

Level Up History: Exploring Technological Change Through Video Games

Grade Level: 7

Subject: Social Studies, History, Technology

Lesson Introduction (10 minutes)

Let's talk games! What are some of your favorite video games? What makes them fun? Think about the oldest game you know and the newest game you've played. What are the biggest differences you notice in how they look, sound, and play? Today, we're going to use video games as a way to understand how technology changes over time and how those changes affect society, just like inventions did in the past.

Activity 1: The Video Game Tech Timeline (25 minutes)

Using internet resources (like Wikipedia pages on 'History of video games', 'Video game consoles', specific console generations, or YouTube documentaries), let's create a timeline. We want to map out major developments:

- Early games (like Pong, Space Invaders)
- The rise of home consoles (Atari, NES)
- The 'console wars' (Sega vs. Nintendo)
- Introduction of 3D graphics (N64, PlayStation)
- The move to optical media (CDs, DVDs)
- The rise of online gaming and the internet
- Modern consoles and PC gaming (HD graphics, VR, mobile gaming)

As you add points to the timeline, briefly note what the *technology* allowed (e.g., 'NES allowed more complex games with scrolling screens', 'PlayStation used CDs for more storage, allowing video clips'). You can draw this on poster board or create a digital document.

Activity 2: History in the Game (20 minutes)

Many games are set in historical periods (like Assassin's Creed, Age of Empires, Call of Duty, Red Dead Redemption). Choose one game you know (or we can look one up) that has a historical setting.

Discuss:

- What historical period or event does it try to show?
- Based on what you know, how accurate does it seem? (Think about clothes, buildings, technology, events)
- Why might game developers choose to change historical details? (Gameplay, story, making it more 'fun')
- Does playing a game like this make you more interested in learning about the actual history? Why or why not?

This helps us think critically about how history is presented in media.

Activity 3: Tech Impact - Then and Now (15 minutes)

Think about how video games and the technology behind them (powerful computers, the internet, online communities) have impacted society. How have they changed:

- Entertainment?
- Communication (online gaming, streaming)?
- Jobs (game developers, streamers)?
- Technology in general?

Now, let's compare this to a major technological shift from the past, like the invention of the printing press or the development of the railroad or the invention of television. How did *that* technology change society in similar areas (entertainment, communication, jobs, technology)? What are the similarities and differences in their impact?

Lesson Wrap-up & Assessment (10 minutes)

Quick recap: We saw how game technology evolved rapidly, reflecting broader tech changes. We also discussed how games represent history and how technology impacts society.

Assessment: Write a short paragraph or explain verbally: Choose one major technological leap in video games (e.g., the move from 2D to 3D graphics, or the introduction of online multiplayer). How did this change how people played or experienced games? How does this compare to the impact of an earlier historical invention (like the radio or telephone) on people's lives?