

Introduction to Thinking Critically Online Companion Guide

PART OF THE MANAGING ONLINE INFORMATION MODULE

Introduction

The Digital Matters modules and lessons are designed to help children navigate online issues in a way that allows them to take risks and explore consequences without real world implications.

Digital Matters is split into two sections: Interactive Learning and Once Upon Online. Interactive Learning is the lesson content that students will learn in school while Once Upon Online can be completed multiple times with different results in the classroom and at home with a parent. Each path helps children learn about the subject and achieve defined learning outcomes.

Interactive Learning takes about 55 minutes to complete on its own. It is recommended that Once Upon Online be completed as its own lesson, which takes about 45 minutes.

Once Upon Online can take from 15 to 45 minutes to complete, depending on the ability of the child and which activities are being used at the time. See the lesson plan for more detail.

Thinking Critically Fast Facts

When discussing online information with children, the following statistics may be useful:

- ¼ of children aged 12-15 do not think about the truthfulness of information on newly-discovered sites or apps
- 57% of children ages 12-15 thought that some of the information they saw on these sites or apps was true but were critical of what they saw.

[Source: Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21 \(Ofcom\)](#)

- only around 30% of children 12-15 check the truthfulness of what they see online
- only 2% of children and young people have critical literacy skills needed to judge information
- 60% of children reported they trust news less because of 'fake news'.

[Source: Digital misinformation/disinformation and children \(UNICEF\)](#)

The Lesson

The Introduction to Protecting Personal Information Online lesson is split into two sections.

The **objective** of the **Interactive Learning** lesson is:

- To recognise what type of information online can be considered reliable.

By the end of the **Interactive Learning** lesson,

students should be able to:

- explain the difference between a belief, opinion and fact, and can give examples of how they might be shared online
- understand what it means to be sceptical and why this is important
- explain how and why some people might present opinions or misinformation as fact
- evaluate digital content and explain how to make choices about what is trustworthy.

The **objective of** the **Once Upon Online** is:

- To analyse information to make a judgement about probable accuracy.

By the end of the **Once Upon Online** lesson,

students should be able to:

- describe and demonstrate how to get help from a trusted adult if they feel upset about content they see online
- explain how misinformation may affect someone's emotions or behaviours, and why misinformation may be harmful
- demonstrate how to analyse and evaluate the validity of information.

[Outcomes sourced from Education for a Connected World](#)

Before the lesson

Preparation

1. Read through the lesson plan and content in this pack to ensure full understanding of the timing and structure. Ideally, the Interactive Learning and Once Upon Online sections will take place separately from one another to keep children from getting fatigued.

a. Before the lesson, you may want to read through the:

- Companion Guide
- Cross-Curricular Links
- Letter to Parents (see more below).

b. For Interactive Learning, you will need the:

- Baseline/Summative Assessment (to be returned to following Once Upon Online)
- Lesson Plan
- Lesson Slides.

c. If you have a limited internet connection and are leading the activities at the front of the classroom, you will need the:

- Interactive Learning handout
- Once Upon Online template (also includes take home activity reflection questions).

2. Check online connections and room/device bookings so children can fully participate in the activities. Alternatively, see instruction below if children will not have internet access but teachers will.
3. To access the app, simply go to www.internetmatters.org/digital-matters and login as a teacher. Students will get to the app the same way but will not require any account access. Simply guide them through to the correct subject (Managing Information Online) and lesson (Introduction to Thinking Critically Online) to get started. Further instructions can be found in the lesson plan notes.
4. Familiarise yourself with your school's policies in safeguarding, child protection, online safety and Relationships Education.

If a child discloses personal things that have happened to them, it is important that you take the right steps as aligned with your school's policies to support them.

Further reading: [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)

Letter to Parents

This letter should be sent to parents before you start using the app so parents know how they can access the web app and support their child. If you are using the app at separate points throughout the school year, it may be important to send it out each time. Be sure to send it out early enough for parents to explore the app in their own time before supporting their child at home.

The letter is able to be edited to align with your school's preferred letter layout and can make mention of specific topics if you so wish.

Start with ground rules

Some of the scenarios and topics during the lesson, particularly during Once Upon Online, might be sensitive or triggering for some students. It's important to establish a positive learning environment where:

- No student is put on the spot to share what they think or the choices they make. All conversations about student choices should be one-on-one as they complete the story. Class discussions should ask for volunteers rather than choosing students to contribute
- Students are not interrupted. Class discussions should have a one speaker rule. Facilitate the discussions so that each student who wishes to contribute can without others interrupting or putting them down.

As a part of your PSHE lesson, you may wish to create rules specific for the lesson that promotes a more sensitive approach to topics.

What if students don't have access to devices?

The lesson and its resources can be completed as a whole class. As a teacher, login as normal and project the screen on the board.

As you go through Interactive Learning and/or Once Upon Online, students can complete the tasks displayed on screen in their own notebooks, on provided handouts and through teacher discussion. See the offline handout for students.

Show the activity or question on screen and agree as a class which options should be chosen. Depending on your resources, you may have students take turns choosing the answers on the screen. Use the discussions as normal.

During Once Upon Online, use our Story Template for children to track the class' answers. If they are able to do the journey at home with their own devices, they will have a record so they can make different choices.

During the Lesson

Supporting Students with Additional Needs

If you have any students with additional needs throughout the lesson, have them work together in a group with the support of yourself or another adult in the classroom. They can discuss the tasks with each other and have the adult read out the content for them if they need it.

Accessibility support is also provided by clicking the [ICON IMAGE] icon to allow students to adjust font size, screen colour, screen reading and more.

You may need to help them set this up at the beginning of the lesson and provide them headphones where necessary.

Encouraging Student Questions

Throughout the lesson, students may have questions about the topic. Before teaching the lesson, arm yourself with additional knowledge on the subject by using the provided Additional Resources at the end of this document.

Anonymous Questioning

To support students asking questions without judgement, we suggest implementing an Ask-It Basket/question box. Throughout the lesson, students can write down and submit questions into the basket that you can answer without singling any one student out.

The Ask-It Basket should be clearly labelled and identifiable to the students interested in using it. At the beginning of the lesson, you can introduce it and ask every student to submit at least one question anonymously about managing online information. This will avoid anyone feeling singled out if there are only

a few questions in the box that make it easy to guess who submitted it.

In the lesson plan, you are given stop points to answer some of these questions and you may add other points where you see fit. If some of the questions relate to information already in the lesson, you may choose to answer it at that specific point.

This lesson will promote questions about managing information online. Below you'll find potential questions and suggested answers. These might be questions that are asked in front of the entire class or are during students' individual Story journeys one-on-one. In the case of the latter, ensure that the conversation remains quiet and as private as possible in the classroom setting.

Possible Question	Suggested Answer
What if I can't tell the difference between fact, opinion and belief?	<p>Our lesson will reflect upon the differences between these. A fact is something that can be proven to be true. An opinion is what you think about a topic, which might be different from what other people think. A belief is a view based on family, morals, and faith and cannot be proven. It might be different from others' beliefs.</p> <p>It can be hard to know for sure sometimes, so it's good to ask a trusted adult like a teacher, parent or carer if you're confused.</p>
What should I do if I see fake news or misinformation online?	<p>First of all, make sure you don't share it and spread more false information. A lot of games and platforms will have reporting tools. You can report messages that spread false information.</p> <p>If you're unsure if something is true, make sure you research it and see if you can find information about it on other websites. Be sure to check in with a trusted adult too to double check it's true.</p>
Where can I find reliable information?	<p>There are a lot of great online resources, but it's good to check what you find with other websites. If you are researching something for a school project, these websites could be helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CBBC Newsround: News stories from around the world written for kids• Encyclopaedia Britannica: an online encyclopaedia about things all over the world• National Geographic Kids: factual information about science and geography• Swiggle: a child-friendly search engine that returns trustworthy results• Find recent non-fiction books in the library! The librarian would be happy to help.

Once Upon Online: Introduction to Thinking Critically Online Story

Each child starts with the following scenario:



Part 1: The HarleeGamez Hoax

HarleeGamez is the Best. Gamer. EVER. Adil loves watching their streams and seeing them own ALL of their opponents. They're also good for a laugh and have taught him a LOT about gaming. And they're only 15 years old! Not even that much older than 13-year-old Adil himself!

One day while Adil is browsing on his phone, his cousin Drew, also a HarleeGamez fan, sends him a

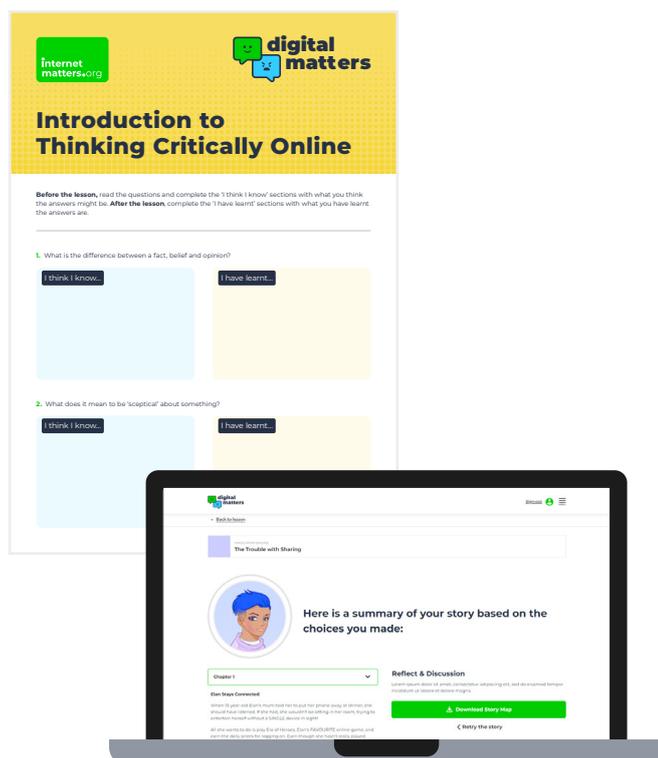
message. It reads, "Did u see this?! HarleeGamez is 37!!! NOT 15 like they say. Fr it's all been photoshop and editing to try and get more followers!!"

Drew also sends Adil a picture of what HarleeGamez REALLY looks like, and she's right – they look WAY older than 15!

This blows Adil's mind. He NEEDS to know more.

How should he find out more?

Children answer four questions using their knowledge of reliable information online to get the characters to a positive endpoint. Once they finish, they can start the journey again and explore other options in a safe environment. Suggest children choose options opposite of their preferred choices to learn about the real-world consequences and take time to discuss these conclusions.



After the Lesson

Take Home

When a child finishes their online journey, they will be able to print out or download a PDF that outlines their choices and journey. This handout will also have a set of reflection questions, which you may ask them to complete for homework on their own or with a parent or carer.

You can also ask students to redo the journey at home with a new goal like choosing all of the answers that are opposite to their preferred choices to see what the outcome might be or choosing a different first choice so they can explore the issue and story in different ways.

It's a good idea to discuss the different outcomes and reflections in the next lesson or the next day to help consolidate their learning and understanding of the topic.

Additional Resources

You can find more information about managing online information at any of the websites below.

Internet Matters

[Tackling fake news and misinformation advice hub](#)

Navigate the different types of information online and how fake news and misinformation might impact people's beliefs online. Learn how to support children in deciphering what is real online.

[Find the fake](#)

Complete this quiz with your students to learn about fake news and test each other's knowledge on the topic.

[Fake news, facts and questions guide](#)

Get support to help children develop their digital literacy and critical thinking to spot the difference between fact and fiction online.

[BBC Bitesize: How to talk to your kids about fake news](#)

A guide with video to help you discuss fake news and misinformation online with your child.

[BBC Own It: Fake News](#)

Help children learn about fake news online with a variety of videos from BBC Own It.

[Childnet: Fake News](#)

What is fake news? Get answers to questions you may have about the topic.

[Summary of types of fake news](#)

Learn where you can go to verify information and what you can do to support your child as they navigate a wealth of information on the internet.

[How to help LGBTQ+ children find safe online communities and resources](#)

If your child has identified or thinks they identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, there are hundreds of online communities and resources that can support you and your child on their journey of self-discovery.

This article from Ditch the Label guides you through helping your child ensure they are finding the right information and support for them.

[Common Sense Media: How to Spot Fake News \(and Teach Kids to Be Media-Savvy\)](#)

A guide to help parents teach kids how to spot fake news and check sources online.

[NSPCC: Fake news, hoaxes and misinformation](#)

Learn about the risks of fake news and find out how to spot hoaxes and misinformation.

[UK Safer Internet Centre: Supporting critical thinking and reliability online](#)

Tips for parents and carers to help their children learn about misinformation online