

MINECRAFT

Goes to School

Why is the hit video game being played in so many classrooms?

Eleven-year-old Kate Teagarden studied the screen on her laptop. She had just finished using blocks of glass to build a greenhouse on Mars. But to grow crops, Kate needed water, so she grabbed a pickaxe to mine for ice.

If you're a gamer, you've probably figured out that Kate was playing the popular video game *Minecraft*. But you might be surprised to learn that she wasn't playing at home—she was in school. Her fifth-grade class at the Fay School in Houston, Texas, was using *Minecraft* as part of a science lesson on Mars.

"It was a lot more fun than just watching a video or reading a textbook," Kate says.

Minecraft isn't like most video games. The goal of the game isn't to rack up points or finish a quest. Instead, it's mainly about creating your own digital world. Players collect materials like

WORDS to Know

replicas (REP-uh-kuhs) plural noun. exact copies of something, often made on a smaller scale

engaged (en-GAYJD) adjective. greatly interested in or busy with something



Fifth-graders at a school in Palatine, Illinois, create *Minecraft* worlds in class.

stone, wood, and clay and use them to construct buildings and other objects. (*Learn more about the game in "Minecraft Basics."*)

The game has more than 100 million players worldwide—and a growing number of them are playing in classrooms. About 6,500 schools in more than 40 countries are using the game to teach everything from science and history to teamwork.

Perimeter to Planets

Minecraft was introduced in 2009 and quickly became a hit. The ability to build anything you imagine appealed to gamers of all ages. Soon, teachers started

finding ways to use *Minecraft* in their lessons. In 2011, a version called *MinecraftEdu* was developed just for schools.

Teachers who use *Minecraft* say that it helps students learn important skills. For example, kids often work on *Minecraft* projects in groups, so they practice teamwork. They encounter challenges as they play—like Kate needing water to grow crops on Mars—so they build problem-solving skills. Teachers also say that the game gets students excited to learn.

"One of the most common responses I hear kids say is 'This is fun!'" says Joel Solomon, a teacher at Village East. "Shouldn't that be what learning is all about?"

Too Much Screen Time?

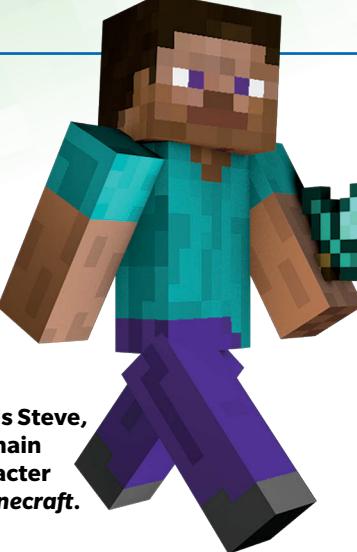
Not everyone is convinced that playing *Minecraft* in school deserves an A, however. Some critics argue that kids already spend too much time playing video games, so schools shouldn't require even more screen time.

Dr. Victoria Dunckley is one critic. She's a psychiatrist, or mental health doctor, who treats kids in Los Angeles, California. Dunckley believes that some kids are addicted to the game.

—by Karen Kellaher



This *Minecraft* world was created to help teach students about ancient cultures.



Minecraft Basics

To learn about *Minecraft*, we went straight to an expert: a kid! Here's a quick guide to the popular game from 12-year-old Jack Kellaher from New Jersey. He's the son of the reporter who wrote the article.



Jack Kellaher

Minecraft is like a virtual LEGO® set with an endless number of building blocks. The game lets you use your imagination to create just about anything you want. Two of the coolest things I've built are a roller coaster and a cruise ship.

All players start out as a character named Steve. But many players change Steve to a character who better represents them. I made mine look like a shark!

One exciting part of *Minecraft* is all the creatures you encounter. They're called mobs. They include villagers and animals like chickens, pigs, and even squid. Some mobs are hostile. Creepers are the ones you really have to watch out for. They explode when they get close to you!

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