



CYBER CIVICS

Level 3: Media Literacy For Positive Participation

This third level of Cyber Civics (designed for late middle school) continues the learning journey begun in [Level 1: Digital Citizenship](#) and [Level 2: Information Literacy](#). By this stage, students are prepared and excited to engage with media as both critical analysts and responsible participants. The media literacy focus of this level empowers students with essential 21st-century skills—teaching them to critically evaluate increasingly sophisticated media messages, thanks in part to new AI technologies, that they encounter across all digital platforms.



It also includes an all-new “Digital Health and Wellbeing” unit that addresses some of today’s most pressing digital challenges. This robust curriculum equips students to navigate our media-rich world with confidence and discernment.

UNIT 1: A PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Students discover there are lots of way to use media and that sometimes media even uses them! They also begin to consider their place in today’s “participatory culture.”

- **Lesson 1: Are You a Maker or a Taker?**
Students assess their technology use to discover how much they “make” and/or “take in” media. Math skills involved!
- **Lesson 2: The Multitasking Myth**
In this lesson, students consider how they deploy their attention as they engage in activities that help them understand that “multitasking” is a myth.
- **Lesson 3: Your Brain on Tech**
Everyone is concerned about so-called tech “addiction,” even young people! This lesson, along with its activity, introduces students to the “persuasive technologies” used to capture and hold their attention. It also encourages them to think of ways they might gain better control over their technology use.

UNIT 2: CALLING ON CRITICAL THINKING

The ability to critically assess online information is perhaps one of the most important skills for a young digital citizen to master. This unit, based on current research conducted by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), teaches students this essential skill.

UNIT 2: CALLING ON CRITICAL THINKING, cont.

- **Lesson 4: Analyzing Online Information**
This lesson teaches students how to use the same three essential questions professional fact-checkers ask when they assess online information.
- **Lesson 5: Analyzing Websites**
Students practice using the same essential questions to evaluate websites they find online.
- **Lesson 6: Analyzing AI-Generated Information**
With AI-generated information popping up literally everywhere online, it's important for students to know how to use this information discerningly. This lesson equips them with this important skill.

UNIT 3: MISINFORMATION

In today's participatory culture, anyone can share news and information, which offers both benefits and risks! This unit helps students become critical consumers of media by showing them how misinformation spreads online and examining the powerful role emerging technologies—like artificial intelligence (AI)—play in amplifying false or misleading content.

- **Lesson 7: What's News?**
After reviewing examples of how social media has influenced the "news" in the past, students analyze and reflect upon the sources and credibility of "news" and information found online today.
- **Lesson 8: Understanding Misinformation**
With so much misleading information online, this lesson helps students understand the different types of false or deceptive content they may encounter and gives them the tools to recognize what is, and isn't, credible information.
- **Lesson 9: Don't Click on the Bait**
Students examine how clickbait can sometimes lead to misinformation, then apply their creativity in a hands-on activity that reinforces the lesson.
- **Lesson 10: AI, Deepfakes, and the News**
It is impossible to overlook the increasing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the spreading of misinformation and disinformation. In this lesson, students learn the role AI plays and, more importantly, how to identify its use.
- **Lesson 11: Simon Says It's True**
This lesson, along with its fun activity (who doesn't love to play Simon Says?), lets students practice detecting online misinformation.

UNIT 4: STEREOTYPES AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Television, videos, movies, commercials, online games, and more often depict people in overly simplified ways and digital technologies make it easier than ever to share and perpetuate these notions.

- **Lesson 12: Seeing Stereotypes**
In this lesson, students learn to recognize how media representations of people—through images, words, characters, and more—can create and perpetuate certain ideas, or stereotypes, and how this, in turn, impacts how we view ourselves and each other.
- **Lesson 13: Don't Label Me!**
Students discover that categorizing people and things is how humans make sense of a confusing world, but that sometimes this can lead to unfair assumptions being made about entire groups of people.
- **Lesson 14: The Ad Who Knows You**
Today advertisers can easily and inexpensively “microtarget” people based on the rich personal information they willingly provide online. Through a fun activity, students discover how ads for narrow target audiences can also perpetuate long-standing assumptions or generalizations about certain groups.

UNIT 5: VISUAL LITERACY

Using everything from YouTube to TikTok, young people consume and create all sorts of visual media, including photos, images, video, memes, and more. This unit helps students learn how to “read” visual media so that they become less susceptible to visual manipulations, including AI ones!

- **Lesson 15: Before There Was Photoshop**
While new technologies make it faster and easier than ever to “doctor” photos, photo manipulation dates back to the invention of the camera. In this lesson students look at some famous photo manipulations that altered perceptions and shaped history.
- **Lesson 16: Every Picture Tells a Story**
In this hands-on lesson, students learn the fundamentals of visual language and photography, and discover firsthand how these fundamentals are used to craft media messages.
- **Lesson 17: Don't Let That Photo Fool You**
Knowing how to question the source and authenticity of an image is more important than ever. Students learn to detect when a photo has been altered, or entirely generated, as they consider the impact of image manipulation.

UNIT 5: VISUAL LITERACY, cont.

- **Lesson 18: When Filters Go Too Far**
Students explore the impact of continued exposure to images that promote unattainable standards of beauty and imagine possible solutions.
- **Lesson 19: Food Takes Center Stage**
Advertisers have long used photographic techniques and editing to make their products look more appetizing and beautiful. Students discover how food is readied today for its “close-up.”

UNIT 6: DIGITAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

With students increasingly navigating social relationships through technology, this unit provides crucial guidance on maintaining safe digital boundaries, recognizing when interactions become inappropriate or harmful, and building confidence to seek support when needed.

- **Lesson 20: Healthy Relationships, Online and Off**
Students explore the characteristics of a healthy relationship and learn strategies to avoid unhealthy ones.
- **Lesson 21: Think Before You Share: Sexting and Online Boundaries**
Students learn that sexting, “the sending OR receiving of sexually suggestive, nude, or seminude images,” is a serious digital age issue and discover the consequences they might face if they send (or are sent!) a sext.
- **Lesson 22: Private Means Private: When Sharing Isn’t Okay**
“Revenge porn” is the act of sending or posting another person’s intimate photos or videos without that person’s consent, as a way to get revenge, to coerce, or just to be cruel. In this lesson, students learn how to protect themselves from this.
- **Lesson 23: Spotting and Stopping Digital Blackmail**
The FBI recently issued a warning about the serious problem of sextortion, particularly amongst teen boys. This is a crime in which an offender coerces a minor into creating and sending sexually explicit images or video to them, often using threats, blackmail, or emotional pressure. This lesson addresses this sensitive, yet important, topic.
- **Lesson 24: AI-Manipulated Images and You**
Students explore how generative AI can be used to manipulate photos of people—including classmates, celebrities, or themselves—and even make it appear as though they are entirely nude. They discover the real-world harm this can cause, even when the image looks fake or is meant as a joke.

UNIT 6: DIGITAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING, cont.

- **Lesson 25: AI Chatbots and Real Connections**

Students explore the growing use of AI chatbots—computer programs that use artificial intelligence (AI) to simulate human conversation, either through text or voice. They consider when it's appropriate to use a chatbot and when it's better to seek out a real person, especially for emotional support or complex issues.

UNIT 7: THE POWER IS IN YOUR HANDS

The overall objective of Cyber Civics has been to help students discover how to use technology positively and productively—to learn, to inspire, be inspired, and to make and share useful, truthful, and uplifting content in ethical ways—and to show others by example how to do the same. This final unit challenges students to consider their place in the digital world, now and in the future.

- **Lesson 26: The Power of Participation**

While it's easy to dismiss social media as a frivolous time-waster (and for many of us it is!), it's important for students to appreciate its incredible power by learning how its been used by many to improve and even change the world. This lesson introduces students to some powerful examples.

- **Lesson 27: How Will You Participate?**

Through discussion of actual online scenarios, students consider the different ways people participate online. The activity helps them understand how online activities that seem passive may actually not be so at all.

- **Lesson 28: Making Technology Accessible To All**

Assistive Technology (AT) provides access for people with certain disabilities (such as software for captioning online meetings, or voice-activated smartphone apps). Students imagine how they might create new ways of making the online world more accessible.

- **Lesson 29: Are You a Maker or a Taker Now?**

Students reassess their digital media use to discover how their relationship with technology may have evolved through these lessons.