

# IS GAMING GOOD FOR YOU?

Video games like *Animal Crossing* and *Among Us* have helped millions of Americans through a challenging year. Is this changing the way adults think about gaming—for good? BY TOD OLSON

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic was hard for Anna Blackburn. Anna is 13. She lives in Vermont. Last spring, her middle school shut down. So did her **social** life. There were no sleepovers. There was no soccer. “I was pretty lonely,” Anna says.

Then a friend told her about a video game. It’s called *Among Us*. Anna started



playing it. She would play online with other people. She liked cruising the spaceship. She liked looking for aliens. But most of all, she loved hanging out with her friends. They weren’t in the same room. But that didn’t matter.

“It wasn’t just about playing the game,” she says. “It was a chance to talk about our lives.”

## VOCABULARY

**social:** involving activities in which people talk and do things together

**addiction:** a strong and harmful need to regularly do something

**isolated:** separated from others

**creative:** able to make new things or think of new ideas

**substitute:** something that takes the place of something else



**PAUSE AND THINK:** What did Anna love most about playing *Among Us*?

## Rethinking Screen Time?

Other people felt the same way as Anna. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Americans have spent more time playing video games than ever before. The number of people playing *NBA 2K20* nearly doubled over the past year. *Call of Duty: Warzone* went from having

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VIDEO

GO TO  
WEB VIEW



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“It wasn’t just about playing the game. It was a chance to talk about our lives.”

— ANNA, 13



30 million to 75 million players. And one weekend last September, *Among Us* had nearly 4 million people playing at once.

Is that much gaming bad for us? Parents often worry about their kids and gaming. They think kids will get hooked. They think kids will lose interest in sports, school, and friends. But for kids like Anna, gaming wasn’t an **addiction**. It helped them feel less **isolated**.

Now, some parents think differently about gaming. “They’re seeing how rich it is, how social it is,” says Jordan Shapiro. He’s an expert who studies screen time.



*Super Mario Bros.* or *NBA Jam*. But it was just them and the computer.

Then about 20 years ago, video games started to move online. That changed everything. When you play online, you’re hanging out with people. You’re learning how to get along.

*Among Us* has you figure out who’s telling the truth. *Fortnite* makes you work with others to do something. Some experts say gamers may have better social skills than people who don’t play.

**PAUSE AND THINK:** How has playing games online changed gaming?

**PAUSE AND THINK:** What effect has Covid-19 had on screen time?



## Hanging Out Online

Gaming has changed a lot since your parents were kids. Maybe they played

## Learning Skills

There may be other benefits to gaming. Think about *Minecraft*. It lets you design and build things. Games like that can make you more **creative**. Other games can make your

## TIMELINE: THE HISTORY OF GAMING



**1970s**

### THE AGE OF ARCADES

In the early 1970s, gamers had to go to a place called an arcade. There, you could use coins to play games like pinball or *Pong*.



**1977**

### VIDEO GAMES COME HOME

The first popular way to play video games at home was with the Atari 2600. This gaming console cost \$200—that’s almost \$900 today!



**1990s**

### GAMING GOES ONLINE

In 1999, *Everquest* became the first popular game you could play online with friends. This led to other online role-playing games, like *World of Warcraft*.

memory better.

Gaming may also help you get ready for a future career. You practice teamwork. You learn to accept failure. And you do it all online.

“Screen time is part of how we all live our lives now,” Shapiro says. “Who’s going to do better in a world of Zoom than a kid who grew up playing *Fortnite*?”



## Switching It Up

Of course, you can game too much. Shapiro says to notice how you feel. “No one feels good after staring at a screen for four hours,” he says.

When you feel bad, experts say, do something else. Go out. See friends in person. But only if you can do it safely. Until then, *Among Us* might be a good **substitute**.



**PAUSE AND THINK:** In what ways does gaming get you ready for a career?



**PAUSE AND THINK:** How can you tell if you’ve been gaming too much?

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# 5 Questions About Video Games



**WHAT TO DO:** Answer the questions below. Use full sentences.



1. Who is Anna Blackburn?

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2. Why do some parents think video games are bad for kids?

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3. When did video games move online?

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4. How might playing video games be good for you?

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5. What should you do if you think you’ve been gaming too much?

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Answers are in the Answer Key at Action Digital.