



# BONUS FEATURE

# FAMILY COMPUTER 1983

**Y**ou've read about the American NES experience for those lucky gamers who picked up the console during its initial launch window during the 1985 holiday shopping season. Now, let's look briefly at the Japanese equivalent: The first six months of the Family Computer's existence.

The Famicom and NES's early days weren't all that different, when it comes down to it. In both Japan and the U.S., Nintendo had very little clout in the console market, and both the Famicom and NES debuted in near-anonymity compared to the hype that would surround subsequent Nintendo product launches. In both markets, the consoles' initial lineups consisted entirely of Nintendo first-party releases. They were not, however, the *same* releases; of the 16 games confirmed to have appeared on NES in 1985 and the nine titles Nintendo launched for Famicom in 1983, the systems shared only one release (Baseball) in common. To a certain degree, that was a function of timing; debuting two years later than Famicom, the NES's tardiness allowed Nintendo of America to cherry-pick games that would appear more impressive than anything published in Japan during 1983 — Super Mario Bros., for example. But in many cases, the differences boiled down to cultural differences. Comparing and contrasting the different launch lineups Nintendo went with in its two main territories offers an interesting study in priorities and marketing.

*Special thanks to Steven Lin for providing access to the hardware and software archived here.*





## NINTENDO FAMILY COMPUTER

ファミリーコンピュータ

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo

Genre: Sports (Baseball) • Release: Dec. 1983 (Japan) Oct. 1985 (U.S.) 1991 (Europe)

NES-BA-USA

Compared to the NES, the Family Computer (Famicom for short) feels remarkably toylike. Much of that comes down to its diminutive size—its footprint is more akin to that of the Wii than the NES—and its softer, more colorful plastics. Its red-and-gold on off-white color scheme has a certain iconic cachet among Japanese gaming fans. It nudges a certain part of the American hindbrain as well, though; due to Nintendo's Japan-centric practices, Famicom-themed merchandise (including a limited edition Game Boy Micro and a variant R.O.B. amiibo) makes its way West from time to time.

It was never a given that Nintendo would find its place in history as a video game publisher. Sure, the company had its roots in gaming and entertainment—it got its start in 1889 as a playing card maker—but the road from grey market hanafuda to purveyors of family-friendly icon Mario was long, rocky, and involved a great many unexpected side excursions.

The late Hiroshi Yamauchi had responsibility for steering the company thrust upon him at a young age, and he ran the company with an iron-fisted, no-apologies approach. Most of Nintendo's business ventures were based primarily on Yamauchi's own gut feeling... and for the most part, he had fairly canny instincts. That's not to say every decision he made was a winner. Sometimes, he had great ideas undermined by unforeseen circumstances, as with the crushing blow the OPEC oil crisis inflicted to his vision of light gun installations to replace failed bowling alleys. Other Nintendo ventures, on the other hand, were just straight up disastrous in their own right. Like the instant noodles they attempted to sell without checking first to make sure they were up to the same standards as Nissin's Cup Noodles.

"Like x but not quite as good" more or less defined Nintendo's output for the first 30 years of Yamauchi's tenure. For every innovative concept they put out, like Gunpei Yokoi's Ultra Hand or the Kosenjuu



SP light gun series, Nintendo had half a dozen products that amounted to shameless, off-brand versions of popular creations... like Nintendo Block, a ripoff of LEGO so blatant that there probably should have been a lawsuit. And nowhere was this imitative lack of imagination more evident than in Nintendo's first decade of video games. The company effectively entered the arcade gaming market because it had an amusement business infrastructure in place and, well, video games seemed the thing to do.

But those early Nintendo video games were rather less than inspired. Its initial standalone home console releases amounted to little more than the same old *Pong* clones that were cluttering up department stores around the world, debuting a full three years after the first *Home Pong* units arrived—a terrible case of too little, too late. Nintendo's arcade releases fared no better, alternating between unremarkable (*Sheriff*, an early top-down shooter), stodgy (its sit-down *Othello* cabinet), and insipid (its flood of *Space Invaders* clones, whose failure to reflect changing trends in games or appeal to international tastes nearly sank Nintendo American branch before it even properly got its start). It wasn't until the '80s dawned that Nintendo's video game division stopped fumbling around and pulled itself out of its morass.

Both Gunpei Yokoi's Game & Watch handhelds and Shigeru Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* turned out to be the biggest hits the company had ever experienced. It was only then that the formula for success became clear: New ideas, inventive applications of technology, and respectable quality control. More easily said than done, of course, but one fact quickly became self-evident: In order to make its games business work, Nintendo would have to move away from dedicated devices and toward the console business. This was hardly a radical idea (Atari had popularized interchangeable cartridges back in 1977), but it was new for Japan. No Japanese company had yet released a cartridge-based games machine, and American machines had almost no presence in Japan at all. This



The Famicom featured hardwired controllers—a sensible feature on a console that would sit in Japanese homes so small that cable length would be a non-issue. The controllers docked in the console housing (upright rather than next to the system as in the ColecoVision) for extra space savings. Interestingly, only controller I included Select and Start buttons; controller II instead featured a microphone complete with volume slider—a rarely used addition, but one that creates compatibility issues with clone hardware. Pictured to the left are the troublesome original model controllers with soft square buttons.

was presumably due to an unfavorable dollar-to-yen exchange rate (which would be normalized by the Plaza Accords in 1985—just in time for Nintendo's entrance into the U.S. home market), but in any case the Japanese games industry could easily have gone the same direction as in the U.K., where microcomputers ruled throughout the '80s. Yamauchi put the head of R&D3, Masayuki Uemura, on the task of creating Nintendo's first proper game system. His task: To create a console that would accept cartridges, cost less than ¥10000, and play a mean game of *Donkey Kong*. And it needed to come out sooner than later, because the Game & Watch line was already fading from its initial popularity and rival arcade manufacturer SEGA had begun test marketing its own console.

Uemura, an engineer who had worked with electronics giant Sharp, called in every marker, drawing on every business relationship he could. The result: The Nintendo Family Computer, or Famicom for short. Nintendo's console hit the market on July 15, 1983—ironically, the same day as SEGA's SG-1000. Uemura didn't manage to hit Yamauchi's price mandate, but ultimately that was likely for the best, as even with the cost overruns it remained competitively priced, and the technology inside its colorful plastic case absolutely eclipsed that of the rival SG-1000.

SEGA had gone with a fairly standard hardware set based on the Z80 processor; the SG-1000 turned



out to be so similar in specs to the ColecoVision that cross-platform conversions between the two systems have become one of the easiest and most popular forms of aftermarket fan bootleggery around. The Famicom incorporated a chip based on the MOS 6502 standard, which was less common in Japan than the Z80 but proved more versatile. The Famicom made some modifications to the 6502's standard instruction set, adding a few new features and discarding others, but its basic specs put it in a class above contemporary consoles. It could handle dozens of four-color sprites at once, offered five channels of simultaneous audio, a palette of 52 colors, and most of all the ability to scroll the screen smoothly, pixel-by-pixel, either horizontally or vertically.

The Famicom also featured a certain degree of extensibility, a fact that would come into play with the Famicom Disk System expansion and in specialized cartridges containing their own co-processors to improve on the console's innate capabilities. While the Famicom's hardware would soon be eclipsed by the competition, it managed to punch above its weight class thanks to ambitious developers and expanded cart capabilities. Uemura's decision to make the Famicom expandable would prove a tremendous asset for the console, allowing it to survive well into the '90s. In fact, the final official release for the console in any region would be *Wario's Woods*, which launched in the U.S. a week *after* the Sony PlayStation debuted in Japan. Back in the early '80s, however, the Famicom sparked a home gaming revolution in Japan. Personal computers would remain popular, but the mainstream gaming format of choice for Japanese kids would be consoles—and, specifically, the Famicom.

The Famicom wasn't an instant success, though. The console had something of a rough start, with only three games available at launch. Those three games had been astronomical arcade hits, but the biggest of

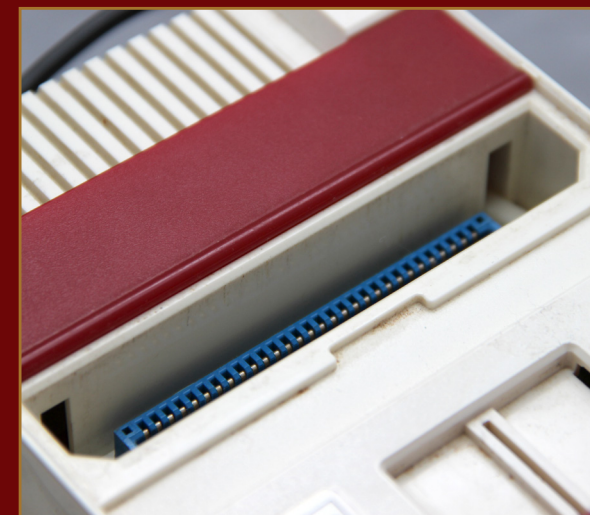
them—*Donkey Kong*—was two years old and getting a little long in the tooth. The Famicom offered the best-looking and most faithful home port by far (missing stage notwithstanding), but it was a bit dusty, and the console's lineup throughout the rest of 1983 had only one truly fresh release on tap, *Mario Bros.*

To make matters worse, the original Famicom model proved to be critically flawed. The processor contained a defect that could, in extremely rare circumstances, crash the console. More crucially, the original control pads proved to be unreliable. The square shape of the A and B buttons, and the fact that they were molded in the same soft plastic as the Select and Start buttons, caused their corners to become caught in the controller housing. Since the Famicom shipped with both of its controllers permanently wired to the console, this made for an irreparable shortcoming.

Nintendo made the hard decision to recall its initial shipment of consoles, replacing early units with new, defect-free CPUs... and, in the process, redesigning the controllers to feature hard, round, jam-free A and B buttons. Rather than destroy the Famicom's reputation, the recall reportedly gave Nintendo a favorable reputation among the Japanese public. A voluntary recall for a quality-control issue that other manufacturers might have simply shrugged off made the company look commendable, more concerned with doing right by consumers than with the bottom line.

By the end of 1984, the dicey early console models had long since been flushed from the retail pipeline; the first-party software lineup had improved considerably; third-party games had begun to appear; and the Famicom had sold a dozen times as many hardware units as the SG-1000. Nintendo had a legitimate hit on its hands... and the truly great games like *Super Mario Bros.* were still a year out.

To Americans familiar only with the NES, the Famicom can seem a strange creature indeed. It's

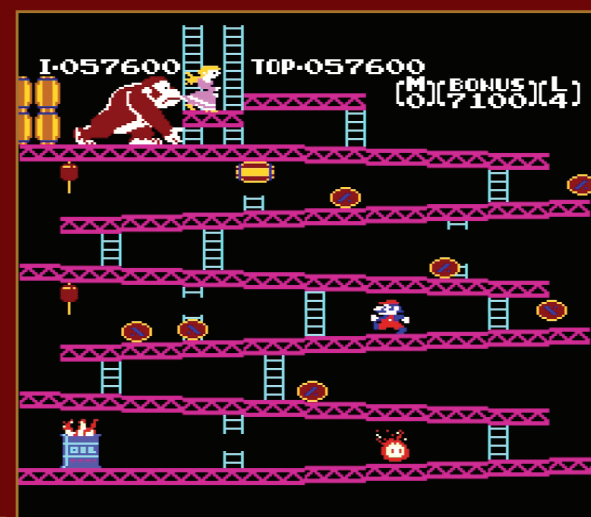


Nintendo created the odd zero-insertion force (ZIF) slot mechanism for the NES in order to minimize any visual continuity between the console and its failed forebears. In Japan, however, no such stigma hovered over the Famicom, so Nintendo went with a simpler setup: A traditional top-loading slot. Presumably as a result of Masayuki Uemura's mandate to keep costs low, the Famicom's slot lacked the spring-flap mechanism of other consoles, going instead with a simple red panel that players manually flipped open when they needed to place a cartridge into the system.

tiny, the plastics look and feel toylike, the controllers can't be removed, it loads from the top, and there's a microphone built into the second controller, of all damn things. Likewise, the Famicom's peripherals seem bizarre next to those that came out for the NES. The console literally could be a family computer, with a keyboard and tape cassette deck that turned it into the equivalent of the Coleco ADAM or the SG-1000's home computer alternate version, the SC-2000. Later, it would receive its own diskette drive. And on top of that, peripherals plugged into a small expansion port on the front of the machine! Truly, it feels some alternate reality NES—a fact further cemented by the strange sound effects and music present in Japanese versions of many popular NES games... all made possible by expansion capabilities of the Disk System or Japan-exclusive third-party mapper chips.

And yet, at heart, despite all the changes it underwent in its journey to the west, the Famicom is recognizably the Nintendo Entertainment System in an alternate form factor. While the specifics may have differed between regions, foundational classics ranging from *Mega Man II* to *Super Mario Bros. 3* look and play essentially the same on either system. Nintendo wasn't necessarily destined to become a video games company, but its first attempt at creating a video game console reshaped the nature of games forever... in both Japan and America.





ドンキーコング

## DONKEY KONG

ドンキーコング

Developer: Nintendo

Publisher: Nintendo

Genre: Platformer

Release: July 15, 1983 (Japan) June 1986 (U.S.) Sept.

1986 (Europe)

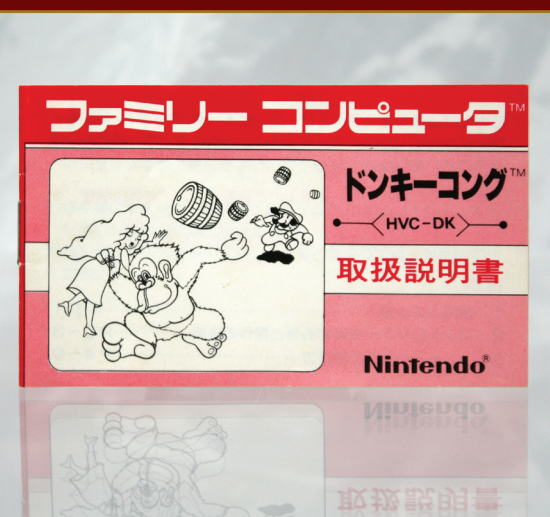
HVC-DK

**M**ario sells: An immutable truth of video games, and a cornerstone of Nintendo's business. Mario launched the company to international acclaim with *Super Mario Bros.*, sold the world on 3D graphics with *Super Mario 64*, and helped demonstrate that portable games could be every bit as rich and involving as their console counterparts with *Super Mario Land*.

Before any of those games could happen, though, Nintendo had to create *Donkey Kong*. The arcade game's stunning success took Nintendo from coin-on nobody to major super-power, so it's little surprise that the Family Computer hardware — for which initial design work began in 1981, right as *Donkey Kong* began its crusade to devour quarters — was purpose-built to offer consumers the best possible home rendition of the game. *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* were easy enough to recreate (despite Atari's infamous failure with the latter), but the more complex *Donkey Kong* proved trickier. Nintendo's big sales pitch for its home console's Japanese launch was that it offered the closest thing available to a perfect port of the arcade smash.

It wasn't *truly* perfect; it dropped the "pie factory" level that developers omitted from all but a handful of computer versions, lacked the opening cinema scenes, and had very slightly squashed vertical proportions. But even with these changes, it looked, sounded, and controlled more accurately than any port before it.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, even a stunning rendition of *Donkey Kong* seemed fairly old hat by 1983. The Famicom would need to brew for a while before it truly became the phenomenon Nintendo dreamed of.







## DONKEY KONG JR.

ドンキーコングJR

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo

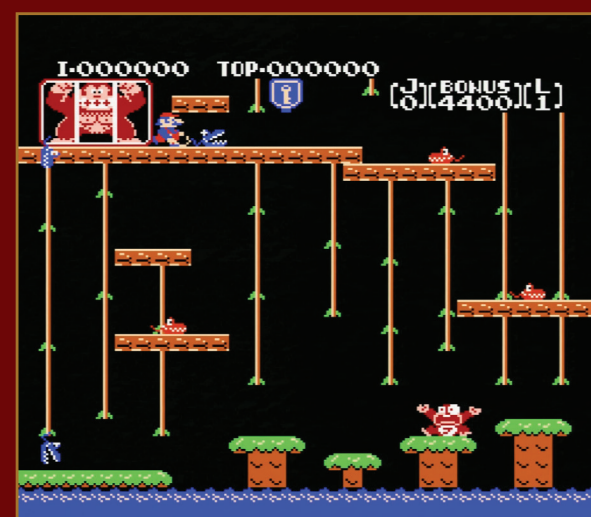
Genre: Platformer • Release: July 15, 1983 (Japan) June 1986 (U.S.) Sept. 1986 (Europe)

HVC-JR

**D**onkey Kong's follow-up lacked the perfect punch of the original game. Junior couldn't live up to the standard set by his old man — a fascinating parallel to the strained relationship between Nintendo boss Hiroshi Yamauchi and his son-in-law (former Nintendo of America president Minoru Arakawa, whom Yamauchi pointedly passed over for succession upon his own retirement in favor of the guy who programmed *Golf* and *Balloon Fight*)... but only so-so-as a video game.

Ironically, *Donkey Kong Jr.* would see a far more exacting Famicom port than its superior predecessor. Unlike *Donkey Kong*, *DK Jr.* contains all four of the arcade stages. Its visuals looked every bit as faithful, and the change in its screen dimensions weren't as noticeable. But that speaks, to some degree, to the failings of the underlying game: For instance, *Jr.* could contain all four arcade stages because those levels were less diverse and unique than the ones that comprised *Donkey Kong* and therefore required less memory.

But even if *Jr.* does fall flat in the wake of its legacy, the Famicom launch couldn't have been complete without it. Nintendo led with three games in July 1983, its three biggest arcade hits to date. Nintendo was more than happy to skip over its flops: There was little room within that tiny launch lineup for the likes of *Radar Scope* or *Sky Skipper*. Maybe *Jr.* hadn't hit the same heights as *Donkey Kong*, but it still fared quite well in the arcades, and it still used *Donkey Kong* as its underpinnings (to the point of inspiring a lawsuit, in fact). This conversion more than did the coin-op justice, and it made a natural complement to the Famicom's must-have launch title. If you were grabbing *Donkey Kong* with your new console, it only made sense to pick up the sequel, right?



ドンキーコングJR





## POPEYE

ポパイ

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo

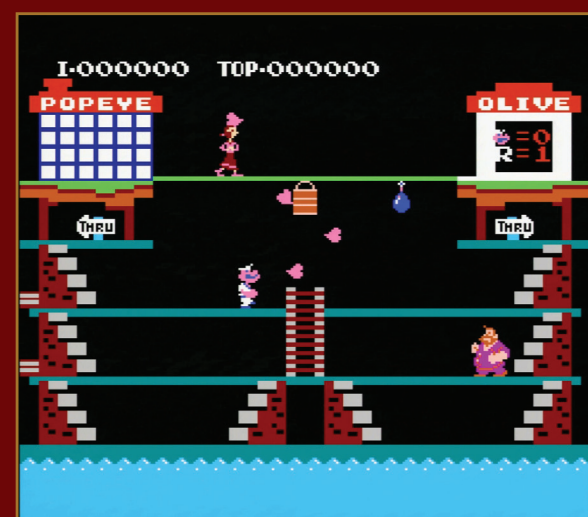
Genre: Platformer • Release: July 15, 1983 (Japan) June 1986 (U.S.) Sept. 1986 (Europe)

HVC-PP

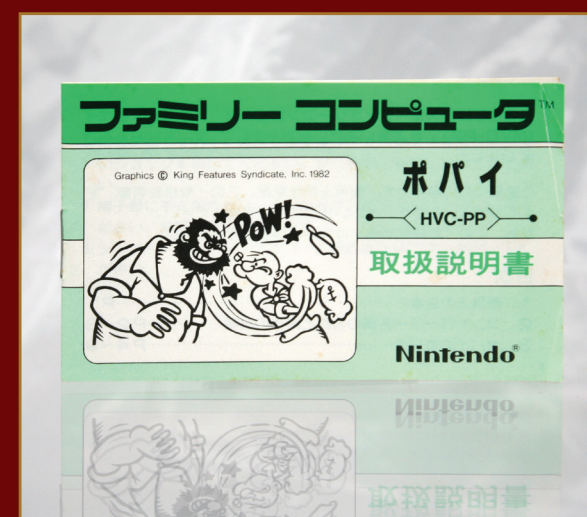
**D**onkey Kong and its sequel enjoyed fantastic conversions on Famicom, but Nintendo's third and final day-one arcade port fared more poorly. The *Popeye* coin-op represented a significant technical improvement over *Donkey Kong*, with huge, bold sprites, and the console lacked the oomph — or perhaps Nintendo's programmers simply lacked sufficient understanding of the hardware — to reproduce those cartoonish characters in a tiny cart (molded, of course, in spinach green, as with all of Nintendo's *Popeye* Game & Watch creations).

Alas, this makes *Popeye* for Famicom something of a letdown. Much like *Donkey Kong Jr.*, this platformer builds on the framework of *Donkey Kong* but lacks its brilliant design. Much of the arcade version's appeal came from the marvelously detailed character sprites, which depicted the cartoon characters. Bereft of that visual hook, the game loses something vital. It's OK, but it feels weaker, like Popeye denied his spinach fix. Despite the graphical downgrade, it still manages to capture the essence of the arcade title: The multi-tiered stages, the unpredictable behavior of Bluto (who, ruffian that he is, ignores the rules of platform game design and attacks across floors), the heart-catching intensity of play.

*Popeye* does have one notable distinction to its name, though: It's the first Famicom release never to be ported to or reproduced on another system. After this port appeared on NES early in the console's U.S. and European careers, the video game rights to *Popeye* evidently passed over to another publisher (namely Sigma, who published two *Popeye* titles for Game Boy). Nintendo learned its lesson about licensing, though: 1987's *Doki Doki Panic*, created for Fuji TV, would be reworked to become a part of the Mario pantheon.



ポパイ







## GOMOKU NARABE RENJU

五目ならべ 連珠  
 Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo  
 Genre: Board game (Go)  
 Release: Aug. 27, 1983 (Japan)  
 HVC-GO

Nintendo followed up its trio of Famicom arcade game conversions with something far less kid-friendly: Two conversions of popular Japanese tabletop games. Over the years, this has proven to be something of a standard for Japanese consoles. You'll almost find a version of *go* or *mah-jong* right near launch, perhaps as a peace offering to older players, or perhaps out of some sense of tradition that began here. The presence of *Gomoku Narabe Renju* — a variant on *go*, roughly the Japanese equivalent of chess — probably shouldn't be a surprise, coming from Nintendo. The company's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, was a high-level *go* player. Though he reputedly prided himself on never having played video games, it's not too difficult to imagine him giving this one at least a cursory try... if only to declare the AI inadequate against someone of his skill level.

But this, too, was ultimately a Nintendo arcade conversion of sorts. One of the company's first coin-op creations in the '70s was a cocktail cabinet-style adaptation of *Othello*, itself a simplified adaptation of the *go* concept (more commonly known as *reversi*). *Computer Othello* made its way home as a one of Nintendo's standalone TV game systems in 1980, retailing for a hefty ¥48000 (according to the blog *Before Mario*). It's easy, then, to understand why Nintendo was eager to switch to interchangeable cartridges: The Famicom debuted at ¥14800, and carts for around ¥4000. *Gomoku Narabe Renju* offered a more complex rendition of the dedicated *Othello* console Nintendo had sold a few years prior, yet combined with the Famicom itself it still came in at less than half the price... and the system could also play a mean game of *Donkey Kong*.

**五目ならべ**

- \* 初級 コンピュータ対局
- 中級 コンピュータ対局
- 上級 コンピュータ対局
- 2人用 2人対局

任天堂 © 1983

初級  
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# 五目ならべ 連珠

ファミリーコンピュータ™

五目ならべ 連珠  
 HVC-GO  
 取扱説明書

Nintendo





## MAH-JONG

麻雀

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo

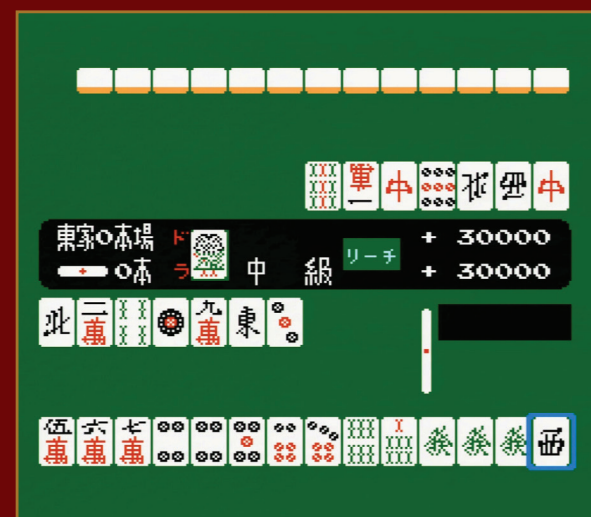
Genre: Board game (Mahjong)

Release: Aug. 27 1983 (Japan)

HVC-MJ

Where there's Japanese consoles, there's mahjong games. Adopted and adapted from the Chinese tabletop game, Japanese mahjong uses its own specific rules — and, more importantly for the purposes of Famicom gaming, it offers a great opportunity for multiplayer gaming gathered around a TV. Which has always been a crucial feature for Nintendo. This first attempt at recreating the tabletop experience didn't actually offer that feature, but everyone has to start somewhere. Unlike every other 1983 Famicom release, *Mah-Jongg* isn't adapted from a previous Nintendo release. The company would begin selling a deluxe mahjong Game & Watch device called *Yakuman* a few months after this game's debut — a dedicated handheld that, at ¥16800, cost nearly as much as a Famicom and a copy of *Mah-Jongg*. The Famicom game featured color graphics, but the monochrome *Yakuman* portable justified its cost: Up to four people could play together (by link cable), as in real mahjong.

*Mah-Jongg*, on the other hand, was strictly a single-player experience. Not only that, but it only included play against a single computer opponent — presumably memory or processing constraints made a full, proper game impossible. Nintendo would eventually rectify this wrong, sort of, by publishing Hudson's *4 Nin Uchi Mahjong* (*4 Person Strike Mahjong*) a year later; it didn't allow four people to play, but it did add two additional AI opponents for a proper man-versus-machine hand of mahjong. This limitation didn't seem to hurt *Mah-Jongg*'s prospects at retail, though; it was reportedly the third best-selling Famicom title released in 1983. Like a lot of early Famicom titles, the sheer novelty of its existence more than made up for any design inadequacies.



麻雀





## MARIO BROS.

マリオブラザーズ

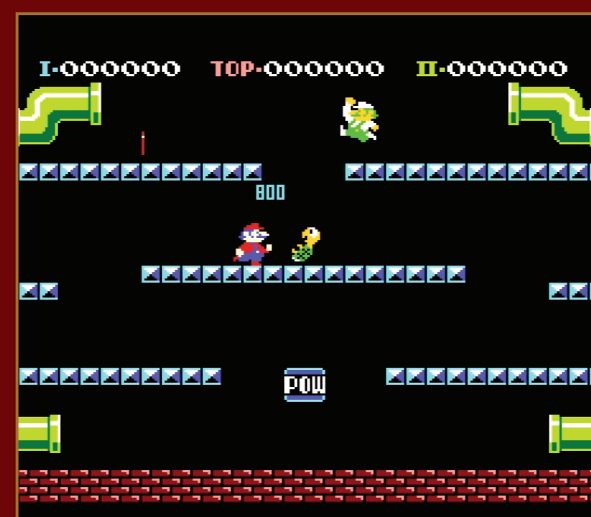
Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo  
 Genre: Platformer (Cooperative) • Release: Sept. 9, 1983  
 (Japan) June 1986 (U.S.) Sept. 1986 (Europe)  
 HVC-MA

Where *Donkey Kong* was slightly too old to be a true killer app for Famicom, and *Donkey Kong Jr.* and *Popeye* too lacking as concepts, *Mario Bros.* made for a far more compelling sales pitch.

Arriving on Famicom a mere three months after its coin-on debut, *Mario Bros.* truly felt like a make-good on the elusive promise every console maker proclaimed: A fresh, current arcade experience at home. Yes, the Famicom release lacked some of the graphical detail of the upright cabinet, but simplified sprites aside, this was the real deal, suffering from very few compromises in its mission to deliver *Mario Bros.* to fans.

Most importantly, of course, *Mario Bros.* on Famicom offered the cooperative design of its arcade counterpart. Well, perhaps “cooperative” is a misnomer — better to say “simultaneous,” as this was the game that established Nintendo’s fascination with multiplayer design that allows for either antagonism or friendship depending on the players, the situation, or the mood.

Here Mario and Luigi face an endless swarm of creatures emerging from a pair of pipes; players punch the ground from beneath their enemies to upend them and kick them into submission. Clearly inspired by Williams’ hit *Joust* — and not the last Nintendo creation to draw on that work — those ground-pounding tactics work just as well to upset the other player as they do the bad guys (interrupting their movements or even causing them to collide with an enemy). Two players working together could achieve high scores; two players working in conflict were more likely to find high blood pressure. A brilliant bit of game design, brilliantly (and quickly) converted to Famicom.



マリオブラザーズ





## POPEYE NO EIGO ASOBI

ポパイの英語遊び

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo

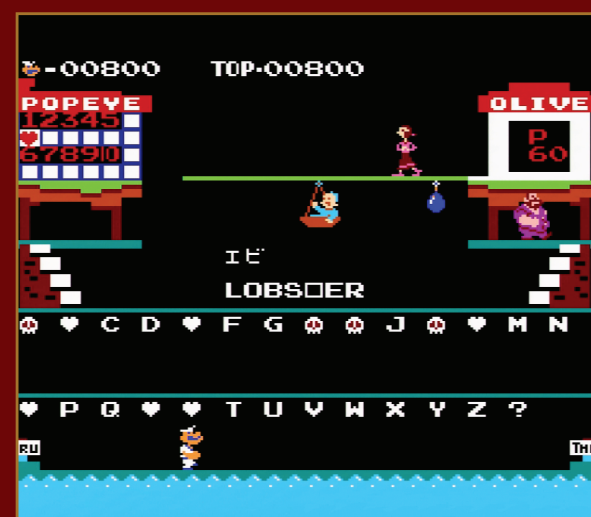
Genre: Edutainment • Release: Nov. 22, 1983 (Japan)

HVC-EN

In the U.S., Nintendo released its Black Box NES games under the banner of various series: Sports, Action, Zapper, and yes, even Robot. But there was one “series” that wasn’t a series at all: The Education Series, which consisted of only a single game, *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*. In Japan, Nintendo didn’t bother with those groupings on its boxes. If it had, though, their Education Series would have had a bit more truth in its name: Famicom did in fact receive *two* educational titles, so it had at least as legitimate a claim to the word “series” as the Robot lineup. Besides *Kong*, Famicom also received the oddity that was *Popeye no Eigo Asobi* — roughly, *Popeye’s English Tutor*.

Popeye was a strange choice to teach Japanese children English, given the character’s rather tenuous grasp on the language, but nevertheless that’s who Nintendo went with... most likely because it allowed them to easily repurpose sprites from their *Popeye* arcade conversion. Players are presented with a Japanese word written in phonetic katakana script and have to spell out the English translation by selecting Roman letters (in any order). Incorrect choices cause baby Swee’pea, hanging precariously from an overhead line, to shift a notch closer to his doom. The box (now exceedingly rare and expensive) included a two-sided reference sheet that provides all the game’s terms, in both languages, in eye-wateringly tiny agate type.

For perhaps obvious reasons, this game was never localized. It probably could have been adapted to teach kids Japanese, but despite America’s widespread ’80s Japan panic, that language was never as useful (or as trendy) here as ours was over there. Even so, *Popeye* works out to be a much better learning game than its math companion — an effective (if limited) vocabulary drill for both Japanese- and English-speakers alike.



ポパイの英語遊び





## BASEBALL

ベースボール

Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo  
Genre: Sports (Baseball) • Release: Dec. 7, 1983 (Japan)  
Oct. 1985 (U.S.) 1991 (Europe)  
HVC-BA

**B**aseball for Famicom needs no real introduction: It's almost exactly the same game as the American release that kicked off the book.

Almost. Unlike many NES launch titles, *Baseball* does include some regional differences. It actually required a small amount of localization, which required a bit of work for a game of this vintage. The tiny amount of text included in the game had to be hard-coded, requiring new graphics to be drawn up for Roman letters. Meters and kilometers had to be converted to feet and miles.

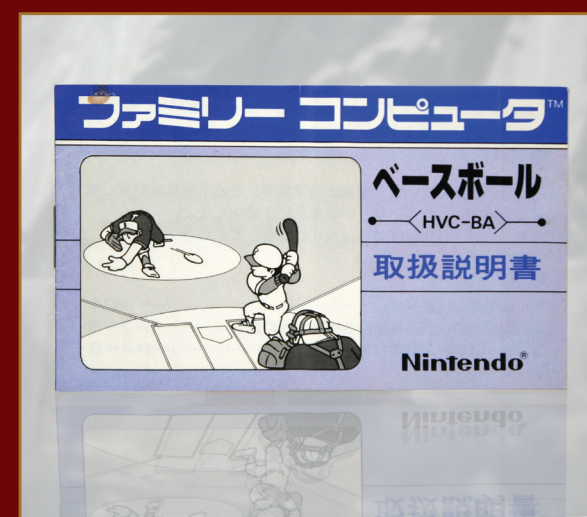
More crucially, Nintendo couldn't simply manufacture a surplus of Japanese ROM chips for *Baseball* and stick them into American carts with an adapter, as was the case for so many games to ship at the NES's soft launch in 1985. That also meant Nintendo had to re-engineer the ROMs themselves.

If that seems like a lot of trouble to go to for such a simple sports game, consider the popularity of *this particular* sport in both Japan and the U.S.: In a time of international distrust, it was a common thread that united our two nations. (Nintendo would even end up buying their own Major League Baseball team.) There's a reason this was the lead sports game for both the Famicom and NES. The fanaticism our countries share for baseball meant it behooved Nintendo to adapt the game for both the U.S. and Japanese markets.

As a sign of how much more sophisticated this take on baseball was than what had come before, the Japanese release comes with a controls cheat sheet in addition to the standard instruction manual. Again, *Baseball* may not look like much today, but in '83 this was state-of-the-art.



ベースボール







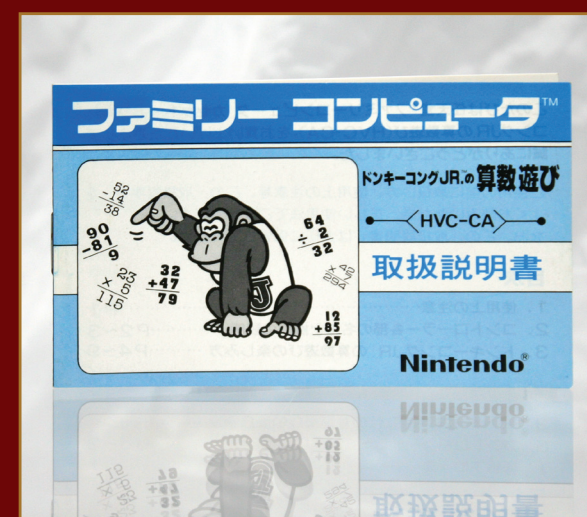
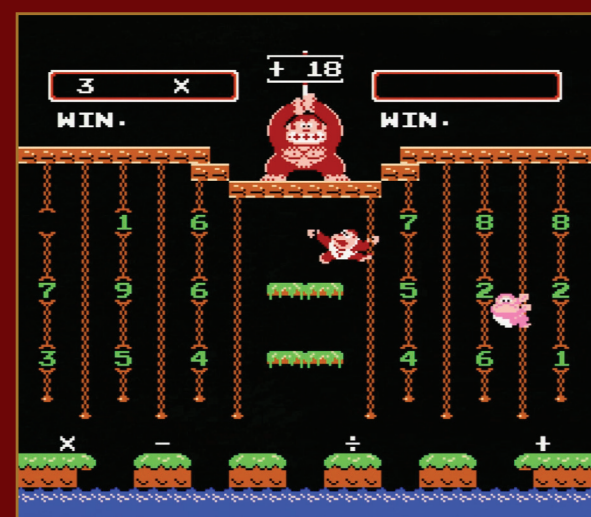
## DONKEY KONG JR. NO SANSUU ASOBI

ドンキーコングJR.の算数遊び • *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*  
 Developer: Nintendo • Publisher: Nintendo  
 Genre: Edutainment • Release: Dec. 12, 1983 (Japan)  
 June 1986\* (U.S.) 1986 (Europe)  
 NVC-CA

**B**ack in the day, *Donkey Kong Jr. Math* was that one game you only ever saw on the NES lineup posters that came with the games. You certainly didn't know anyone who owned it, and — like *Stack-Up* — you probably never saw it in stores after 1986. It wouldn't be the last edutainment game for NES, but it would be the last from Nintendo, who between this and *Popeye no Eigo Asobi* paid their obligatory lip service to video games as constructive activities and promptly went back to making software people would actually want to buy.

The game's undesirable nature in the '80s makes it a hot property now: The U.S. version of *Donkey Kong Jr. Math* sells for a pretty penny as a bare cart and for a horrifying sum complete. The Japanese version isn't quite so scarce, especially bare, but it's just as unloved. Players control Junior as he shuffles up and down vines attempting to complete math sums. Perhaps it's down to personal bias — as a writer, I find words more interesting than numbers — but it's not nearly as enjoyable as *Popeye's* edutainment bid.

The Famicom education “series” consists of graphics repurposed from two launch titles: *Donkey Kong Jr.* and *Popeye*. So what of the third and most popular launch game? Well, that was to be recycled into something educational as well: *Donkey Kong no Ongaku Asobi*, a music teaching game. That never saw the light of day, despite having been advertised; perhaps its creators realized it wasn't much fun without a keyboard. Anyway, it was the first canceled Famicom creation (that we know of)... which is a shame, because it seemed a lot more interesting than this one.



ドンキーコングJR.の算数遊び