

GAME CONNOISSEUR

MINECRAFT: A BUILDING BLOCK FOR THE FUTURE

---DR. ANTHONY BETRUS
THE GAME CONNOISSEUR

Minecraft is on a fast-track to being the single best selling video game of all time. With 54 million sold and counting, it trails only behind Tetris, Wii Sports, and the Oregon Trail, a staggering fact given that it has only been around since 2009. Much like the Oregon Trail, which was the common shared educational game experience for my generation, part of its success is that Minecraft doubles as both an entertainment and educational game. Also contributing to its success is that it is available on virtually every major platform, including Windows, Macintosh, iOS, Android, and almost every console system (with the notable exception of Nintendo). Given its popularity, it should not have come as a major surprise that on November 6, 2014 Microsoft completed a deal to purchase Minecraft maker Mojang for 2.5 billion (with a b). One can assume that this will only further its development.

I have been aware of the game for quite some time, and have watched it being played, watched some YouTube videos, and even picked up the demo at one point, although it never really "stuck." I just returned from an international Educational Technology conference, and Minecraft was a top trending topic. There is growing community of educators using Minecraft in the classroom, with relevant lessons and educational materials freely available at minecrafteu.com. For my part, I am by no means an early adopter of the game, but the testimonials I heard were very compelling. So when I returned home I decided that I would pick up the game again and give it another shot, this time with my two daughters. I had not yet run the demo on my home computer, so I visited the website and downloaded the demo, which installed in less than 5 minutes.

Instead of playing myself, I gave the controls to my youngest daughter and let her have at it. After some acclimation to the basic w,a,s,d

keyboard & mouse interface, she immediately started in building. We exhausted the 90 minute demo in the second day, so with her encouragement I chose to plop down the \$25 bucks for the game. While it is not free, it does come in at half the price of a typical console game. I could have purchased the iPad version for \$6.99, but I chose the Windows version to encourage her to get more experience with a standard computer interface. Her older sister saw what we were doing, and immediately jumped in on the action. We are only three days into the game, and while we have built a subterranean home, a castle, and a winding labyrinth, we have barely scratched the surface. I especially look forward to helping them create basic logic triggers and mechanical devices, which will serve as a building block for their future computer programming skills. And whether or not they become computer programmers, basic programming skills are, to me, a fundamental skill that all school-age children should have. Still, even in this short time, and without getting into these more complicated aspects, I can clearly see the benefits of a game that has been described by some as an incognito introduction to computer-aided design (CAD), of course with heavy doses of imagination and creativity.

At this point I can say that I strongly recommend Minecraft, both for entertainment and for educational reasons. I debated putting together a holiday buying guide, but my advice to you is that if you buy one game for your children this holiday season, make it Minecraft. And if they already have it and play it, engage them and play it with them. And if you already are doing that, visit minecrafteu.com and check out some of the educational resources, they are not just for teachers. And like LEGOs, which was declared by Time Magazine in October of this year to be the most influential toy of all time, Minecraft is on track to be the most influential video game of all time.

David Wells

Singer/Songwriter from Norwood, NY, is currently working on his third studio album at Studio37 in Ogdensburg, NY. You can catch him along with fellow guitarist Rik Woodward, live across northern NY throughout the summer. He is also currently looking to fill some dates for the summer months.

Keep up to date at www.davidwellsmusic.net and at www.facebook.com/dwsongwriter.

If you are interested in booking, please contact david@davidwellsmusic.net

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