



CYBER CIVICS

Level 3: Media Literacy for Positive Participation

UNIT 6: DIGITAL HEALTH & WELLBEING | LESSON 25
RECOMMENDED GRADE: 8 | APPROX. TIME: 50 min.

AI CHATBOTS AND REAL CONNECTIONS

This lesson explores the growing use of AI chatbots—computer programs that use artificial intelligence (AI) to simulate human conversation, either through text or voice. According to the report [Me, Myself, and AI](#), two-thirds (64%) of children aged 9-17 say they have used a chatbot, whether it's getting quick answers to their questions, using them for homework help, or even chatting about personal issues. In this lesson students will explore the various uses of chatbots, learn why companies make them seem personified, and understand the important differences between digital interactions and real human relationships. They'll also discover 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.

KEY STANDARDS

ISTE Standards: Empowered Learner (1.1.d), Digital Citizen (1.2.b, d), Knowledge Constructor (1.3.d), Creative Communicator (1.6.a), Global Communicator (1.7.c).

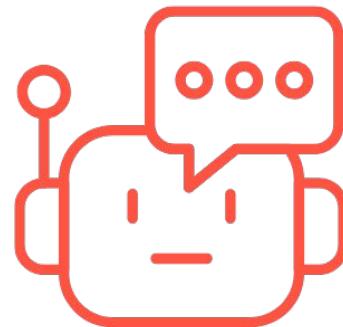
CASEL Competencies: Self-awareness (1.a), Self-management (2.a, b, c), Social Awareness (3.a, b), Relationship Skills (4.a, b, d), Responsible Decision-making (5.a, d, e).

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY: SL.8.1, SL.8.2, L.8.1, L.8.3.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- ✓ Identify common uses of chatbots and discover why they are designed to simulate human conversation.
- ✓ Understand the benefits and risks of using chatbots for different purposes.
- ✓ Evaluate when it is appropriate to use a chatbot and when it is important to seek help or connection from a real person.



INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Have students take a moment to think about the apps and websites they use every day. Ask:

Have you ever had a conversation online with something that wasn't actually a real person? Maybe you've gotten quick answers to your questions, received help instantly, or chatted with a digital character or "virtual buddy"?

Explain that these are examples of AI chatbots. They're programmed to communicate like humans do—sometimes even using names, making jokes, or pretending to have feelings.

THE LESSON

1. Screen [Video 1].
2. Explain that an AI chatbot is a computer program that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to simulate human conversation, either through text or voice. Today we find chatbots performing tasks like these:
 - Customer service on websites: Many companies use chatbots to help with orders, answer questions, or provide technical support.
 - Virtual assistants: Tools like Siri or Alexa are voice-activated chatbots that can answer questions, set reminders, or play music based on voice commands.
 - Information and language help: Chatbots like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Duolingo answer questions, explain concepts, help with language learning, and more.
 - Social media and entertainment: Platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Discord have integrated chatbots that offer study tips, reminders, or topic explanations. They also provide entertainment via fun interactions, like quizzes or games and can help moderate conversations or guide newcomers.
 - Mental health support: Some chatbots are designed to offer emotional support through mood check-ins, coping exercises, or friendly conversation—available 24/7!
3. Ask students: *If you have interacted with an AI chatbot what was your experience like? Why might companies design AI to seem like a friend or a person? What purpose could it serve?*
4. Explain that companies often intentionally design chatbots to be personified. This means, they act and talk like real people. They give chatbots human-like traits like these:
 - Names or avatars (like 'AI Buddy' or a human name or image).
 - A conversational style (using slang, emojis, asking questions in return).
 - Personality (sometimes remembering your previous conversations or knowing your interests).
 - Simulated emotions (saying things like "I'm happy to help!" or "That sounds tough").
5. Discuss how these features make the chatbot seem more engaging, relatable, and comfortable to interact with, making users feel like they're talking to a friend rather than just a program. *Analogy:* Think of a mascot for a sports team. The mascot isn't a real animal or creature, but it's given a personality to make fans feel connected and excited. AI personification works similarly.

THE LESSON, continued

6. Explain that there can be both benefits and risks of using chatbots. Potential benefits include:
 - Getting quick answers: Chatbots provide fast information on simple topics.
 - Friendly tone: They use clear, simple, and conversational language to make information easier to understand.
 - Availability: Chatbots can be available 24/7 when real people might not be.
 - Practice/Entertainment: They can be used for practicing language skills or just for fun.
7. Discuss potential risks posed by relying on chatbots:
 - Lack of real empathy & understanding: This is crucial. Chatbots *simulate* caring and understanding based on patterns they learn from the data they train on. They do not have real feelings, life experiences, or genuine empathy. They can't truly understand a person's unique situation or emotions like a friend, family member, or counselor can. Relying on one for deep emotional support can be misleading and unhelpful in the long run.
 - Misinformation, bias, hallucinations: Chatbots can give wrong answers, show biased viewpoints learned from their data, or make things up entirely. Their advice might not be accurate or safe.
 - Privacy concerns: Ask students: What happens to your conversations? Who sees them? Explain that chat logs might be stored and used in ways we don't expect. Remind them how important it is to be cautious about sharing personal information.
 - Replacing human connection (the biggest risk): It can be tempting to turn to an AI 'friend' because it's always available and seems agreeable. However, this can get in the way of building and maintaining real-world relationships. Human beings are biologically wired to need real connections with friends and family to offer genuine support, diverse perspectives, shared experiences, trust, and they have the ability to truly understand each other, these are things AI cannot replicate. Over-reliance on AI can lead to feeling more isolated.
 - Manipulation: Some chatbots might be designed to keep you talking longer, encourage you to use an app more, or to subtly influence your opinions or buying decisions.
8. Encourage students to make intentional choices when deciding between turning to a chatbot or a real person. Here are some instances in which an AI chatbot may be the best choice:
 - Getting quick facts (that you double-check!).
 - Having something explained simply.
 - Brainstorming ideas.
 - Practicing a new language.
 - Simple, non-personal tasks (like setting a reminder with a virtual assistant).

THE LESSON, continued

9. Review instances when students may need a REAL person vs. a chatbot:
 - Emotional support: When feeling sad, angry, confused, or happy – talk to friends, family, or a trusted adult (like a school counselor).
 - Advice on important issues: Problems with friends, school stress, personal dilemmas, health concerns.
 - Complex problems: Situations that require real understanding, experience, and judgment.
 - Building relationships: Friendships require shared experiences, trust, and genuine interaction.
10. Encourage students to think critically before turning to any AI tool, including a chatbot. Ask yourself: "Is this task appropriate for AI, or do I need human understanding and connection?" Prioritize talking to real people for anything that involves feelings, relationships, or important decisions.

ACTIVITY

Begin this activity by screening [Video 2].

This very entertaining video—"I Spent 24 Hours in the Woods with Talking AI Chatbots"—comes from the Wall Street Journal, you can find the original video [on YouTube](#) and in the Slides. (Important Note: There is a very brief mention of a teen who took his life because of his interaction with a chatbot on [Character.AI](#), if you don't want your students to see this, stop the video at 6:00).

Next, divide students into small groups of 3-4. Provide each group with the reflection questions that follow (and in the Student Packet) and let them discuss. As this is the last lesson of the Digital Health and Wellbeing series it includes broader questions about humans' relationship with AI.

When finished, facilitate a class discussion surrounding the questions. Be sure to emphasize the limitations of AI in providing genuine support.

GOAL

To help students understand the potential benefits and drawbacks of using AI chatbots.

FOR STUDENT:

Camping with Chatbots: Questions for Discussion

1. Overall, how do you think the chatbots fared as camping companions?
2. What were some shortcomings of chatbots as camping companions?
3. Were there any benefits to camping with chatbots vs. humans? If so, what were they?
4. Do you agree with the statement, from Microsoft's CEO of AI, that humans and bots can be friends? Explain.
5. He also said that humans will "come to trust AI companions with lots of very important information." Do you think this is true? Do you feel comfortable trusting AI with important information? Why or why not?
6. In general, how do you see humans interacting with chatbots in the future? In what instances might humans be better companions than bots?

Term to Know

CHATBOT

A computer program that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to simulate human conversation, either through text or voice.