



# Developing Thoughtful “Cybercitizens”

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN to be a citizen in a digital world where technology has facilitated global connections? The children of today are immersed in a digital age, and as increasing numbers of students go online, they require skills to securely and responsibly take full advantage of computers and the Internet. Despite the natural enthusiasm that many young people have for online activities, they are often unaware that the privilege of “cybercitizenship” requires skills beyond the technical capacity to search out information, engage in dialogue, or play games. Children need continued guidance to successfully manage the challenges associated with responsible use of technology. These skills include instruction on evaluating and comparing informational web sites, identifying commercial messages, protecting their identity and privacy, demonstrating responsible behavior online, and managing difficult situations that might be encountered in “cyberexchanges” such as chat rooms and discussion lists.

## Preparing Children for the Digital Age

Today’s children are the first generation to be raised in a wired world where computers are common in classrooms and homes. In

addition to the tremendous benefits that Internet technology has afforded, including access to information and educational resources, its use also brings new issues, problems, and risks. For example, the Internet can expose children to information with questionable legitimacy, ideas that can be contrary to positive behaviors, and messages that are intended to manipulate their actions or beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, new issues of public policy and ethics have arisen as information technology gains prominence in the national infrastructure, accelerating the capacity for economic opportunities and opening communication. Given these emerging applications, society is increasingly recognizing that technology-based assets must be protected from threats to security (personal, corporate, and national security).

Furthermore, digital communication is integrally connected with global understanding, multicultural respect, diversity, and tolerance.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the broad global access the Internet brings, users often lack cultural sensitivity that can foster collaboration in a global community. Young people are especially prone to misperceive the opinions of others and may therefore refrain from respectful interactions. In order to adequately prepare children for use of the Internet,

# Websites Recommended for Teachers

## Cyber Citizenship

**Center for Democracy & Technology** provides up-to-date information about Internet public policy issues such as privacy, cyber-crime, censorship, and security.

[www.cdt.org](http://www.cdt.org)

**Computer Learning Foundation: Use Technology Responsibly** describes the efforts of parents and educators to promote responsible computing.

[www.computerlearning.org/RespComp.htm](http://www.computerlearning.org/RespComp.htm)

**CyberSmart!** provides standards-based lesson plans for grades K-8 that address cybercitizenship and other cybersafety topics.

[www.cybersmart.org](http://www.cybersmart.org)

**The CyberPilot's License** includes several links to Web sites designed to help students become responsible "netizens."

[wist236.edtech.hawaii.edu/dept/classes/cpl](http://wist236.edtech.hawaii.edu/dept/classes/cpl)

## Respecting the Law

**Cybercitizenship.org** provides approaches for teaching children about "Cyber Ethics." This site also includes sets of links for adults and children to gain a better understanding of the Internet.

[www.cybercitizenship.org](http://www.cybercitizenship.org)

**Cybercrime.gov**, a website of the U.S. Department of Justice, contains background information and up-to-date news about cyber crimes.

[www.cybercrime.gov](http://www.cybercrime.gov)

**United States Copyright Office** provides up-to-date news about copyright issues, as well as explaining the basics of copyright law.

[www.loc.gov/copyright](http://www.loc.gov/copyright)

## Computer Ethics

**Institute for Global Ethics** promotes and educates about ethical decision-making both on and off the Internet.

[www.globalethics.org](http://www.globalethics.org)

**Right and Wrong Online**, developed by The National PTA, provides guidelines for parents about teaching their children ethical online behavior.

[www.pta.org/programs/fttright.htm](http://www.pta.org/programs/fttright.htm)

**Cyberethics for Kids** is a site by the U.S. Department of Justice's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section. It provides adults, children and teens information on how to use the Internet safely and responsibly.

[www.cybercrime.gov/rules/kidinternet.htm](http://www.cybercrime.gov/rules/kidinternet.htm)

## Netiquette

**Emoticons** explains to children how to use keyboard characters to express emotions and ideas in e-mails.

[www.chirpingbird.com/netpets/html/computer/emoticon.html](http://www.chirpingbird.com/netpets/html/computer/emoticon.html)

**Netiquette Home Page** provides links to information about online manners, including an entire online book by Virginia Shea.

[www.albion.com/netiquette](http://www.albion.com/netiquette)

## Online Simulations

In the online game **Privacy Playground: The First Adventure of the Three Little CyberPigs**, students (age 7-9) assist three little CyberPigs in an adventure that introduces them to online marketing scams and privacy in cyberspace. An accompanying Teacher's Guide provides lessons with activities and handouts for use in the classroom. All materials are available through a free download.

[www.media-awareness.ca/english/special\\_initiatives/games/privacy\\_playground/index.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/games/privacy_playground/index.cfm)

In **CyberSense and Nonsense: The Second Adventure of the Three CyberPigs**, children (ages 9-11) learn the importance of validating online information and using rules of netiquette. The teacher guide and simulation can be downloaded from the Media Awareness Network of Canada.

[www.media-awareness.ca/english/special\\_initiatives/games/cybersense\\_nonsense/index.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/games/cybersense_nonsense/index.cfm)

**Jo Cool or Jo Fool:** Media Awareness Network has created an online cybertour and quiz for more advanced students to test their cybersmarts. A comprehensive teacher's guide is also available.

[www.media-awareness.ca/english/special\\_initiatives/games/joecool\\_joefool/jo\\_cool\\_teachers.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/special_initiatives/games/joecool_joefool/jo_cool_teachers.cfm)

**Disney's Surf Swell Island** presents Internet safety to elementary age students. A series of games featuring Disney characters focus on privacy, viruses, and netiquette.

[disney.go.com/family/surfswell](http://disney.go.com/family/surfswell)

**Internet Safety Game:** This lively quiz game from KidsCom reviews basic Internet safety information with children.

[www.kidscom.com/games/isg/isg.html](http://www.kidscom.com/games/isg/isg.html)

**Who's Your Friend on the Internet** is one of many activities available on The NetSmartz Workshop, a resource designed by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach children safe Internet practices.

[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)

developmentally appropriate approaches to cybersafety must be fully integrated into the school curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Such approaches can optimize use of teachable moments in school.<sup>4</sup>

In December 2000, Congress enacted the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). This law requires schools seeking federal funding for technology to install a "technology protection measure" that will restrict access to material that is considered harmful for minors and to develop an Internet Safety Plan. The vast majority of education decision-makers have responded to this legislation by installing commercial filtering software.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2002, just two months before most schools were required to certify they were in compliance with CIPA, the National Research Council (NRC) issued its report, *Youth Pornography and the Internet*. The NRC report noted that much discussion has been devoted to technological solutions: "Technology solutions seem to offer quick and inexpensive fixes that allow adult caregivers to believe that the problem has been addressed... [But technology should not be considered an adequate] substitute for education, responsible adult supervision, and ethical Internet use." The report concluded: "...(D)eveloping in children and youth an ethic of responsible choice and skills for appropriate behavior is foundational for all efforts to protect them."

Ultimately, the best way to enhance the learning experiences of children on the Internet is to prepare them to make safe and responsible choices. Preventative intervention may preserve the extraordinary opportunities that the Internet presents. However, cyberspace, with the lowest threshold of publication of any communication medium, necessitates skills to evaluate the credibility of information, inspect sources, and look to see if the diversity of perspectives and people in a global community is fairly maintained.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, youth can help shape social and cultural interaction in a cyberworld by building on the values of respect, responsibility, justice, and tolerance.

A compelling role for the social studies emerges from an awareness of our vulnerabilities due to our new reliance on technology. To this end, we are obligated to educate children on critical protection and security in a digital age as well as prepare them for cybercitizenship. This connection between responsible choices and global awareness provides a strong linkage between social studies and preparation of students for their role in cyberspace. Cyberspace offers a globally-connected community in which elementary school children will be challenged to apply their social competence and ethical decision-making skills within a worldwide forum.

### **A New Context for Responsible Behavior**

"The measure of a man's character is what he would do if he knew he never would be found out."

—Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859)

The social studies have a long history of preparing children and youth for their roles as responsible citizens. As Internet users, students become members of a global community with important new powers to share ideas and communicate with people around the world. The Internet facilitates the open sharing of opinions, personifying the freedoms of a democratic society. However, our

approach to computers has typically focused more on the mechanics of their use and less on social consequences. Since many teachers did not grow up using computer technology, they may not understand or recognize the potential risks associated with the Internet.

Yet the word "citizenship" takes on new dimensions when it is applied to the online world. In cyberspace, young people often perceive that they are functioning in an anonymous and lawless land where there are no consequences for actions. As a result, children have a greater tendency to experiment with behaviors that they normally would not do in person. Their public persona on the web can be more mischievous and dangerous. This behavior has been most notable among adolescents who, for example, would never steal a CD from a store, but may happily download music and movies over peer-to-peer networks free of charge and in violation of copyright laws.

Lessons in cybercitizenship address the problematic aspects of the Internet and enhance critical skills for managing these challenges. Learning experiences should incorporate basics in "netiquette" (etiquette on the net), and gradually include the more complex critical evaluation skills that one needs to recognize quality online resources and participate in the digital social space.

### **Cybercitizenship and the Curriculum**

When children are equipped with the power of the Internet they do not automatically apply ethical decision making skills to their digital activities. Young people often make artificial distinctions between the ethics of behavior that they apply to real life encounters and analogous cyber-interactions. Developmentally, young children typically lack the capacity to generalize these skills and become easily allured by the enticing images and sounds of cyberspace, which contribute to a fantasy-like experience. They may be challenged to recognize that there are real people who are affected by their online actions, and these others can witness the choices that they make. Thus, cyberspace can serve as a test for the citizenship skills of youth.

Early experiences in using the Internet can provide a forum to prepare children as citizens of our media-saturated culture. For example, privacy is an important concept to understand when engaged in online activities. Lessons on the basics of what is meant by private information (e.g., name, address, phone number, school, etc.) can provide an important starting point for preparing elementary students for safe online experiences.

We usually encourage our students to proudly display information about themselves in the classroom. This is understandable, since children need repeated exposure to seeing their name and other identifying information written down to help them with recognition and familiarity. However, when each student's computer password is openly posted next to the computer screen in the classroom, teachers model poor safety practices. Children need to appreciate that passwords should never be shared with anyone except for their caregivers, teachers, or other significant adults. If students are young and cannot remember their passwords then they can be written in their notebooks or planners and placed more securely in their desks or cubbies.

We usually encourage our students to share information and help one another as they study in pairs or small groups. Although sharing is usually good behavior, the sharing of personal information or school work over the Internet may not be. “Good hygiene” is as important in online interactions as it is in real world interactions. Viruses are spread on the Internet when we get sloppy and take risks, such as opening unknown files. Sharing files can be like sharing a toothbrush. File sharing programs are especially popular among young people as a way to get new music files. However, file sharing also has resulted in unintentional exposure to sexually explicit files and illegal infringement of copyright laws that were designed to protect against “pirated” distribution of movies, songs, and video games.

### Understanding Privacy

Children need a basic understanding of the problem of privacy on the Internet. The following activity provides a way to introduce young students to the concept of privacy in correspondence.

1. While the class watches, write two notes on your desk, but do not let the class see the content of the notes.
2. Write the first note on a postcard, a message such as “The candy is on the chair.”
3. Write a different note a piece of paper, such as “The money is in the cookie jar.” Fold the paper and place it in a sealed envelope.
4. Explain to the students that they will be assisting you in delivering the messages to Floppy, a stuffed animal who is waiting on a bookshelf across the room for her mail to arrive.
5. Pass the postcard from child to child until it arrives at the recipient, Floppy.
6. Deliver the envelope in the same way.
7. Ask the class if anyone knows what might have been on the postcard. With any luck, a child or two will have glanced at it as it passed by, and they will volunteer to reveal that it is about candy (or know the whole message).
8. Ask the class if anyone knows what might have been written in the letter. Nobody will know.
9. Walk over to Floppy and ask him for both messages. Hold up and then read each message in turn.
10. Ask children which method of communication was more secure: the post card or the sealed letter.
11. Explain that, when we send messages by e-mail, it is like sending a post card. Not everybody reads the message, but some people might be able to. We do not want strangers to know our secrets, like where we hide our candy, or where we keep our money, or what our street address is. That is private information and, when we are using e-mail, it should be kept secret.
12. Conclude by emphasizing the open nature of the Internet and the lack of privacy that can occur in Internet communication.

Of course, students should be restricted, in the classroom, to sending e-mail messages only to approved addresses, such as to children of the same age in a classroom in a sister city overseas. Ideally, a teacher is using an e-mail software program that manages such access and e-traffic. The point of this lesson, however, is to teach children the concept of privacy when logging onto the Internet in other settings. For example, many children, on their home computer, use an e-mail service that is not secure.

### Resources for Civic Educators

Just as we teach children to be good citizens of their communities we can teach them to be responsible citizens of cyberspace. Many resources are available for integrating key ideas associated with cybersafety into the elementary social studies curriculum and fostering responsible citizenship on the Internet. A good place to start is a discussion that centers on this tenet: in cyberspace—just as in our classrooms and on the playground—we need to respect the rights of others. Students also need to understand that just like in the real world, misbehavior can have serious consequences. Some websites provide excellent information for teachers on these issues, and several are highlighted on page 6. The most important thing teachers should remember is that they don’t have to be information-technology experts to integrate activities that teach the basics of such cyber ethics in social studies lessons. Indeed, integrating cybercitizenship activities into citizenship education can, and should, be a natural extension of the social studies. 📖

### Notes

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3. Joah G. Iannotta (Ed.), *Nontechnical Strategies to Reduce Children’s Exposure to Inappropriate Material on the Internet: Summary of a Workshop* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001), 8.
4. Michael J. Berson and Ilene R. Berson, “Lessons Learned About Schools and Their Responsibility to Foster Safety Online,” *Journal of School Violence*, 2 (2003): 105-117.
5. Nancy Willard, *Computer Ethics, Etiquette and Safety for the 21st Century Student* (Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), 2002).
6. Merry M. Merryfield, “Using Electronic Technologies to Promote Equity and Cultural Diversity in Social Studies Education,” *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 28 no. 4 (2000): 502-526.

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