NEWS LESSON

When a Game Launch Becomes a Cultural Event



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What gives a product or event the power to become a shared cultural moment?
2. Why might society treat some leisure activities as more respectable than others?
3. Have you ever felt pressure to join in with something simply because everyone else was?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**anticipation**	☐	A	the first public showing of a film
2	**franchise**	☐	B	a statement about what is likely to happen
3	**audit**	☐	C	saying where a piece of information came from
4	**forecast**	☐	D	the excited feeling you have while you wait for something
5	**attribution**	☐	E	activities you do for enjoyment in your free time
6	**pastimes**	☐	F	the quality of being accepted as proper or reasonable
7	**premiere**	☐	G	an official check of figures by someone independent
8	**legitimacy**	☐	H	a series of games, films or products sold under one name

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

After a thirteen-year wait, Grand Theft Auto VI sent fans to launch parties and leave requests rising. The numbers raise a broader question about which pastimes society takes seriously.

1 Would you take annual leave specifically to play a video game? For some people, the idea sounds like the perfect reward after a demanding week. For others, it suggests a hobby getting completely out of hand. The arrival of Grand Theft Auto VI in November 2026 turned that question into an international talking point. After thirteen years without a new main instalment, fans organised overnight sessions, rearranged commitments and immersed themselves in a fictional world they had been anticipating for more than a decade.

2 Reporting on 19 November, the Guardian described enthusiasts around the world skipping work or school, attending launch parties and staying awake through the night. The latest instalment of the enormously successful Grand Theft Auto franchise, which is rated 18 and so aimed at adults, takes place in Leonida, a fictional American state, and follows a crime-focused storyline involving two central characters. The intensity of the response highlights how gaming releases can function as cultural events rather than ordinary entertainment purchases, with fans eager to share the experience while avoiding spoilers.

3 The commercial numbers reinforced that impression. The human resources platform Remote reported a 32% increase in leave requests worldwide on launch day. On 20 November, Rockstar Games announced estimated first-day retail sales of $3.79 billion, a record, according to the company, and a figure that reflects what players paid rather than what the publisher keeps. That figure requires careful attribution because it was based on company estimates rather than an independent audit. The Guardian reported a different forecast from the analytics firm Omdia, which expected the game to reach $3.2 billion in sales by the end of the year. Even allowing for uncertainty, the attention surrounding the game illustrates the extraordinary economic and cultural power of major interactive franchises.

4 What makes someone willing to take time off for a digital world? Anticipation is part of the answer, but the social element matters too. Games can provide shared stories, challenges and communities, especially when millions of people are discovering a new experience at roughly the same time. In that respect, a major launch resembles a concert, sporting final or long-awaited film premiere. There is something satisfying about being present when a cultural moment unfolds rather than hearing about it later.

5 Of course, enthusiasm has limits. Someone who takes an agreed holiday is exercising a reasonable choice about leisure, whereas an employee who disappears without warning may leave colleagues covering their responsibilities. Sleep deprivation and prolonged gaming sessions can also have practical consequences. The pressure to participate immediately, amplified by social media and marketing, may make an enjoyable hobby feel like an obligation. Fans can end up chasing the event rather than deciding how they genuinely want to spend their time.

6 The more revealing question may be why society grants some pastimes greater legitimacy than others. A person travelling across the country for sport is often described as passionate; someone arranging leave for a game may be dismissed as immature. Such judgements depend heavily on cultural expectations, not on a consistent measure of how worthwhile an activity is. Leisure need not be productive to have value, but it should leave room for ordinary responsibilities. If you had waited thirteen years for something you loved, how much of your working week would you be willing to give up for it?

Sources: The Guardian, Grand Theft Auto fans skip work and pull all-nighters to play new instalment; Associated Press, 'Grand Theft Auto VI' sets record with $3.79B in first-day retail sales, Rockstar Games reports. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer suggests that the urge to play on day one is partly driven by marketing. T F NG
2. Omdia's forecast covered the same period as Rockstar's first-day estimate. T F NG
3. Most employers approved the leave requests made for launch day. T F NG
4. The article presents society's judgement of hobbies as inconsistent. T F NG
5. According to the writer, a pastime needs to be useful to be worthwhile. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

commitments **consequences** **dismissed** **grants** **prolonged** **reinforced** **resembled** **unfolded**

1. The record sales _____ the impression that this was a major cultural event.
2. Critics have _____ the idea as immature, but fans see it differently.
3. Fans wanted to be there as the story _____ , not hear about it later.
4. Sleep loss and _____ gaming sessions can affect performance at work.
5. Some fans rearranged their _____ so that launch week was clear.
6. Society _____ some hobbies more respect than others.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of the response shows that releases can be cultural events. (INTENSE)
2. Sleep _____ can have practical consequences. (DEPRIVE)
3. Someone arranging leave for a game may be dismissed as _____ . (MATURE)
4. The pressure to take part immediately may make a hobby feel like an _____ . (OBLIGE)
5. Leisure does not have to be _____ to have value. (PRODUCE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Look at what follows the gap. Some words need a noun, some need a clause, and some join two ideas across a comma.

admittedly	albeit	despite	especially	hence	namely	whereas

1. _____ the uncertainty, the attention around the game is striking.
2. An agreed holiday is a reasonable choice, _____ an employee who vanishes may leave colleagues covering for them.
3. The first-day estimate was impressive, _____ unverified.
4. _____ , enthusiasm has limits.
5. Games provide shared stories, _____ when millions discover them at the same time.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Can the excitement around a big release become unhealthy, and how would you know?
2. What makes a leisure activity valuable if it does not produce anything?
3. How far should employers accept time off for a hobby?

9 Role-play: a day off for launch day

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your employee wants Friday off. The team is busy this week. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the employee

A game you've waited years for comes out on Friday. Ask for the day off. Explain why it matters to you and how your work will be covered.

Useful phrases

I was hoping to take Friday off.

It's something I've waited years for.

Who'd cover your tasks?

I'd be happy to say yes if you finish the report first.

I'm afraid that's not possible, because we're short of staff.

Could we find a compromise?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the manager say yes, and was it a fair decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 D · 2 H · 3 G · 4 B · 5 C · 6 E · 7 A · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 reinforced · 2 dismissed · 3 unfolded · 4 prolonged · 5 commitments · 6 grants

6 Word forms

1 intensity · 2 deprivation · 3 immature · 4 obligation · 5 productive

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 whereas · 3 albeit · 4 Admittedly · 5 especially

---

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**