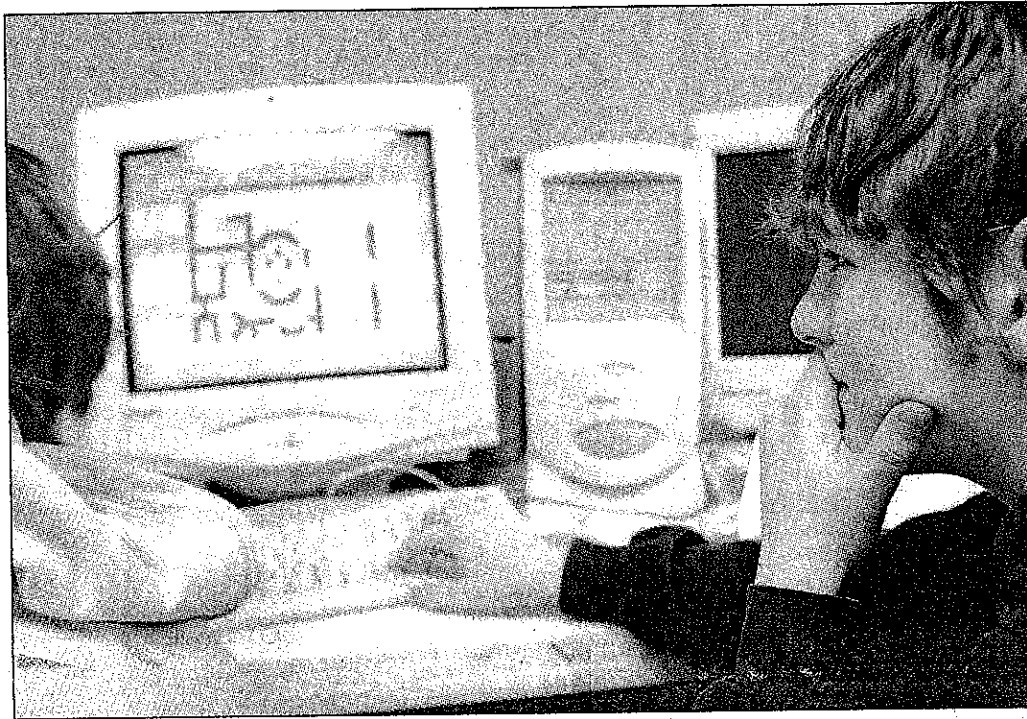
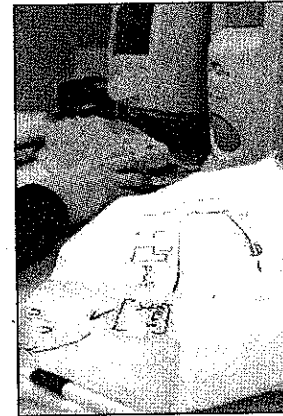


# Game plan



Liz Martin photos/The Gazette



ABOVE: A sketch outlines ideas for a non-violent video game being developed by students in the Uniteens class at Unity Center in Cedar Rapids.

LEFT: Tom Werner, 13, of Cedar Rapids, works on a video game Sunday that he is creating with other teens at Unity Center in northeast Cedar Rapids. The game harkens back to earlier games, such as "Pac-Man" and "Frogger," and incorporates Unity faith principles.

## Unity teenagers take up challenge to create non-violent video game

By Molly Rossiter  
The Gazette

**C**EDAR RAPIDS — For Noah Swanson and Tom Werner, the real challenge wasn't creating a video game — it was creating one that didn't have the violence, gore and other graphics the games they play at home have.

"We weren't really happy about the non-violent aspect, but we did it," said Swanson, 13, of Central City.

Swanson and Werner, 13, of Cedar Rapids, are the "project managers" of a video game being created by the

Uniteens Sunday school class at Unity Center of Cedar Rapids, 3791 Blairs Ferry Rd. NE, although Swanson defers most of the credit to Werner: "He's more of a programmer, I just give him ideas," he said.

Three other Uniteen members — Korderro Carter, 11, Kamar McLaud, 12, and Tristian Davis, 11, all of Cedar Rapids — help in brainstorming ideas and



Tom Werner  
Project manager



Noah Swanson  
Project manager

suggestions.

Right now the game is a sort of "Pac-Man" meets "Donkey Kong," with "Frogger" elements planned for the next stage, Werner said. Once they got over the non-violent aspect, the boys realized how much fun they could really have making the game.

► VIDEO GAME, 8B

# Video game/Classic games incorporate faith

► FROM PAGE 1B

"We just used the ideas from old arcade games," Werner said. "Once you realize you can use the really old arcade games, you see it's not really violent. It's not violent to hit a ball against a brick wall."

"But death is essential, we have to teach people about death," Swanson said.



**Laura Meade**  
Uniteens leader

In the first stage, or level, the player must jump barricades, maneuver conveyor belts and avoid life-stealers such as homework, bad lunch and bullies to get close to the end. Once near the end, the player is asked: "Where is God when you need him?" and provided with four possible answers. Clicking on "Nowhere," "Up in a cloud" or "In a trash can" will cause you to lose a life. Only by clicking "Everywhere" can the player proceed and finish the first level.

In the second level — and the last one completed thus far — the player munches through a maze similar to those found in the Pac Man games. In the Uniteens' game, however, the player must get through a maze that spells out "God" and "Unity."

Werner said he hopes the next stages will follow the models of "Frogger" and "Space Invaders."

Each level of the game will incorporate at least one of the five Unity principles: God is good and is everywhere present; I am naturally good because God is within me; I create my world with my thoughts and actions and beliefs; prayer and meditation connect me with God; and I make a difference by expressing the truth that I am.

The video game project seemed a natural choice for this year's class, said Laura Meade, 48, of Cedar Rapids, the Uniteens' leader at Unity Center.

"When we were starting this year out, I knew these guys were really into video games, and I wondered how we could incorporate that into our lessons," she said. "I thought it would be something good they could do with such a small group."

Add a donated computer and "Games Factory" software and the kids were in business.

Meade said she was impressed with how well the boys had adapted the Unity principles into the game, noting that with each level completed the player "gets stronger and they know that that's how you handle all the things going on in your life."

"I think it's great that they



Liz Martin/The Gazette

are learning about their spirituality in a way that is relevant to them," Meade said. "They had to really think about how they could make a non-violent game and how do you take the

ideas and principles and make it into an icon."

She said the brainstorming sessions have served as good spiritual lessons, as well.

"These guys are at an age

where they question everything, so it's good to have those conversations going," Meade said. "The last Unity principle is that one person really can make a difference — I

hope they feel they're making a difference by doing this."

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A computer game is reflected in Noah Swanson's glasses as he works on a video game he is creating with other teens at Unity Center in northeast Cedar Rapids. The non-violent game incorporates Unity faith principles, reinforcing spirituality and life lessons for the Uniteens Sunday School class members as they work on the project.