



Are Video Games Bad for You?

Most people agree that gaming affects teens—the question is how

by Laura Anastasia

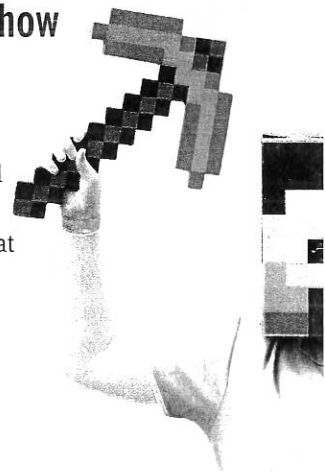
You've gathered wood, built a shelter, and armed yourself against the spiders, zombies, and skeletons that attack at night. But could all that time spent protecting yourself on *Minecraft* actually hurt you in real life?

More than 90 percent of American kids play video games an average of two hours a day. In recent years, psychologists have linked gaming to everything from increased

aggression to shortened attention spans.

Other researchers, however, have found that playing video games can have some positive effects. Some psychologists say that gaming helps teens learn, become more understanding of other people's feelings, and improve their overall outlook on life.

Do America's teens need to start powering off? *JS* spoke with experts on both sides of the issue.



YES Games Are Harmful

Playing certain video games makes teens more likely to drive dangerously, smoke cigarettes, and engage in other risky behaviors, according to a recent study by Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

Other research has linked violent video games with increased hostility and aggression.

"If you're playing a lot of violent video games, you're practicing being [aware of your] enemies," says Douglas Gentile, a psychologist at Iowa State University. "When you get bumped in the hallway, you stop assuming it was an accident."

Gamers tend to respond with aggression because certain video games, such as *Grand Theft Auto*, reward retaliation, he says.

Even nonviolent games can be harmful, critics say. About 6 percent of gamers are addicted, doing poorly in school and becoming withdrawn as a result, says psychologist David Greenfield of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction in Connecticut.

Video games can also make it difficult to stay focused at school.

"The more time kids spend playing video games," Gentile says, "the worse their attention problems seem to get."

Video games use features like flickering lights to catch your attention. That means it takes more of an effort to maintain your concentration when you're not playing, Gentile adds.

Many gamers, including Jack Perez, a sixth-grader from Pennsylvania, admit that it can be hard to cut back on playing video games.

"You can't just stop," he says.

Plus, the time teens spend playing video games is time not spent being active, experts point out.

"If you spend 8, 9, 10 hours a day gaming," Greenfield says, "the only thing you're moving is your finger."

NO Games Are Good

Teens who play up to an hour of video games a day are actually better off than teens who don't play at all, according to a recent study by Andrew K. Przybylski of the University of Oxford in England.

Przybylski found that gamers have fewer emotional problems and are less hyperactive than non-gamers. Kids who play video games for up to an hour a day also tend to be more social than those who don't play at all, he says.

Video games can also reinforce computer literacy, math and English skills, and knowledge of history, says Kurt Squire, co-director of the Games Learning Society in Wisconsin. More than 2,500 schools worldwide use *Minecraft* to build math skills and to teach history, biology, architecture, engineering, and other subjects.

Studies have shown that games in which players help other characters boost kids' empathy and cooperative behavior.

Gaming can also improve reaction times and hand-eye coordination, which can help prepare teens for future careers. One study found that surgeons who played certain video games finished surgeries faster and made fewer errors than their non-gaming counterparts.

Playing video games—even violent ones—is also a great way for teens to wind down, says Chris Ferguson, a psychologist at Stetson University in Florida who has studied gaming's therapeutic effects.

"It seems to be an activity that soothes people and can reduce their stress," Ferguson tells *JS*. "They have a bad day, they play, they feel better afterward."

Plus, most kids are mature enough to play responsibly, says Phoebe Block, an eighth-grader from New York City. She plays video games for about two hours a day.

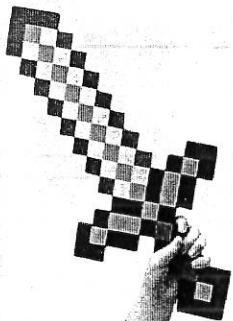
"It doesn't distract me," she says. "I still do all my work."



\$20.5 billion

Total amount Americans spent on video games in 2013

SOURCE: *Forbes*



ERIK THAM/DEMOTIX/CORBIS (TEEN PLAYING GAME); ART WIDAK/DEMOTIX/CORBIS (MINECRAFT)

DEBATE



DID YOU KNOW?
In 1923, a 14-year-old girl in Reedy, West Virginia, was arrested for wearing pants. She had violated a local law that banned women from wearing "anything that impersonates male attire."

Should Schools Ban Short-Shorts & Leggings?

Leggings almost didn't make it onto Ally Beljan's back-to-school list. The teen from Evanston, Illinois, thought she and her classmates would have to shelve the popular pants for good last spring when Haven Middle School banned them. Administrators said leggings were inappropriate for class.

The kids protested, collecting more than 500 signatures on a petition. Their story made national news—and eventually won the students the right to wear leggings to class.

Other schools, however, aren't backing down. Some have bans on shorts that don't extend past students' fingertips when their arms hang by their sides. A high school in Utah even Photoshopped sleeves and higher necklines in girls' yearbook photos.

With a new school year under way, teachers and students are weighing in on school fashion rules.

Dress for Success

Save short-shorts for the weekend, says Stefanie Urban, a seventh-grader in Altamonte Springs, Florida. She and other dress code supporters say tight or revealing clothing puts too much focus on fashion. "You're supposed to be learning at school, not trying to impress other people," she tells *JS*. "Short-shorts are fine for the mall or when you're out with your friends, but not at school."

Certain clothing can be distracting for students, teachers say. Boys may spend more time looking at girls in class and less time focusing on their schoolwork. The controversial fashions can affect girls' focus too, says Erica Coonelly, a middle school librarian in Lindenwold, New Jersey.

"It creates a sense of animosity," she tells *JS*. "The girls who don't wear the short-shorts are talking about the girls who do."

Dress code restrictions are helpful because they make clear to everyone what is and isn't appropriate in class, supporters say. That way, students, teachers, and administrators are all on the same page about the rules.

Coonelly says schools need to prepare students for life after graduation, so teens don't show up for job interviews in skin-tight pants or barely there shorts. Restrictions on leggings and short-shorts at school help kids learn what is appropriate in certain settings, Coonelly says.

"Anywhere students go in the workforce, there are going to be dress codes," she tells *JS*. "It's important to help them transition for what their careers [are] going to be like."

Cool for School

Teens should be able to wear outfits that show off their personalities, says Fernando Ferrer, one of Ally's classmates. "Clothes let people

express themselves," he says.

Plus, some students say, it's not the place of schools to decide what kids can wear. "It's parents who should talk to their kid about it and set boundaries," says Lauren Samuel, a high school sophomore in New Hyde Park, New York.

It's also not fair to ban certain clothes just because they might distract boys or make them uncomfortable, some people say. Those restrictions send the message that girls should be ashamed of their bodies, says Courtney Carp, a teacher in Acton, Massachusetts.

"We talk so much about wanting kids to be healthy and strong, but when girls wear that stuff to show that they are, people get upset," she says.

Other people say dress codes aren't always enforced uniformly, since clothes can look different on different people. That was part of students' frustration over the leggings ban at Ally's school. "I have friends who are super-skinny and they could always wear leggings," Ally says. "I had other friends who are more developed, and they would get [in trouble] every single day for wearing leggings."

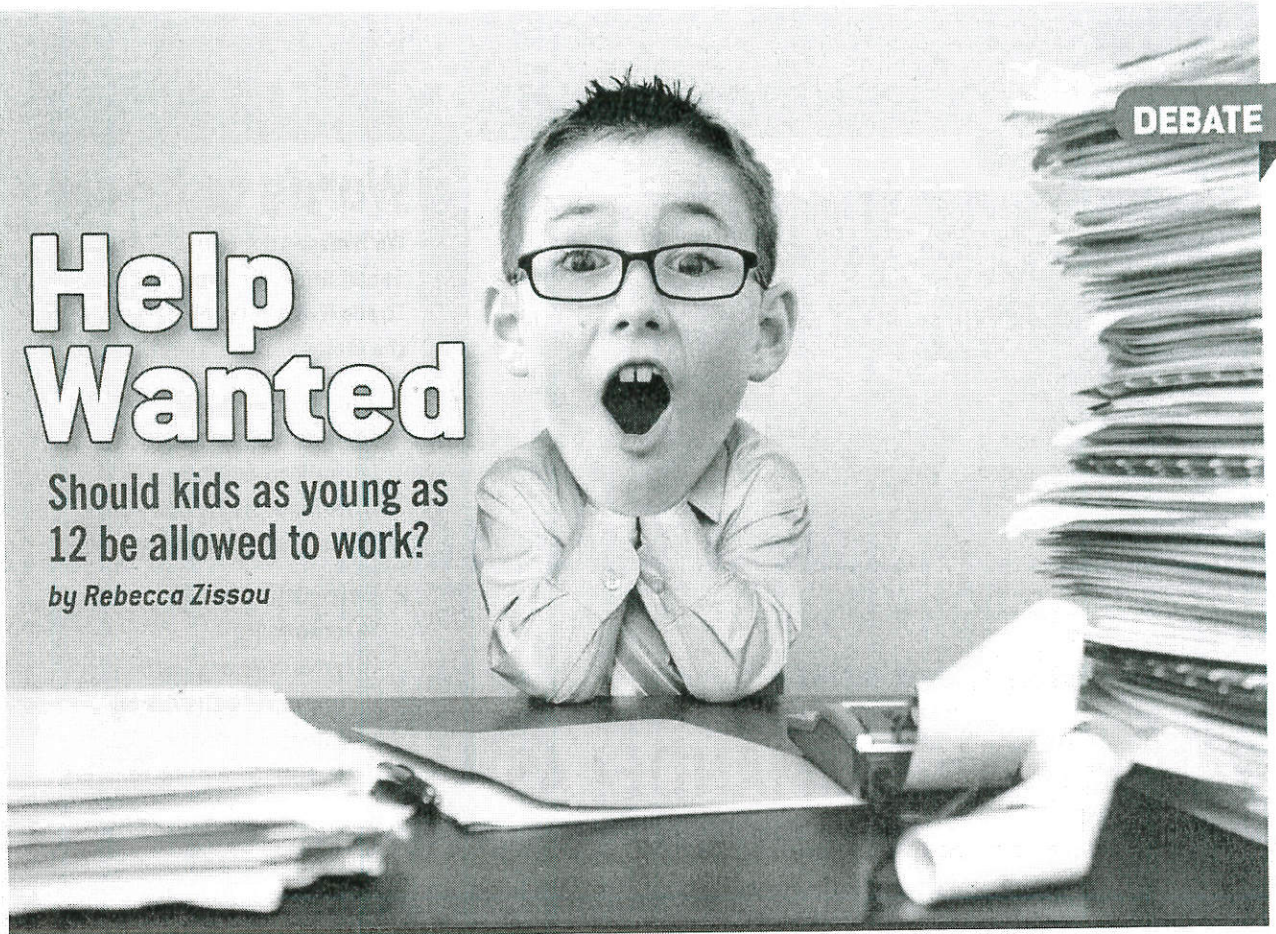
Carter Hayes, a high school senior in Deltona, Florida, doesn't think banning clothing like short-shorts will affect boys' focus. "Boys will always be distracted by girls no matter what they're wearing," he tells *JS*. —Laura Anastasia



Help Wanted

Should kids as young as 12 be allowed to work?

by Rebecca Zissou



YES Are you longing for an iPhone or the PlayStation 4, but your parents won't buy it for you? If Maine Governor Paul LePage has his way, kids could earn paychecks so they can buy things for themselves. He recently said that he would like to lower the state's legal working age to 12. In the U.S., kids under 14 are barred from working most non-agricultural jobs other than delivering newspapers, acting, or babysitting. The governor's comments have stirred a national debate.

LePage says that allowing younger kids to have jobs would instill a strong work ethic and help them learn valuable life lessons, such as time management.

Having a job teaches kids to be responsible.

It would also teach kids to be responsible and allow them to gain work experience.

"I'm all for not allowing a 12-year-old to work 40 hours," he told Maine's *Down East* magazine.

"But a 12-year-old working 8 to 10 hours a week . . . is not bad."

LePage attributes his success as an adult to his part-time jobs shoveling snow and mowing lawns as a kid.

"I went to work at 11 years old," he recalled at a town hall meeting. "I became governor. It's not a big deal. Work doesn't hurt anybody."

NO The reason child labor laws were passed in the first place was to protect kids, says Matt Schlobohm of the Maine AFL-CIO, a federation of labor unions. During the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s, kids often worked long hours under brutal conditions in coal mines, factories, and mills.

"Lowering the legal working age is a step backward," Schlobohm tells JS. "It could hurt kids' chances for success [in school] and it creates workplace safety issues. . . . Also, having more 12-year-olds in the workforce drives down wages and employment opportunities for adults."

Eliza Townsend of the Maine Women's Lobby says that students need to make education, not employment, their top priority.

"A strong education is a key tool in moving families out of poverty," she says. "When children are working instead of focusing on school, they will fall behind, which harms those students and, in the long run, the entire economy."

Others point out that many kids' schedules are already jam-packed with sports, music lessons, and other extracurricular activities. They say kids need time to just be kids. There'll be plenty of time for them to work when they get older.

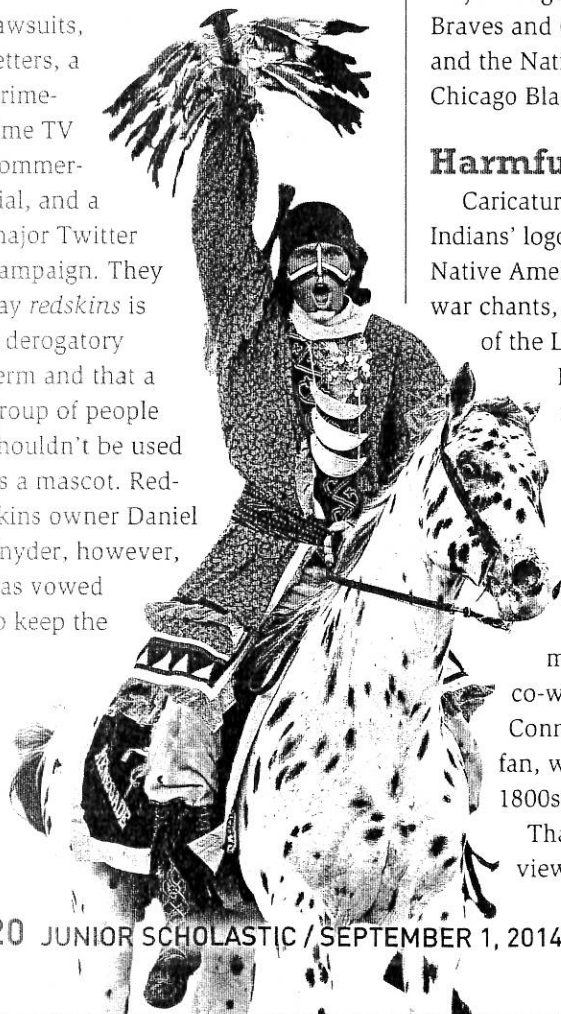
School should be kids' No. 1 priority.



Are Native American MASCOTS RACIST?

The Washington Redskins face tough competitors on the gridiron, but lately some of their fiercest opponents have been off the field. Native American groups, lawmakers, and some football fans are pressuring the National Football League (NFL) team to change its name and mascot.

The team's critics have targeted the Redskins with lawsuits, letters, a prime-time TV commercial, and a major Twitter campaign. They say *redskins* is a derogatory term and that a group of people shouldn't be used as a mascot. Redskins owner Daniel Snyder, however, has vowed to keep the



team's mascot of 81 years, saying it honors Native Americans.

The controversy is the latest in a decades-long debate over the use of American Indian mascots. In the 1960s, about 3,000 U.S. schools and professional sports teams had Native American mascots. Today, about 900 teams do—including the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, Major League Baseball's Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians, and the National Hockey League's Chicago Blackhawks.

Harmful Stereotypes?

Caricatures like the Cleveland Indians' logo of Chief Wahoo reduce Native Americans to cartoons and war chants, says Cynthia Connolly of the Little Traverse Bay

Bands of Odawa Indians in Michigan.

"Every time the Atlanta Braves do their tomahawk chop, we are not real people. We are no longer successful businessmen, doctors, soldiers, co-workers, or neighbors," Connolly tells *JS*. "To the fan, we exist only in the 1800s as a warrior culture."

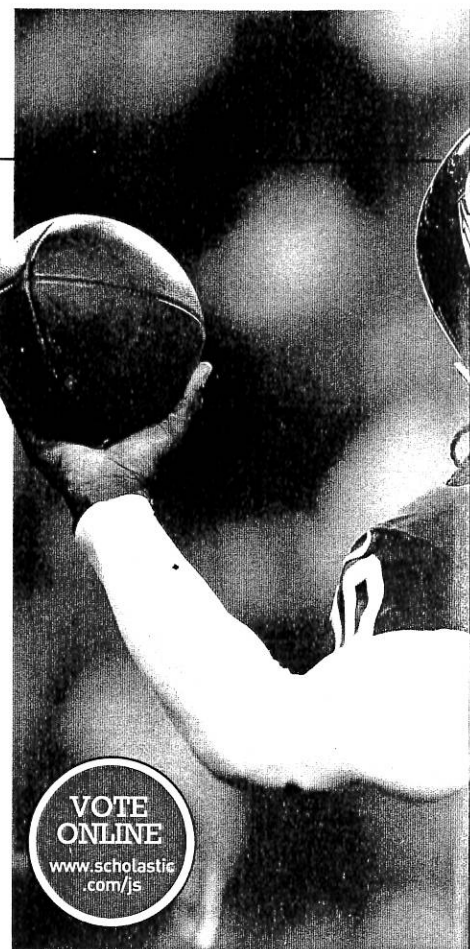
That stereotypical view makes it harder

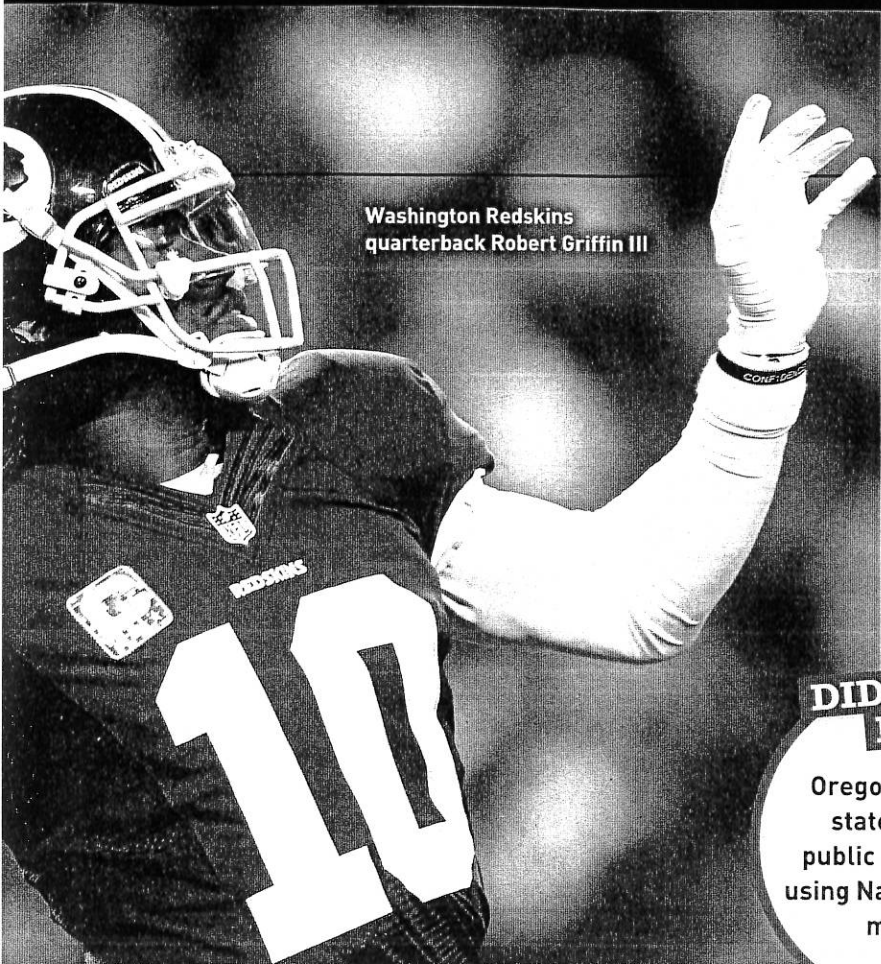
for American Indians to get the help they need, says Suzan Harjo of the Morningstar Institute, a Native American rights group in Oklahoma. The country's more than 2 million American Indians face high rates of poverty, unemployment, and health problems.

"[Depicting us as characters is] toxic for Native Americans," Harjo tells *JS*. "People will think that it's OK for us to have substandard health care and . . . housing because the mascots make them think we're not quite human."

Harjo says slurs for other races are taboo, and the term *redskins* should be too. "We should listen to the oppressed about what is oppressive," she says. Harjo thinks that it's not up to non-Native Americans to say what is appropriate. "The oppressor does not get to decide," she says.

The symbols may also affect





Washington Redskins
quarterback Robert Griffin III

person, says the school and tribe work together to make sure the school's symbols are accurate and respectful.

Before every home football game, a student dressed as the famous Seminole leader Chief Osceola—the school's mascot—gallops across the field on a horse (*far left*). The tribe also participates in graduation ceremonies and other school events to share its traditions with students, parents, and sports fans.

DID YOU KNOW?

Oregon is the only state that bans public schools from using Native American mascots.

"We Seminoles embrace the mascot," says James Billie, the tribe's chairman. "They honor us."

The Seminole tribe also benefits directly from being affiliated with FSU. The

school has a scholarship program that pays for Seminole students to attend the university.

Frank Cloutier of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe of Michigan says mascots raise awareness about Native American culture and history. "If you have an image of a warrior or a chief, you can talk about the character—the bravery, the resilience, the respect, the honesty," he tells *JS*.

"If we take a zero tolerance [policy] on mascots, we walk away from the opportunity to teach and the opportunity to learn," Cloutier says. "If we do it appropriately, the sky's the limit when it comes to the knowledge that can be shared."

—Laura Anastasia

how young Native Americans view themselves. University of Southern California professor Daphna Oyserman has studied the effect of mascots on Native American teens. After seeing American Indian mascots, the students reported having lower self-esteem. They were also less likely to predict that they would get good grades, graduate, and find a job.

"American Indian mascots are harmful," the researcher's concluded. "They remind American Indians of the limited ways others see them."

Emily Greenberg, 17, who recently graduated from Coopers-town High School in New York, agrees. Last year, she convinced the school board to change their mascot from the Redskins to the Hawkeyes. Emily hopes the Washington Redskins and other teams follow suit. "It's time to change," she tells *JS*.

A Proud Tribute?

Redskins owner Snyder says the team's first roster in 1933 included four Native American players, and that the name is a proud reminder of its roots and a tribute to American Indians.

"Our team name captures the best of who we are and who we can be by staying true to our history and honoring the deep and enduring values our name represents," Snyder said in a letter on the NFL's website earlier this year.

Some Native Americans welcome the mascots. The Seminole tribe of Florida, for example, has long supported Florida State University's (FSU) use of the Seminoles as a team name.

Liz Maryanski, an FSU spokes-



Underline three facts and three opinions in this debate.