BrainPOP

Leading the Conversation on Digital Citizenship

A guide to prepare future-ready learners to make informed choices when navigating the digital world

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What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital Citizenship is the foundation for students to practice the skills they need to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. Being a good digital citizen means using technology in a way that is respectful, informed, and mindful of its impact on oneself and others–serving as a bridge between character education and technology instruction.

The core competencies of digital citizenship include:

Digital Literacy:
Understanding and effectively using digital tools

Privacy Knowledge:
Understanding the importance of protecting personal information online

Online Etiquette:
Practicing respectful online communication

Ethical Online Behavior:
Recognizing the rights and responsibilities of online actions, such as copyright rules

Digital Footprint Awareness:
Recognizing the long-lasting nature of online actions

Safe Online Interactions:
Knowing how to interact safely with others online and recognizing potential online danger

Cyberbullying Recognition and Reporting:
Identifying and standing against online bullying

Digital Citizenship vs. Digital Literacy

Digital Literacy:
Teaching kids how to use technology and the internet effectively, such as searching for, evaluating, and curating digital information.

Digital Citizenship:
Teaching kids how to behave nicely and safely online. How we teach them to be good citizens in the real world, digital citizenship teaches them to be responsible and kind on the internet

Beyond Browsing:
Digital Literacy in Every Lesson

School leaders and teachers play key roles in fostering digital citizenship and integrating digital literacy into their curriculum all year. Principals set policies that embed digital citizenship into the school culture. Teachers model responsible online behavior, making digital citizenship a core part of learning and demonstrating its real-world applications.

How to incorporate digital citizenship lessons in every classroom:

In an English Language Arts (ELA) class...

- Discuss the ethics of online communication and the impact of digital footprints while analyzing the digital behavior of characters in novels or real-life figures.

- Encourage students to create classroom guidelines for respectful online discussion, emphasizing the importance of empathy and understanding different perspectives.

In a Math class...

- Introduce coding as a way to use logical and mathematical concepts to solve problems, introducing basic computational thinking while reinforcing math skills.

- Discuss how data can be collected and used and why it's essential to understand user agreements and privacy settings.

In a Science class...

- Conduct experiments using virtual labs or simulations, allowing students to interact with scientific concepts in a digital format.

- Discuss the ethical implications of scientific research and the responsibility of sharing and using scientific data online.

In a Social Studies class...

- Research historical events or collaborate on digital timelines to teach students to critically evaluate online sources.

- Use current events or historical contexts to facilitate discussions on digital rights and responsibilities.

5 Skills Students Use When They Read Online

As digital natives, our students are expected to use the internet to search, comprehend, and evaluate the validity of a near-constant stream of digital content. A generation who grew up with technology must be natural digital citizens, right? Not exactly. That's because essential literacy skills and digital literacy skills are inextricably linked, each requiring consistent practice to build the foundation that students need to navigate today's world.

1 Decoding Digital Texts

The Internet hosts a wealth of digital content, from articles and blogs to infographics and interactive videos. Essential literacy skills allow students to decode these formats, ensuring access to information regardless of its presentation.

2 Comprehending Complex Ideas

Online messages are often hidden behind layers of context. The more background knowledge students have and the stronger their reading foundation, the more equipped they will be to dig beyond the surface, extract core ideas, and build meaning.

3 Evaluation and Critical Thinking

Reading critically enables students to evaluate source credibility, spot bias, and distinguish fact from opinion. These skills help students know the difference between what is real and what is not and make thoughtful, responsible decisions.

4 Navigation and Synthesis

Learning online often requires readers to jump between multiple tabs, articles, and sources to gather comprehensive information. Strong reading skills help students organize and prioritize information to build a holistic understanding.

5 Digital Engagement

Reading and understanding online content enables students to participate in digital discussions, forums, and social media. Students can build connections and deepen their knowledge based on content they've learned by reading.

Learn more >

Helping Students Foster Critical Thinking and Research Skills

Students today have access to endless information at their fingertips, however, it doesn't mean they know how to use it effectively. It takes consistent practice to flex those critical thinking and research muscles.

Even then, the challenges students face with research are not just about knowing how to find information; they're also about thinking deeply about that information and making connections.

By learning to evaluate information effectively, students can take more ownership of their learning, improve their problem-solving abilities, and foster creativity—all while preparing them for future challenges in an information-rich world.

✓ Ask Thought-Provoking Questions

When a question or problem presents itself, don't give the right answer right away. Guide your students to the correct answer. You can provide them with a trusted resource to work from or ask them a critical follow-up question that directs them where to start looking.

✓ Make Time for Research

Giving your students extra time to research allows them to dig deeper on the question at hand.

✓ Require Multiple Resources

Challenge students to not rely on the first answer they come across in their search. Teach them to consult multiple credible sources, find patterns, and draw informed conclusions.

✓ Vet Information

Guide students to evaluate the quality and accuracy of online information. Start with a checklist (we provided one in this e-book!).

✓ Collaborate

Encourage students to research as a whole class or in small groups to inspire deeper discussions and fact-checking exercises with peers.

✓ Encourage Persistence

Motivate students to keep exploring until they fully understand the subject and are confident in their answers.

Internet Research Checklist

Ask yourself these questions while you're searching for information online

About the PUBLISHER
The person or group running the website

Check the domain - what are the letters that come after the last dot in the address?

- ✅ .gov → government website
- ✅ .edu → college or university
- ⏸ .com/.org/.net → open to anyone
  (be sure to check these sources)

Look for an About Page - statement about the editor or publisher
- Who are they?
- What is their point of view?

Look for sponsors - the people or organizations paying for the site
- What goals are they trying to accomplish?

About the AUTHOR
The person writing the information on the website

Look for their biography - a paragraph explaining the author's background
- Are they an expert in the topic?

If you cannot find an author, do extra digging!
- Was it written by a group of people or an organization with a goal?

About the CONTENT
The information on the website

Determine the goal
- What is their point of view?

Look for the sources
- Where do the facts originally come from?

Find the date the content was published
- Is it recent?
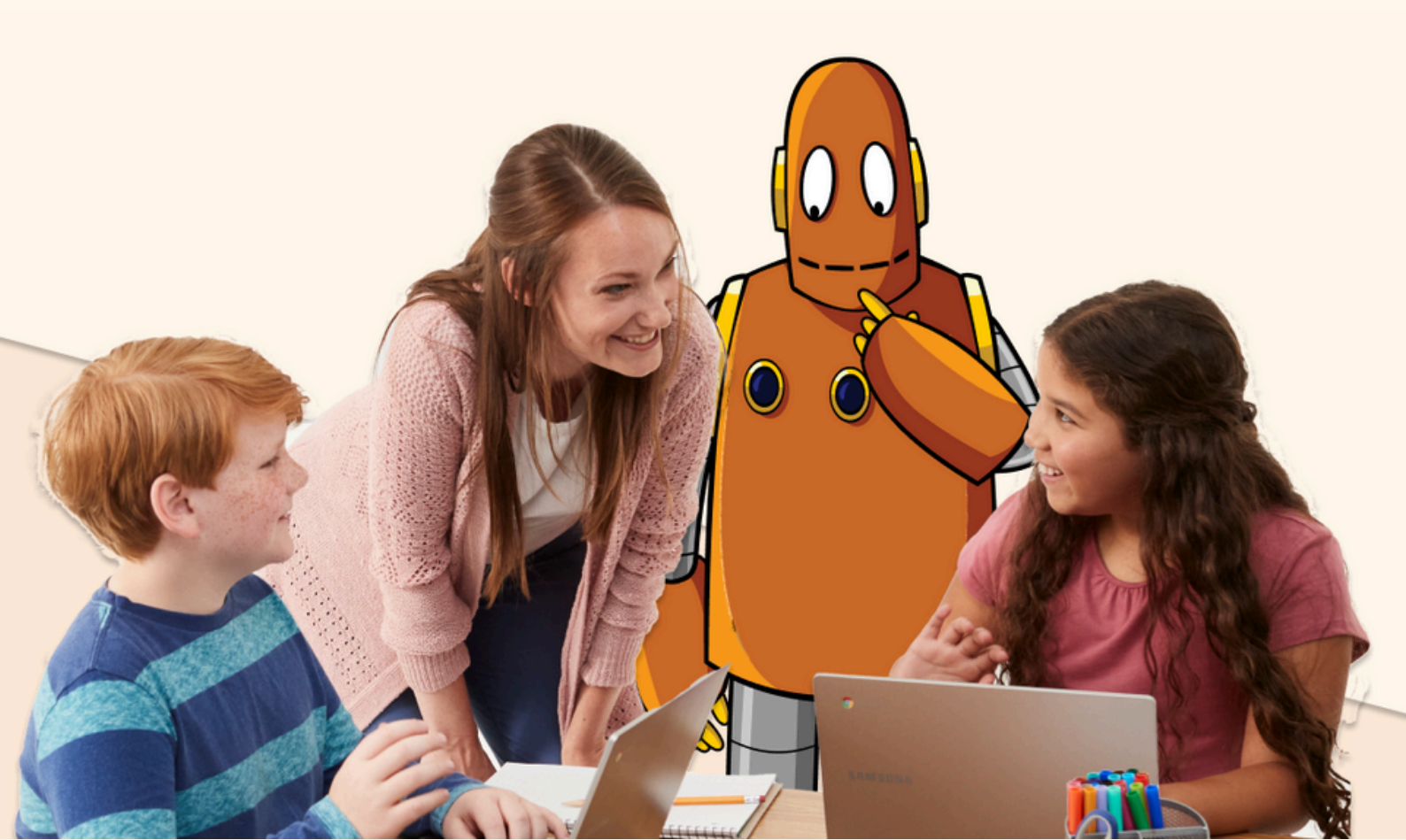- Is the content still relevant?

Download the poster >

How Digital Citizens Grow in a BrainPOP Classroom

For teachers, guiding students as they practice digital citizenship can feel pretty heavy on their already overflowing plates. That's why, for more than 25 years, classrooms have relied on BrainPOP to equip students with the skills they need to navigate online spaces.

And with BrainPOP's learning activities, these are lessons that can be taught all year long– and in any subject. Whether you're diving into ocean currents, breaking down long division, or exploring our vast digital citizenship resources, BrainPOP is built to help students stretch these essential skills.
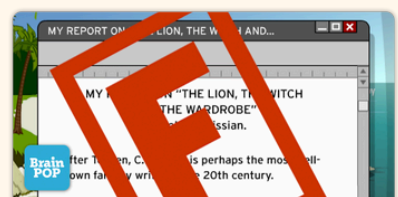
Learn more >

Explore BrainPOP's Digital Citizenship Resources
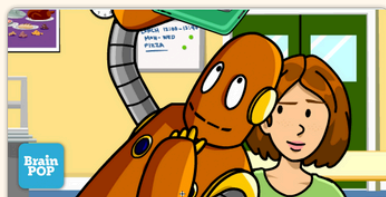

Digital Etiquette

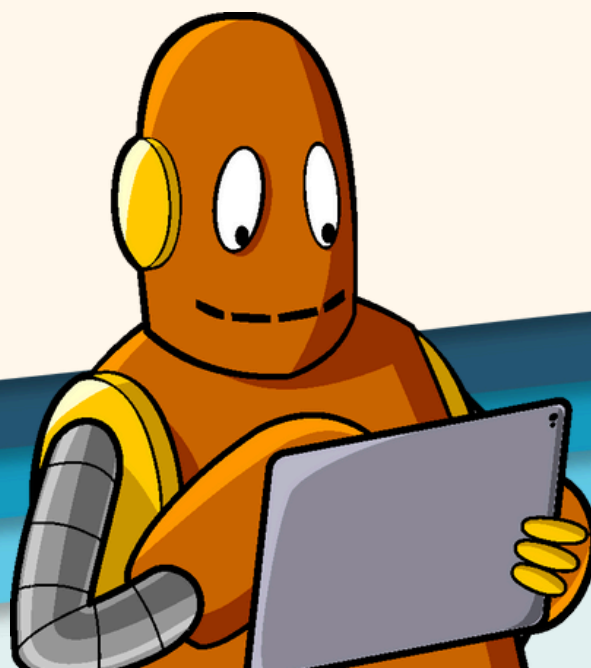Information Privacy

Plagiarism

Online Safety

Media Literacy

Online Sources

Our complete Digital Citizenship unit covers more than 20 topics across K-8th grade, including Cyberbullying, Copyright, Social Media, Peer Pressure, and more.

Explore BrainPOP's Digital Citizenship Resources >

AI has Entered the Chat

Understanding Artificial Intelligence is a must-have in today's digital citizenship curriculum. From daily tech interactions to future impacts—let's prepare our students to navigate and shape this new digital world responsibly and safely.

✓ AI is Everywhere

From customer service chatbots to facial recognition, AI is becoming more prevalent in our everyday lives. Having a basic understanding of how AI works helps students make informed choices when interacting with the technology.

✓ Media Literacy is Key to Navigating AI

AI systems learn from vast amounts of data, which may include biased, offensive, or even incorrect information. Knowing how to decipher these biases can help students critically and safely evaluate the AI-generated content they consume.

✓ AI Will Impact Their Future

As AI continues to evolve, students today will engage with it more than any generation before them–and they need to be prepared for its potential influence on their lives. Helping students understand new technologies empowers them to shape a society that can benefit from them.

Don't know where to start? BrainPOP's newest Digital Citizenship topic, Artificial Intelligence, takes students on a journey to build background knowledge on what AI is, understand the impact it can have on their daily lives, and the risks that can unfold.

Explore the full Artificial Intelligence topic, free for a limited time.

Apply Digital Best Practices Today and Every Day

Every time students go online, whether it's for homework, games, or research, they're joining a big digital world. That's why equipping students with digital citizenship skills and best practices is a 365-day-a-year mission.

With BrainPOP (and Moby!) by educators' sides, it's a mission we can go on together.

Contact us about bringing BrainPOP to your school or district.