

Review: *We Are Chicago* **By Katie Gallant**

We Are Chicago tells real life stories through a narrative video game. Set in Chicago, the player takes on the role of Aaron, a young black student who is days away from high school graduation. He worries about keeping his younger sister safe and being a good son to his single mother, while simultaneously trying to keep away from gangs. The game has the player become Aaron, choose his dialogue options, and watch his life unfold as he navigates the stressful balance between home life and street life.

This game is told through first-person perspective, with the player choosing how the dialogue progresses. The choices that the player makes will have little impact on the story progression, as there is a set storyline for the player to follow. The aim of the game is not to complete any puzzles or quests; rather, this game was created to make the player *think* about the world, Aaron's world, and to understand what it is like to live a life like Aaron. Players can experience what it is like to live an inner-city life with poverty just around the corner.

Due to the nature of this game, the narrative storyline can help nurture empathy in players. As the player progresses, they learn more about Aaron, specifically his aspirations and fears. The player not only experiences the 'exciting' parts of Aaron's life, such as overhearing a gunshot during dinner, but also the mundane - having conversations while walking to the park, sitting in class and looking over a test, and setting the table for dinner. Throughout all of this, the player is engaging in cognitive empathy by understanding Aaron's emotional state.

While this game may be an eye-opener for some young adults, others may find themselves in similar situations as Aaron in reality. Maybe a young adult accepts gunshots and sirens as a regular part of life, or has to work during school to help with bills for the family. There are many ways that a teen can connect with Aaron and understand his plight, and in doing so, create a further level of empathy with his character.

The game is not won by being a strong, tough, or clever player. Instead, the game ends with the player becoming empathic towards the characters. The point of the game is to care about Aaron, and his sister, mother, friends, and even the young gang members out on the streets. Hopefully, by playing this game, young adults will improve both their empathetic concern and their relationships with diverse populations.

It is worth pointing out that, despite this game only being released in February of 2017, the graphics are not necessarily of the highest quality. This is largely due to the game being created and developed by a small company. The run time of the game is comparable to a movie - game play may take approximately 2 hours to complete.



Culture Shock Games. (2017). *We Are Chicago* [Video game]. Chicago, IL: Culture Shock Games.

Recommended audience: 14+ due to mature themes.