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Pirates of the Classroom

Simple guidelines for motivating your students to become responsible cybercitizens **By Melanie G. Snyder**



Do you have bandits in your midst? Not one-eyed swashbucklers stealing gold and jewels, but bright, kind, otherwise law-abiding students pilfering copyrighted materials? Chances are, you do. Students—even the younger ones—are illegally copying and downloading software, music, movies, and games from the Internet with little trouble and little cognizance of their wrongdoing.

Your buccaneers have most likely adopted an “everybody does it” mentality. A poll conducted in April 2004 by Harris Interactive, a worldwide market research and consulting firm, found that a majority of youth are aware that digital media files are copyrighted, yet many of them download files anyway. More than half of the 8- to 18-year-olds surveyed have engaged in some form of illegal downloading from the Internet, and one-third of this group think it’s acceptable because “lots of people do

it.” Follow these strategies, designed by the Business Software Alliance (BSA), a nonprofit educational resource, to encourage your students to become conscientious Internet adventurers.

1. Follow the Code

Although virtually all K–12 students have used computers at school, only 18 percent of students surveyed by Harris Interactive learned from their teachers the dos and don’ts of downloading copyrighted works. Impress upon your students the ethical and legal reasons why it’s not acceptable to take someone else’s creative work without paying for it or getting the creator’s permission.

Although you may have already discussed copyright and plagiarism with your students in the context of books and other library materials, address these issues specifically in relation to the Internet. Start by sharing with students the following key terms and definitions, and explaining how this vocabulary also applies to creative works online.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: Work that is the result of your own creativity; it can be protected by copyright.

COPYRIGHT: The law that says that someone who created something owns his or her creative work; the symbol for copyright looks like this: ©.

LICENSING AGREEMENT: The agreement that comes with software that permits you to install that program

on your own computer.

PIRACY: Illegally copying or downloading software, music, or games that are protected by copyright.

2. Make It Personal

Boost your students’ comprehension of these key terms by connecting cyberethics to their own inherent creativity. Students produce original works all the time, from artwork and music to essays, stories, and poems.

“Show students how copyright and intellectual property laws relate to them by explaining that, just as they wouldn’t want someone taking or using their creative work without their permission, neither do software programmers or others who have created such works,” says Bob Kruger, who leads BSA’s antipiracy programs.

3. Give Creators Their Booty

According to Diane Demott Painter, a technology resource teacher in Centreville, Virginia, students may also benefit from an explanation of the economics involved in creating and selling works and how piracy affects those economics.

“Most students understand that in the work world, people get paid for their hard work and creative ideas,” says Painter. “Explain that when someone copies [video games or software packages] without paying for them, all of those people who helped to create them don’t get the money they have earned.” When software developers and video-game creators fail to earn back the investment they’ve made, they may scale back

on creating anything new—a daunting prospect for most students.

4. Don't Walk the Plank

Students must realize, too, the consequences of violating copyright laws. The creators of the copyrighted works, or the organizations that represent them, may take legal action against pirates. For example, in 2003 and 2004 the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) filed a slew of lawsuits against people it alleged

had engaged in music piracy. Many of those accused were students; most notably, 12-year-old honor student Brianna LaHara faced penalties of up to \$150,000 for illegally downloading music. In September 2003, LaHara settled the lawsuit for \$2,000.

To download a comprehensive,

free curriculum to educate your students about cyberethics, visit www.playitcybersafe.com. ■

Melanie G. Snyder's articles have been published by Harcourt Educational Publishers, SIRS Mandarin, LexisNexis, AlbemarleFamily, *Welcome Home*, www.SheKnows.com, the children's magazines *Cricket* and *Guideposts for Kids*, and a wide range of other magazines, Web sites, and newspapers.

Building Digital Citizenship



Learning.com's EasyTech—a technology integration system that includes a K–8 curriculum—features built-in lessons, activities, and discussion guides on responsible use of technology. Below are some of its suggestions for building digital citizenship in K–8 schools:

GRADES K–2 Make a list of computer rules as a class. Have students illustrate each rule and post the drawings in the computer area.

GRADES 3–5 Have students prepare and perform skits to show how computer rules work and what might happen if those rules are broken.

GRADES 6–8 Have students research examples and consequences of unethical computer use in the news. Have them create a presentation illustrating what they learned and how it relates to their school and community. Detailed lessons on responsible use of technology are available online at EasyTech. For a free 30-day trial, go online at www.learning.com.

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