

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (series)

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CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE (SERIES)

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Game: *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare series (Modern Warfare; Modern Warfare 2; Modern Warfare 3)*

Developer: Infinity Ward

Year: 2007; 2009; 2011

Platform(s): PC; Xbox 360; PlayStation 3

Number of players: Single player campaign; Multiplayer options

Genre: First-person shooter (FPS); modern military shooter (MMS)

Type of game: Computer-based/console digital game

Curricular connections: History; politics; international relations; ethics

Possible skills taught: Ethical decision-making; ethical design; analyzing moral dilemmas, narrative design

Audience: 18+; college students; young adults

Length of time: At least ten hours for the single-player campaign; individual missions or multiplayer matches can take 10-20 minutes for classroom activities.

Where to play: Home; class; afterschool

Cost: \$20-40 new (now discounted heavily and available for as little as \$10)

URL: <https://www.callofduty.com>

SUMMARY

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (MW) and its sequels *Modern Warfare 2* (MW2) and *Modern Warfare 3* (MW3) are FPS video games primarily developed by California-based developer Infinity Ward and published by Activision. They are the fourth, sixth and eighth installments of the *Call of Duty* franchise. The MW story arc marked a significant departure from the initial *Call of Duty* series roots, in that it moves the setting of the game to the present-day/near-future from the previous iterations that were set in World War II. This shift allowed the developers to tap into the geopolitics post-9/11. In the single-player campaign, the player takes on the roles of various characters, including a United States Marine and a British Special Air Service (SAS) operative. The player's perspective changes dependent on the character and as the plot evolves through non-playable events and playable missions. Missions typically include objectives based around eliminating enemies, passing

checkpoints, securing objectives against attackers or destroying an enemy location. In the multiplayer version, the series utilizes these mechanics for various team-based and deathmatch-based modes across various maps. The multiplayer modes established several features that became the de-facto benchmark for similar games in the genre in that players earn experience points, allowing them to advance in level, unlock new weapons, and open up further customization options, challenges, and gameplay modes. The series also popularized the notion of rewarding players for “Kill Streaks.”

HOW TO USE THE GAME

The *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* series have courted controversy, regarding the perceived realism of the graphics, the level of violence and ethical decisions that the player must make. As such, I have used the games in my Games Marketplace classes to explore ethics in design, ethics in play and the games popularity in the marketplace. Students can play and discuss the ethical choices in the game design, the decisions that players make within the game world, and the military-entertainment complex. Before playing, I encourage my students to think critically about how games can reflect the real-world. Reading material and/or activities might include concepts like: the ethical questions of designing certain gameplay mechanics; the use of controversial events in narrative design; the intersection of the real and the virtual world; how games portray global politics and international relations; how accuracy, realism and authenticity are presented as marketable concepts; or wider societal issues such as video game violence. Ben Clarke, Christian Rouffaer, and François Sénéchaud’s “Beyond the *Call of Duty*: Why Shouldn’t Video Game Players Face the Same Dilemmas as Real Soldiers?” presents a good introduction to these concepts and is a counterpoint to thinking of games as just entertainment. It is suitable for high school seniors and college students. Warm-up activities can include students considering how modern conflict is represented in news media, film and television and online via YouTube or Wikileaks. Students can share resources and the teacher can ask how this might differ in interactive media. For instance: What are the considerations for presenting conflict in a virtual world? What should a player be allowed to do?

Each of the games can be played individually, or as multiplayer. For the purposes of exploring the various ethics of the game design it is best experienced by students taking turns to play missions and the game being projected for the class to see. Students observing can identify key events, take notes, and offer discussion topics for post-game. Students can explain how they perceive decisions made in the game, whether they are realistic or fantastical. Teachers could encourage students to relate the game content to the geopolitical landscape of 2007-11. Focusing on specific missions can focus discussions. In *Modern Warfare*’s “Death from Above” has the player play as a Thermal Imaging TV operator for a Spectre AC-130 gunship. The low-fidelity, grainy and jittery camera combines with the “white and black” night vision and provides a stark reminder of real-life footage. The comparison led artist Josh Bricker to create *Post Newtonianism* that places video of actual war footage taken from American military aircraft next to footage from the game. The video is augmented by blending audio from the war in Iraq with that in-game and students can discuss the blurring of media, entertainment and reality. The “No Russian” level in *Modern Warfare 2* has the player take on the role of an undercover agent and presents them with the dilemma of participating with terrorists as they massacre civilians. The designer has argued that the level was necessary to further the plot but allows the player to opt-out of actively participating. The level sparked significant controversy when the game released and invites teachers and students to discuss the ethics of designing such a level,

of players ethical decisions, and how people reacted in the real-world to such actions in a virtual world. Activities can include the design of an ethical decision, or a game that includes decisions. Alternatively, students could play the multiplayer mode, Kill Confirmed, in *Modern Warfare 3* and discuss the Red Cross's concerns about war crimes committed in virtual worlds. The basis of this game mode is the collection of dog tags that enemies drop upon death. Throughout the series students can explore how character development, plot development, narrative design, the presence of NPCs (non-player characters) and the background of real-world conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, shape entertainment.

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

1. Teachers should play or view the entire game beforehand to understand the different game missions.
 2. Teachers should set the expectations for students that this is a mature game.
 3. Students can take notes on the mission design and gameplay mechanics as they play.
 4. Call of Duty games can be played individually through a campaign, or as a multiplayer experience.
 5. Certain missions can be played (or viewed through a 'Let's Play' video) to invoke discussion in class regarding the design of ethical decisions in games and discussion of game content.
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RELATED GAMES & MEDIA

Call of Duty series (<https://www.callofduty.com>)

Battlefield series (<https://www.ea.com/games/battlefield>)

Spec Ops: The Line (<http://www.specopsthegame.com/>)

Web Biennial 2012 – Josh Bricker – Post Newtonianism (War Footage/ Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cto649nkjY>)

FURTHER READING

Clarke, B., Rouffaer, C., & Sénéchaud, F. (2012). Beyond the *Call of Duty*: Why shouldn't video game players face the same dilemmas as real soldiers? *International Review of the Red Cross*, 94(886), 711-737. doi:10.1017/S1816383113000167

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