

Understanding “Wild”: How Nature is Presented in Video-Games Across Cultures

Aaryan Sukhadia

Guess the Game

- Single-Player, Role-Playing Game
- You play as a former knight in a medieval kingdom battling supernatural monsters
- Tasked by the king to rescue his daughter with magical powers who has been kidnapped by a dark, ancient foe you once knew
- Exploring and traversing nature is a central component of gameplay
- Contains “*wild*” in the title
- Won the Game Awards’ Game of the Year

Trick Question!

TWO games fit that exact description!



What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Praised for Narrative and Characters	Praised for Exploration and World Design

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Praised for Narrative and Characters	Praised for Exploration and World Design
Focus on Main Character's Fate and Relations	Focus on Fate of Kingdom and World

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Praised for Narrative and Characters	Praised for Exploration and World Design
Focus on Main Character's Fate and Relations	Focus on Fate of Kingdom and World
Emphasis on moving through natural world	Emphasis on engaging with natural world

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Anthropocentrism Prioritizing human comfort and wellbeing above all else	Praised for Exploration and World Design
	Focus on Fate of Kingdom and World
	Emphasis on engaging with natural world

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Anthropocentrism Prioritizing human comfort and wellbeing above all else	Ecocentrism Prioritizing and valuing nature as equal to or above human luxuries

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Anthropocentrism Prioritizing human comfort and wellbeing above all else e.g. Western Capitalism	Ecocentrism Prioritizing and valuing nature as equal to or above human luxuries

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Anthropocentrism Prioritizing human comfort and wellbeing above all else e.g. Western Capitalism	Ecocentrism Prioritizing and valuing nature as equal to or above human luxuries e.g. Japanese Shintoism

What's different?

The Witcher 3	Breath of the Wild
Anthropocentrism Prioritizing human comfort and wellbeing above all else e.g. <u>Western Capitalism</u>	Ecocentrism Prioritizing and valuing nature as equal to or above human luxuries e.g. <u>Japanese Shintoism</u>
Developed by CD Projekt Red in <u>Poland</u>	Developed by Nintendo in <u>Japan</u>

**Q: Are Japanese Games more
Ecocentric than Western Games?**



WHY DO WE CARE?





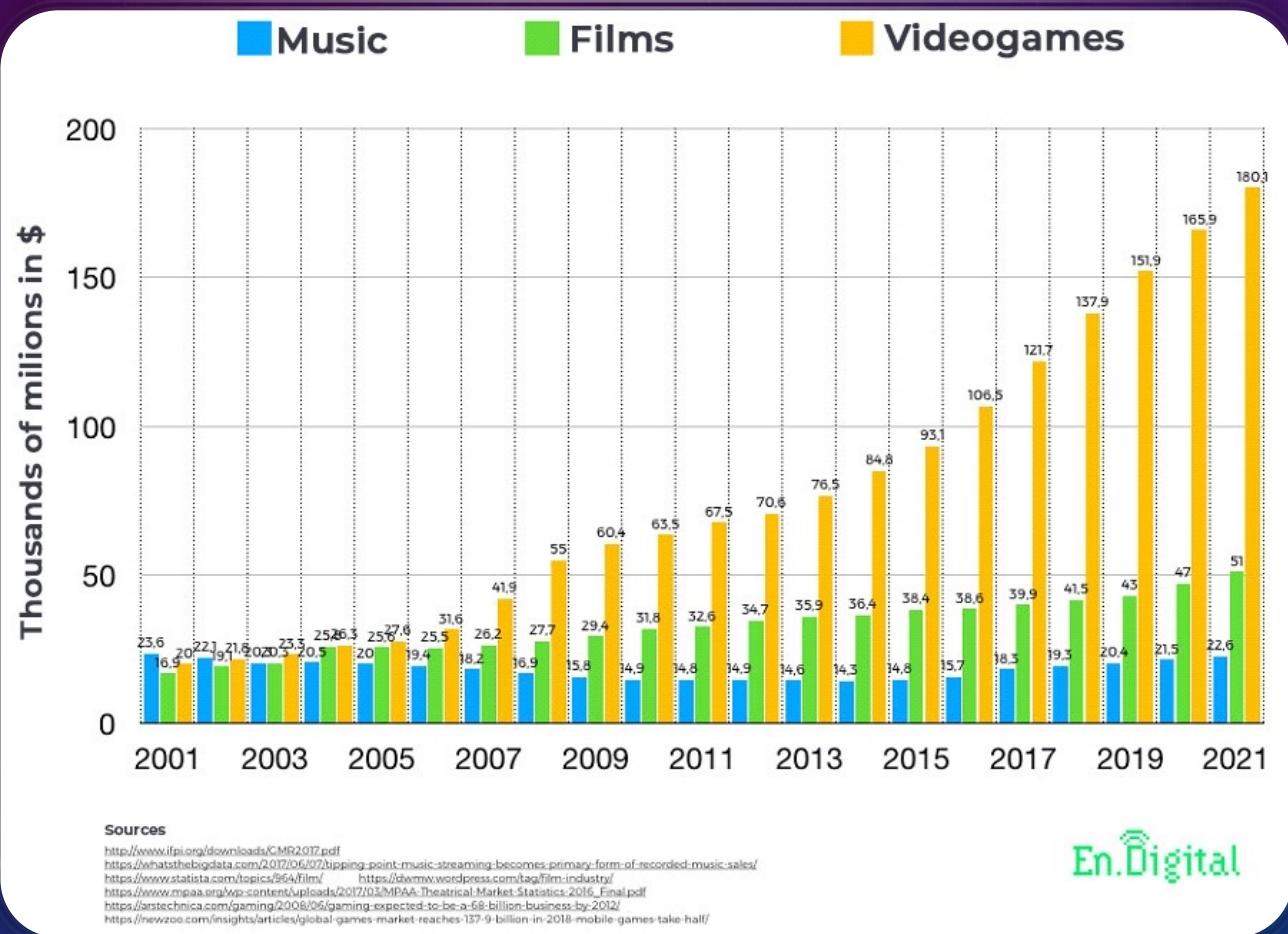
WHY DO WE CARE?

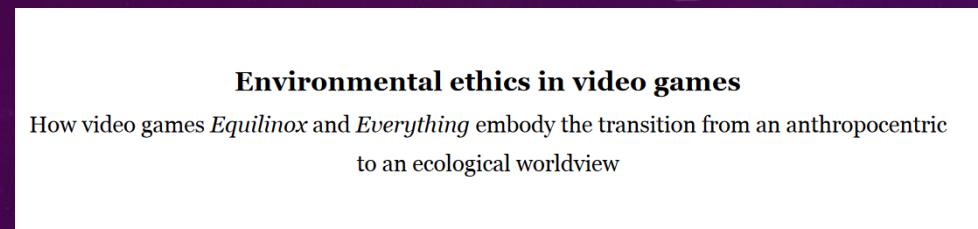
- Video games are huge, and only growing



WHY DO WE CARE?

- Video games are huge, and only growing
- Anthropocentric behavior in games correlates with anthropocentric mindset in real life (Vuong et al, 2022), (Rogers, 2018)
- No such **breadth-wise** analysis exists





This screenshot is similar to the one above, showing a white box with text. It includes the title "Island Time in Lockdown: Animal Crossing: New Horizons' Slow Culture and Its Shinto Source", the source "In: *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*", the author "Author: Monica Alice Quirk", and the publication date "Online Publication Date: 18 Nov 2021". Below the text are five navigation links: Abstract, Metadata, References, Cited By, and Metrics. The "Abstract" link is underlined.

This screenshot shows a white box with text. The title is "Ecofeminism and Gaia Theory in *Horizon Zero Dawn*". Below the title is the author's name "Lauren Woolbright" and her contact information: "woolbrightle [at] alma [dot] edu" and "Communication, New Media Studies". At the bottom of the box, it says "(Published October 24, 2018)".

WHY DO WE CARE?

- Video games are huge, and only growing
- Anthropocentric behavior in games correlates with anthropocentric mindset in real life (Vuong et al, 2022), (Rogers, 2018)
- No such **breadth-wise** analysis exists

Q: Are Japanese Games more Ecocentric than Western Games?



Key idea: Analyze whether **components** of the game are ecocentric or anthropocentric

Our Case Study



- (Mostly) Anthropocentric
 - Developed in Poland
 - Western Capitalism

Nature is a commodity! The free market will solve everything! (



VS



- (Mostly) Ecocentric
 - Developed in Japan
 - Japanese Shintoism



Build more forest shrines! Give offerings to nature spirits!

On-Screen Space

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric



Image via Ganker

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

On-Screen Space

The Witcher 3: Anthropocentric



Image via Ganker

On-Screen Space

Breath of the Wild: Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

On-Screen Space

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric



Image via Ganker

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

Inventory Management

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric

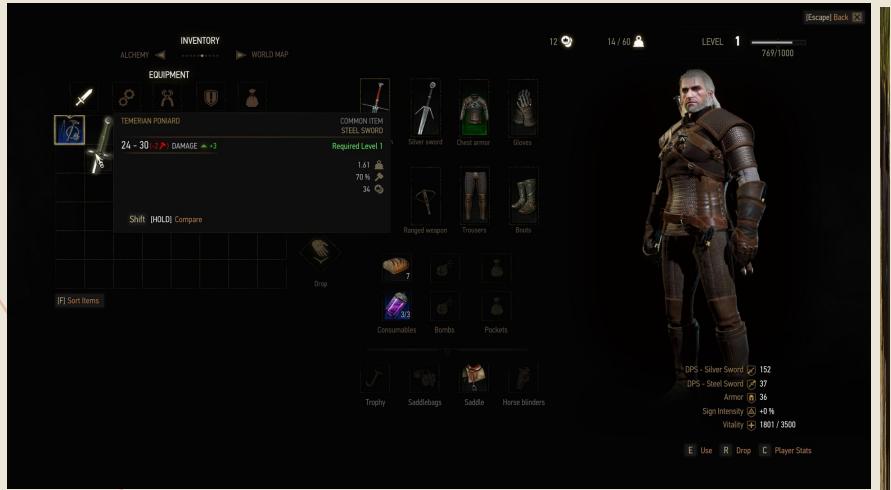


Image via WitcherWiki

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

Inventory Management

The Witcher 3: Anthropocentric

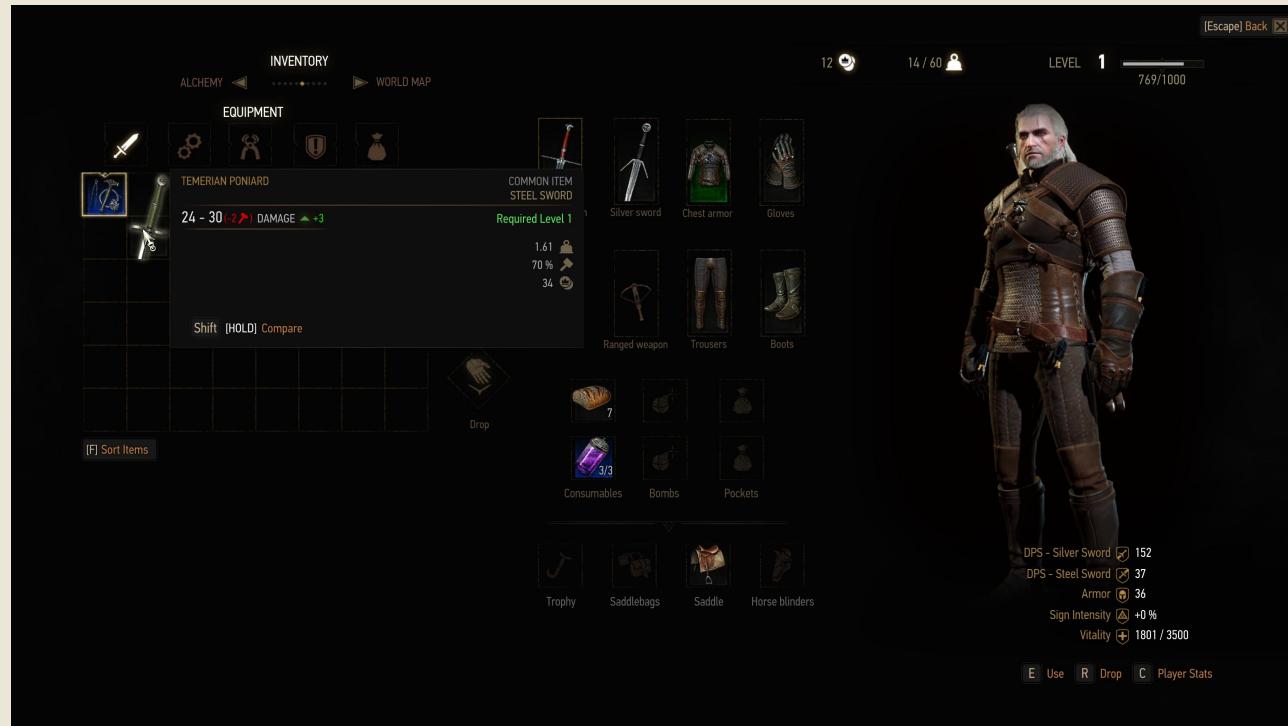


Image via WitcherWiki

Inventory Management

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric



Image via WitcherWiki



Inventory Management

Breath of the Wild: Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

Inventory Management

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric

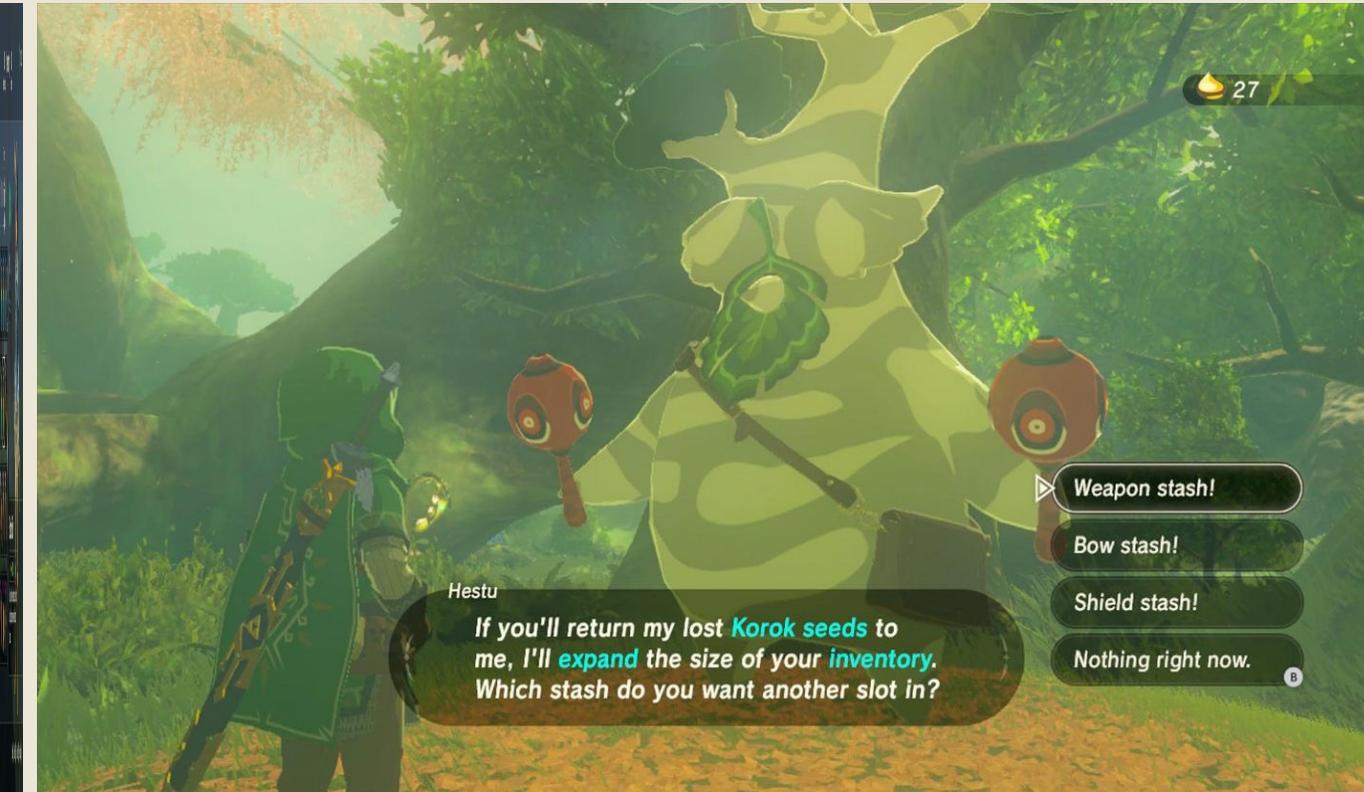


Image via Nintendo

Inventory Management

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric

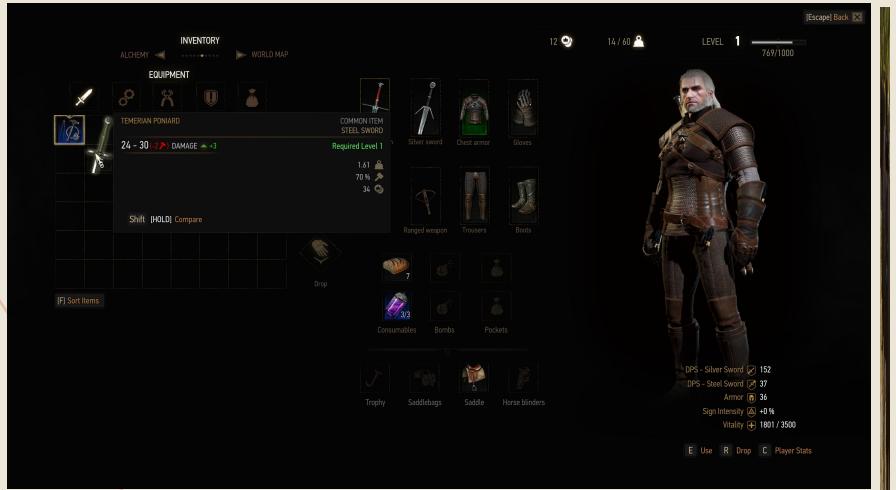


Image via WitcherWiki

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Image via Nintendo

Increasing Health

The Witcher 3: Anthropocentric



Image via NerdStash

Breath of the Wild: Ecocentric



Images via Polygon and IGN

Increasing Health

The Witcher 3:
Anthropocentric



Image via NerdStash



Increasing Health

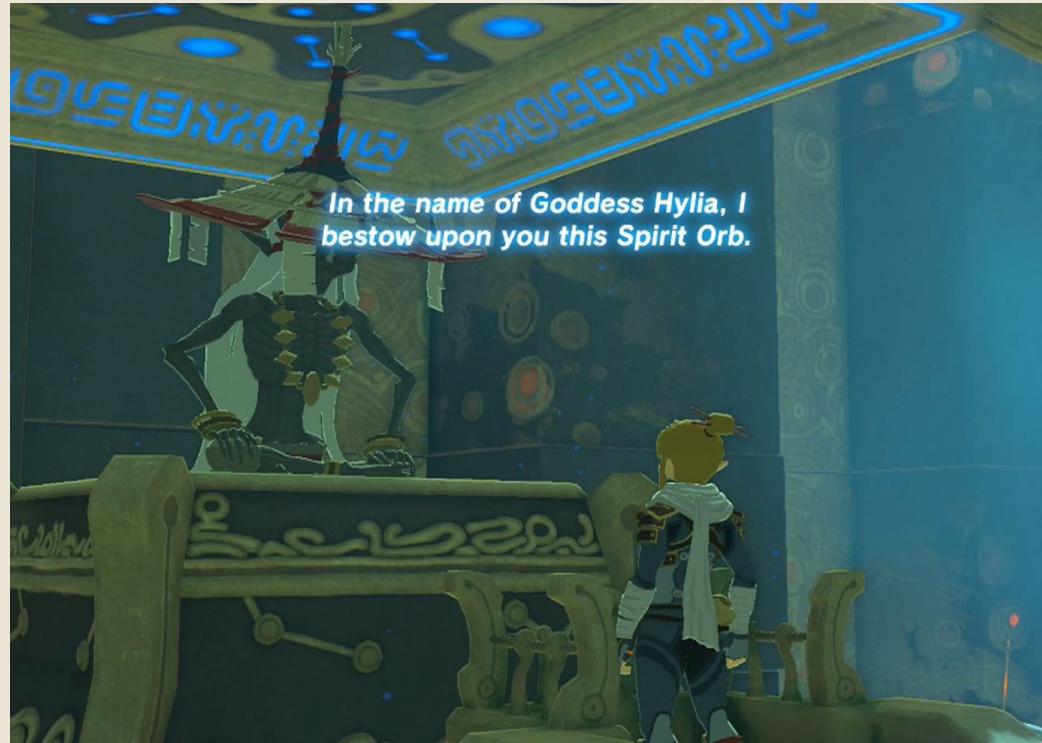
Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Images via Polygon and IGN

Increasing Health

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Images via Polygon and IGN

Increasing Health

Breath of the Wild:
Ecocentric



Images via Polygon and IGN

Increasing Health

The Witcher 3: Anthropocentric



Image via NerdStash

Breath of the Wild: Ecocentric



Images via Polygon and IGN

Our Case Study



- (Mostly) Anthropocentric
 - Developed in Poland
 - Western Capitalism



- (Mostly) Ecocentric
 - Developed in Japan
 - Japanese Shintoism

**Q: Are Japanese Games more
Ecocentric than Western Games?**



Q: Are Japanese Games more Ecocentric than Western Games?

- **Analyze These Components:** On-Screen Space; Inventory; Stats; Animals; Exploration of Nature; Enemies; Soundscape; Narrative Themes; “Slow-Gaming”; (Navarro-Remesal 2019)
- **Across These Games (Top 50 Best-Sellers and GOTY Winners)**
 - **Western:** Minecraft, Read Dead Redemption 2, Terraria, Witcher 3, Skryim, God of War, Dragon Age
 - **Japanese:** Pokémon (6 games), Animal Crossing, Breath of the Wild, Elden Ring
- **Determine (Broadly) Ecocentric or Anthropocentric (for each game)**

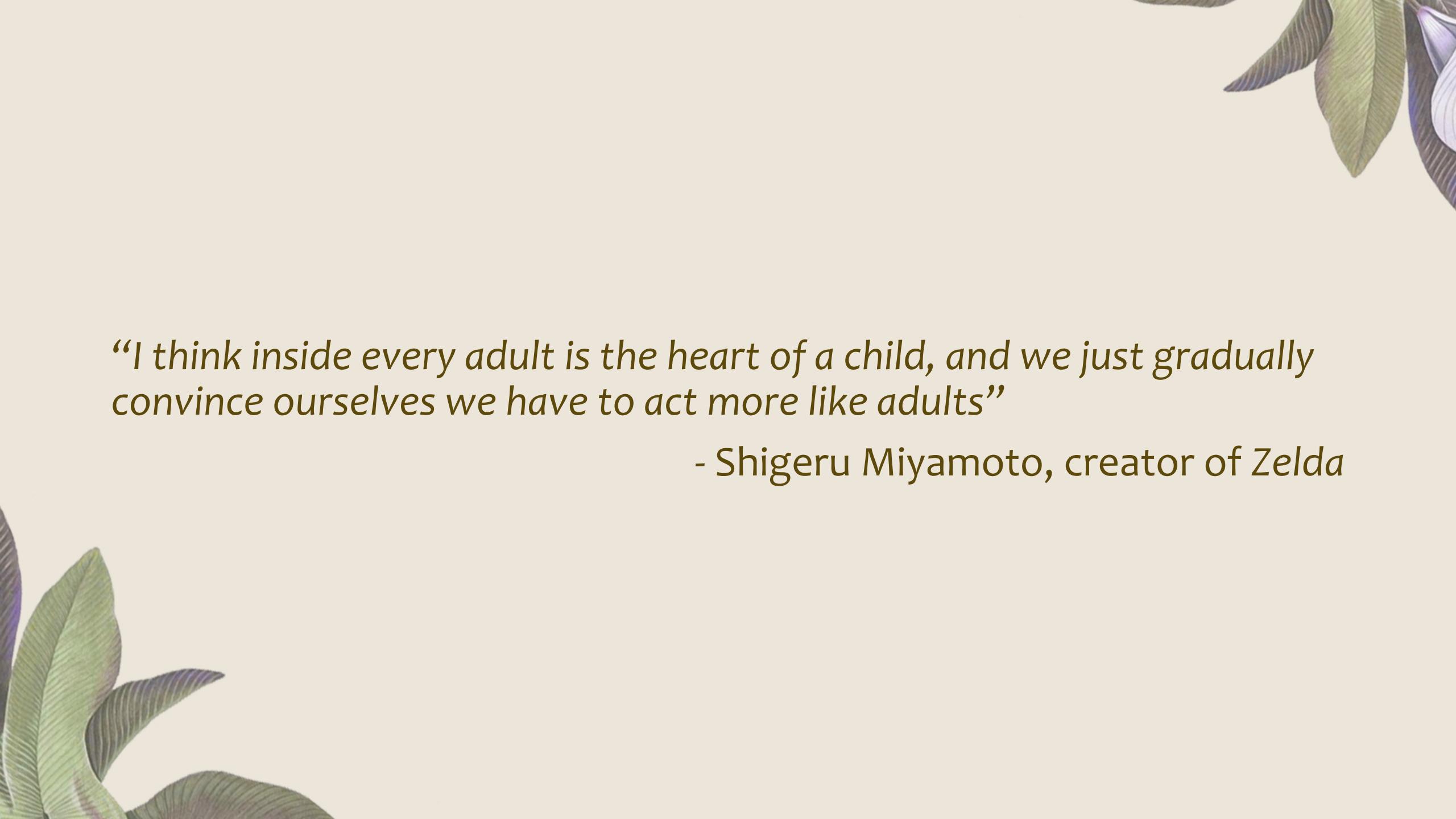
Results

More Anthropocentric	More Ecocentric
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	Elden Ring
Dragon Age: Inquisition	God of War
Red Dead Redemption 2	Animal Crossing: New Horizons
Terraria	Pokémon (All 6 Games)
	Minecraft

Results

More Anthropocentric	More Ecocentric
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	<u>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</u>
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	<u>Elden Ring</u>
Dragon Age: Inquisition	God of War
Red Dead Redemption 2	<u>Animal Crossing: New Horizons</u>
Terraria	<u>Pokémon (All 6 Games)</u>
	Minecraft
Emboldened: Western	<u>Underlined: Japanese</u>

Conclusion: Popular Japanese games are more ecocentric;
Popular Western games are more anthropocentric



“I think inside every adult is the heart of a child, and we just gradually convince ourselves we have to act more like adults”

- Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of Zelda