continue to put off female gamers.

There are now, however, a number of web sites springing up on the World Wide Web to help women deal with this issue. Sites such as Game

Girlz, Women Gamers and Game Gal offer game reviews, articles, discussion forums and even employment opportunities for women interested in becoming part of the rapidly expanding games industry. The games are reviewed by women from a very female perspective. Some rate the games from one to ten across a range of criteria which include the appearance of the female characters, the degree of intelligence attributed to them in the game and even the marketing attitude adopted by the company. The sites are obviously looking for games that move away from the very male dominated and violent nature of the majority of computer games. Many of them review games that are more constructive and developmental. Although the common fantasy themes of knights, witches and goblins still exist within these games, the aims are often very different. Instead of destroying opposing armies the aim of the game can be to make peace with them.



With this increased degree of awareness and involvement from women in the games industry many positive changes could be made that could encourage more women and young girls to

become enthusiastic about technology and what it has to offer them. Perhaps we may even find more male gamers moving away from the traditional violent and destructive games towards

the more positive values promoted by these more feminine role models, after all Tomb Raider is still one of the most popular computer games on the market, but perhaps that's too much to ask.

After reading

Exercise 1

Each of the sentences below summarises one of the paragraphs from the text. Can you put them in the correct order?

1. Criticisms of the way women are portrayed in computer games.
2. Attempts by manufacturers to encourage more women to buy computer games.
3. Ways in which women are influencing change in the production of computer games.
4. Common criticisms of computer games.
5. The possible outcomes of a more feminine approach to game design.

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More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of computers refugees at: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-computers.htm>

- **UK Culture: The gaming issue**, in which we take a look at the role of the UK in the computer gaming industry and the design and technological developments the UK is responsible for.
- **Magazine articles:** There are 3 other articles: **Information society**, **Technophobia** and **Viral marketing**.
- **Word game: Internet abbreviations.** Type in the missing information to see what different abbreviations mean.
- **Poems:** There are 2 poems: **Eye Halve a Spelling Chequer** and **The Good Old Days**.
- **Trivia:** The following trivia topics are available for this theme: **computer games**, **information society** and **technophobia**.
- **Science:** cubed - **Balance-controlled computer**, **Cubic computer**, **Fast fingerprinting**, **Intelligent interiors**, **Movie makers** and **Virtual London**.
- There are also 3 computer-related cartoons, and the following sets of carefully selected external links: **computer games**, **information society**, **search engines** and **technophobia**.

Answers to comprehension activity: *The correct order is 4; 2; 1; 3; 5*