As a video game player, I truly believe that the Walking Dead Season One is near the level of a gaming masterpiece. Being a critical and financial success for Telltale, this game cemented itself as a staple in gaming history. However, what exactly makes the Walking Dead any better than other games? Isn’t it just a glorified walking simulator? That couldn’t be further from the truth. This game’s success lies with the concept of free will, in the idea that your choices as a player matters.  The Walking Dead is a perfectly realized video-game concept with a phenomenal narrative and stylized cel shading.

In this game, your choices feel like they impact not only your experiences but the other characters as well. Your choices feel personal to you, as you feel responsible for the fate of your character and the rest of the cast. As soon as you enter the world, you gain control of Lee, a recently convicted murderer on his way to prison. As you are being driven to prison, the police officer has a conversation with you (see Image A). This naturally prepares you for this dialogue mechanic in the game. Furthermore, this event is used to establish the atmosphere and the mood of the game. As the car ride proceeds, the player feels an ominous tension in this scene as police cars and helicopters move towards the city. The anticipation of horror allowed the game to make you on edge throughout the entire conversation. In all my experiences of video games, the jumpscares were genuinely startling and heightened your engagement with the game.

As the player, there is no given tutorial on how to interact with the game, you just learn how to play or die. In this game, it is killed or be killed and if you struggle to react, you will have to suffer the consequences. This is clearly demonstrated in the opening scene, as you are immediately tasked with killing a zombie despite no formal tutorial (see Image B).  However, the minimalistic UI design established that the rules for this game is like a point and click adventure game.

An essential aspect of this game is its characters (see Image C), as you are gradually building relationships with you throughout the game. Through dialogue, audio and the environment, you will gradually learn who the characters are and their interpersonal relationships. Of all these characters, there is one character so significant that she has allowed the series to continue for four seasons: Clementine. The game uses Clementine to maintain your humanity and give you a reason to carry on. In the opening moments of the game, you find her alone in a treehouse, hiding from “the monsters.” Through context clues, you find that her parents are most likely dead, and you are made to feel responsible for her safety.

You need to be her protector, to guide her and make sure she will survive. Clementine introduces of your choices have serious ramifications in the story and her character. By choosing to leave at day or at night, you choose to expose Clementine to different risks (see Image D). Your choices matter with her as you want to instill the skills to survive within her but also keep her sense of morality. This game quickly blurs the line between player and character, as you will often find yourself heavily impacted by your decisions, both good and bad. When you make decisions, you make a permanent impact on your relationship with that person and the game. This allows for the game to have a long-lasting impact on the player, long after you stop playing it.

A common complaint about Telltale Games is the idea of the illusion of choice, that you always begin and end with the same advantages. That eventually everyone in the story would die, one way or another and that it renders your choices obsolete. The existence of Clementine contradicts this statement and solidifies The Walking Dead as one of the best video games ever. When you die in the last episode, you validate your struggles and decisions by entrusting your knowledge and time into Clementine. Your choices determine her survival and gives your decisions a sense of purpose. In the end, your goal as a player was not to allow you to survive but to ensure that Clemetine survived.  As the main character, you are a vessel for the player to communicate, care and protect Clementine (see Image E). Knowing that your decisions will carry over with each rendition of the character creates a real sense of control and power that could only come from this game.

Despite its tremendous quality, The Walking Dead suffers from some fatal flaws. The movement in this game doesn’t allow for increased mobility, which causes walking to feel sluggish at times. Additionally, the multitude of small technical glitches or loading issues restricted the immersion in the game. However, my largest issue in this game was the controls relating to challenge. In this game, shooting zombies simply didn’t feel satisfying. The gameplay in this game worked but lacked a clear understanding of compelling shooting mechanics. There was no sense of danger when you were button-massing the controls or methodically shooting the same zombies to quickly complete the quick-time event. With similarly styled games like Detroit: Become Human and Until Dawn creating compelling shooting and movement mechanics, The Walking Dead needs some improvement to be considered a true masterpiece.

The success of The Walking Dead relied heavily on the consistent tone, atmosphere and the array of emotions when you played it. The fear and dread you have as the walkers claw their way through the drugstore. The despondency you feel looking at Lee’s zombified brother pinned under a telephone pole. The amusement you feel playing detective with Duck. The sorrow you feel when you had to make the choice to kill him (see Image F). The extremely emotional soundtrack and dynamic scene composition seamlessly transitions each scene from chaos to sorrow to joy.

Writing about these in-game experiences brings up so many different emotions in my mind and that is the true success of the game. The fact that I can cry because a character that doesn’t exist, that I can laugh with someone who isn’t really, that I can comfort someone who isn’t there (see Image G). This game managed to complete captivate a new generation of gamers with its clever new ideas and grim aesthetics. This game transformed the idea of entertainment into memorable stories that will continue with the player for a lifetime.

**Citation Page:**

1. SpottinGames. “The Walking Dead Collection - Full Season 1 Walkthrough.” *YouTube*, Jan 4, 2019, https://youtu.be/b\_8Y\_znpcP0.
2. Gamer’s Little Playground, “The Walking Dead FULL Season 1 (Telltale Games) All Cutscenes 1080p HD” *Youtube*, https://youtu.be/i\_ej3t8jvhw.
3. “TSJ Reviews Video Game THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON ONE by Telltale Games.” *Writer of Contemporary and Futuristic Technothrillers:* 6 Apr. 2019, https://timothysjohnston.com/tsj-reviews-video-game-the-walking-dead-season-one-by-telltale-games/.
4. Terminator. “The Walking Dead Collection vs The Walking Dead 2012.” *Game20.Gr, Το Άσυλο Των Gamers*, 1 Dec. 2017, https://game20.gr/walking-dead-collection-graphics-comparison-21772/amp/.
5. Terminator. “The Walking Dead Collection vs The Walking Dead 2012.” *Game20.Gr, Το Άσυλο Των Gamers*, 1 Dec. 2017, https://game20.gr/walking-dead-collection-graphics-comparison-21772/amp/.
6. “Kenny Jr. (Video Game).” *Walking Dead Wiki*, https://walkingdead.fandom.com/wiki/Kenny\_Jr.\_(Video\_Game).
7. “The Official Walking Dead Game Wiki Guide.” *IGN*, 24 Dec. 2016, https://ca.ign.com/wikis/the-walking-dead-game/.