

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

New 'Fun Biology' Video Game Lets Players Tinker with Evolution

10/07/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/science/july-dec08/spore_10-07.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What is evolution?

2. What is a spore?

3. What are some computer games you like to play?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What is the object of the game Spore?

ANSWER

Players use a creature creator to guide an organism through five stages of development, recreating evolution from single-cell organisms to modern space exploration.

2. Is it a popular game? How many copies has it sold?

ANSWER

The game is popular, it has sold more than 1 million copies since its September release, and Sporepedia, the Spore wiki, is the host to more than 33 million user-created creatures, vehicles and buildings.

3. How do players upgrade their initial creatures? Is this really how evolution works?

ANSWER

Players can eventually upgrade their creature by eating "DNA," earning enough points to crawl out of the primordial soup. They can then use the creature creator to physically shape their creature as it evolves in stages.

4. What happens in the final stages of the game?

ANSWER

In the later stages of the game, players create complex civilizations with unique buildings and vehicles,

eventually developing spacecraft that allow for travel to unexplored galaxies where other civilizations can be befriended or destroyed.

5. How does the game follow evolutionary theory?

ANSWER

Just as in the evolution theory, which holds that life on earth is the result of billions of years of competition and adaptation, players must compete with other organisms and adapt to changing environments.

6. How does the game differ from evolutionary theory?

ANSWER

The mechanics of the creature creation in Spore do not accurately reflect how evolution works because evolution is not driven by choice for outcomes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you think that video games should be used to teach? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think Spore has been so popular?

3. Should games have to represent science exactly? Why or why not?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.