

# COULD PLAYING VIDEO GAM

In 2003, two teenage boys in Tennessee (William Buckner, 16, and his step brother, Joshua, 14) shot at vehicles on the interstate with a .22 calibre rifle. One man was killed and a woman was injured. Why? The boys said they were copying the *Grand Theft Auto* game. Can playing a violent video game really change your behaviour? Can it cause you to kill? CLUB profiles the arguments...



## YES

The case in Tennessee is not unique. Five years ago in Paducah, Kentucky, Michael Carneal walked into his school and shot dead some of his peers\*. He used to play *Resident Evil*, *Doom* and *Quake*. These are all games in which participants shoot virtual opponents. Six months before in Ohio, a boy stabbed\* his aunt to death while he was sleepwalking. Hours earlier he had been playing a game called *Diablo*.

“It takes the stress out of the day.”

Martin, student and  
GTA: San Andreas fan.

## NO

The ESA (*Entertainment Software Association*) has issued the following statement: “The responsibility for violent acts belongs to those who commit them.” The ESA also points out that *Grand Theft Auto* has an M [mature] rating. This means it is not for under 17s and it is up to\* parents to control what their teens play. Every day video games are played by millions of teenagers. Why aren't they shooting and killing? There must be other factors that cause these teens to kill.

## YES

Many video games show people 'getting even\*' by killing their opponents. For many unstable teens this could be what inspires them to get even in real life too. Seeing so many deaths and shoot-outs on computer screens can mean that kids become immune to the horror and reality of death.

## NO

Research about the effects of 'de-sensitizing'\* kids to violence has not proved anything. Any teen who watches the news sees what effect war and real guns have on the world. “Video games are escapism\* in the same way that cartoons are fantasy for younger children,” says Mark Griffiths of Nottingham Trent University. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* deals with gang revenge, but the reason it is so

# ES MAKE YOU VIOLENT?

“It's a training film for mass murderers and has no place in anyone's home.”

Barry Silver, US lawyer, commenting on *GTA: San Andreas*

## THE FACTS

### *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*

It is the biggest-selling video game of all time.

It sold 1 million copies in 9 days in the UK.

The three *Grand Theft Auto* games have sold 32 million copies worldwide.

*GTA: San Andreas* is a virtual world based on 90's California. Players become Carl Johnson, a part-time gangster returning to his hometown.

In the game, players can cruise around the ghetto, but they can also rob stores, beat up women, get tattoos, smoke drugs, shoot cops and hijack cars.

The game has an M rating (Mature) for eighteen years and over.

GTA isn't from America – It is made in Scotland, by Rockstar games.

### Writing a formal letter

Imagine that your government is going to bring in restrictions on video games. Here are their proposals:

- ▶ Nobody under eighteen will be able to buy a video game.
- ▶ All people under eighteen will have their gaming monitored and controlled by a governing body.
- ▶ Nobody under eighteen will be able to play games alone in their bedroom.

### What's your reaction?

Write a letter for or against the proposals to the government. Use the following phrases to express your opinions:

- In my opinion.....
- I feel strongly that.....
- In my view.....

### What's your verdict?

#### Words

**Peer (n.)** – person of the same age group ● **stab (vb.)** – attack with a knife ● **It's up to you (phrase)** – it's your decision/responsibility ● **lack (vb.)** – not have something which is needed ● **get even (vb.)** – get revenge ● **desensitized (adj.)** – become so accustomed to seeing/hearing something terrible that you no longer react ● **escapism (nn.)** – avoiding an unpleasant or boring life by thinking about a more exciting life (can be done by watching films, reading books and playing video games) ● **hooked on something (vb.)** – be addicted to something

popular is because of its music and special effects.

John Murray of Kansas State University says, "Kids know the games are entertainment, but it's possible the brain could store the experience as trauma."

## YES

The frontal lobe of the brain is responsible for controlling a person's behaviour. The frontal lobe does not grow fully until a person is about 20

years old. There is some evidence to suggest that computer games could inhibit the development of the frontal lobe if they are played to excess.

## NO

While it's true that many teenagers do get hooked on\* video games, they would have to play for twenty hours a day for several years for any significant effect on the development of their brain.