

A Standards-Aligned Educator Guide for Grades PK-3

# Jerry Changed the Game!

## About the book:

Before Xbox, PlayStation, or Nintendo Switch, there was a tinkerer named Jerry Lawson. As a boy, Jerry loved playing with springs, sprockets, and gadget-y things. When he grew up, Jerry became an engineer—a professional tinkerer—and in the 1970s, he turned his technical know-how to video games.

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**Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books**

**Age Range: Preschool - 3**

Back then, if players wanted a new video game, they had to buy an entire new console, making gaming very expensive. Jerry was determined to fix this problem, and despite roadblocks along the way and having to repeat a level or two, it was never game over for his mission. Eventually, he leveled up and built a brand-new kind of video game console: one that allowed players to switch out cartridges! He also founded Video Soft, Inc., the first African American-owned video game company in the country.

Jerry's tinkering and inventions changed the video gaming world forever. Today, gamers have access to hundreds of video games at the push of a button, all thanks to him. Game on!

## Meet the author - Don Tate:

As an esteemed illustrator and author, Don worked on notable books like the upcoming *THE DAY MADEAR VOTED* (2024) and *SWISH! THE SLAM-DUNKING, ALLEY-OOPING, HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS* (2020). He had authored gems such as *POET: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF GEORGE MOSES HORTON* (2015) and *WILLIAM STILL AND HIS FREEDOM STORIES* (2020). Don loves to engage with audiences at schools and literary events. Learn more about Don at [dontate.com](http://dontate.com).



## Meet the illustrator - Cherise Harris:

Cherise Harris, a Barbadian illustrator, honed her skills at institutions including NYC's School of Visual Arts and the UK's Falmouth University. With a rich freelance portfolio covering children's books, storyboarding, and theater design, her work fuses various mediums, inspired by her 90s childhood adventures. Beyond her art, she loves movies, baking, and creating motherhood-themed comics. Cherise lives in Barbados with her family. Learn more about Cherise and her projects at [cheriseharrisillo.com](http://cheriseharrisillo.com).



## Pre-Reading Discussion:

- Describe the man featured in the illustration. Identify the tools in his hands. What is he doing with the tools? How does he feel about this activity? How do you know?
- Observe the images of electronic equipment featured in the illustration background. Have you ever seen or used any these products? If so, what was the experience like?
- **JERRY CHANGED THE GAME! HOW ENGINEER JERRY LAWSON REVOLUTIONIZED VIDEO GAMES FOREVER** is a nonfiction biography, meaning that it is a true story about the life of a person. The word *revolutionized* means changed, innovated, and transformed. Is it possible for one person to revolutionize the entire gaming industry? How so?
- Predict what **JERRY CHANGED THE GAME!** is going to be about.

## Post-Reading Discussion:

*The Lawson family, however, would not let racism stand in the way of a good education.*

- The term *racism* means to judge someone by the way that they look or treating them unfairly because of the color of their skin. Explain how racism might have hampered Jerry's opportunities to get a good education.
- *Devotion* means loyalty, always caring, and loving. Identify situations in which his parents' devotion granted Jerry every opportunity to succeed, despite all odds.

*Six months later Jerry and his team figured things out and completed the project. Jerry even designed an eight-way joystick controller to go with the new console.*

- Engineers are *problem-solvers*. Their job is to come up with solutions that fit together to make things work correctly. Identify ways that Jerry worked hard to solve engineering problems with the game components he was developing.
- Discuss the importance of the invention of the joystick had upon the gaming industry.
- The word *dedication* means keeping at it, not giving up, and sticking with it. Examine aspects of Jerry's life in which his dedication to his family and science served to define his true character.

*He started his own company, called Video-Soft, Inc. It was the first African American-owned video game development company in the country.*

- The word *creativity* means dreaming big, using one's imagination, and thinking of things in a fun and special way. Identify scenarios during which Jerry demonstrated inventive creative thinking.
- *Determination* means keeping at it, pushing forward, and being strong-willed. Discuss how Jerry's favorite saying, "I'm one of the guys, if you tell me I can't do something, I'll turn around and do it" serves as an example of Jerry's determination to succeed in engineering, the gaming industry, and in life.

# The History of Video Games

Objective: To ask questions, make observations, and gather information about the technological advancement of video games throughout history.

Materials:

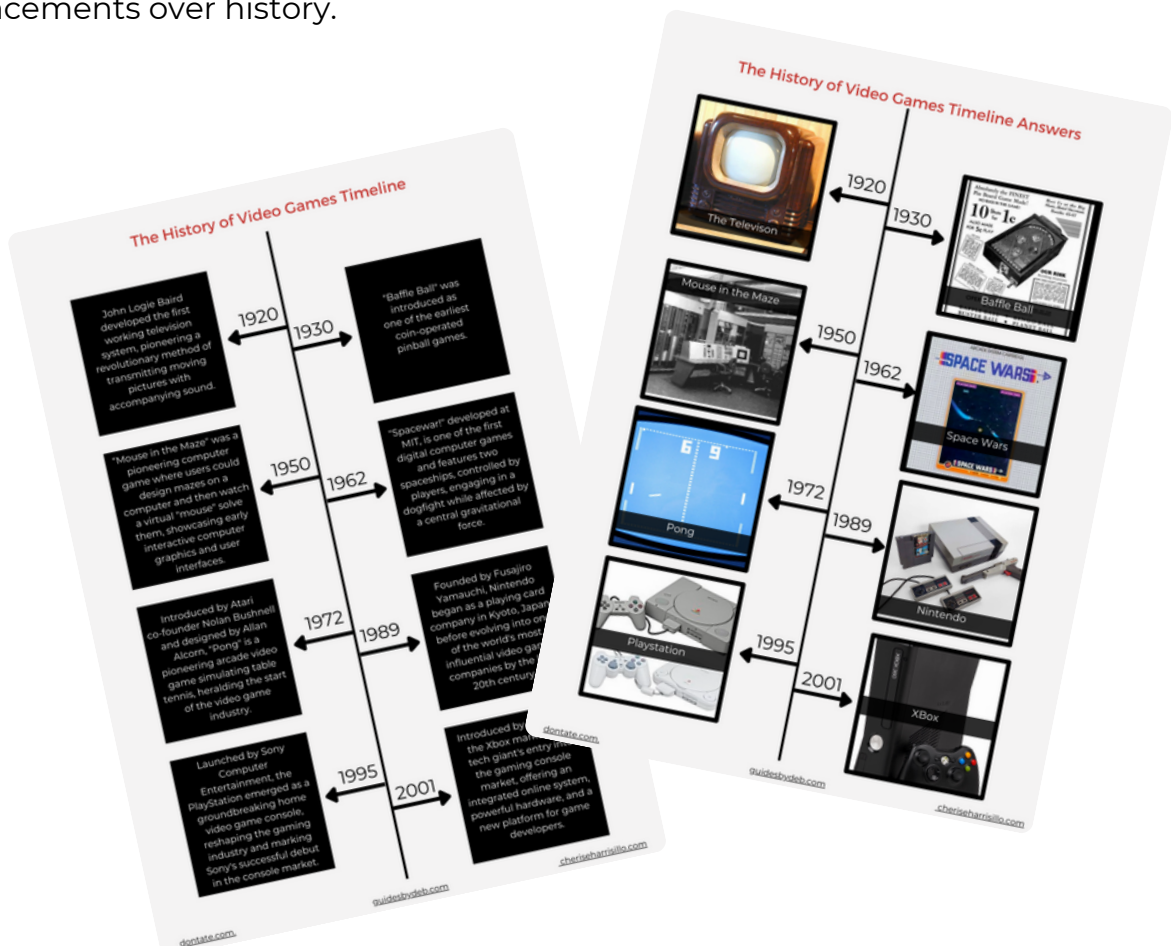
- Video Game Image Cards (Guide, pg. 4)
- The History of Video Games Timeline (Guide, pg. 5)
- The History of Video Games Timeline Answers (Guide, pg. 6)

Procedure:

- Print the Video Game Image Cards on cardstock. Use scissors to trim around the borders of the cards.
- Review the technological advancement descriptions featured on the History of Video Games Timeline.
- Using The History of Video Games Timeline as a guide, match the Image Cards with its corresponding technological advancement description.
- Use the History of Video Games Timeline Answers guide to verify the matches.

Application:

- Instruct students identify the similarities of differences shared by each of the visual timeline of technological advancements by identifying the engineering changes in each.
- Have students write a short essay examining the engineering progress of the video games featured on the timeline. Have the students consider how the desire to be entertained by playing electronic games has impacted and altered technological advancements over history.





# Video Game Image Cards



The Television



Baffle Ball



Mouse in the Maze



Pong



Space Wars



Playstation

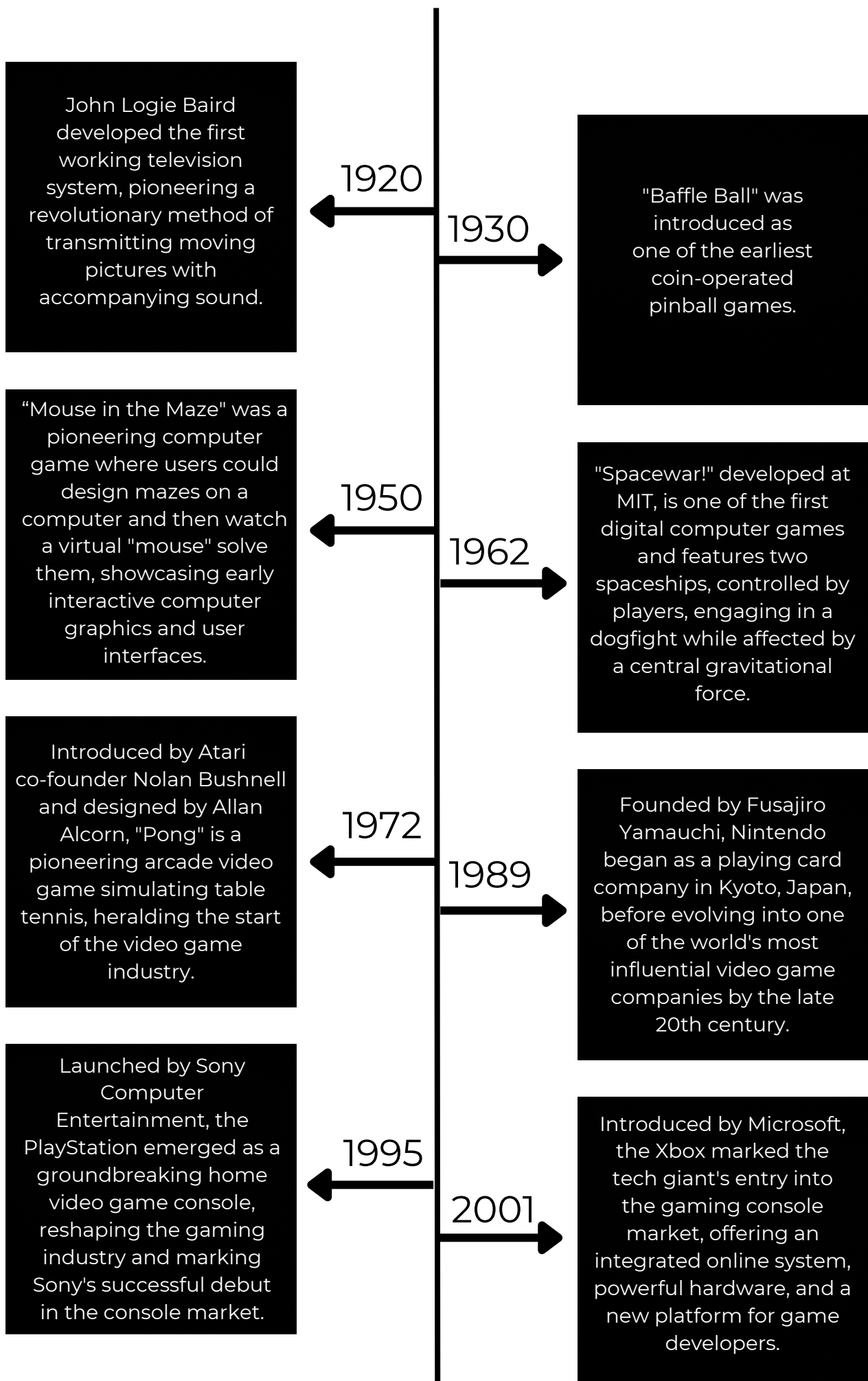


Nintendo



XBox

## The History of Video Games Timeline



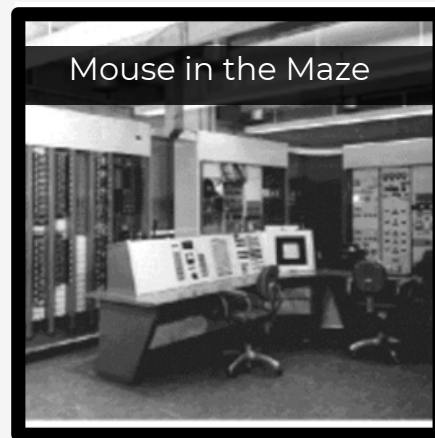
# The History of Video Games Timeline Answers



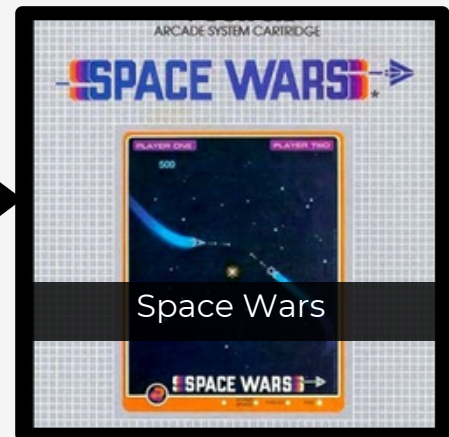
1920



1930



1950



1962



1972



1989



1995



2001