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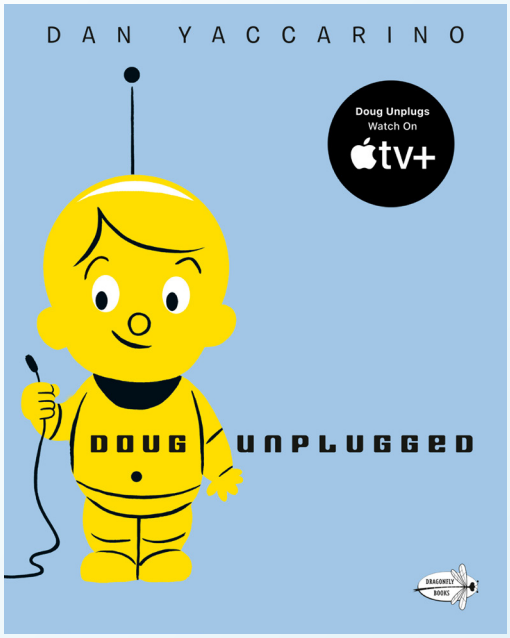
THEMATIC GUIDE
MEDIA LITERACY

Teaching Media Safety
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



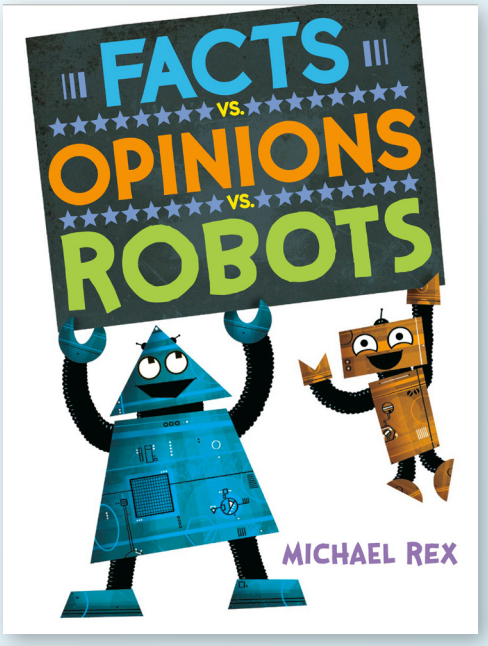


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **INTRODUCTION** 3
- **ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION** 4
- **BUILDING KNOWLEDGE** 5
  - MINDFULNESS MOMENT 5
  - PLUSES AND MINUSES 5
  - MEDIA SAFETY WORD WALL 5
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES** 6
  - INTERNET SAFETY POSTER 6
  - NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER 6
  - NEWS SORT 6
  - ACTIVITY LOG 7
  - SEE, THINK, WONDER 7
  - WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT? 7
  - FOLLOW IN MY FOOTSTEPS 8
  - DIGITAL STORYTELLING 8
  - CLAIM, SUPPORT, QUESTION 9
- **DISCUSSION AND WRITING PROMPTS** 10
  - INTERNET SAFETY POSTER 10
- **RESOURCES** 11
- **ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE** 11

INTRODUCTION

For elementary-aged students, the internet is a Willy Wonka-type wonderland filled with amazing applications for all aspects of children's lives. Young users can monitor their physical activity, access reading and math apps, and connect with their grandparents via video chats. Yet wonderlands come with tricky traps and danger zones. Excessive gaming, online predators, cyberbullying, and fake news sites are sullying the landscape, too often creating an unsafe environment for children as young as kindergarten.

In 2023, thirty-five states had pending legislation to address concerns over children's mental health and internet communication, including social media. School systems are enacting media digital citizenship curricula. Amidst this growing concern, it is imperative for educators to keep two guiding questions in mind: *What are the many technology traps from which we need to keep kids "safe"? And, how can we prepare children to make good choices online even when adults or parental controls are absent?*

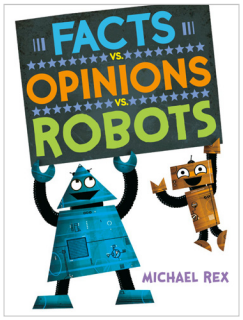
The books in this text set provide important information about media safety for elementary-aged children. Notes are included on modifying strategies for lower-elementary students (grades K–2) versus upper-elementary students (grades 3–5). Teachers can choose one or any combination of books and strategies to use with whole-class instruction, reading circles, or independent reading as they empower students to make good choices as they navigate the internet wonderland.

ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION

Listed below are brief summaries of the books in this guide:

Doug Unplugged
DAN YACCARINO
978-0-375-85921-2
Paperback | Dragonfly Books | 40 pages | $8.99 | Lexile: 630L
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

Doug Unplugged follows a day in the life of Dan Yaccarino's child robot as he spends a day learning and living in the real world.



Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots
MICHAEL REX
978-1-9848-1626-9
Hardcover | Nancy Paulsen Books | 32 pages | $18.99 | Lexile: AD480L
Also available: **E-Book**

In *Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots*, Michael Rex teaches young children the value of listening to others' opinions, navigating the news, and respecting the facts.

First Phone:
A Child's Guide to Digital Responsibility
CATHERINE PEARLMAN, PHD, LCSW
978-0-593-53833-3
Paperback | TarcherPerigee | 144 pages | $15.00
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

First Phone, by Catherine Pearlman, is a student-friendly guide illustrating the power and responsibility that come with internet access.

Light Comes to Shadow Mountain
TONI BUZZEO
978-0-8234-5902-5
Paperback | Holiday House | 272 pages | $9.99
Also available: **E-Book**

Toni Buzzeo's *Light Comes to Shadow Mountain* depicts the opportunities and challenges of modern technology in a rural town in southeastern Kentucky.

Mitzi and the Big Bad Nosy Wolf
A Digital Citizenship Story
TERESA BATEMAN, Illustrated by JANNIE HO
978-0-8234-5323-8
Paperback | Holiday House | 40 pages | $8.99
Also available: **E-Book**

In *Mitzi and the Big Bad Nosy Wolf* , author Teresa Bateman tasks Mitzi the sheep with remembering privacy rules in order to keep herself safe from the wolf.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

The books in this collection vary in complexity and include content that is new to some students. In order to provide an equitable environment where all students are prepared for context and reading demands, the following activities build knowledge and provide access to the texts.

MINDFULNESS MOMENT

Introduce the concept of media mindfulness with the Common Sense Education video "Pause and Think Online" (prhlink.com/pausethinkonline), which covers topics used throughout the text set. Featuring cartoon characters called "Digital Citizens," the clip introduces concepts like privacy, balance, cyberbullying, predators, fake news, and digital footprints. Before showing the video, set a purpose for viewing: younger students can be on the lookout for their favorite "digital citizen" cartoon character, and older students might be asked to identify the concept that most relates to them. After watching, lower-grade students can use the accompanying template to draw and write how they will mimic their character next time online (prhlink.com/pauseandthink). Upper-grade students can write a longer response about why privacy, credibility, or balance is significant or timely. Close with a class discussion about using the video's "Pause and Think" protocol to practice mindfulness anytime students are online, and explain that each of these topics will be explored in more detail throughout the texts.

PLUSES AND MINUSES

The books in this set depict technology as a powerful tool that is simultaneously amazing and concerning. Encourage student thinking around advantages and disadvantages of technology. Hold a class discussion where students generate and defend both positive and negative outcomes that accompany certain uses of technology. For instance, students might suggest health monitoring, family video calls, and educational apps as "plus" examples. On the "minus" side, students might suggest lack of sleep, disconnection from friends and family, and "stranger danger." Younger students might be presented with ready-made examples, and then move to a plus or minus side of the room, where they discuss their thinking. Upper-elementary students might generate their own examples and explain why the tool, app, activity, or outcome is positive or negative. Help or encourage students to sort their examples into categories such as communication, learning, creativity, and health, and discuss how balance is critical in all areas. As an extension, students can read the introduction to *First Phone*, which addresses these pluses and minuses.

MEDIA SAFETY WORD WALL

To ensure equity and access, students may need intentional vocabulary instruction essential for comprehending specific texts. Rather than assigning the entire list at one time, pre-teach only the words that will be important in a particular day's lesson. Ask students to stop and note when these words are used in the text(s). After reading, have students rephrase meanings with partners or in writing. Words addressed can then be added to the classroom word wall, and students can engage in games and activities to solidify their learning. Examples of media safety vocabulary appearing throughout this text set include *clickbait, cyberbullying, digital footprint, doxing, hacker, phishing, pop-up, predator, propaganda,* and *scammer*.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following activities engage students in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about media safety and the texts in this set.

INTERNET SAFETY POSTER

In *Mitzi and the Big Bad Nosy Wolf* , the main character shares her "rules for digital citizenship" (pp. 32–33), including guidelines on permission, privacy, plagiarism, cyberbullying, and polite posting. Ask students to use Mitzi's rules to create internet safety posters that can be posted in the classroom. For early-grade students, conduct a read aloud of the book, inviting students to shout out "That's PRIVATE" every time Mitzi explains a rule. Together during the read aloud, create a class anchor chart for privacy rules. Example anchor charts can be found at We Are Teachers (prhlink.com/anchorchart). In upper grades, students can choose one rule, make a slogan, and create their own poster using Tux Paint (tuxpaint.org) or Canva (www.canva.com).

NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER

In *First Phone*, *Doug Unplugged*, and *Light Comes to Shadow Mountain*, characters learn that technology can never replace the value of human relationships. Using the "Numbered Heads Together" discussion protocol (prhlink.com/numberedheads), ask small groups of four students to evaluate a list of scenarios and decide whether using media would be considered polite or unacceptable. Scenarios might include responding to a text during dinner, answering a parent phone call while busy with friends, playing a video game during a visit with grandma, etc. A list of scenarios can be found on page 17 of *First Phone*. Using "Numbered Heads Together," number students one through four. Present groups with the scenarios one at a time, provide time to reach consensus about appropriateness and etiquette, then call on students one, two, three, or four to serve as spokesperson for their groups. For the next scenario, call on a different number so all voices are heard.

NEWS SORT

Light Comes to Shadow Mountain and *Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots* both illustrate the significance of basing beliefs in facts while respecting the opinions of others. Challenge students to analyze a collection of online links or articles and determine whether they are real or fake. As a class, review the resource "How to Tell if a Newspaper or Web Source Is Reputable" in *First Phone* (p. 73). Then, provide a collection of links or articles, some real and some fake. Ask students to work in partners and use the three questions on page 73 of *First Phone* to determine whether the source is fact or fiction. Questions include: *Who are the experts quoted in the article? Is there another article from a reputable source you can double-check the information with? Is the article trying to sell something?* For younger grades, students might work with headlines, advertisements, or shorter articles. As an extension, show students the Common Sense Media video "How to Spot Fake News (and Teach Kids to Be Media-Savvy)" (prhlink.com/mediasavvykids), which underscores the practices of digging deeper and cross-checking, and addresses additional factors such as web addresses, grammatical content, and reverse image searches.

ACTIVITY LOG

Challenge students to track their onscreen and offscreen leisure activities on two separate charts over the course of one week. Their onscreen chart might have columns for "searching/scrolling," "creating," and "watching." Their offscreen chart can include "movement," "friends," and "other activities." Sample charts can be found in *First Phone* (pp. 88–89). Ask students to total their hours, reflect on what they notice, and set goals for the following week that reflect a healthy balance. Model for students how to create a handmade or digital schedule they can use to meet their goals. Templates can be found at ModernRatio (prhlink.com/timeblocking) or in apps such as TimeBloc (timebloc.app). When the week is over, ask students to bring in their activity logs, meet with an accountability partner, and share their goals.

SEE, THINK, WONDER

In *Doug Unplugged*, the robot discovers the joy of playing outside, away from his computer. Show the class one or more editorial cartoons depicting kids using technology. Ask students to reflect on what they see with the "See, Think, Wonder" routine. Lead students through the three analysis rounds, each time providing a more detailed lens. Students should consider:

- What do I see? (What details stick out?)
- What do I think? (What about the image or wording makes me think that?)
- What does this make me wonder? (What questions or big ideas does this image raise?)

One cartoon that works well depicts a child who is trying to play soccer but is surrounded by friends on phones (prhlink.com/pulptastic). Another shows a couple of children swimming in the lake, their skin sunburnt except for where they held their cellphone (prhlink.com/pulptastic2). Help students recognize the irony of being in nature while still tied to technology. Discussion should include the value of exercise, nature, and time with friends. For more on "See, Think, Wonder," check out Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero (prhlink.com/seethinkwonder).

WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?

In *Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots*, students learn "rebooting" skills that help navigate negative discourse, find common ground, and wait for more information before deciding something is factual. Encourage students to practice these skills of observation, evidence-based reasoning, and acceptance of varied viewpoints with the "What Makes You Say That?" visible thinking routine (prhlink.com/whatmakesyousay). Project an image, object, or document for all students to see. Then ask students two questions:

1. What's going on?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?

Students can think/write/pair/share in order to build their explanations

and listen to classmates' thinking. Teachers can scaffold student explanations with follow-up questions that push for factual evidence and with accountable talk stems that encourage respectful discussion (prhlink.com/accountablediscussions). The ultimate goal is for students to internalize the routine so that their claims, whether at school, in discussions, or on social media, are always carefully considered, respectfully presented, and backed with evidence.

FOLLOW IN MY FOOTSTEPS

Mitzi and the Big Bad Wolf and *First Phone* both warn students to stay aware of their digital footprints. Discuss with students how everything we do or say on the internet leaves a permanent trail of our digital footprints, so if we want to leave a positive trail, it is important to think before we post, tweet, blog, surf, etc. For younger grades, provide each student with a foot-shaped cutout and ask them to write one word on the foot describing how they would like others to remember them. Attach the cutouts to the classroom floor or wall, forming a trail that serves as a media safety reminder to leave only positive footprints behind. For upper grades, ask students to either think/pair/share or journal about the impression they would like to leave on their digital trail. For all grades, show students the short video "5 Ways to Make a Positive Digital Footprint!" (prhlink.com/ytdigitalfootprint), which directs students to ask themselves five questions before they surf, post, tweet, or blog something on social media: *Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? Is it kind?* Point out that the first letter of each adjective in the footprint rule spells out "THINK." Challenge students to consider these questions as they form their unique digital path.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Harness the power of sequential art to provide practice making good decisions online. Pose one or more safety scenarios and challenge students to respond using a digital storytelling application. For example, ask students to create a story demonstrating what to do when encountering inappropriate material online, how to confront a social media bully, or what to say when asked for personal information. Students can work individually or in partners to create a digital comic with the National Council of Teachers of English's Comic Creator (prhlink.com/nctecomiccreator), a doodle video using Pixton (www.pixton.com), a storyboard with StoryboardThat (www.storyboardthat.com), or a flip video using Flipsnack (www.flipsnack.com). Once completed, students can solicit feedback from classmates and edit their work before publicizing on the class website.

CLAIM, SUPPORT, QUESTION

Light Comes to Shadow Mountain provides a unique opportunity for upper-elementary students to explore the benefits of technology and the concept of cooperatives, both historic and contemporary. Show students "The Electric Cooperative Story," a short sketch video cited in the book's "More to Know" section (prhlink.com/elecrticcoop). Ask students to use the "Claim, Support, Question" framework (prhlink.com/claimsupportq) to identify the benefits of co-ops and the Rural Electrification Administration. Students may need to watch the video twice, once to capture the gist, and a second time to record claims and evidence. Claims will include electricity to more Americans, membership open to all, help to schools and hospitals, and focus on community ties. After viewing, ask students to share their claims and invite them to add any benefits they may have missed. Encourage students to ask questions as part of the discussion. If students want to know more about the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, they might explore this piece by the National Museum of American History (prhlink.com/ruralelectric).

Make a contemporary connection with the video "Blowing in the Wind," which explains President Joe Biden's push to get rural electric cooperatives to use more renewable energy (prhlink.com/bidenruralpower). Students can once again apply the "Claim, Support, Question" framework to think about this complex topic. Afterward, discuss how amendments to the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 continue to address safety and equity by advancing clean energy and broadband internet.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING PROMPTS

The following questions integrate themes found throughout the texts in this set and can be used for journaling, essays, small-group discussions, and large-group seminars.

1

What are some advantages that come with access to technology and the internet?

What are some dangers or disadvantages?

What steps can we take to use technology for good?

2

What are some questions we can ask to decide if online information is truthful or fake?

3

How can we respectfully disagree with opinions while always respecting facts?

4

What information should never be shared online, and what should you do if asked?

5

What is important to remember when posting a picture or video online?

Consider your own and other people's safety and wellness.

6

How do our offline activities and relationships contribute to our physical, mental, and emotional health?

What steps can we take to balance our online and offline lives?

7

What are some sites, apps, and tools that help people stay organized, healthy, and connected?

8

When is it okay to use a cellphone, tablet, or computer around others, and when is it not okay?

9

What are some ways people can be unkind online? What should you do if you witness cyberbullying?

10

What are some signs that an ad or message is either a phishing attempt or clickbait?

RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information and ideas for engaging students in media safety education.

How to Teach Internet Safety to Younger Elementary Students
prhlink.com/edutopiasafetyelem

Media Literacy in the Classroom: Teacher Fellows Share
prhlink.com/pulitzermedialiteracy

Position Statements: Media Education in English Language Arts
prhlink.com/nctemediaed

Power from the people: Rural Electrification brought more than lights
prhlink.com/ruralelectric

Protecting Kids Online
prhlink.com/protectingkids

Students Need to Learn to Manage Their Own Screen Time
prhlink.com/edutopiascreentime

23 Great Lesson Plans for Internet Safety
prhlink.com/23lessonplans

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

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