

ultra

Kidtelligence



ROLE PLAYING'S BIGGER ROLE

Tabletop role-playing games, or RPGs, like Dungeons and Dragons, Fate, and Monster of the Week have seen a resurgence in popularity in the past decade due in great part to Stranger Things and podcasts like The Adventure Zone, and Critical Role.

There is also a crucial nostalgia factor to this pop-culture evolution as parents who grew up as the first generation of role-playing enthusiasts have started to pass their love of the genre on to their own children.

For the uninitiated, role-playing games invite players to create a unique character which they roleplay through a story-based game guided by a game master who acts as the storyteller. Events in the game are determined by a combination of the players imagination and the outcome of dice rolls which determine success or failure as players attempt to interact with their environment and other characters.

What is often overlooked by many parents is the inherent benefits these role-playing games bring to the table for younger, grade-school-aged players.

According to Rachael Swertfeger, a creator who hosted role-playing campaigns as part of an after-school program for kids, tabletop RPGs "help kids learn important social and emotional skills like: empathy, tolerance, problem-solving, teamwork, sharing, communication and creativity." (Level-One Geek, May 2020)

Role-playing games are also an excellent way for kids, especially shy kids, to make new friends. The narrative nature of the game gives kids a natural structure for social interaction and role-playing a character who is not yourself can help kids who struggle with social interaction ease into opening up to a group of new friends.

"I incorporated RPGs into my lessons to empower my students. I wanted them to be able to see long-term, to not get hung up on every little obstacle that came their way. More importantly, I wanted them to celebrate success and adapt to failure—a virtue that would take them far in life."

- Teacher Shaun, dyslexia specialist of Swords & Stationary

The fantasy nature of these games also offers kids a safe space to explore the importance of empathy without worrying about how their acts of kindness and mercy will be perceived by their peers.

James Floyd Kelly, writing for the blog Geek Dad summed this idea up nicely. "Players in RPGs know that there are times when the evil-looking creature is just that: evil-looking. But not evil-acting. RPGs allow young players (and really ALL players) to feel sympathy and show mercy to see if they get a positive result without risk of ridicule."

More people, and more kinds of people are engaging with role-playing now. A recent New York Times article lists Anderson Cooper and Tiffany Haddish as fans. With a proliferation of fantasy entertainment (Game of Thrones, Rings of Power, The Mandalorian etc.) and the boost from Stranger Things, dragons and space wars are less a part of nerd culture and more mainstream. (Amelia Diamond for NYT, May 21, 2022)

Brands are joining the role-playing renaissance as well. In 2021 Nerds candy offered fans an exclusive Dungeons and Dragons campaign with the purchase of any of their D&D themed packages, and Wendy's created Feast of Legends, an RPG that invites players to join Queen Wendy "first of her name, breaker of fast-food chains, defender of all things fresh never frozen" to protect the borders of Freshovia and help restore freshness to the realm of Beef's Keep." (Holly Petre for Nation's Restaurant News, October 2019)

Given all the benefits role-playing games offer young kids we'd call the resurgence of the genre a "critical hit".