

# Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum Overview

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## Curriculum in a Nutshell

Digital media and technology are evolving at a dizzying pace, bringing with them extraordinary opportunities as well as real risks for young people. Young people are using the immense power of the Internet and mobile technologies to create, connect, explore, and learn in ways never before imagined. But issues that emerge with this 24/7 “connected culture” – from identity theft, to cyberbullying, to uncertainty about what information to trust online – are surfacing both in schools and at home.

Common Sense Media offers this **FREE Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum** to help educators empower their students and school communities to be safe, responsible, and savvy as they navigate this fast-paced digital world. The curriculum:

- Introduces reliable, research-based information to students about digital media and their impact
- Helps students explore the complex issues of our connected culture
- Empowers students to think critically about the ways they use digital technologies as they build digital literacy skills for life
- Satisfies all criteria for E-Rate compliance and is aligned to ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) and AASL (American Association of School Librarians) standards

This curriculum, uniquely designed for middle school students, has been implemented by librarians and technology educators, subject area teachers, health educators, and guidance counselors. Lesson activities range from low-tech options, such as discussion and paper-based worksheets, to media-rich videos and Internet-based activities. These materials can also be used in informal learning environments such as after-school programs and community centers, libraries, and museums.

## Approach

This research-based curriculum presents a balanced voice to digital literacy education. We celebrate the power of the Internet and other digital media while teaching students to avoid the potential perils of digital life. Based on the work of Howard Gardner and the GoodPlay Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the curriculum emphasizes skill building, critical thinking, ethical discussion, and decision making – using case studies and real-life scenarios. During our foundational research, students told us they wanted to grapple with real-life issues that would require them to think deeply. The activities in this curriculum, which include video, interactive online tutorials, and role playing, allow them to do just that.

It takes a village: Common Sense Media takes a whole-community approach to digital literacy and citizenship, providing parents with educational resources and engaging them in discussion. There are unit and lesson-level parent tip sheets, videos, and a handful of student and parent homework activities. You can also find a wealth of parent material and advice on Common Sense Media’s website: [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org).

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## Just Use Common Sense!

Many of the curricula that address students’ use of media focus only on keeping children safe. This curriculum addresses safety and security concerns, but it consciously expands beyond them to address an array of issues, including ethics and behavior as well as Internet research and evaluation skills. Lessons are designed to be developmentally and culturally appropriate, are geared toward diverse learning styles, and engage students whether they attend a school with one laptop per child or a school with no laptops at all. Simply put: Using Common Sense Media’s **Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum** is a matter of common sense!

## The Strands

The curriculum is divided into these three topical *strands*, each with its own *units* and *lessons*. Educators may choose to teach all the lessons in each of the three strands, or may decide to use individual lessons. Scope and sequence charts as well as implementation guides are available to help you get started. The topics covered by this curriculum include:

**Safety and Security:** Students learn the basics of Internet safety and security, including how to create strong passwords, handle inappropriate content, avoid unwanted contact (e.g., predators), and protect against identity theft, phishing, and malware.

**Digital Citizenship:** Students learn to think critically about how they treat others in this fast-paced digital world, and they learn to use the Internet in legal, ethical, and responsible ways.

**Research and Information Literacy:** Students learn research and evaluation skills, including how to search the Internet effectively, evaluate the trustworthiness and usefulness of online information, and how to correctly cite sources.

See page three for descriptions of the strands and units

## Strand/Units description

**Safety and Security Strand:** Students learn concrete skills to stay safe and secure online.



**Safety Unit:** Students explore the benefits and risks of online talk. They learn about the rewards of communicating online, but also how to recognize inappropriate contact. Students learn how to apply common sense tips to online talk, and to stay safe when they connect with others.



**Security Unit:** Students learn strategies for managing their information online to keep it secure. They learn how to guard against identity theft, keep their data safe from hacking and malware, and protect themselves from phishing.

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**Digital Citizenship Strand:** Students reflect on how to behave ethically online.



**Digital Life Unit:** Students explore the positive and negative impact of digital media on their lives, communities, and culture as a pathway to defining good digital citizenship.



**Privacy and Digital Footprints Unit:** Students learn that the Internet is a very public space and that they must therefore carefully manage their digital footprint and respect the privacy of others online.



**Self-Expression and Identity Unit:** Students identify and explore different ways they present themselves online while at the same time learning to recognize when playing with identity can cross the line into deception.



**Connected Culture Unit:** Students explore the ethics of online communities – both the negative behaviors to avoid, like cyberbullying and hate speech, and positive behaviors that support collaboration and positive relationships.



**Respecting Creative Work Unit:** Students learn about the value and responsibility of being a 21st-century creator: getting credit for your own work and giving others proper respect online.

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**Research and Information Literacy Strand:** Students think critically about finding and evaluating information online.



**Searching:** Students are introduced to different search options and effective strategies for finding information. They make informed choices about which search sites to use, and how to use search tools and precise keywords to yield the best results.



**Research and Evaluation:** Students become critical thinkers about the information they encounter online. They learn to evaluate the quality and credibility of websites. They also explore how some websites are designed to be “sticky” – attracting viewers and keeping them coming back.