

Open Worlds

How we became nostalgic for Minecraft

Minecraft has sold 176 million copies across all platforms, making it the best-selling video game of all time. I first learned of it in 2013, when its popularity was peaking. While surviving against monsters, starvation, other players, and environmental conditions can be part of the game, the main objective is to build things. Players extract resources from the environment and combine them to make construction materials, armour, weapons, and more.

All the nerdiest boys in my seventh-grade class were obsessed with it; they all wore T-shirts and backpacks with the game's pixelated characters, and I would overhear them making plans to meet up in the game after class. They talked about monsters, dungeons, building fortresses, and mining rare gemstones. Motivated mostly by the fear that I was missing out, I downloaded a free trial.

When I first played it, it seemed a serene and infinite garden of paradise. I spent hours wandering aimlessly around the blocky map. As you travel in any direction, the game engine procedurally generates terrain by its own algorithmic logic, decorating it with shrubs, lakes, snow-capped mountains, among other geographical wonders. The excitement of exploration, even in this most basic sense, was addicting. Beyond this, the possibilities seemed endless. You could create a life-size replica of your house or build a volcano or have a war between your friends, all possible through mining, building, and exploring.

Ten years from its conception, millions of people still play Minecraft. Earlier this summer, YouTube superstar PewDiePie began uploading a series of videos in which he plays Minecraft's survival mode, the exact mode featured in his first upload in 2010. The popularity of the series started a revival among the game's veteran players from late 2019 into 2020, sparked partly by irony but fuelled by wholesome nostalgia.

As Minecraft's player base has grown up, the game and its surrounding meme culture have become an oasis from adult ideas of productivity and the stress that comes with it. On YouTube there is a massive amount of Minecraft content that showcase impressive feats of creativity and technicality within the game. From large International Style mansions to NASA space shuttles to even a fully functional 32-bit CPU, many of these builds must have been incredibly time-consuming and labour-intensive. Much of the most-viewed Minecraft content are music videos made in the game to accompany parody versions of songs like Usher's "DJ's Got Us Fallin' in Love" (Parody name: 'Creeper Aww Man') and Coldplay's "Viva La Vida" (Parody name: 'Fallen Kingdom'). People have even made full blown movies in Minecraft. Most influentially in the meme culture, "Parkour Civilization" follows the story of Evbo, who seeks to rise up from a parkour noob to establish himself in the civilisation. The movie and its sequel have been viewed for 50 million times. Subsequently, the talk of "jumping for the beef", a homage to one of the most iconic moments in the movie, became a hot topic within online forums.

The popularity of this kind of content suggests that the nostalgia for Minecraft is tied to the perception that it was a boundless pastime — an open world that allowed for user-defined objectives, in which truly unmotivated discovery was possible, where players could build things for their own sake and not out of sense of mandatory productivity or competitive advantage.

Even as Minecraft experiences a nostalgic renaissance, the online open world Roblox has become its spiritual successor. Roblox has become massively popular in the past two years, with over 90 million monthly players, most of them between the ages of nine and 15. It shares Minecraft's basic core design — blocky graphics, flat colours, and the requirement of user participation to turn it into something better. Its selling point isn't anything that exists

40 in the game itself but the possibilities the bare framework allows for. The user's creative labour is built in as an expectation. Unlike Minecraft, Roblox isn't a single expansive world or a defined game in itself; it has no basic game modes to return to and no classic game mode from which all the other user-created games stem. It is more a game-creation platform, hosting more than two million games, each of which is its own world, with its own rule set, value system, map, and user interface.

45 While the open worlds of Roblox are sometimes touted as an opportunity for children to learn programming skills and develop an aesthetic sensibility, they have also introduced children to the world of entrepreneurship. Almost every game on Roblox is free to play, but many games are money pits to get players to spend Robux, the game's universal currency. Some games offer VIP packages, which allow access to restricted areas and special abilities, while others rely solely on cosmetic features like clothing, weapons, and vehicles. Some of the purchases look like:
50 "Master Dragon Sword," "Majestic Leaf Wings," and "🌈🔥SALE🔥🌈Rainbow Adidas Hoodie🔥🌈". With the magical and powerful branding, coupled with the colourful emojis plastered in the items' names, it is clear who these items are marketed towards.

55 The most popular games in Roblox abandon the traditional game model of levelling up toward a concrete goal and instead focus on the user's desire to acquire rare items to show off their taste and status. This social aspect of the game makes customization the most important factor. In most of the popular simulation and tycoon games, the user plays with others but doesn't collaborate with them. Roblox seems to power imagination only when it has the potential to make money: through development, or through buying and selling in-game merchandise.

60 Though Minecraft and Roblox both require time and effort, the multiplayer aspect of Roblox games makes levelling up a social competition based on resources rather than skill. In the nostalgic memory of Minecraft, multiplayer interaction is often an extension of real-life relationships and requires cooperation. There is no "buy item" microtransaction on Minecraft. To gain respect in Minecraft, whether through crazy builds or gathering massive amounts of diamonds, needs expertise from the player, rather than their parents' credit card for the case of Roblox.

65 Open worlds can be viewed less as games than as experiments in political philosophy, fostering new kinds of citizenship. For me, watching Minecraft grow over the past 10 years has been like watching an idealized simulation of the unfolding of human history. A linear path of development can be drawn from Minecraft's beginnings — the shared player world has gone from mass agriculture with NPC villagers to the building giant functional computers.

70 On the other hand, Roblox has no governing master narrative, no shared experience of development that players might collectively remember in the future. People are nostalgic for Minecraft because they are nostalgic for an open world that promised discovery rather than entrepreneurship in an age where popular open worlds offer no escape from the quest for personal advantage. Instead, players are trained in how to prove themselves through blatant signifiers of achievement.

75 By enabling self-defined goals and DIY accumulation of skills and resources, Minecraft promises fun without fixed form, without ownership, without competition and hierarchy. Roblox, with its goal of blurring the line between player and creator may seem democratizing, it transforms conventional gameplay into entrepreneurial striving. Young children are now competing on capitalist society's hierarchical scoreboards, with those having the most standing on top.

Read the text and answer all of the questions.

1. Based on the information in paragraph, complete the summary by using ONE word taken from the paragraph, you may need to change the part of speech of the word to ensure your answer is grammatically correct. (3 marks)

The author first knew about Minecraft when it was at the (i) _____ of its popularity. Minecraft is a game with the main objective of constructing structures all while facing challenges like starvation and being hunted down by (ii) _____ or other players. Resources are (iii) _____ from the environment and used to craft construction materials, armour, weapons and more.

2. Find a piece of evidence that showcased the popularity of Minecraft in paragraph 2.
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3. In line 9-10, the writer mentioned the ‘fear that I was missing out’, what was the writer missing out on?
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4. Find a word in paragraph 3 that can be replaced by ‘peaceful’
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5. Complete the following sentence with the information from paragraph 3
While exploring the world, the terrain around the player _____

6. What does ‘this’ (line 14) refer to?
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7. Complete the following chart detailing the events of Minecraft on YouTube using the information in paragraph 4. Fill in each blank using ONE word only. (4 marks)

2010	PewDiePie uploaded a Minecraft gameplay video as his (i) _____ video on YouTube.
2019 Summer	PewDiePie revisited Minecraft and started a new series which was very (ii) _____.
Late 2019 - 2020	Veteran Minecraft players came back to the game because of (iii) _____ and (iv) _____.

8. Complete the following sentences using information from paragraph 5. Your answers should be grammatically correct. (4 marks)

With Minecraft's once young players heading into the workplace, they find Minecraft and its surrounding culture to be (i) _____.

On social media sites, content creators post Minecraft creations which requires (ii) _____ and _____ . Meanwhile, parody music videos created in Minecraft are the (iii) _____ on the platform. Even longer form content has found success in Minecraft with the movie "Parkour Civilisation" being (iv) _____.

9. With paragraph 5, determine whether the following sentences are True(T), False(F), or Not Given (NG). (4 marks)

	Statements	T	F	NG
(i)	Minecraft can help its players to escape from the troubles and annoyances of adult life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(ii)	People who make Minecraft content on YouTube are technical with using computers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iii)	Music videos made in Minecraft are the most popular parody videos on YouTube.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iv)	Despite racking up many views, Minecraft content on YouTube has little cultural impact.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Find a word in paragraph 5 which means 'reference'
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11. With the information given in paragraph 6, is playing Minecraft a relaxing experience? cite a piece of evidence from the text to support your answer.
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12. How has the nature of the gameplay in Minecraft helped the game to become 'an oasis from adult ideas of productivity' (line 21) ?
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13. What is the metaphor used to describe the amount of spending opportunities on Roblox?
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14. Who are the target audience of the items on Roblox?
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15. Using the information in paragraphs 5 and 6, why is ‘focus on the user’s desire to acquire rare items to show off their taste and status’ (line 54) important for Roblox games developers.

16. Explain the irony in lines 56-57.

17. Complete the following summary using information from paragraph 9. Fill in each blank with ONE word only; the words may not be found in the article; your answers should be grammatically correct. (4 marks)

In Minecraft, players gain respect through their (i)_____ and collection of rare items. Moreover, players are expected to (ii)_____, hence the game is able to (iii)_____ real-life relationships. On Roblox, however, players can choose to (iv)_____ to skip the grind, resulting in a game where players’ skill has less influence than their resources.

18. What does “their parents’ credit card” imply about the players of Roblox?

19. What has the writer compared the development of Minecraft to in paragraph 10?

20. The word “Nostalgia” is frequently used to describe Minecraft throughout the essay. Cite a piece of evidence from paragraph 11 to explain whether Roblox can become nostalgic in the future.

21. Why did the writer say that children who play Roblox “are now competing on capitalist society’s hierarchical scoreboards” (line 75) ?

22. Fill in the following comparison between Minecraft and Roblox. Make sure your answers are grammatically correct. (6 marks)

Aspect	Minecraft	Roblox
Game modes	Minecraft has basic game modes that every user can return to	Roblox has (i) _____
Money spending opportunities	Minecraft has (ii) _____	Roblox has many games that are money pits
How users can display their status	Players show their progress through builds and gathering resources	Players display their status with (iii) _____
In-game goals	Goals on Minecraft are (iv) _____	Roblox players prove themselves with achievements.
Types of creations that are encouraged	Minecraft encourages (v) _____	Roblox encourages (vi) _____

23. Does the writer prefer Minecraft or Roblox, why?
