Introducing the Internet: Exploring the Internet

Overview

This lesson helps students understand how hyperlinks work and introduces them to basic Internet safety skills. The lesson begins with students exchanging messages across a “web” that they have created from photocopies of computers and yarn. The teacher has placed various “surprises” in some of these messages, to reinforce the concept that users may receive unexpected surprises in Internet correspondence. Using a series of online rules as a starting point, students will discuss ways in which they can minimize their chances of receiving unwanted surprises when they are corresponding with others on the Net.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- understand the open, non-private nature of online communications
- identify safe practices for children surfing the Web
- understand the principles of hypertext linking
- recognize the anonymous nature of the Internet

Preparation and Materials

This lesson entails some prior preparation.

- Photocopy and prepare photographs of computers (instructions are below)
- Prepare “Lists of Colours” (instructions are below)
- Review the Online Rules

The day before you conduct this lesson, assign each child a partner. Have each child:

- write a message on a piece of paper,
- cut the message into four pieces,
- put each piece into a different envelope
- write their partner’s name on each envelope.

Tell the children not to seal the envelopes and collect the envelopes from them.
Before class, tape photocopies of a picture of a computer in different places in the room. Make sure there is a picture for each child participating in the exercise, plus one for the teacher. Each picture should also be marked with one of the following colours: red, blue, purple, green, brown, black, orange, pink. (You can use markers or squares of construction paper to label the pictures - just make sure the colour is prominent and can be seen easily from around the room.) Create four different "lists" of these colours (i.e. each list will contain the same colours, but in different order).

Also before class, take the envelopes the children made and insert a sticker in at least one of the envelopes addressed to each child. Depending on your tolerance for mess, insert baby powder, confetti, a picture of a mean character such as a "Big Bad Wolf," a spring or a bell in other envelopes selected at random. Seal all the envelopes.

The Lesson

To start the activity, divide the class into four teams, and appoint four team leaders. (It helps to have the children pick a team name and team chant, if time permits, like cybercast, cybernauts, cybersurfers, Net pros, webcrawlers, Net stars, etc.) Then have all the children except the four team leaders return to their "computers" on the web. The four team leaders should go to the front of the class, where they can be seen and heard by their team members. Have the children take note of the location of different coloured computers around the room.

The purpose of this part of the lesson is to introduce the children to the concept of hypertext linking. Give each of the team leaders a different list of colours. The team leaders will call out the first colours on their lists. Their team members then have to run to a computer labelled with that colour as fast as they can. No more than three children can go to a single computer at the same time. (Make sure there are enough 'computers' of each colour to accommodate all the children in the class.) Once all the members of a team have found the right coloured computer, the leader then calls out the next colour on the list.

After the activity, discuss how the Internet lets children go to different places all over the world to discover new facts and new ideas by clicking on hypertext links. Reinforce that the sites sometimes get crowded, but there is an incredible amount of information out there to discover. Use overhead or a diagram on the blackboard to show children how to find the links on a World Wide Web page.

Playing Safe on the Internet

Talk about exploring in the real world. How do kids know where it's safe to go? What rules do they use to "Play Safe?"

Introduce the need for safe surfing skills. Outline how the Internet is different from the real world.

- You can link to a scary site just by pushing a button.
- Strangers on the Internet can pretend to be someone else to fool you - for example, bad strangers can pretend to be kids and you can’t tell the difference

Distribute four envelopes randomly to each student and have them "deliver" the envelopes to the child whose name is on the cover in the following manner. (Tell them "no peeking" until they have received the envelopes that have their names on it.)
• Have each student return to their "computer"
• They must send the message over the web, by handing each envelope, one at a time to the nearest child along the web, who then hands it to another child along the web, who then hands it to another child, until all four envelopes reach the addressee.
• Once everyone has their four envelopes, have the children open the envelopes and re-construct the message.

Talk about the "surprise" messages, and reinforce the need for personal safety skills.

• What might some of these surprises be on the real World Wide Web? (*This might include an email message from a stranger; electronic spam from a marketer; a link to an inappropriate website; a nasty or threatening message; a computer virus etc.*)

Reinforce to students that you never know when you're going to receive an electronic "surprise," so they always have to be careful. Using the Online Rules handout as a starting point, have them brainstorm ways in which they can minimize their chances of encountering nasty stuff on the Net.

**Activity**

• Have students create posters of a highway complete with road signs describing safe surfing rules. The posters can be titled "Safe Driving on the Information Highway." Hang the posters in the hallway, the computer classroom or the library for other children to see.

**Evaluation**

Student learning can be assessed in a number of ways:

• Journal or verbal reflection on what they learned in each of the activities.
• Participation in the classroom activities.
• "Safe Driving" posters.

**Where to go from here**

There are a number of activities that can be used to reinforce the skills learned in this unit.

• Introduce children to safe Internet sites, such as TVOKids (http://www.tvokids.com/), CBC.ca/Kids (http://www.cbc.ca/kids/) or NFBKids (http://nfbkids.ca/).
• Take kids on a guided tour of the Internet, focusing on subjects such as the Titanic, wolves, space and travel, and reinforce safe surfing skills.
• If computers are available, assign students, individually or in groups of three to four (with at least one strong reader in each group) time on the computer to play MediaSmarts' computer-animated game Privacy Playground: The First Adventure of the Three CyberPigs (http://mediasmarts.ca/game/privacy-playground-first-adventure-three-cyberpigs). This game reinforces consumer and safe surfing skills and demonstrates how easily online communications can be intercepted. For ideas on how to use Privacy Playground in the classroom, see the Teacher's Guide.
Online Rules

- I will not give out any personal information online without my parents’ permission. This includes my name, phone number, address, email, location of my school, my parents' work address/telephone numbers, credit card number information, and my picture.

- When using the Internet, I will always use a pretend name or nickname that doesn't reveal anything about me.

- When creating a password, I will make one up that is hard to guess but easy for me to remember. To avoid having it stolen, I will never reveal it to anyone (except my parents) - not even my best friend. I will not respond to any message that makes me uncomfortable. I will show an adult right away.

- I will NOT arrange to meet a friend I have made on the Internet unless one of my parents has been informed and will be present. I will not open email, files, links, pictures or games from people that I don't know or trust. I will always ask an adult first.

- I will practice responsible online behaviour:
  - I will not post or send insulting or rude messages or threats to anyone online.
  - I will not take words, pictures or sounds from someone else's website without their permission.
  - I will not disable any filtering software my parents have put on the computer
  - I will not make any online purchases without my parents' permission.

- I will not believe everything I read on the Internet. When doing online research, I will always check the source of the information and confirm it with a parent, teacher or librarian.