

Saving the Village

How Dungeons & Dragons[®]

Teaches the Lessons of Citizenship

By Wizards of the Coast

A group of teenagers are huddled around a kitchen table festooned with books, dice, and maps.

“The mayor says that the evacuation starts tomorrow, but most of the villagers aren’t waiting that long,” one says. “They’re starting to pack up their belongings. A lot of them look worried, and a few are crying. You hear a villager mutter that even if everyone flees now, they won’t get out of the valley in time.”

A second teenager pipes up. “I ask the mayor about that. ‘Will the evacuation work?’ ”

“The mayor says, ‘What else can we do? If the goblins wreck the dam near the waterfall, it’ll flood the whole valley.’ He shrugs his shoulders and gestures out at the crowd. ‘Is anyone here a match for a whole tribe of goblins?’”
A third teenager stands up. “I say, ‘Tauroc Wintervein is more than a match! I’ll scare off those goblins and repair the dam!’ ”

More voices from around the table: “Akamai the wizard will aid you!”
“Vevailus the dwarf never turns down a challenge!”

The teen at the head of the table smiles. “Well, volunteers, you’d better pack your bags for a journey.”

Many of the key attributes of citizenship-volunteerism, teamwork, advocacy, and community building-are integral to success in Dungeons & Dragons[®]. Below, we detail how D&D works to develop these key attributes of citizenship in real life.

What a Typical Game Looks Like

A typical D&D game includes four to six players gathered around a table. All but one of them role-play specific characters that they've created: Tauroc Wintervein the barbarian, Akamai the wizard, or Vevailus the dwarf, for example. The other player, at the head of the table, is the Dungeon Master—the one who's responsible for portraying all the antagonists and the minor characters, and who sets up the scenario. In the example above, the Dungeon Master described the situation and played the role of the mayor. Later on in the game, the Dungeon Master will play the role of those goblins that are wrecking the dam. The Dungeon Master also drew the map of the valley, figured out why the goblins are wrecking the dam, and otherwise invented the scenario.

The players tell the Dungeon Master what their characters are doing or attempting to do, such as, "I'm heading up the path," or, "I buy some rope in town before we leave." When the outcome of an attempt is uncertain—"I try to climb up the cliff," or, "I draw my sword and try to scare the goblin"—then some rolling of the dice and a little arithmetic determine whether the character's attempt succeeds or fails. And those successes and failures lead to more decisions, and so on, until the scenario reaches a climax just like a novel would. And then it's on to the next adventure. This week it might be goblins threatening a frontier village. Next week it might be a spy mission into the castle of a ruthless tyrant, and the week after that the characters might be defending a city from a fire-breathing dragon. The Dungeon Master never runs out of new role-playing scenarios to test the players.

Volunteerism

One of the best citizenship lessons that D&D teaches is the need for competent people to volunteer—to offer their talents for the good of the community. Many a D&D plot hinges on the characters being asked to deal with a crisis, even though it's not their job and they won't necessarily get rewarded for doing so. If the players at the table don't act, there's no guarantee that anyone else will.

In the medieval-themed world of the D&D game, authority figures such as lords and soldiers are often few and far between. If something needs doing, then it's up to the players' characters to get it done. D&D adventures draw from the same source as countless folktales and works of fantasy literature that involve rescuing innocent hostages, slaying marauding dragons, and otherwise volunteering for difficult, dangerous duty. In a D&D adventure, it's rarely your *job* to save the village, rescue the prisoner, or slay the dragon. You volunteer out of a sense of obligation to the community—an exercise in citizenship, in other words.

Teamwork

There's a fundamental truth at the heart of the D&D game: you can't play it alone. It takes a team of heroes—some athletic, some smart, some persuasive—to overcome the challenges of an adventure. The players don't need to be as athletic, smart, or persuasive as the characters they're role-playing. But they do need to realize what their best attributes are, and they need to rely on the people at the table who have the attributes they lack.

Perhaps D&D's best teamwork lesson lies in the interaction between the Dungeon Master and the rest of the players. The Dungeon Master is in charge of all the "bad guys" and is the person who's inventing obstacles that the rest of the players have to deal with. Yet D&D is fundamentally a cooperative game. The Dungeon Master's job is really to "let the players win . . . but just barely. . . ." More than any other game, D&D teaches players that the adversary (the DM) isn't really the enemy; the DM is just someone who has a different perspective and a different role within the game. The Dungeon Master functions as the game's "loyal opposition," to put it in political terms.

Public Speaking and Advocacy

In many D&D scenarios, the path to success isn't always clear. Should the characters rush up to the mountain before the goblins wreck the dam, or should

they stock up on provisions first? Can they negotiate with the goblin chieftain, or should they force the goblins away at the point of a sword?

Even introverted players find themselves drawn into debates—and it’s a safe environment to do so, because they’re surrounded by real-life friends, and they have the “cover” of the fictitious characters they’re role-playing. A player who’s nearly silent in real life can, in the guise of the wizard he’s portraying, make a convincing argument that the goblin chieftain should leave the dam alone.

D&D can be a tonic for players reluctant about public speaking because they get lots of practice and an excuse—the notion that it’s not *really* them doing the speaking—to experiment. Eventually, those introverted players become aware that they’re as capable of voicing and defending an opinion as the next person. It turns out that talking to a goblin chieftain is good practice for speaking at a city council meeting or some other real-life citizenship opportunity.

Community Building

D&D also encourages community-building efforts—again, by using a fictitious community as a stand-in for the communities of the real world. The Dungeon Master can invent crisis after crisis facing that frontier village, and the rest of the players at the table rise to the challenge. Over time, they’ll see that community prosper through the heroes’ efforts. Every time they come back to the frontier, they’ll think, “That town over there? It was just a little village last year, when we had to save it from the goblin tribe.”

One of the driving forces behind the D&D game is its ability to draw forth empathy—and empathy for imaginary characters, no less. Players get drawn into the game and worry about the plight of the villagers. Their brows furrow with consternation as the mayor describes the desperate situation. Later, they all sit up tall in their chairs when the Dungeon Master describes how the mayor throws a parade in their honor. D&D players go on one “help-those-who-need-help” adventure after another. And when your chosen hobby draws forth so much empathy, it’s a short step to that empathy driving real-world actions, too.

Putting D&D to Work for You

Wizards of the Coast, the world's leading developer and publisher of role-playing games, offers a number of downloadable resources for educators interested in D&D, including:

- How to Host a D&D Adventure
- How D&D Taught Me to Use the Library
- D&D Parents Guide

About the Writer

Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc., is considered the global leader in hobby gaming, developing and publishing game-based and other entertainment products celebrated the world over.

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Suggested Reading

To add D&D to your curriculum, check out:
www.wizards.com/library.

Dungeons& Dragons Player's Kit with Free Miniatures Booster
978-0-7869-4309-8, \$29.95

Dungeons& Dragons Basic Game
978-0-7869-3944-2, \$24.95

Dungeons& Dragons Deluxe Dice
978-0-7869-4146-9, \$12.95

Revised Dungeon Master's Guide
978-0-7869-2889-7, \$29.95

Revised Monster Manual
978-0-7869-2893-4, \$29.95

Revised Player's Handbook
978-0-7869-2886-6, \$29.95

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