

Video game helps kids learn about Shakespeare



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Makers of a new video game are hoping students will become excited about Shakespeare by trading in their books for a spaceship.

University of Guelph English professor Dan Fischlin came up with 'Speare, based on the works of William Shakespeare, in an effort to get young people interested again in the literary legend. As the character 'Speare, players must save the planet from evil ships that have captured the ancient text of Romeo and Juliet.

To advance, students have to periodically answer questions about Shakespeare's literature.

"Mostly they're just odd facts you have to answer but it does include reading," said Brian Krug, a student testing out the game.

Fischlin, who teamed up with Apollo Games for the project, said 'Speare should be successful because students spend an average of 4 to 6 hours playing video games daily. The game is aimed at youth aged 10 to 15.

"It's the first attempt to do this with Shakespeare but also with thinking about literacy as something you can do in a game context," said Fischlin.

According to a focus group conducted by Fischlin, after students played the game for just one hour their literacy scores increased by 72 per cent.

'Speare, which cost about \$50,000 to develop, will be offered to schools and a free demonstration is available online at www.apollogames.ca. A downloadable version is also available for \$20.

"I think it would be a good hook for kids who think Shakespeare is boring," said teacher Beth McEwen.

As for game reviews, some kids say reading the book might actually be a better choice.

"It's fun for the first time but it gets kind of repetitive after a while," said Ben Turner, a student. "I think reading the actual book would be more educational."

With files from CTV's Trina Maus