

Press Start: A History of Nintendo

From Playing Cards to Power-Ups (1889–Present)



Start



Did you know the company that created Mario is older than your great-grandparents? Before they made video games, Nintendo had a **90-year** history of making everything from playing cards to instant rice. Let's push start on history.

Level-Up Timeline

Level 1: The Paper Origins (1889)



Nintendo Koppai HQ, 1889



Handmade Flower Cards

The Mission

On September 23, 1889, Fusajiro Yamauchi founded "Nintendo Koppai" in Kyoto, Japan.

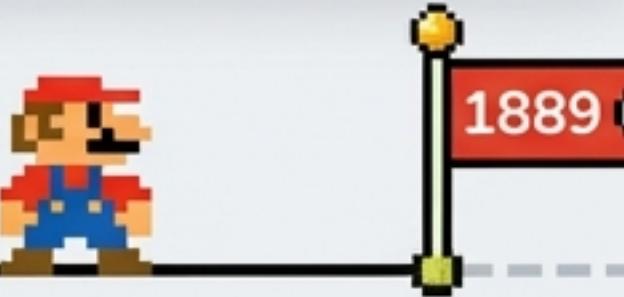
The Product

They didn't make electronics (electricity was barely a thing yet!). They made **Hanafuda**—handmade "flower cards" used for games.

Fun Fact

The name "Nintendo" is often translated as "Leave luck to heaven."

Level-Up Timeline



Level 2: The Side Quests (1960s)



Taxi Company

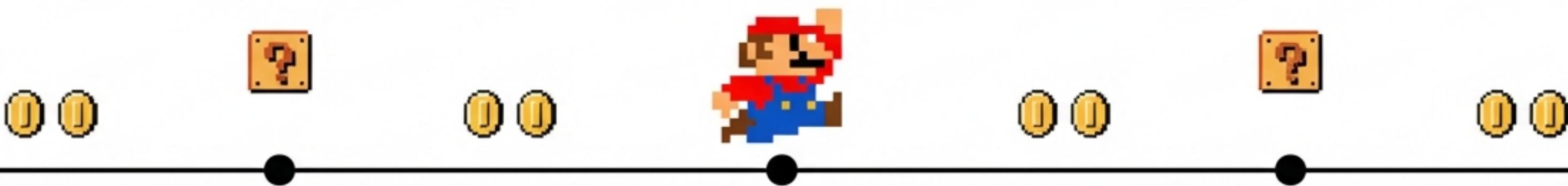
Instant Rice

Hotel Chains

New Leader: In the 1950s, Hiroshi Yamauchi (the founder's grandson) took over. He realized playing cards were limited, so he tried *everything* to grow the company.

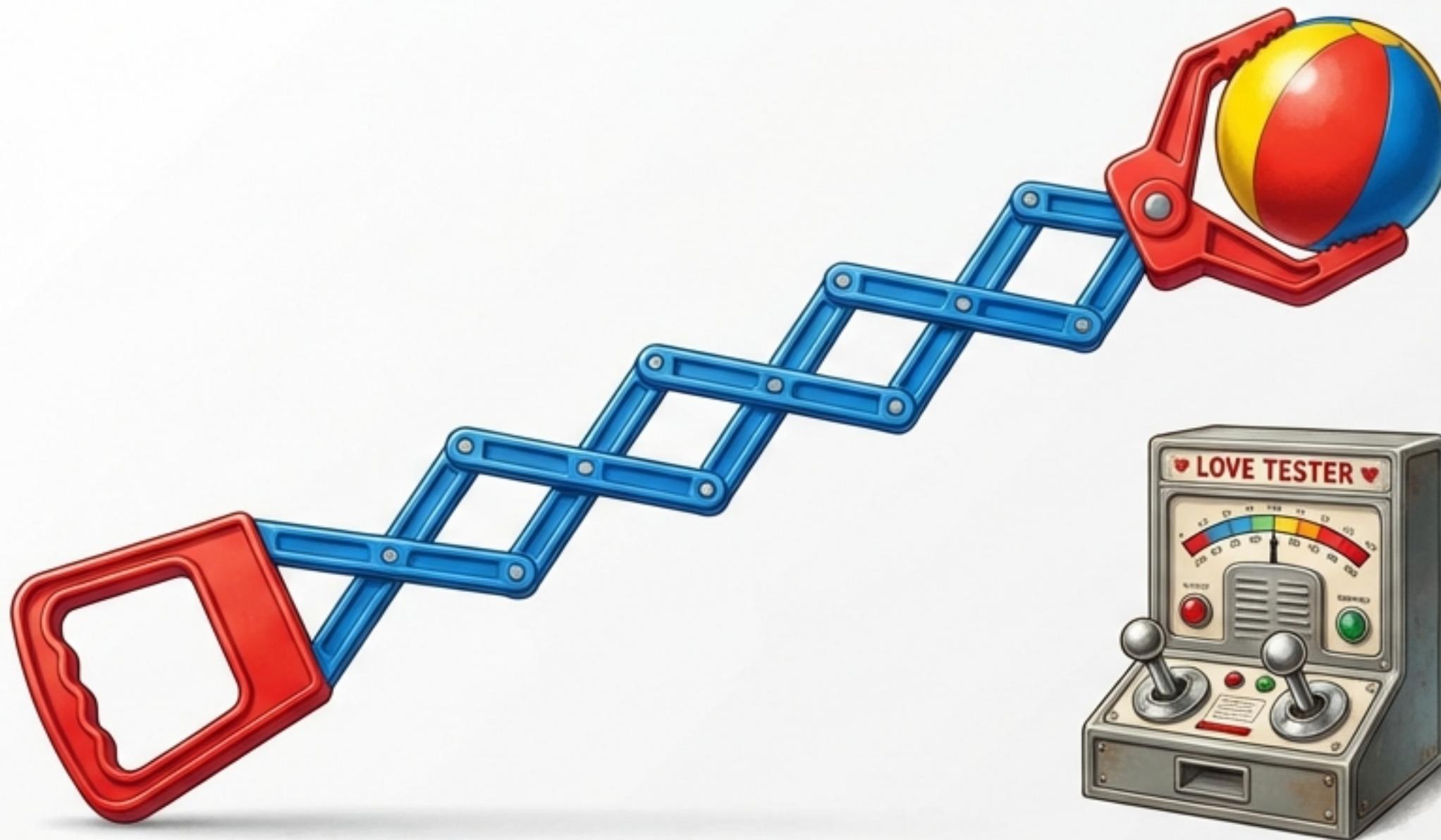
Trial and Error: Nintendo started a taxi company, sold “instant rice,” and even tried running a hotel chain.

Game Over?: Most of these businesses failed. Nintendo was deep in debt and needed a new idea to survive.



1960s: Failed Ventures

Level 3: The Toy Maker (1966–1979)



Level-Up Timeline



The Hero: Gunpei Yokoi was just a maintenance engineer fixing conveyor belts. One day, the President saw him playing with an extending arm he built for fun.

The Hit: The President ordered it to be made into a product. The “Ultra Hand” sold 1.2 million units!

Level Up: This success proved Nintendo was good at making *fun*, not just cards. They began making electronic toys, including the “Beam Gun” (the grandfather of the NES Zapper).

Level 4: The Arcade Invasion (1981)



Level-Up Timeline



The Call to Adventure: Nintendo tried arcade games, but their early ones flopped. They had one last chance to succeed in America.

The Artist: A young artist named Shigeru Miyamoto designed a game about a pet gorilla escaping his master.

A Star is Born: The game was *Donkey Kong*. The hero was 'Jumpman'—soon renamed **Mario**. It was a massive hit and saved Nintendo of America from going broke.

Level 5: Saving the Industry (1983–1985)



The Crash: In 1983, the video game industry “crashed.” Stores stopped selling consoles because there were too many bad games.

The Trojan Horse: To sell their console in America, Nintendo redesigned it to look like a VCR and called it the “Nintendo Entertainment System” (NES). They included R.O.B. the Robot so it looked like a high-tech toy, not a video game.

The Seal of Quality: To prevent bad games, they put a golden “Seal of Quality” on boxes, promising the game wasn’t broken.



Level-Up Timeline



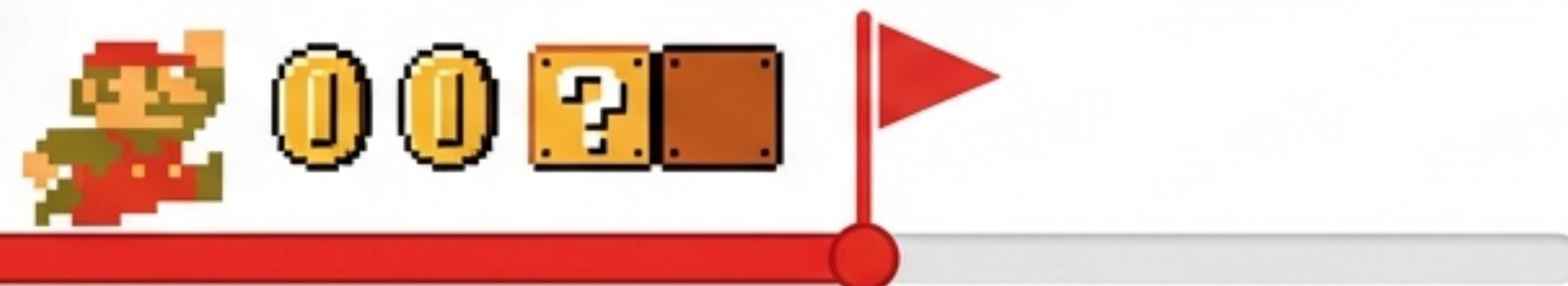
1985: NES Launch



Level 6: Power in Your Pocket (1989)



Level-Up Timeline



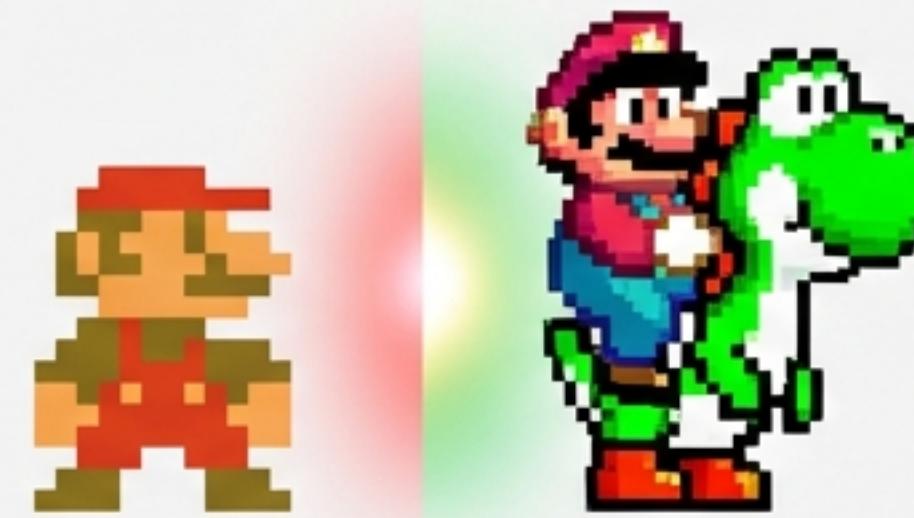
1989: Game Boy

The Invention: Gunpei Yokoi struck again. He designed the Game Boy. It didn't have a color screen like its rivals, but its batteries lasted forever.

The Killer App: Every Game Boy came with Tetris. This puzzle game was so addictive that adults played it just as much as kids.

Impact: It was the first time you could play real console-quality games on the bus or at school.

Level 7: The Console Wars (1990–1995)



16-Bit Power: The Super Nintendo (SNES) brought better graphics and sound. Colors popped, and music sounded like real instruments.

Control Evolution: The SNES controller added 'Shoulder Buttons' (L and R) on top, adding new ways to play.

The Rivalry: A fierce battle began with Sega. This era is known as the 'Console Wars,' pushing Nintendo to make some of their best games ever.



Level-Up Timeline

1991: SNES

Level 8: The Third Dimension (1996)



3D Revolution: The Nintendo 64 changed gaming forever. Before this, Mario could only move left and right. Now, he could explore a fully 3D open world.

The Analog Stick: To control 3D movement, Nintendo introduced the 'Analog Stick' (thumbstick), which allowed precise 360-degree movement.

Rumble: They also released the 'Rumble Pak,' letting controllers vibrate for the first time so you could "feel" the action.

Bonus Stage: Pokémania (Late 90s)



Gotta Catch 'Em All: In 1996, a game called Pocket Monsters (Pokémon) launched.

Social Gaming: The game required players to trade monsters with friends using a 'Link Cable' to complete their collection. You couldn't win alone!

The Craze: It became a global phenomenon with trading cards, anime, and movies, proving Nintendo could create culture, not just games.

Level 9: Thinking Differently (2004–2006)



Blue Ocean Strategy: Instead of fighting Sony and Microsoft for the best graphics, Nintendo decided to make games for everyone—even people who didn't consider themselves gamers.

Nintendo DS: A handheld with two screens and touch controls.

The Wii: A console controlled by motion. *Wii Sports* got grandmas and toddlers bowling in their living rooms. It sold over 101 million units!



Level 10: The Stumble (2012)



The Confusion: The Wii U tried to use a tablet controller, but people were confused—was it just an accessory for the old Wii?

The Failure: It sold poorly (only 13.5 million units compared to the Wii's 100 million).

The Lesson: Nintendo learned they needed a clearer message. They took the idea of 'playing away from the TV' and perfected it for their next attempt.



Level 11: The Hybrid Revolution (2017)



SNAP!



Level-Up Timeline

1998: Pokémon in the West

2006: Wii

2012: Wii U

2017: Switch



The Concept: Nintendo combined their two biggest strengths: handhelds and home consoles.

Switch It Up: The Nintendo Switch lets you play on the big TV, then “snap” the controllers onto the side and take the same game on the bus.

Mastery: It became the third best-selling console of all time, proving that unique ideas can beat raw graphical power.

Level 12: The Future (2025 & Beyond)



Level-Up Timeline

1998: Pokémon in the West

2006: Wii

2012: Wii U

2017: Switch

2025: Level Complete!

- **Beyond Gaming:** Nintendo is no longer just a video game company. With the massive success of *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* and Super Nintendo World theme parks, they are a full entertainment empire.
- **What's Next?**: The 'Switch 2' has been announced for release in 2025.
- **The Legacy:** From flower cards in 1889 to theme parks today, Nintendo's goal has remained the same: Putting a smile on people's faces.



BOSS BATTLE! (Test Your Knowledge)

1. What did Nintendo make when they started in 1889?
2. Name one business Nintendo failed at in the 1960s.
3. Who invented the 'Ultra Hand' and the Game Boy?
4. What character saved Nintendo's arcade business in 1981?
5. Why was the NES designed to look like a VCR?
6. What puzzle game helped make the Game Boy a success?
7. What major controller feature did the SNES introduce?
8. How did the Nintendo 64 change how Mario moved?
9. What was the 'Blue Ocean' strategy used for the Wii?
10. What makes the Nintendo Switch different from other consoles?



Level-Up Timeline



1998: Pokémon
in the West



2006: Wii



2012: Wii U



2017: Switch



Final Stage



Level Complete!